

***Fight The Power: Law and Policy through Hip-Hop Songs.* Edited by Gregory S. Parks and Frank Rudy Cooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 300 pp. ISBN: 978-1-009-01153-2  
doi:10.1017/S0261143022000721**

*Fight the Power: Law and Policy through Hip-Hop Songs* aims to showcase hip-hop's utility in the fight for social justice. It does so by connecting hip-hop songs to the transformation of law and policy sought in the aftermath of 2020's global protests against the brutality, violence and racism Black people face in the US and worldwide. The collection largely focuses on US law and policy, but much of its analysis is generalisable to other national settings. The collection identifies music as having a 'great potency as a vehicle for political expression' (p. 1), but hip-hop as especially having a unique role in the fight against white supremacy in the US through uplifting and inspiring Black people to challenge racism.

The editors, Frank Rudy Cooper and Gregory S. Parks, both specialise in race and law issues and have assembled a group of exceptional scholars on the topic. Although most authors are law specialists, the team includes graduate, undergraduate and high school students studying and researching in an array of disciplines from sociology – Margaret Eby – to creative writing – Zoe Smith-Holladay. All the authors use hip-hop as a medium through which they analyse, understand and sometimes evaluate, strategies to counteract instances of injustice against Black people.

The collection proceeds in four parts. Part I concerns policing; it comprises topics on defunding the police, diversity in the police force, traffic laws, illegal stops and police brutality against Black children. Part II concerns imprisonment, consisting in topics on trauma and mass incarceration. Part III is on genders; it comprises chapters on Black women's social roles, Black men as an endangered species and oppressive gendered norms. Part IV concerns protests, and consists in chapters on 'black rage', reparations, the 'culture of poverty' and social conditions' effects on racialised health disparities. Each author intends to show how hip hop is an enlightening resource in their analysis of these topics and the kinds of changes to law, policy and society many Black people in the US seek. In some cases, the songs provide material to explore what changes to law and policy might look like.

The edited collection keeps its promise insofar as chapters analyse issues of law and policy through the lens of at least one hip-hop song. In doing so, the collection shows that hip-hop is an attractive and illuminating resource in highlighting and hopefully bringing about the changes necessary for social justice through sparking important discussions, opening up new possibilities for social change and galvanising political consciousness. The hip-hop songs chosen are all clearly relevant to each topic and include a mix of older political songs – such as Paul Butler's analysis of what 'defund the police' could mean through NWA's 1988 song 'Fuck tha Police' – and newer political songs as seen in andre douglas pond cummings' (no capitals intentional) discussion of Meek Mill's 2018 song 'Trauma' as an entry point to debates about the psychological effects of growing up in poverty-stricken environments as a racial minority.

The collection does a great job of outlining and scrutinising popular claims made by people about the over-policing and imprisonment of Black bodies and protests in response to these forms of violence. For instance, a popular claim during the aftermath of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor was that an increase in


the number of Black police officers would go some way to ‘ameliorate the complaints against the police for racial profiling and police violence against blacks’ (p. 2; see also Snodgrass 2021). However, as Kami Chavis skilfully argues here through an analysis of KRS One’s ‘Black Cop’, diversifying police departments will not do much to end police brutality and profiling, since some of the most horrendous acts of police violence have been committed within the most diverse police departments. Instead, our efforts would be better directed at addressing the structural racism and culture that contribute to the violence directed towards Black bodies.

One important set of literature not well represented in this collection concerns the volume’s engagement with Black Male Studies. Black Male Studies provides an accurate and verifiable account of Black male life and death in Western patriarchal societies, through a thorough engagement with disciplines such as history, sociology and philosophy (Curry 2017). Given the collection’s main themes – policing and imprisonment – and that Black males are disproportionate victims of police brutality and corruption, and are especially likely to be imprisoned, more scholarship highlighting the distinct racialised misandry that Black boys and men are subjected to would have strengthened the discussion. The collection aims to highlight hip-hop’s role in social transformation, but an important area of social transformation concerning the treatment of Black boys and men has been overlooked.

One chapter in particular that strengthens the collection in that respect, co-written by Robert Pervine, Kevin Brown, Charles Westerhaus and Kynton Grays, is ‘From the 1930s to the 2020s: What Ice Cube’s Song “Endangered Species” Meant for Four Generations of Black Males’. This chapter employs Ice Cube’s ‘Endangered Species’ to elucidate the popular narrative on Black men as an endangered species. The authors draw on Walter Leavy’s article ‘The crisis of the Black male: challenge and opportunity’, in which he asks, ‘is the Black male an endangered species?’ (Leavy 1983). Leavy understands an endangered species as ‘one which suffers a serious reduction in its population and faces the threat of extinction because its exposure to unfavourable social environmental conditions’ (Leavy 1983). Each author is from a different generation – senior Black male (aged 86), middle-aged Black male (aged 66), junior Black male (aged 45) and young Black male (aged 21) – and discusses what the narrative of Black males as endangered means to them. The ‘senior Black male’, for instance, experiences the narrative of an endangered species since Black males continue to have the shortest life expectancy of all major ethnic and racial groups, meaning he has watched the ‘species’ disappear as many of the Black males in his life die young. Further, the ‘young black male’ is reminded of what it is like to be a member of an endangered species every time he walks on his college campus, which is predominantly white.

Still, this chapter could have been strengthened by an engagement with Black Male Studies to show the history of discourse about the extinction of Black men in the US. For instance, Josiah Nott and Frederick Hoffman pushed agendas that Black boys and men were naturally inept to survive post-slavery, and if they did not die naturally, social policies leading to their extinction were encouraged (Nott 1854; Hoffman 1896; Walker 2022). Making such connections would have really driven home how law and policy made Black males an endangered species. Furthermore, an engagement with Black Male Studies might have also highlighted the specifically gendered and racialised kinds of injustice involved in law and policy, in a way that would be beneficial to Black men *and* Black women by highlighting the different oppressions they face.

This suggestion for development aside, *Fight the Power* is a well-written, accessible and insightful collection intended for anyone interested in hip-hop's usefulness in analysing law and policy in pursuit of a more just society.

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***Popular Music Autobiography: The Revolution in Life-Writing by 1960s Musicians and Their Descendants*. By Oliver Lovesey. New York: Bloomsbury, 2022. 366 pp. ISBN: 978-1501355837  
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In *Popular Music Autobiography: The Revolution in Life-Writing by 1960s Musicians and Their Descendants*, Oliver Lovesey offers a shrewd reading of pop music's 1960s creative renaissance and its implications across the ensuing decades. In particular, he maps an intriguing history of musicians' adoption of life-writing as an evolving means of expression. As a form of 'audio biography' in Lovesey's coinage, this shift towards transforming private experience into public exhibition has produced a considerable body of work during the postwar era.

In his analysis of the genre, Lovesey examines pop music's life-writer in a wide variety of forms, including traditional autobiographies and memoirs, auto-fiction, songwriting and self-fashioned museum exhibitions, among others. Lovesey posits a convincing theory that pop music's autobiographers often exhibit senses of anxiety regarding their perceived lack of authenticity. In addition, he argues that these same artists frequently wrestle with their own celebrity within the context of a warped postmodern culture.

In his most thought-provoking chapter, Lovesey identifies Beatles manager Brian Epstein's autobiography *A Cellarful of Noise* (1964) as 'an example of a distinctly late-Victorian genre of life writing which conceals or masks as much as it reveals its subject' (p. 74). In Lovesey's interpretation, *A Cellarful of Noise* succeeds in exposing 'internalized homophobia at a time when acts of "gross indecency" between men in "public or private" were criminalized under the provisions of 1885's Labouchere Amendment' (p. 74). Although Epstein managed the Beatles during the transitional period between 1957's Wolfenden Report, which recommended decriminalisation,