



DCC WRITING CONTEST ENTRY

Omar Graves



SUBMISSION CATEGORY: ACADEMIC WRITING

We Gon Be Alright!

Kendrick Lamar is a thirty-three old highly acclaimed rapper, artist, Pulitzer prize winner, and Grammy award winner for his album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. *To Pimp a Butterfly* tackles a myriad of complex themes and issues in Lamar's life and Black America, including police brutality, systematic racism, discrimination, and white supremacy. One of the standouts songs featured on the album is the Grammy award-winning track titled, "Alright". "Alright" is a lyrical act of resistance that challenges contemporary white supremacy by educating and uplifting African Americans in America while simultaneously boasting this newfound confidence towards the supremacist. Throughout the track, Lamar challenges and questions the societal constructions white supremacy has influenced. To do this, Lamar draws upon ideas from Lewis Gordon's *Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, Web Du Bois, and his creative mind to combat the composition, appeal to person, and the rhetorical definition logical fallacies that comes with white supremacy.

To understand and appreciate "Alright" to its fullest extent, we must break down the meaning of the album title, *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Lamar explains, "I just wanted to show the brightness of life and the word pimp has so much aggression and represents several things" ([mtv.com/Kendrick Lamar reveals To Pimp a Butterfly's Original Title and Tupac Connection](http://mtv.com/Kendrick-Lamar-reveals-To-Pimp-a-Butterfly's-Original-Title-and-Tupac-Connection)). However, Lamar's quote holds a deeper meaning. The word "Pimp" serves as a representation of white supremacy. Pimps exploit people for personal or monetary gain. Butterflies are seen as innocent and beautiful creatures, reaching the final stage of metamorphosis and fulfilling their potential to the fullest. With this knowledge, the pimp represents white supremacy and the societal constructions that are exploiting African Americans. Throughout the album, Lamar explains how white supremacy in America is constructed to abuse, profit, control, and impose

white lifestyles and preferences onto African American communities. This leads directly into the track "Alright," the turning point of the album. Done educating, Lamar decides to rally up the African American community and make a stand, realizing their potential and ability to fight against white supremacy.

At the beginning of "Alright," Lamar proclaims the pain the community is going through and their relentless need and determination to get justice:

Nigga, we gon' be alright / Nigga, we gon' be alright / We gon' be alright you hear me?
Do you feel me? We gon' be alright / Nigga, we gon' be alright / Huh? We gon' be alright
/ Nigga, we gon' be alright / Do you hear me? Do you feel me? We gon' be alright. (line
8-15)

White supremacists have imposed struggles and "pimped" the African American communities in America. Part of the way white supremacists do this is by using the appeal to the person fallacy to undermine Lamar and these communities. White supremacists try their best to criticize and ridicule Lamar and the black community to take attention away from the dangers and racism Blacks face every day. Whether they do this through African Americans' actions, choices, beliefs, or Lamar's song lyrics, white supremacists never reflect upon themselves and acknowledge their actions. Despite this, Lamar chants throughout the song that Blacks will be alright, staying headstrong and militant on their mission for change.

Throughout "Alright," Lamar uses complex rhyme schemes, allusions, and writing techniques to convey his point and uplift his community. However, Lamar's music contains mature content that could be inappropriate for certain age groups and demographics:

But homicide be looking at you from the face down / What MAC-11 even boom with the
bass down? / Schemin' and let me tell you about my life / Painkillers only put me in the
twilight. (19-21)

White supremacists use the composition fallacy to compromise Lamar's message to make him appear like a questionable leader and role model. Although it seems he is glorifying a "street life" filled with sex, drugs, violence, and death, this does not represent the whole song. Thus, the part does not represent the whole. The rest of the song promotes unification for African Americans and resistance towards white supremacy. Besides, the systems these supremacists created are the ones responsible for the predicaments Lamar and the community are in. Lyrics like these prove that Lamar is a multi-faceted and intelligent rapper who addresses race and social issues.

Lamar is a crafty lyricist; however, he does not use his own ideas all the time. Lamar may be inspired by Lewis Gordon's *Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. Gordon's textbook extensively covers the African Americans' emergence in philosophy, values, and culture. Like Gordon, Lamar exposed where white supremacy originated from and how it seeped into America's way of life:

Wouldn't you know / We been hurt, been down before / Nigga, when our pride was low /
Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go? (32-35)

These lyrics demonstrate white supremacist using the rhetorical definition fallacy. White supremacy uses it to sway the beliefs and opinions of African American communities to conform to their beliefs and lifestyles. Nevertheless, Lamar questions why their ideologies seeped into their culture and does his research for these ideas. Regardless of white supremacy using this

fallacy to manipulate African Americans into assimilation and conformity, Lamar is still uplifting his community throughout the song.

In Lewis Gordon's *Introduction to Africana philosophy*, renowned sociologist and activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, or Web Du Bois, discusses the concept of “double consciousness.” Du Bois explains that "Another version of double consciousness emerges from the double standards of citizenship, where the black individual who is born in a white and even light-skinned, black-majority society discovers that he or she is not fully a citizen, or at least is not treated as or taken seriously as a citizen, by virtue of being racially designated black" (78). Essentially, White Americans do not see Black Americans as citizens at all. Too many Whites see Blacks as separate entities. Because Blacks are seen that way, White Americans do as they please whenever they interact with African Americans. Lamar acknowledges this stating, "Nigga, and we hate po-po / Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho' (36-37). The concept of double consciousness has seeped into the law and Lamar uses that to detail why they need this act of resistance.

Kendrick Lamar is a highly skilled rapper and lyricist who uplifts the black community throughout “Alright” and in his album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. Lamar uses ideas from Lewis Gordons *Introduction to African Philosophy*, WEB Du Bois, and his own experiences to create the track “Alright” as an act of resistance to white supremacy. Lamar combats the common fallacies White Supremacist use which are the appeal to the person, rhetoric definition, and composition fallacy to change the narrative and form act of resistance that will lead to change. “Alright” is an anthem in African American culture and the Black Lives Matter Movement and will go down as one of the most impactful songs of our generation.

Citations:

Atkins, Jamie. "To Pimp A Butterfly': How Kendrick Looked Back To Push Music Forward"

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Gordon, Lewis. "An Introduction to Africana Philosophy" Cambridge University Press, 2008

Markman, Rob. "KENDRICK LAMAR REVEALS *TO PIMP A BUTTERFLY'S* ORIGINAL TITLE AND ITS TUPAC CONNECTION" *mtv.com*, 31 March, 2015, [Kendrick Lamar Reveals To Pimp A Butterfly's Original Title And It's Tupac Connection - MTV](#)