Mr. Shieh
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Protest Song Analysis: Black-Eyed Peas, "Where Is the Love?"

I. Song History
In the summer of 2003, the biggest international hit was an anthem by the Black-Eyed Peas, titled "Where Is the Love?"   The song charted in the Top 10 in at least 15 different countries, and was certified Gold in the U.S. As a hip-hop song with a mainstream pop sound, it has been played on all kinds of radio stations.

"Where Is the Love?" was released shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and because of its timing, it can be considered an anti-war protest song related to the Iraq War. "Where Is the Love?" has not been sung at any anti-war protests or used in any movies or advertisements protesting the war.

II. Lyrics
"Where Is the Love?" is a song about how hypocritical people in the U.S. are. In it, the Black-Eyed Peas criticize the decision of the U.S. to enter a war in revenge for the attacks on 9/11. At the same time, they argue that the U.S. is full of problems that people ignore: racism, lies in the media, and greed.

One of the most powerful lines is, "But we still got terrorists here livin' in the USA, the big CIA." In it, the Black-Eyed Peas argue that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency can be considered a terrorist group. Another powerful line is "A war is goin' on but the reason's undercover." They directly criticize the fact that people are being lied to about the war by the government. Lyrics like these make people look at the war differently and question what they are being told.

III. Music
The song is very bold, with a dance beat. There are not many instruments playing, which makes it easy to hear the words. Because the words are the loudest part of the song, it makes the listener focus on the words and the message, rather than the music. Aside from the drum, the other main instruments are violins, violas, cellos, and basses, and they give the song a smooth texture. The chorus of the song is also very singable, making this a great song to sing along to. In concert, the audience probably sings along and participates in asking the question "Where is the love?"

IV. Artists
The song was written and performed by the Black-Eyed Peas. In the past, the Black-Eyed Peas have not sung very much about social issues, and in fact have put out some songs with negative messages. However, will.i.am, the lead singer, advocates a lot for different political issues, and is famous for remixing Obama's "Yes We Can" speech during the 2008 elections. Most of the audience for the Black-Eyed Peas are young people in middle school, high school, and college. Because of this, many of the listeners probably don't have much influence over the Iraq War. However, some of the other issues in the song, like discrimination and violence, do apply to these people and may change their minds.

V. Personal Effect

The song did not have much of a personal impact on me. Because of the dance beat and the smooth chorus, I didn't take the song very seriously and had a hard time thinking about all the questions the Black-Eyed Peas were asking. I think that many people had the same reaction as me, because I often see people singing this song with a smile and not thinking about the words they are singing.

VI. Conclusion

In some ways, I think this is an effective protest song because it has become very popular around the world, and many people know it. Its lyrics also raise some important questions about the United States. On the other hand, it seems like it had more of an effect on the Black-Eyed Peas, who became famous because of this song, than the war!

VII. Major References

Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute* (2011)
about.com "will.i.am" - http://top40.about.com/od/w/p/willadams.htm
wikipedia "Where Is the Love?" – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Where_Is_the_Love%3F
Black Eyed Peas website - http://www.blackeyedpeas.com/

Directions

- Text-code the Song Analysis for important facts and statements
- Fill in the chart below with your noticings and wonderings about this project

Noticings What goes in a protest song analysis?	Wonderings What questions do you have about this project?