

Persistent Resistance: The Demand for Collective and Individual Human Rights Action in the Music of Rebel Diaz

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Abstract

From the 19th to the 21st centuries, and through folk, blues, jazz, punk, and hip-hop, activists have relied on music to engage people in the fight for human rights. When it comes to conscious hip-hop and activism in the United States today, few artists compare to Rebel Diaz. A bilingual English-Spanish duo triangulated between the South Bronx, Chicago, and Chile, the group consists of brothers Rodrigo (RodStarz) and Gonzalo (G1) Venegas, UK-born/US-educated children of Chilean dissidents who fled the Pinochet regime in the 1970s. From labor rights (“Work Like Chavez”) and immigration (“I’m an Alien”) to police malfeasance (“Stop! Stop and Frisk!”) and corrupt elected officials (“#Crook”), the issues Rebel Diaz takes up resonate locally and globally. Concentrating on aesthetics, this article examines how the group marshals their music to demand justice. Close readings of “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” and “#Crook” detail how Rebel Diaz’s lyrical, musical, and visualization strategies cohere to create rich, semiotic texts that entertain, educate, and encourage audiences to confront police misconduct—specifically, the harassment and murder of people of color in America’s urban communities. In closing, this article considers how the Venegas brothers utilize independent media to further the human rights agenda outlined in their music.

Keywords: Hip-hop, Activism, Police Misconduct, Aesthetics, Independent Media

A Thumbnail Sketch of Music’s Role in the Fight for Human Rights

From organizing labor to exposing racial violence, music has long had an active role in the fight for human rights in the United States. E.R. Place’s “A Song of Eight Hours,” which emerged from Chicago’s mid-nineteenth century labor movement to demand an end to twelve and fourteen-hour work days (Jentz; Foner and Roediger 85-86), has been reprinted by many artists, including Pete Seeger and, more recently, the Chicago raptivist Rhymefest (“Rhymefest”). As “armed company deputies roamed the countryside” in Harlan County, Kentucky, “terrorizing the mining communities, looking for union leaders to beat, jail, or kill,” Florence Reece, wife of union leader Sam Reece, penned the lyrics for “Which Side Are You On?” (1931) to rally support for striking miners (Boal). Woody Guthrie’s *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940) articulated the experiences of farmers and their families who, driven westward,

suffered immense hardship as a result of the US government’s failed, monocultural agriculture policies of the 1930s. Based on a poem by Abel Meeropol, a white Jewish schoolteacher from New York (Margolick 11), Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” (1939) sought to shed light on the lynching of African Americans by southern whites who escaped prosecution for murders committed openly. Each of these examples illustrates the power music has to rally people so that they might work toward achieving justice and equality.

As the federal government began implementing desegregation policies in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), musicians responded to the South’s belligerent reluctance to integrate. Incensed by segregationist Arkansas governor Orval E. Faubus, jazz bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus penned “Original Faubus Fables” (1959/60) to challenge the fascist, white supremacist status quo (Monson 183). Working from the African American blues, spiritual, and gospel traditions, folk singer

Odetta Holmes, widely considered the voice of the Civil Rights Movement, “performed the song ‘O Freedom’ at the March on Washington” in 1963 (“Legendary Folk Singer”). As white-on-black violence across the South culminated in the brutal murder of voting rights activist Medgar Evers, Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” (1964) voiced the exasperation many in the Civil Rights Movement felt towards white, middle class liberals who advocated for a “go slow” approach to social reform (Simone). That same year, topical singer Phil Ochs contributed his scathingly critical “Here’s to the State of Mississippi,” in which he called on residents who committed, or were indifferent to, racial violence to “find yourself another country to be part of” (Ochs). Alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Pete Seeger united the civil rights and anti-war movements while bringing visibility to protest singers Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Near the end of the decade, R&B funk maestro James Brown, who worked with civil rights activists, released “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968) to immortalize the Black pride movement. Though a small sample of ‘hits,’ these songs nevertheless demonstrate the impact of music on the cause of social, economic, and racial justice.

One might also argue that the malaise of the 1970s that resulted from a nation weary with social and political upheaval eventually spawned punk music. By the early 1980s second-wave punk had become starkly politicized to address social problems with urgency. Nearly every track on the full-length debut albums of the Dead Kennedys (*Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables*, 1980), Black Flag (*Damaged*, 1981), and Bad Religion (*How Could Hell Be Any Worse?*, 1982) deals with political themes. Disgruntled, disillusioned, and disaffected as the country began embarking on what would become the project of neoliberalism, punk artists shined light on subjects in an unabashed, caustically effrontery manner. As the go-to form for cathartic expressions of disgust, anger, and distrust, high-profile post-punk songwriters such as Ani DiFranco and ex-Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello continue that form today. Protest music in America, which is an extension of the jeremiad, i.e. the “rhetoric of indignation [that] express[es] deep dissatisfaction and

urgently challeng[es] the nation to reform” (Nordquist), appears in a number of musical genres, the most recent being conscious rap, which commonly deals with questions of human rights.

Hip-hop, as Andrea Clay (2012) astutely notes, is where many young people today become politically aware and engaged. Hip-hop emerged as a new set of cultural practices, and community activism has been a component since the beginning. Breakdance stood in as a replacement for gang violence, and Afrika Bambaataa, one of hip-hop’s original deejays, founded the Universal Zulu Nation to mitigate the turf wars among rival gangs in New York City. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” (1982), a song that continues to inspire artists around the world, was the first attempt in recorded rap to address the deteriorating conditions in New York’s predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. By the late 1980s the South Bronx-based crew Boogie Down Productions, headed by rapper KRS-One, founded the Stop the Violence movement to convince artists and audiences to cease the glorification of violence. With the politically-charged lyrics of Public Enemy’s *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988) and *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990) distilling Black pride, Black power, and Black nationalism into an aesthetic quintessence, N.W.A.’s “Fuck tha Police” (1988) and Body Count’s “Cop Killer” (1992) remain two of the most notorious instances of hip-hop social commentary, especially with regard to police misconduct in communities of color. While high-profile artists such as Beyoncé (“Formation”) and Kendrick Lamar (“Alright”) shine light on injustices today, the work of equally compelling but lesser known artists deserves consideration.

This essay will consider the culture work of Rebel Diaz, a South Bronx-based hip-hop outfit founded by two brothers, Rodrigo (RodStarz) and Gonzalo (G1) Venegas. Born in England to expatriated Chilean dissidents on the run from Chile’s brutal, US-backed Augusto Pinochet regime, the Venegas brothers were raised and educated in Chicago. Two songs, “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” (2012) and “#Crook” (2015), are of particular interest. By providing a litany of grievances, both songs can be understood

as modern-day jeremiads. Addressing how law enforcement disproportionately targets people of color, each song demonstrates how Rebel Diaz aestheticizes real-world events to call for individual and collective action in the cause of social justice. To understand the potential for these works to motivate listeners to actively work for human rights, I apply Winfried Fluck's work in reception aesthetics. Where sound, word, and image create an engrossing "body-centered, corporeal form of aesthetic experience" (348) that activates our bodies, emotions, imaginations, and intellects, in how far might these songs trigger audiences to work for human rights? What aesthetic strategies do Rebel Diaz deploy, and how do these strategies cohere to motivate individuals to demand restitution not only for gross transgressions, but to do the important community work needed to prevent similar occurrences? After closely analyzing these songs to show how they function on the aesthetic level of sound and word, I will contextualize Rebel Diaz's ancillary media work to ask in how far the aestheticization of real-world crime to attain human rights is an ethical artistic pursuit.

Rapping to End Racial Profiling: "Stop! Stop and Frisk!"

"Stop! Stop and Frisk!" (2012) demonstrates Rebel Diaz's commitment to confronting, contesting, and overturning the controversial police practice known as stop and frisk. Criticized for its reliance on racial profiling to justify searches without sufficient probable cause, the policy represents a potential violation of the Fourth Amendment, which protects citizens from unreasonable searches. According to the Civil Liberties Union of New York, 87% of the 685,724 frisks conducted in New York City at the height of the practice in 2011 were carried out primarily against African Americans and Latinos. Tellingly, the ACLU found that 88% of all those stopped were found not guilty of any wrongdoing ("Stop-and-Frisk Data"). While the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery and established citizenship and voting rights for African American men, respectively, one might ask in how far these legal

measures are worthwhile if fourth-amendment protections are not honored. It is in that spirit that racial profiling and stop and frisk are resisted. To that end, what strategies does Rebel Diaz deploy to motivate listeners to demand an end to this controversial practice?

Released through Rebel Diaz's Bandcamp page on February 18, 2012 [1], the artwork for the single (Fig. 1) incorporates the non-linguistic symbol for prohibition (a red circle with a red line through it) designated by the International Organization for Standardization in Geneva, Switzerland ("ISO 3864-1:2011"). [2] In that sense, the call for cessation iterated in the title is communicated visually through a globally recognized symbol. Drawing upon an independent, non-governmental agency situated outside the United States, Rebel Diaz calls upon an authority to return constitutionality to policing and uphold codified human rights. Furthermore, the artwork's red and yellow color scheme harbors considerable symbolic emotional potential. Where red signifies high alert, rage, or, through its association with vehicular traffic, the imperative *stop*, the use of dark yellow suggests

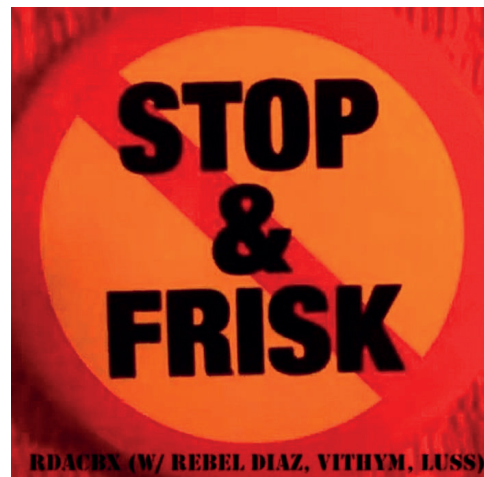


Fig. 1: "Stop! Stop and Frisk!" cover art

jaundice—that is to say, the state of being afflicted with bitterness and resentment. These strategies distill the song's message down to a succinct visual language. Without even hearing the song or considering its lyrics, people who visit Rebel Diaz's Bandcamp page are subtly conditioned to support overturning stop and frisk.

Musically, the song's driving, hard-edged

4/4-rock rhythms and distorted, punk rock-style guitars propel its tempo and impel listeners to actualize the goal. As the song opens, two male voices sing “O! mama I’m in fear for my life from the law, the law,” an a cappella re-rendering, or allosonic quotation (Williams 208), of American rock band Styx’s “Renegade” (1979), a song that tells the story of an outlaw on the run. But where the Styx line concludes with “the long arm of the law” to bestow moral rightness on the authorities to apprehend a criminal (Styx), Rebel Diaz’s deliberate omission of these words suggests that even though stop and frisk is a codified police tactic, its disproportionate application to people of color is unjust. To underscore this point, the manner in which the line is performed imparts a solemn tone evocative of the blues, spiritual, or gospel tradition, and perhaps even the type of group chanting heard at candle-light vigils for victims of police malfeasance. As the modified line from “Renegade” is repeated a second time, a flourish of orchestral strings builds tension, and the simulated cocking of a firearm and the sound effect of a gun blast immediately precede the chorus. Delivered double time, the chorus “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” is heard nearly thirty times throughout the song. In this way, listeners are psychologically conditioned through the power of suggestion to support overturning the policy. Other non-musical effects such as sirens, walkie-talkie static, and the indiscernible mumbling of officers combine to create a tense, dramatic atmosphere to aurally cast the listener into the position of someone being chased by the police, an effect that can titillate, create exhilaration, fear, or trepidation, but also—and perhaps especially—empathy. While listeners stand to become motivated and take action, the song sustains the efforts to end stop and frisk already underway. Much like E.R. Place’s song, which emerged from a committed group of labor activists in Chicago, “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” is part of an existing movement.

Lyrical, the song takes a defiant stance. Riffing on the opening line to N.W.A’s “Fuck tha Police” (“Fuck tha police, yeah I said it, fuck’em”), lead emcee RodStarz voices solidarity with the west coast rappers who infamously criticized police misconduct in South Central Los Angeles. [3] In doing so, RodStarz declares allegiance

across hip-hop’s proverbial coastal divide. As the song progresses, he delivers shout-outs to the families of individuals who have borne the brunt of police transgression. When RodStarz raps “the system accuse you of the same crimes they do to you/call it excusable. Sean Bell’s killer, acquitted, Troy Davis, lynched,” he memorializes Sean Bell, a 22-year-old African American shot and killed in Queens, New York by the NYPD on November 25, 2006, the morning of Bell’s wedding (“Hundreds to Attend Sean Bell Funeral”), but also Troy Davis, a Savannah, Georgia-native executed on September 21, 2011 for the alleged murder of police officer Mark MacPhail after a long, grassroots-effort that had sought a stay for Davis failed (“Over 500,000 Sign Petition”). While juxtaposing these two incidents exposes the hypocrisy of a system that protects murderous officers (yet hands down death sentences to those found guilty under questionable convictions), this strategy seeks to build an imagined community that stretches from New York and Georgia to Los Angeles and California. Exposing hypocrisy and a system that protects murder among those whose duty is to uphold the law (the police), Rebel Diaz argue for human rights. By uniting individuals and communities across the country, the group strives to bridge geographic and demographic divides—an important component for any significant, long term change.

Exposing Complicity at the Highest Level: #Crook

Where “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” stands to activate listeners and unite communities across the nation, “#Crook” (2015) sheds light on Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke’s shooting and murder of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald on October 20, 2014. Released on December 2, 2015, [4] just one week after city officials finally released dashcam video footage that had been withheld from the public for 400 days, “#Crook” is much more than a politically-conscious rap song. It is part of a campaign calling for the ouster of Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel for his role in covering up Laquan’s murder.

Rebel Diaz brazenly uses Rahm Emanuel’s official portrait for the single’s artwork (Fig. 2).

With the title emblazoned across his eyes, the cover shot visually suggests that the mayor has been blinded by his own corruption. Enhancing this effect, Emanuel's smirk creates a disturbing contrast to suggest that he is comfortable with his own crooked behavior—indeed, that dishonesty and corruption are part of his very nature. To facilitate demonstrations via social media, the hash tags “#JusticeForLaquan” and “#ResignRahm” are embedded in the artwork, thereby anchoring the song in efforts to attain justice for his family.



Fig. 2: “Crook” cover art

By incorporating the group’s Twitter handles “@RodStarz” and “@RebelDiaz,” the group invites people to contact them so that they can assist in organizing activities. Thus, the artwork for “#Crook,” more than mere aesthetic, contains functional elements to assist in ousting the mayor, and thereby begin dismantling the systemic structures that protect murderous officers. At the song’s outset, RodStarz issues simple, declarative shout-outs: “for Education” (i.e. setting the record straight about Laquan murder and its cover-up), “for Reparations” (compensation for his family), “Justice for Laquan” (a call for human rights), and, in a call for unity, “north side, South side.” [5] The ambiguity of north and south includes Chicago, the U.S., and, by extension, global audiences (global north and south) due to how the police murder people of color globally. In the opening lines, RodStarz raps, “A crook mayor with an attitude named Rahm/Who needs to resign now so I’m about to drop this bomb.” He then discloses key details about the case: “Officer Van Dyke shot a young black teen/Laquan way too young he was only 17/He was walkin away

but he caught 16” [bullets]. Further still, RodStarz declares his belief that Chicago police are “killin us For sport,” thus illustrating an attempt to prevent future incidents by exposing an ulterior, morally bankrupt *modus operandi*.

Taking aim at the mayor’s deception, RodStarz declares “a clear cover up,” then issues questions as demands: “Where’s the audio and the sound?/Where’s the footage from the BK [Burger King] that’s no longer around?” Further, he accuses the mayor of cynically suppressing the video as a reelection strategy: “a Month after Ferguson—the whole nation heated/If this video came out Rahm you would’ve been defeated!!” Rapping “I know that you was lying when you said you hadnt seen it/The other day you said it was graphic —so which one eeease it?,” RodStarz highlights the blatant hypocrisy underpinning Emanuel’s deception. Moreover, the intentional mispronunciation of *is* (“eeease”) captures the sliminess of the mayor’s behavior. Pressing his case further, RodStarz postulates that Laquan’s family received an out-of-court settlement because Rahm had “seen that video! that’s why the city wrote that check.” Calling out officials such as Cook County State Attorney Anita Alvarez and Superintendent of the Police Garry McCarthy (whose respective electoral loss and dismissal seem to retroactively prove a cover-up) by name, RodStarz unmasks complicity at the highest level.

RodStarz’s performed outrage—for example, his voice rises with palpable indignation when he raps “I AM Rekia Boyd”—may potentially trigger the type of anger needed to create and sustain prolonged community action to obtain justice. By invoking the memory of Boyd, a 22-year-old Chicago-native who was murdered by off-duty Chicago police officer Dante Servin on March 21, 2012, RodStarz leverages power and agency in her memory. Channeling Boyd through performance, RodStarz conjures the slain woman’s spirit so that listeners might become her revenant. In this way, listeners may be convinced to become foot soldiers to attain justice for Boyd, her family, or other victims of police malfeasance. In that sense, “#Crook” harbors significant inspirational potential, and listeners are poised to become part of a long term, grassroots resistance effort comprised of

multiple and diverse communities.

Although the song's musical composition is sparse, elements add aesthetic punch to underscore an overt social justice agenda to reinstate fundamental human rights under the law. A cleverly deployed deejay scratch on the word "crook" in the chorus becomes a persistent, repetitive accusation. Shuffling, ambulatory drums propel the song to suggest continued, forward momentum for the cause. Building on the rhythm track, a stuttering bass guitar lick insinuates a stammering, guilty mayor at the base of the cover-up. A keyboard riff that oscillates between two minor keys creates a "crooked" intonation to subtly suggest the sound of a whistle. These sonic aesthetic devices point towards one conclusion: Rebel Diaz is blowing the whistle on Rahm. "#Crook" thus illustrates that music holds immense power to ferret out corrupt officials who try to shield institutional perpetrators of murder from prosecution. Thus, the song demonstrably calls for an adherence to basic human rights.

Activism, Outreach, and The Ethics of Aestheticization

These examples of Rebel Diaz's musical output position them squarely in the Black Lives Matter movement. Founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after George Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges on July 13, 2013 for the murder of Trayvon Martin (Alvarez and Buckley), Black Lives Matters constitutes "an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" ("Guiding Principles"). High-profile cases that led to the movement's national rise include the choking death of 43-year-old Eric Garner in Staten Island by the NYPD on July 17, 2014 (Goldstein and Schweber), the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri just three weeks later (August 9) by officer Darren Wilson (Thorsen), and the killing of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio (November 22, 2014), a 12-year-old whose guilt amounted to playing with a toy gun in a public park (Danylko).

As if those tragic deaths were not enough, Crenshaw et al have shown that "2014 also

marked the unjust police killings of a number of Black women, including Gabriella Nevarez, Aura Rosser, Michelle Cusseaux, and Tanisha Anderson," noting further that "[t]he body count of Black women killed by the police continued to rise in 2015 with the killings of Alexia Christian, Meagan Hockaday, Mya Hall, Janisha Fonville, and Natasha McKenna" (3). These deaths led to the foundation of the Say Her Name movement in February 2015 to shed "light on Black women's experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally" (ibid. 4). This type of organizing has come to be known as *hashtag activism*, a term inspired by the Occupy Wall Street protests in Zuccotti Park in the Fall of 2011 and Egypt's Tahrir Square uprising of January 2011 (Augenbraun). Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name reflect not only a sense of desperation and urgency following the uptick in deaths at the hands of police, they remind us that people of color in the United States continue to unduly bear the brunt of institutional violence. By seeking to obtain justice for men, women, and transgendered people of color, this form of activism is more than an online fad. In many ways it envisages the ideals of civic participation the U.S. was founded upon through the redress of grievances. While nativist, far-right political movements may also draw upon such online tools to advance their agenda, activists do so to draw communities together to contest wanton murder—a transgressive act that resonates across the political spectrum.

Rebel Diaz is very much a part of these movements. Releasing "Stop! Stop and Frisk!" at the height of its practice, the group carried out a real-time, coast-to-coast intervention to question its constitutionality. Viewership stats for an accompanying music video uploaded to the group's YouTube account on February 18, 2012 stand at 11,687. [6] As an independent hip-hop group that records and releases its own material, these figures, though small, underscore the potential for telecommunications technologies to link people up to cooperate on activist campaigns. Other outreach efforts include a performance of the song at "CARRY IT FORWARD: Celebrate the Children of Resistance," an event held on June 16, 2013 by the Rosenberg Fund for

Children in honor of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg on the sixtieth-anniversary of their execution under dubious charges of espionage (Meeropol). Given that the event sought to help children of slain parents, Rebel Diaz works to elevate and activate communities to improve the lives of those left behind, even if under dissimilar circumstances.

Similarly, Rebel Diaz took their accusations of Rahm Emanuel's misdeeds to another level. Alongside *Rebel Diaz Radio*, a weekly show on 99.5 FM WBAI Pacifica (New York) where a variety of community-oriented issues are discussed on air, Rodrigo and Gonzalo produce the short-form topical events program *Ñ Don't Stop* for TeleSur English. In an episode from early April 2016, the two brothers come by chance upon Rahm Emanuel, who was booked on the same flight to New York. Armed with a camera and a microphone, they chase Emanuel down in the arrival hall to ask him how he feels about "having the blood of Laquan McDonald" on his hands. The mayor demurs by stating that he is with his family, to which Rodrigo replies, "Laquan McDonald had a family, too," repeating it many times. He then asks the mayor about mass mobilizations taking place in Chicago to protest the cover-up. Reluctant to answer, Emanuel and his family flee ("*Ñ Don't Stop* – Rahm Emanuel and Bernie in the Bronx."). The incident reflects a rare opportunity to candidly interrogate a public official and speak truth to power. While the video at present only has approximately 2,000 views on YouTube, it nevertheless shows Rebel Diaz's commitment to activist-oriented media outreach. That the incident happened by chance suggests that coincidence works on their behalf.

But are there any ethical concerns, especially regarding the aestheticization of real-world crime and tragedy? Only available as free digital downloads, Rebel Diaz does not receive financial compensation for "Stop! Stop and Frisk!" or "#Crook." (By contrast, Beyoncé's much-lauded "Formation" remains for sale.) Further, these songs are cathartic, inspirational, and motivational. In terms of catharsis, they vocalize frustration and disaffection to allow for a healthy discharge of negative feelings and emotions. Transforming tragedy into music, Rebel Diaz converts indignation and outrage

into political, cultural capital in hopes of initiating social change. Where these songs play in the communities that endure such tragedies, or find their way into others dealing with similar instances of police brutality, a feedback loop emerges. This production chain—criminal transgression, outrage, aestheticization, free dissemination, and activist organizing—represents a deep level of ethical social engagement. If the music of Rebel Diaz actually does recruit people to join movements and become activists themselves, their culture work for human rights will have been successful. They embrace the D.I.Y. attitudes that lie at the heart of punk and hip-hop, and their work very much represents a continuation of the tradition of protest music in America through the voicing of grievances.

Conclusions

From guitar-strummed folksongs and jazz to punk and beat-driven hip-hop, music has long been a part of human rights struggles in the United States. Although the instruments have changed, the intent remains the same: by drawing upon the combined power of music, voice, lyrics, and images, artists make emotional and rational appeals to audiences. Hip-hop, arguably one of most important pop cultural forms today, has become the *de rigueur* social protest form in music. Rap artists do more than any other to raise awareness and call upon people to become politically active and engaged. In that sense, this musical activist work, especially when it contains a litany of complaints and demands change, is rooted in the tradition of the jeremiad.

Of the many hip-hop artists involved in human rights struggles, Rebel Diaz stands at the fore. Their work encourages listeners to rise up, collectively take action, and demand justice through persistent resistance. "Stop! Stop and Frisk!" makes a convincing case for ending the ethically questionable police practice of the same name. With 23,000 frisks in New York in 2015 under the de Blasio administration (as opposed to the nearly 686,000 in 2011 under Mayor Bloomberg), the practice, though in decline, continues ("*Stop-and-Frisk Data*"). "#Crook," on the other hand, aestheticizes the murder of Laquan McDonald to expose a cover-

up by the administration of Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel. Although many of the families that have lost loved ones to police misconduct have received financial compensation, officers often face no charges. When they do, they are typically acquitted. In Laquan's case, the McDonald family was remunerated for their loss, but Mayor Emanuel remains in office, and Jason Van Dyke still awaits trial.* In addition to their musical output, the media outreach efforts of the Venegas brothers on Pacifica Radio and TeleSur English reflect two more instances of how Rodrigo and Gonzalo invite, and even demand, listeners to stand up and get involved.

Tempting though it may be to suggest that the aestheticization of real-world events decontextualizes, and thus severs, them from their historical, social, or cultural specificity (and possibly even their humanity), Rebel Diaz, especially in the two songs analyzed here, has been able to draw significant sociopolitical power from tragedy. If such music gets people involved in actively working for human rights, then we might call the combined aural and visual impact of such material the aesthetic experience of activist art. With musical groups like Rebel Diaz carrying out the redress of grievances in song, and the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name campaigns demanding recognition for the victims of police crime, it is clear that efforts to overcome institutionally protected racialized violence in the United States rages on. The fight for fundamental human rights continues.

*Editor's Note: Officer Van Dyke was found guilty of second-degree murder on October 2018 and awaits sentencing.

Endnotes

[1] The song is available at rebeldiaz.bandcamp.com/track/stop-stop-and-frisk.

[2] Permission to reproduce the cover art for both singles was granted by the group via Twitter. See @RebelDiaz.

[3] Since a transcript does not appear on Rebel Diaz's Bandcamp page, Genius.com, or any other popular lyrics website, I've transcribed the lyrics myself. Any errors are my own.

[4] The song is available at rebeldiaz.bandcamp.com/track/

crook.

[5] In retaining the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the lyrics as they appear on the site, I refrain from using "[sic]" mainly to avoid disrupting the flow of the lyrics.

[6] See "STOP! STOP AND FRISK!- RDACBX (feat. Rebel Diaz, Vithym, Luss)."

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