



## THE LYRICS OF *RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE*: A STUDY IN RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY?\*

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes selected lyrics by the now defunct metal/rap band *Rage Against The Machine* as a tool for teaching and understanding radical criminology. Included is a brief overview of the major tenets of the radical position, an analysis of songs from three of *Rage Against The Machine's* albums as well as additional singles, and a discussion of their teaching utility.

### INTRODUCTION

Radical criminology arose on the criminological scene in the 1960s, as a response to criticisms of traditional criminology as well as to political, social, and economic events occurring in the United States at the time. Starting with interpretations of the works of Marx and Engels and building on the work of labeling and conflict theorists (Lynch, 1997), radicals questioned both traditional criminological explanations of why crime occurs and critiqued the emphasis on positivistic methodologies. As Lynch and Groves (1989) note, the choice of the term radical truly describes this perspective, as to be radical means to try to get to the root of things and to value social reorganization or social change; both are major tenets of the radical criminological view.

The radical perspective, while sharing many similarities with conflict theorists, is considered distinct. While both groups see conflict as the central component of criminality, radical theorists automatically look to class as the source of this conflict, whereas conflict theorists, who might look at class relationships, are even more likely to look at cultural and subcultural factors (Lynch, 1997). Further, conflict theorists feel that it is possible to discover the source of conflict through the objective use of scientific means, while radical theorists denounce "objective means" as merely a mechanism to maintain the status quo (Lynch, 1997).

Cardarelli and Hicks (1997) note that the radical perspective was recognized and legitimated throughout the 1970s and 1980s, owing to the inclusion of radically oriented sessions at the American Society of Criminology (ASC) meetings. Formal recognition came when the Division of Critical Criminology was established by the ASC in 1990, which "further strengthens the legitimation of critical/radical criminology within the discipline" (Cardarelli & Hicks, 1997, p. 101). It also received attention outside of academe, as the political, economic, and social climate of the late 1960s and 1970s was influenced by radical ideas (Cardarelli and Hicks, 1997). In fact, Pelfry (1980) reports survey data based on the views of 384 members of criminological organizations in the 1970s; these data reveal that a majority felt as though the "new criminology" warranted further study and was a viable alternative to mainstream criminology. [End Page 150]

Some have argued that today, with an aging population, the radical criminological perspective has virtually died. Inciardi (1980) foresaw this "crisis" when he published *Radical Criminology: The Coming Crises in 1980*. The "crises" he was referring to include the credibility and mere existence of the radical perspective. Inciardi (1980) discusses the importance of the widespread acceptance of the radical perspective. "In the absence of credibility and acceptability by the wider community of criminological scholars, the purpose of radical thought can never be achieved and its impact can never come to pass" (Inciardi, 1980, pp. 8-9). This issue is being addressed today by a symposium of criminologists

associated with the ASC; their question is whether there still exists a radical criminology. This is a legitimate concern, as the knowledge that criminal justice in the United States is racist, classist, and ineffective persists, whether or not radical criminology does. While a complete review of the radical perspective is not appropriate here, it is clear that concerns remain regarding its validity and utility within academe.

Radical approaches, however, were never and should not be confined to criminologists working or studying in academe. In fact, for the perspective to have any true utility, as noted by [Inciardi \(1980\)](#), it would require more mainstream exposure. Recognizing, yet critiquing, the notion that radical criminology must have application beyond academe, [Friedrichs \(1980\)](#) states: "That the impact of radical criminology has extended beyond the academy is, to date, less clear" (p. 40). Indeed, the critique of the entire capitalist system put forth by radicals, as well as the proposed economic revolution, must be heard by an audience outside academe. As [Cardarelli and Hicks \(1997\)](#) state: "To the degree that radical movements are unable to invoke external social and cultural forces in their struggles, the debates are likely to be confined to the Academy with much effort directed toward legitimation under the principles of academic freedom" (p. 99).

This article looks at the existence of radical criminology outside of academe, as it examines the notion of a radical approach to the understanding of crime as it is presented in popular culture. Specifically, the work of the now defunct band *Rage Against The Machine* is examined as exemplifying the radical perspective. As [Alkhvist \(1999\)](#) notes, "*Faith No More's 'War Pigs'* (1989) and *Rage Against The Machine's* leftist melding of metal and rap (1992, 1996, 1999) also take aim at the same targets as Marx" (p. 133). These works are analyzed in regards to their ability to reflect the radical position, as well as their utility as a teaching tool.

Prior to assessing the utility of *Rage Against The Machine's* ideas and lyrics as examples of radical criminology, an overview of the basic tenets of the radical perspective is described. The summary is organized into five main areas: The roots of radical criminology in Marxism; radical interpretations of law and economy; creation and application of criminal laws; why crime occurs; and the radical critique of criminal justice. This is followed by a description of *Rage Against The Machine*, the beliefs of its members, and a general timeline of their works. Selected lyrics are then analyzed for their consistency with the radical perspective. These are presented by theme (i.e., capitalism and crime; ideological justifications; actions to be taken) and are integrated with the extant literature regarding radical criminology. Implications for teaching and exploring radical criminology appear in the final section. **[End Page 151]**

## BASIC TENETS OF RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY

***The Roots of Radical Criminology in Marxism.*** As noted above, radical criminologists generally adhere to Marxist principles. Although neither Marx nor Engels discussed crime or criminal justice at length, Marx, as described in [Chambliss and Mankoff \(1976\)](#), did comment that crime produces jobs. "The criminal ... produces the whole of the police and of criminal justice, constables, judges, hangman, juries, etc." ([Chambliss & Mankoff, 1976, p. 6](#)). The radical perspective requires an understanding of the importance of the relationship between the economic system and the formation of classes, as well as the relationship between those classes. As [Lynch and Groves \(1989\)](#) note: "First and foremost, Marx is saying that any economic system will tend to be supported by 'superstructural' factors such as law, politics, education, and consciousness" (p. 13). Thus, law is not something that exists "out there;" it is embedded in the extant economic system in a given society. In a capitalist system, for example, laws will be enacted to protect private property, as individual ownership of land and resources is paramount. As capitalism develops and conflicts between the classes increase (they inevitably will because capitalism creates class conflict), more acts will be defined as criminal ([Chambliss & Mankoff, 1976](#)). Criminal law, then, is not a reflection of consensus or custom, as in the functionalist view, but is a "set of rules laid down by the state in the interests of the ruling class and resulting from the conflicts inherent in class-structured society" ([Chambliss & Mankoff, 1976, p. 6](#)).

***Radical Interpretations of Law and Economy.*** Radical criminologists have not completely agreed on the extent that the law is embedded in the economic system. Instrumentalist Marxists see the law as simply a tool used by those in power to promote their own economic and political concerns. More radicals, however, take a structural perspective. These people see the law as a system of rules and regulations that is determined by the economic system, that reinforces the economic and political power of the privileged, but that also grows to have some degree of autonomy, as opposed to the overly deterministic view of instrumentalists. In addressing crime and the law, [Lynch and Groves \(1989\)](#) state: "Contemporary Marxists wish to explore ways in which law and criminal justice, as forms of social control, have been used to contain class struggle and maintain class divisions at different times and in different societies" (pp. 5-6). The bottom line for this group is that: "Law is not exclusively an instrument of the ruling class, but it is designed to maintain the long term interests of capital" ([Lynch and Groves, 1989, p. 26](#)). This is due, in part, to the fact that not only those who make the laws, but those who interpret and enforce them as well, are virtually all middle to upper class.

**Creation and Application of Criminal Laws.** In addition to the centrality of a society's economic system in their legal institutions, radical criminologists follow labeling theorists' view of what constitutes a crime in that they "argue that acceptance of the legal definition entails deference to the state, which in their view is biased in favor of those holding positions of power and authority" (Lynch and Groves, 1989, 31). As Quinney (2000) states, one of the main propositions of a radical or critical criminology is that "criminal definitions are formulated according to the interests of those segments (types of social groupings) of society which have the power to translate their interests into public policy" (p. 76). The criminal label "varies according to the extent to which the behaviors of the powerless conflict with the interests of the power segments" (Quinney, 2000, p. 77). Chambliss and Mankoff (1976) state that the lower classes [End Page 152] are more likely to be labeled criminal, as the control of that label rests with the bourgeoisie, "who protect themselves from such labels by the laws they select to make and enforce. Further, as capitalism expands so will penal law in its efforts to 'coerce the proletariat into submission'" (p. 8). Radicals argue that criminologists should not only be interested in behaviors traditionally proscribed by criminal law, but also those behaviors that result in the violation of human rights. While traditional criminologists, as well as the general public, have focused on those crimes reported in the *Uniform Crime Reports*, radicals argue that: "The focus on common crimes and common criminals serves ideological purposes that turn public attention from crimes committed by the ruling class to crimes committed by the powerless" (Lynch and Groves, 1989, p. 34).

Radicals, then, are also interested in governmental or state crime, white-collar crime, or "crime in the suites," as it is often called, and what Michalowski, as cited in Lynch and Groves (1989), calls "crimes of capital." He defines crimes of capital as: "Socially injurious acts that arise from the ownership or management of capital or from occupancy of positions of trust in institutions designed to facilitate the accumulation of capital" (Lynch & Groves, 1989, p. 34). Others define the specific crimes differently, but maintain the critique of using only state-driven crime definitions. Kauzlarich and Kramer (1998) identify the categories of governmental crime, state crime, and political white-collar crime. Governmental crime includes those acts committed within the entire governmental context. State crimes are those acts committed by the state or agencies of the state, while political white-collar crime are those acts committed by political officials but for their own personal benefit. Quinney (2000) says: "Someplace along the way ... it occurred to me that there were others who were violating criminal laws, such as businessmen and politicians. But this was only a transition period, for soon I realized that the really bad guys were those who make laws to protect their own selfish interests, those who oppress others" (p. 88).

Additionally, "Criminal labels are not the only mechanism used by the powerful to express their displeasure with certain behaviors. Particularly threatening behaviors – behaviors which menace the social, economic, and political order – are labeled terrorist as well as criminal" (Lynch and Groves, 1989, p. 39). As with other crimes, the application of the label "terrorist" is state-controlled. Thus, the powerful are able to exclude their own acts, as well as the acts of friendly countries and groups.

**Why Crime Occurs.** Criminality is not a function of human nature. Rather, "capitalism produces egocentric, greedy, and predatory human behavior" (Friedrichs, 1980, p. 38). As people act in ways that are compatible with their class position (Chambliss & Mankoff, 1976), several different types of crime occur. "Crime is a reaction to the life conditions of a person's social class" (Chambliss & Mankoff, 1976, p. 9). According to Quinney (2000), crimes of economic domination are crimes committed by corporations, "from price-fixing to pollution of the environment" (p. 163). This also includes the economic crimes of individual businessmen. Crimes of government are committed by both elected and appointed officials, and includes such scandals as Watergate, as well as offenses committed by the government against persons and groups who they perceive to be a threat to national security. Crimes of control include those acts, both felonies and misdemeanors, committed by law enforcement agents, especially police officers, carried out "in the name of the law" (Quinney, 2000, p. 163). Crimes of control may [End Page 153] also include violations of civil liberties by agents of the law, such as unlawful surveillance. Unlike traditional law, radicals note that many social injuries committed by the capitalist state or in the name of capitalist values should also be included. "These systemic actions, involving the denial of basic human rights (resulting in sexism, racism, and economic exploitation), are an integral part of capitalism and are important to its survival" (Quinney, 2000, p. 164).

Of course, crime is also committed by the non-ruling class. These people, known to Marx and Engels as the *lumpenproletariat*, generally commit crimes of accommodation, according to Quinney (2000). Some of the crimes committed by the *lumpenproletariat* are called predatory crimes. These are "of a parasitical nature, including burglary, robbery, drug dealing, and hustling of various sorts" (Quinney, 2000, p. 165). In explaining why these acts occur, Quinney (2000) says: "The behavior, although pursued out of the need to survive, is a reproduction of the capitalist system. The crimes are nevertheless antagonistic to the capitalist order. Most police activity is directed against these crimes" (p. 165). Personal crimes occur, and are generally committed, against members of the same class. This includes the crimes of murder, assault, and rape. In explanation, Quinney (2000) says: "They are pursued by those who are already brutalized by the conditions of capitalism. These actions occur in immediate situations that are themselves the

result of more basic accommodations to capitalism" (p. 165). As Reiman (1998) notes, however, the public loses more from such practices as price-fixing, monopolies, and consumer deception than from all of the FBI indexed property crimes combined.

***Radical Critique of Criminal Justice.*** Building on this critique of capitalism, Lynch and Groves (1989) explain how radicals also critique the utility of criminal justice as it works in the United States. They say:

As an institution which deals with processing and adjudicating criminals, the criminal justice system does not affect the method of production, nor does it redistribute ownership; it merely reinforces existing patterns of ownership. This being the case, the criminal justice system is not in a position to solve the problems inherent in capitalist production, problems which create criminal behavior and the criminalization of certain forms of behavior (p. 98).

Reiman (1998) says the goal of the criminal justice system is not to eliminate or even significantly reduce crime, but to project the image that the poor constitute a threat. Further, "punishing individuals will not affect rates of criminal behavior, nor will it correct the social conditions which caused criminal behavior in the first place. By focusing attention on individual criminals, courts present us with the image of a person who needs correcting instead of a social system which needs reorganization" (Lynch and Groves, 1989, p. 99). Punishment, then, "serves many ideological functions, reinforcing certain beliefs about the content of appropriate behavior patterns. By imprisoning certain types of people (especially lower class persons, blacks, and the young), capitalist forms of punishment create the belief that there is a 'class of criminals' who should be feared because they might exhibit criminal behavior" (Lynch & Groves, 1989, p. 117). [End Page 154]

According to Shichor (1980), radical criminologists believe that only revolutionary change can alter the capitalist economic, political, and social arrangements. He and others see this as a weakness, in that "this position categorically excludes gradual or small-scale change; compromises by definition are eliminated" (p. 197). The thinking is that reforms do not address the real problems, "they only serve to make life more palatable under the capitalist system. They therefore pacify the exploited masses and strengthen the capitalist system" (Shichor, 1980, p. 197). Friedrichs (1980) states that radical criminology "raises questions about the moral legitimacy of complying with the 'inherently illegitimate order.' While radical criminology does not condone 'street crime' – most directed against the poor – it challenges a legal conception and criminal justice system response which does not deal with the most harmful crimes effectively – namely those committed in the name of the state or by the economic elite" (p. 50).

In sum, Gordon (1976) describes three ways that the current patterns of criminal justice support the criminal justice system. First, "the pervasive patterns of selective enforcement seem to reinforce a prevalent ideology in this society that individuals, rather than institutions, are to blame for social problems" (p. 207). Second, our criminal justice processes work to "neutralize the potential opposition to the system of many of our most oppressed citizens. In particular, the system serves ultimately to keep thousands of men out of the job market or trapped in the secondary labor market by perpetuating a set of institutions which serves functionally to feed large numbers of blacks (and poor whites) through the cycle of crime, imprisonment, parole, and recidivism" (Gordon, 1976, p. 207). Third, and most importantly, according to Gordon (1976), current patterns of crime and punishment:

Allow us to ignore some basic issues about the relationship in our society between institutions and individuals. By treating criminals as animals and misfits, as enemies of the state, we are permitted to continue avoiding some basic questions about the dehumanizing effects of our social institutions. We keep our criminals out of sight, so we are never forced to recognize and deal with the psychic punishment we inflict on them. Like the schools and welfare system, the legal system turns out, upon close inspection, to rob most of its "clients" of the last vestiges of their personal dignity (p. 208).

### ***RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE***

*Rage Against The Machine (Rage)* consisted of four members. Lead vocalist and songwriter Zack de la Rocha and guitarist Tom Morello are the most politically active of the group. Morello's father was a member of the Mau Mau guerilla army that freed Kenya from British colonial rule, while his mother is a founding member of Parents for Rock and Rap, an anti-censorship group (see [www.ratm.org](http://www.ratm.org)). De la Rocha's mother holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, while his father was a member of "Los Four," a group that depicted Chicano history through pictures. It appears that de la Rocha's father, who had a nervous breakdown, was religiously demanding, requiring that Zack embrace the Bible in all

parts of his life (see [www.ratm.org](http://www.ratm.org)). This may, at least in part, explain the group's apparent disdain for organized religion. The band released four separate albums, plus numerous live and specialty releases, prior to their break up. Lyrics from their first three albums, the self-titled *Rage Against The Machine* from 1992, *Evil Empire* from 1996, and *The Battle of Los Angeles* from 1999, will be analyzed here. Their last album, "*Renegades*," is not considered, as it consisted of remakes of other people's work. Three [End Page 155] other songs performed by *Rage* are also described here. These lyrics were found on the website [www.ratm.org](http://www.ratm.org), listed as "Other" lyrics, meaning they were not included in an album. As will be shown presently, each of the three albums reflects basic themes in radical criminology.

## RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY AND RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Three primary themes, all consistent with the tenets of radical criminology outlined previously, can be seen in the lyrics of each of the songs described here. First there is the idea that capitalism is the source of criminality and that the ruling elite are even more criminal than those labeled as such. In essence, lyrics dealing with the creation, interpretation, and application of law in a capitalist society are included under this theme. The second theme is that the media present propaganda that prohibits the general public from recognizing capitalist ideologies. Other societal institutions, especially schools and the criminal justice system, also reflect the capitalist structure and, therefore, are also culpable. Further, there is also the notion that capitalist "power whores" justify their actions in the name of religion, but are in reality anything but religious or spiritual. In sum, this theme includes ideological support for capitalist practices. Third, the resolution of the problems induced by capitalism is revolution, ranging from violent forms to revolution of knowledge. It should be known, however, that most criminologists do not advocate violent revolution. What follows is an exploration of radical criminological themes in *Rage's* lyrics, organized by the themes described above. Where applicable, selected lyrics are linked back to radical literature in order to show the connections between them.

**Capitalism and Crime.** In "*Bombtrack*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/bombtrack.htm>) from the 1992 self-titled album, we hear the line: "Landlords and power whores on my people they took turns." This line reflects the notion that those in control of the land and resources, the *bourgeoisie*, are exploitative. The *bourgeoisie* have no concern about literally walking all over workers, as anything can and must go in the name of profit. It is, in essence, a statement about state or political crime. Certain groups of the working class, or *proletariat*, are most vulnerable, including minorities. [Pepinsky and Jesilow](#) (1992) suggest that:

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The law is rather arbitrary about what kinds of harm are regarded as crime. It can be considered criminal to refuse to kill, as conscientious objectors have discovered during wartime. It can be legally tolerable to kill, in self-defense or in defense of property. On the other hand, it may be regarded as unlawful to help a terminally ill person in great pain to commit suicide. Common sense and compassion are often missing in the law's definition of what is permissible (p. 28).

As de la Rocha has Mexican heritage, it is likely that "my people" refers to Mexicans. *Rage* discusses the radical notion that particular minority groups are more affected than others by *bourgeoisie* law and public policy. Capitalist policies harm females in "*Revolver*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/revolver.htm>) also from *Evil Empire*. *Rage* says: "His spit is worth more than her work." Similarly, "*Down Rodeo*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/rodeo.htm>) from the *Evil Empire* album features the line: [End Page 156] "Rollin' down Rodeo with a shotgun. These people ain't seen a brown skin man since their grandparent's bought one."

In "*Voice of the Voiceless*," (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/voiceless.htm>) off *The Battle of Los Angeles* album, *Rage* takes up the story of Mumia Abu Jamal, who many feel is wrongly imprisoned for killing a police officer in Philadelphia. While his guilt or innocence is in dispute, even more in question is the sham of a trial he received. In fact, an appellate court recently changed his sentence from death to life imprisonment. Mumia was known as the "voice of the voiceless," speaking out about racial injustices in Philadelphia, especially those committed by the police department. *Rage* says: "You see the powerful got nervous, 'cause he refused to be their servant."

"*Bulls on Parade*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/bulls.htm>), probably *Rage's* most popular song from the 1996 *Evil Empire* album, discusses the crimes committed by capitalists. "Weapons not food, not homes, not shoes, not need, just feed the war cannibal animal, I walk the corner to the cemetery that used to be the library." This is consistent with the radical suggestion, propagated by the Schwendingers and others, that human rights should be the foundation of all laws.

Fanon (1963) discusses the notion of capitalists as war-mongers when he says: "Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories. For centuries the capitalists have behaved in the underdeveloped world like nothing more than war criminals" (p. 101).

Capitalist greed, leading to injury or the loss of life for the powerless, is described in several places throughout the song "Testify" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/testify.htm>). "The car is our wheelchair, my witness your coughing. Oily silence mocks the legless, now traveling in coffins." The rush for oil that has led to numerous wars is also described. "The pipeline is gushing, while here we lie in tombs," and "mass graves for the pump and the price is set." Marx himself was quite clear about the fact that capitalism breeds greed, as evidenced by these words: "We have seen how political economy regards exchange itself as an accidental fact. The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are greed and the war among the greedy-competition" (quoted in Kamenka, 1983, p. 132). Chomsky (1997) echoes these same thoughts when he says:

That tells you how a well-functioning propaganda system works. People can believe that when we use force against Iraq and Kuwait it's because we really observe the principle that illegal occupation and human rights abuses should be met by force. They don't see what it would mean if those principles were applied to U.S. behavior. That's a success of propaganda of quite a spectacular type (p. 46).

*Rage* also addresses the way that the *bourgeoisie* use workers in criminal ways: "My slaving, sweating, the skin right off my bones."

"War Within a Breath" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/breath.htm>), from 1999's *The Battle of Los Angeles*, discusses corporate and political exploitation and crime. "Every official that comes in cripples us, leaves us maimed, silent, and tamed. And with our flesh and bones he [End Page 157] builds his homes." Going on: "Their existence is a crime. Their seat, their robe, their tie. Their land deeds, their hired guns. They're the crime."

"Calm Like a Bomb" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/calm.htm>), also from the 1999 *The Battle of Los Angeles* album, discusses the impact of capitalist crimes. *Rage* says: "Stroll through the shanties and the cities remain. Same bodies buried hungry but with different last names. Pick a point on the globe, yes the picture's the same." They go on to list a variety of capitalist offenses and tools used to perpetrate them: "A bank, a church, a myth, a hearse, a mall, a loan, a child dead at birth. A white hooded judge and a syringe and a vein. A field full of slaves some corn and some debt. There's a ditch full of bodies, the check for the rent. A mass without roofs, a prison, a jail."

In arguing that corporate or governmental crimes in a capitalist country are even more problematic than other crimes, Kappeler, Blumberg, and Potter (2000) underscore three main myths that are perpetrated to the public:

The first of these myths is that corporate criminality causes less damage, both economic and physical, than traditional "street crimes." Government officials have tried to present the issue of corporate crimes in terms of individual misconduct and fraud, ignoring the more pervasive and dangerous criminality of corporations. The second myth is that corporate crimes are accidents or oversights – that they are unintended crimes lacking the criminal intent found in crimes of violence and theft. The third myth is that current laws and law enforcement efforts are more than sufficient to deal with the problem. This argument is frequently carried a step further to suggest that present laws are too stringent and severe and out of proportion to the danger of the behavior (p. 122).

In a clear critique of criminal justice in capitalist societies presented in "Year of the Boomerang" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/year.htm>), *Rage* states: "Cast me into classes for electroshock. Straight incarcerated, the curriculum a cell block." They go on: "'cause the bosses right to live is mine to die."

In "Darkness (of Greed)" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/other/darkness.htm>), *Rage* says: "Greed! 'causing innocent blood to flow. Entire culture, lost in the overthrow. They came to seize and take whatever they please, then all they gave back was death and disease. My people were left with no choice but to decide, to conform to a system, responsible for genocide." These lines again reflect the theme that capitalism breeds greed, which then allows for both physical and cultural genocide. As Churchill (1992) says: "Literature crafted by a dominating culture can be an insidious force,

disinforming people who might otherwise develop a clearer understanding of the struggles for survival faced by an indigenous population" (p. 1).

*"Hadda Been Playing on the Jukebox (aka JFK)"* (<http://www.ratm.org/music/other/jfk.htm>) was written by Allen Ginsberg and performed by *Rage* in concert. Illustrating the notion of a capitalist police state, the refrain "The CIA and the Mafia are in cahoots" appears. This phrase echoes the words of Quinney (2000), who states: "The oppression within the United States cannot be separated from American imperialism abroad. The crisis of the American empire is complete. The war waged against people abroad is [End Page 158] part of the same war waged against the oppressed at home. ... A counterinsurgency program is being carried out through the CIA abroad and the FBI, LEAA, and the local police at home" (p. 90). A lengthy critique of the power structure is described in the following passage, quoted here at length:

One big set of gangs working together in cahoots

Hitmen

Murderers everywhere

The secret

The drunk

The brutal

The dirty rich

On top of a slag heap of prisons

Industrial cancer

Plutonium smog

Garbage cities

Grandma's bed soft from father's resentment

It had to be the rulers

They wanted law and order

And they got rich on wanting protection for the status quo

They wanted junkies

They wanted Attica

They wanted Kent State

They wanted war in Indochina

It had to be the CIA and the Mafia and the FBI

Multinational capitalists

Strong armed squads

Private detective agencies for the rich

And their armies and navies and their air force bombing planes

It had to be capitalism

The vortex of this rage

This competition

Man to man

The horse's head in a capitalist's bed

These lyrics are quite close to the work of **Becket and Sasson** (2000):

Concern about crime, together with the technologies that have grown around it, has fueled and legitimated new strategies for keeping tabs on people. Surveillance strategies long associated with prison have thus spilled into communities, as law enforcers and **[End Page 159]** security guards increasingly monitor public places – a trend captured in the phrase "prisonization of society" (p. 188).

In all, the work of *Rage* as well as **Beckett and Sasson** (2000) describes social control efforts that grow from capitalist criminal "injustice."

Finally, *Rage* continues its radical critique in "*Producer/Fall from the Grace of the People*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/other/produce.htm>). In a direct assault on the incarceration binge in the United States, *Rage* says: "And the ideas you uphold while incarcerated, a victim of social experiment. Eventually addicted to your eight hour injections of hypocrisy and arrogance and greed." Going on: "Forced to sit with complicity in front of my executioners, as they bludgeoned me with their so-called superior values, and demanded my submission. I became an indentured servant in a factory, where I myself was the product."

***Ideological Justifications***. Illustrating the point that media and other institutions keep the people from knowing the true source of their pain, *Rage* says in "*Bombtrack*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/bombtrack.htm>) from *Rage Against The Machine*: "See through the news and views that twist reality." In "*Take the Power Back*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/power.htm>), also from the 1992 self-titled album, *Rage* focuses more on the lies people are told at the hands of capitalist media. They say: "One-sided stories for years and years and years." Regarding our knowledge of the issues of state and political crime, in "*Bulls on Parade*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/bulls.htm>) *Rage* says: "What we don't know keeps the contracts alive and movin'. They don't burn the books they just remove 'em."

*Rage* seems to have become even more overtly political, as well as more articulate, in their 1999 album *The Battle of Los Angeles*. "*Testify*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/testify.htm>) addresses the media's role in hate and warmongering and the criminality associated with capitalism. Regarding the media during the Persian Gulf War and other assaults on the Middle East, *Rage* says: "Mister Anchor assure me that Baghdad is burning. Your voice it is so soothing, that cunning mantra of killing." **Chomsky** (1997) explains why this occurs: "Usually the population is pacifist, just like they were during the First World War. The public sees no reason to get involved in foreign adventures, killing, and torture. So you have to whip them up. And to whip them up you have to frighten them" (p. 25). *Rage* goes on: "I need you, my witness, to dress this up so bloodless. To numb me and purge me now of thoughts of blaming you." The song ends with the Orwellian prophecy: "Who controls the past now, controls the future; who controls the present now, controls the past" (**Orwell**, 1949).

Echoing their admonition from "*Testify*," *Rage* warns us in "*Voice of the Voiceless*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/voiceless.htm>) that: "Orwell's hell, a terror era coming through." However, "this little brother's watching you, too." As noted above, this song is about Mumia Abu Jamal. Although Mumia's case is embedded in violence, Wolf, as cited in **Quinney** (2000), states that the state can repress in ways that are not violent, but equally if not more problematic. He says: "The most perfectly repressive (though not violently so) capitalist system ... would not be a police state, but the complete opposite, one in which there were no police **[End**

**Page 160]** because there was nothing to police, everyone having accepted the legitimacy of that society and all its daily consequences" (pp. 160-161). This is actually more Huxleyian than Orwellian, as Huxley argued that no one would even think to question their repression because they would not recognize it (Postman, 1986).

"*Know Your Enemy*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/enemy.htm>) from *Rage Against The Machine* is essentially a critique of the "American Dream." Toward the end of the song, *Rage* says: "Compromise, conformity, assimilation, submission, ignorance, hypocrisy, brutality, the elite. All of which are American Dreams." Rather than the American Dream that we are taught, *Rage* feels that the values listed above are the true values in this country. This is consistent with the work of Ferguson (1998), who says in regards to media depictions of the "American Dream" that: "... Positive stereotypes feed the myth that success is equally accessible to all. What this suggests is that those who are not successful have decided not to accept and embrace the American Dream, and have chosen a life of savagery and/or destitution" (pp. 179-180). The Marxist critique is clear, especially in the final choice of "the elite."

Echoing the mantra of submission to authorities, "*Killing in the Name Of*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/killing.htm>), from the self-titled album, simply repeats: "And now you do what they told ya. And now you're under control," building in intensity until de la Rocha is screaming with angst [Editor's note: By the last refrain, de la Rocha is screaming: "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me! Motherfucker!"]. As Quinney (2000) states, in a capitalist system, "criminal law is increasingly used in the attempt to maintain domestic order. The underclass, the class that must remain oppressed for the triumph of the dominant economic class, will continue to be the object of criminal law as long as the dominant class seeks to perpetuate itself" (p. 90). In referring to the use of propaganda in preventing citizens from being aware and thus empowered to fight the genocide, in "*Darkness (of Greed)*" *Rage* says: "Left with no choice but to decide, to conform to a system. Their minds enslaved, their souls encaged." Later *Rage* describes white hegemony: "Ya cram ya culture down my throat. Say I'm inferior when I find that I choke. Ya fill my mind with a false sense of history. And then you wonder why I have no identity?"

One of *Rage's* more popular songs from the *Evil Empire* album, "*Down Rodeo*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/rodeo.htm>), articulates the problems with "truth" as we know it, with organized religion, and with capitalism. The following line links these critiques together: "One God, one market, one truth, one consumer. Just a quiet peaceful dance for the things we'll never have." "*Year of the Boomerang*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/year.htm>), from the *Evil Empire* album, further addresses capitalist ideology when *Rage* describes being "enslaved by dogma." Much like Orwell's doublespeak, characterized by the mantras "War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength," the lack of ability of the oppressed classes to articulate and act on their own oppression is purposeful. As Quinney (2000) says: "Thinking in itself is the beginning of a critical philosophy" (p. 103).

Schools are generally held responsible for perpetrating the American Dream myth in "*Know your Enemy*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/enemy.htm>) from the self-titled album. *Rage* says: "Yes, I know my enemies. They're my teachers who taught me to fight me." Another song from the self-titled album, "*Take the Power Back*" [**End Page 161]**] (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/power.htm>), also discusses the hegemony of schools: "The present curriculum, I put my fist in 'em. Eurocentric every last one of 'em. See right through the red, white, and blue disguise."

The notion of religious justification for oppression is clear in "*Take the Power Back*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/power.htm>) when *Rage* says: "So-called facts are fraud. They want us to allege and pledge and bow down to their God." Indeed, radical criminologists believe that the system is set up to do one thing, that is to keep order, but in fact does something else, which is to depict "the enemy."

"*Testify*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/testify.htm>) from *The Battle of Los Angeles* discusses the ways that religion is used to justify capitalist crimes. Religion is envisioned, as Marx did, as the "opiate of the masses" in the line: "Your temple, it calms me, so I can carry on."

**Actions to be Taken.** What should we do about these problems created by capitalists? In "*Bombtrack*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/ratm/bombtrack.htm>) from the self-titled album, *Rage* tells us: "Burn, burn, yes, ya gonna burn." This coupled with the line, "I warm my hands upon the flames of the flag," suggest that they advocate such symbolic gestures as burning the United States flag to express their convictions.

*Rage* advocates violent revolution in "*Year of the Boomerang*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/evil/year.htm>), citing the work of Franz Fanon regarding the French colonization of Algeria: "Grab the cannon like Fanon," *Rage* recommends. *Rage* has developed a recommended reading list on each of the two websites that use their name. These include works by Fanon, as well as Noam Chomsky, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, George Jackson, Howard Zinn, Eldridge Cleaver, and,

of course, Karl Marx (see [www.ratm.org](http://www.ratm.org) and [www.ratm.com](http://www.ratm.com)).

In "War Within a Breath" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/breath.htm>) from the 1999 album *The Battle of Los Angeles*, *Rage* recommends that people "Seize the metropolis, it's you that it's built on." Again seeming to advocate violent revolution, they state: "War within a breath, it's land or death."

"Guerilla Radio" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/guerrilla.htm>), also from the 1999 album *The Battle of Los Angeles*, discusses the notion that true change cannot occur within a capitalist framework. "As the polls close like a casket on truth devoured, a spectacle monopolized, the camera's eye on choice disguised. Was it cast for the mass who burn and toil? Or for the vultures who lust for blood and oil?" These lines are especially interesting in light of George Bush's stolen presidential election. Crimes of the elite are again addressed. "Who stuff the banks, who staff the party ranks. More for Gore or the son of a drug lord." Here awareness is advocated, rather than revolution: "It has to start somewhere. It has to start sometime. What better place than here? What better time than now?" **[End Page 162]**

Once again arguing that we should not obey capitalist laws that allow these discrepancies and these harms, in "*Calm Like a Bomb*" (<http://www.ratm.org/music/bola/calm.htm>) *Rage* says: "There's a right to obey and a right to kill."

### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND EXPLORING RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY

The lyrics of *Rage* demonstrate that there are people, whether knowingly or not, who are still discussing and even pursuing a radical agenda. *Rage* clearly can be considered radical, but the members of this band are not criminologists. Recognition of the connections between radical academic themes and popular culture has import for criminologists because it suggests that the message is out there, even if listeners do not know to, or desire to, label it radical criminology. Regardless of whether the radical perspective has lost credibility, steam, or both, it still must be understood in the evolution of criminological thought and taught to students of the discipline. In explaining this theoretical approach to criminology students, many of whom will be at least partly familiar with the work of the band, *Rage* can provide a useful tool. Pfohl (1980) states: "To teach criminology is to teach about the construction of criminal law, the development of criminal behavior, and the organization and application of criminal control measures" (p. 245). While *Rage* takes a more instrumentalist perspective, it is certainly possible to use their work as an introduction to the structuralist perspective. *Rage's* lyrics can highlight the radical understanding of crime and capitalism, ideological justifications, and actions to be taken.

*Rage's* lyrics can also be introduced as a means of critiquing the flaws with the radical perspective. As Ahlkvist (1999) asserts: "... Music can do much more than illustrate concepts and theories" (p. 126). Ahlkvist (1999) argues that teachers have been criticized for failing to make sociology relevant to diverse audiences, as well as for their use of primarily passive methods. Use of music, however, can promote active learning, described here: "Rather than the teacher presenting facts to the students, the students play an active role in learning by exploring issues and ideas under the guidance of the instructor. Instead of memorizing, and being mesmerized by, a set of often loosely connected facts, the student learns a way of thinking, asking questions, searching for answers, and interpreting observations" (p. 127).

Since completing this analysis of *Rage's* work, I have not taught a criminology course, so I have not had the opportunity to use *Rage's* music as a teaching tool. In the future I plan to incorporate *Rage* into my criminology courses, although I am uncertain of the approach I will take. One option is to introduce students to the radical perspective first through lecture, reading, or other materials, and then to listen and discuss *Rage's* work in more of an application and review fashion. Another option is for students to be given a few songs by *Rage*, as well as by other musicians, that reflect the radical perspective and ask them to work in groups to dissect the lyrics and present their findings to classmates. Other groups of students could perhaps look at different media for application of the radical perspective. Still another option is to begin with a discussion of the lyrics, asking students what they think are the major points *Rage* is making and then connecting those thoughts to the work of radical criminologists.

Reports regarding the use of music in the classroom indicate that it is an effective, as well as interesting, teaching tool. Ahlkvist (1999) summarizes several evaluations of classroom use, each indicating that the music helped students get involved in discussion and encouraged **[End Page 163]** students to question assumptions. Further, music can be used as more than a simple lyric analysis, but as an analytical tool. This provides students the chance to practice "using theoretical, conceptual, and empirical tools to make sociological sense of it" (p. 128). Ahlkvist (1999) says: "Indeed, heavy metal and rap allow fans to symbolically express resistance to dominant cultural forms, ideologies, and identities: A process whereby marginalized people –such as the working class, women, and gay and lesbian youth – use music and other signifying practices to make 'noise' that challenges society's symbolic order" (p. 135).

In addition to the need to teach students about the radical perspective, it is also becoming increasingly important for students to analyze the role of the media in their own knowledge base. In regards to the importance of analyzing film as a teaching tool, Giroux says in **Bailey and Hale** (1998): "Teachers and students should engage popular films seriously as legitimate forms of social knowledge that reveal different sets of struggles among youth within diverse cultural sites" (p. 234). Numerous texts that look at the intersection of crime and popular culture have been produced in the late 1990s, including Bailey and Hale's *Popular Culture, Crime and Justice* (1998), Ferrell and Websdales' *Making Trouble: Cultural Constructions of Crime, Deviance and Control*, and Rafter's *Shots in the Mirror*. Each of these texts has relied on analysis of film, television, or print media, however. Analyzing how music reflects themes of crime and justice has not been fully pursued to date. Using the work of *Rage* to introduce radical criminology is one way to start. In sum, the work of *Rage Against The Machine* can be used to engage students in a critical review of Marxist interpretations of crime, as well as to empower students to be more critical media consumers.

## ENDNOTE

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#### WEB LINKS

Rage Against The Machine: The Official Site. [[www.ratm.com](http://www.ratm.com)].

§rage against the machine§ [[www.ratm.org/index2.htm](http://www.ratm.org/index2.htm)]. **[End Page 166]**