

Gangsta's paradise



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Definition of Paradise

One person's utopian world may not always be the same as their neighbor's.

What one person may deem a paradise may well be a slum for others.

Depending on the time and location of the speaker, their ideal lifestyle may be a reality, or simply a dream of one. Both Stevie Wonder and Coolio musically interpret their societies' idea of paradise. Both Coolio's and Wonder's songs gloomily display their views on society. Through the difference in the context of each writer's life, these two interpretations of the same song are very different in meaning.

Both songs identify the struggle of life as being directly related to the evils of the world such as money and power. Stevie Wonder's "Pastime Paradise" reflects on the racial inequalities that America has struggled with for decades. The song also describes the hope for a future world free from discrimination. Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise" represents the hard-lived lives of gangsters in inner cities. The song also alludes to their dream of one day living in peace. Wonder's "Pastime Paradise" reflection on discrimination between races was greatly altered by Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise. Coolio's description of struggles between gangs was still similar in theme, but very different in meaning. Stevie Wonder was born on May 13, 1950, in Saginaw, Michigan (Marquis Who's Who LLC.). The blind Stevie Wonder has been known by America as an R&B icon since his early 1963 release of "12-Year-Old Genius". Since his start in the music industry, Wonder has won 25 Grammy Awards (Africa News), was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989 (Puterbaugh) and has been recently awarded the

Library of Congress' Gershwin Prize for Popular Song by President Obama (Africa News).

Throughout his career, Wonder has created many songs in which he addresses certain subjects in order to bring change. Wonder once said " I am not a politician. I am an artist. I do express certain feelings about certain things. Even if I give a song that deals with a negative subject, it's only constructive criticism to encourage our minds to look and go in a positive direction" (Trescott). When Wonder released his 1976 hit song " Pastime Paradise", America had only been integrated for 22 years. In America in 1976, most blacks were not treated equally.

Wonder's lifetime experiences with race relations directly influenced his word choice in " Pastime Paradise". In his music, Wonder usually plays songs with his signature style of being weirdly mellow, and forcibly upbeat (Mazmanian). But in " Pastime Paradise", Wonder strongly reveals his concerns with how African Americans are treated. He does this by giving the song a gloomy, depressing style. Wonder best demonstrates his concerns with racial inequality by using powerful words such as " segregation", " race relations", " mutations", and " miscreation".

When Wonder references those " living in a pastime paradise", he is possibly alluding to how Americans are so fixated with the past. Another interpretation of Wonder's song is that he is alluding to African Americans wanting to be back in Africa with their ancestors. Many African Americans have been trying to earn equality ever since slavery was abolished. Wonder is no exception to this. Through a combination of protest, song, and support of fellow blacks, Wonder demonstrates his support for equality in America.

It is apparent in the second half of the song that Wonder dreams of the integration of man. In the second half of the song, Wonder describes a future paradise in which there is no such thing as inequality between different races. He uses words such as "consolation", "integration", and "confirmation" to paint a picture of a world in which all people can live together in unity. Through his credibility of being a pop icon, Wonder hoped that people would hear his song and want to end any racial inequalities still present in America.

Wonder may not just be one of the biggest R&B musicians ever, but he is also very politically conscientious. Wonder even went as far as being an activist against oppression when he was arrested along with a group of anti-apartheid demonstrators outside of the South African Embassy (AP). Whether directly or indirectly stated, Wonder tends to place his political views in his lyrics. In "Pastime Paradise", Wonder expresses his support of African American rights through the line "Proclamation of Race Relations".

Wonder strongly supports the idea of a peaceful, unified America. Wonder supported Martin Luther King's beliefs of an integrated world so much that he helped persuade President Reagan to make Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday (Egan). Although most of Wonder's words are inspiring, some of his lyrics were not always politically supportive. In some cases, Wonder criticized the political leaders of America. President Nixon was a particular American leader that Wonder did not trust. Wonder released two songs in which he bashed Nixon's credibility.

Wonder's 1973 "He's Mistakenly Know-It-All", and his 1974 "You Haven't Done Nothin'" both presented Wonder's ill faith in the American government.

Wonder uses music to make others aware of problems in American society and to evoke a change in society; similarly, rap artist Coolio uses the lyrics in his 1995 hit song "Gangsta's Paradise" to make his audience aware of problems in his community. Through his remix of Wonder's original, Coolio uses the inspiration from the struggles that Wonder faced to correlate his own personal struggles with gang life.

Artis Leon Ivey Jr., also known as Coolio was born on August 1, 1963, in the South Central Los Angeles area of Compton (Jinman). Tommy Boy Records Label Company released this song as a single for the soundtrack for the movie "Dangerous Minds" (Reece). The song "Gangsta's Paradise" was insanely popular with the public. Its a depiction of life in the inner city could have been relatable to most lower class people around the United States and was adopted by some of the richer white teenagers living in the suburbs.

With his release of "Gangsta's Paradise", Coolio portrays himself as a "Gang-Banger". Coolio's remix was likely so popular due to his hard, thuggish appearance. If he had seemed emotionally soft, or sympathetic then his audience may not have been so inclined to believe his credibility as a gangster. Although throughout his career, Coolio has not always been portrayed as a gangster. Coolio has also appeared on Nickelodeon's "All That" as a musical guest. When he appeared on the opening credits of the show, he did not appear gangster.

When he appeared on "All That," Coolio most likely altered his attitude in order to better suit the expectations of the younger audience. While Coolio appeared as a gangster in "Gangsta's Paradise", he also demonstrated how he could alter his persona in his appearance on "All That". When "Gangsta's

"Paradise" was released, the racial gang violence demonstrated in rap music was attractive to a few particular audiences. Many younger Americans during the '90s began to embrace rap music. Many poorer minorities living in the inner cities related to Coolio's portrayal of gang life.

The fact that Coolio served seven months of jail time for committing larceny at the age of seventeen (Hatt, and Schnauffer), and that he had gotten addicted to crack cocaine before the age of twenty (Fulton) supports his credibility of being a gangster. Coolio at a young age joined a Compton based gang called the Baby Crips (Fulton). Coolio possibly used lyrics such as "being down with the hood team" in order to express how important it was for him to become affiliated with a gang. Much richer, white Americans also adopted the context of Coolio's gang life.

Much like the hippie revolution of the '60s, many white American youths wanted to associate with a culture that was different from their own. This combined fan base of much richer white and poorer minority youths gave Coolio tons of publicity. His success at being a rap artist was largely contributed to this integrated fan base. "Gangsta's Paradise" not only won a Grammy award for best solo rap performance of the year (McElroy), but was parodied by Weird Al Yankovic, sold over 2 million copies, and stayed on the Hot Rap Singles Chart at number 1 for 10 weeks (Reece). "Gangsta's Paradise" depicts the life of a gangster and its two possible outcomes, either death or prison. In his song, Coolio describes himself as an "educated fool." Being an "educated fool" means that he understands the consequences of living life as a gangster, but does it anyway. With this description, he acknowledges his actions as "foolish." This knowledge of what happens to

gangsters is why Coolio constantly alludes to death in the lyrics of "Gangsta's Paradise". At the end of the song, he states, "the ones we hurt, are you and me".

In these lines, Coolio expresses his idea that gang members not only hurt others but also hurt themselves. By using such emotional lyrics, Coolio suggests that gang members must alter their lifestyle in order to have a better tomorrow. Stevie Wonder's "Pastime Paradise" and Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise" are both depressing representations of how America defines a paradise. Both songs are completely different due to their difference in context. Through Coolio's life experiences with gang affiliation, he drastically changed the meaning of his remixed version of Wonder's original. "Pastime Paradise" reflects on the evils of the world being due to prejudice, people living in the past, and how equality among race can make a better future. While "Gangsta's Paradise" states how gang violence should end. It also emphasizes that there are certain factors that cause people to join gangs. Coolio demonstrates how racism and poverty within the community both contribute to people becoming gang-affiliated. Both Coolio's and Wonder's songs emotionally portray how America has fought for peace and equality throughout the decades.

Coolio and Wonder performed together in 1996 at the Billboard Music Awards, where they used lines from both "Pastime Paradise" and "Gangsta's Paradise" (Wonder). Wonder and Coolio showed that when they played the two versions together, their songs' emotional appeal to the audience was greatly enhanced.

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