
*One Love* 5:25 and Incarceration

*One Love* is a concept record that functions as an open letter from inside Queensbridge to inside the prison system. It both transcends the place of QB and jail by connecting the two sites in the public sphere. The letter to a friend in jail uses narrative as a clear concept in which to engage in various levels of social and political advocacy. The letter marks the turmoil and conditions that are a product and a cause of disproportionately high rates of incarceration in neglected communities. Nas warns the audience of the viscous effects of incarceration as he encourages his friend to “stay civilized.”

*So stay civilized, time flies*  
*Though incarcerated, your mind dies*  
*I hate it when your moms cries*

It is a difficult task to present and expose inequalities and oppressive situations within popular cultural texts and it is done well here by the use of emotional appeals or pathos. The song revolves around a hook that signifies a call for compassion and respect.

*One love, one love, one love, one love*  
*One love, one love, one love, one love*

The letter represents a postmodern dialog as the medium is both the letter and the song in which these appeals take shape. Early in the letter Nas notes the effects perseveration can
have on incarcerated individuals while painting a positive picture of life outside that continues.

_When the cops came, you shoulda slid to my crib_

_But fuck it black, no time for looking back it's done_

_Plus congratulations, you know you got a son_

The song “One Love” remixes The Heath Brothers “Smilin’ Billy Suite Pt. II” and Parliament’s “Come in Out of the Rain” to provide a backdrop for a letter to an absent figure, an incarcerated friend.

The Heath Brothers, _Smilin’ Billy Suite Pt. II_ 1975

Parliament, _Come in Out of the Rain_ 1972
The sampled track acts as a page, a letter that travels through the hands from outside to inside the prison system. The audience becomes a witness to Nas as he tells a story to an absent identity. The mind of Nas connects with other spaces incapable of entering or leaving. Michael Eric Dyson states that

> It makes demographic sense for rappers to seriously grapple with prison and jail, especially since hip-hop culture is largely created by the young males who are most vulnerable to incarceration. Just as they grapple with the plagues of poverty and police brutality, hip-hop artists contend with the prison bars that seal the fate of many of their peers, and in some visible cases, that of rappers too. (131)

Here a letter to a friend in jail takes a dialogic form as people read and share the letter. Nas tells his friend what is going on in the neighborhood while he is gone much like how he tells the audience of life in Queensbridge. In doing so he paints a vivid picture of all that is missed while involuntarily away from home. The response to this dialog lays in the reading of the message to multiple people. Nas speaks for himself, the neighborhood, and the incarcerated friends incapable of speaking. Ultimately he comes to question how he and other historically marginalized people such as those that disproportionately fill American prisons can exist with an oppressive structure of this reality.

*Mind's in another world thinkin'*

*How can we exist through the facts?*

*Written in school text books, Bibles, etc*

*Fuck a school lecture, the lies get me vexed*