
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Racism, Equality, and Empowerment in Michael Jackson's "They Don't Care About Us"

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Abstract

This study examines how racism, equality, and empowerment are discursively constructed in Michael Jackson's protest song "They Don't Care About Us", using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research adopts Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to analyze the song at the levels of textual features, discursive practice, and social practice. A qualitative approach is employed to examine linguistic strategies such as pronoun usage, agency, lexical choices, repetition, and rhetorical questioning.

The findings reveal that racism is represented as systemic and institutional, equality is framed as a denied but legitimate right, and empowerment is constructed through collective identity and resistance. The study demonstrates that popular music can function as a powerful form of social discourse that challenges dominant ideologies and articulates social critique. This research contributes to the application of CDA in the analysis of cultural texts and highlights the role of language in shaping social awareness and resistance.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Racism, Equality, Empowerment, Protest Songs, Michael Jackson

1. Introduction

Discourse Analysis (DA) is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language that focuses on how meaning is constructed through texts and talk in real social contexts. Unlike approaches that examine grammar or vocabulary in isolation, DA considers how language functions within cultural, political, and institutional settings, and how it both shapes and reflects social values and power relations (Gee, 2011; Schiffrin, 1994). From this perspective, discourse is not neutral: it can reproduce ideologies or challenge dominant viewpoints through linguistic choices, patterns of representation, and forms of evaluation (van Dijk, 1993, 1998).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) develops this contextual focus further by explicitly examining how discourse relates to power, inequality, and dominance in society (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA treats discourse as a form of social practice, meaning that language is both shaped by social conditions and contributes to shaping those conditions (Fairclough, 1992). As a result, CDA is widely used to analyze texts that engage with racism, discrimination, and social justice, because it provides tools for linking micro-level linguistic features (e.g., pronouns, modality, agency, metaphor) to macro-level social meanings and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

Song lyrics represent a valuable site for discourse analysis because they are widely circulated cultural texts that communicate meanings repeatedly to audiences. Lyrics can frame social groups, moral responsibility, and collective identity through linguistic patterns such as repetition, evaluative vocabulary, metaphor, and forms of address. Studying lyrics using CDA therefore, makes it possible to examine how popular culture can reproduce or resist social inequalities and how it may position listeners toward particular values and social interpretations.

Michael Jackson's work is a relevant case for such analysis because his lyrics often move beyond personal themes to engage with racial injustice, equality, and social responsibility. In particular, the protest song "**They Don't Care About Us**" explicitly foregrounds discrimination, exclusion, and collective resistance. This study therefore applies CDA to this song to examine how language constructs discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment.

1.1 Rationale

Michael Jackson's songs have global reach and cultural impact, and his protest-oriented lyrics provide rich material for investigating how popular music constructs social meanings. "**They Don't Care About Us**" is especially suitable for CDA because it addresses discrimination and marginalization, and it can be examined as a text that negotiates power relations and ideological representations through language. CDA is therefore an appropriate approach for studying how the song frames social inequality and how it positions listeners in relation to injustice and collective action (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

1.2 Research Problem

Although Michael Jackson has been widely discussed as a cultural icon, linguistic analysis that systematically examines his protest lyrics as discourse—particularly with sustained focus on racism, equality, and empowerment—remains limited in many undergraduate contexts. This creates a need for an academically structured analysis of how the lyrics themselves construct identity positions, represent power relations, and communicate empowerment. The research problem of this study is therefore to determine how "**They Don't Care About Us**" uses language to (1) represent racism and exclusion, (2) construct claims of equality, and (3) frame empowerment through resistance and collective voice.

1.3 Research Questions

This study answers the following research questions:

How does Michael Jackson's song "*They Don't Care About Us*" construct discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment through linguistic and rhetorical strategies, as revealed by Critical Discourse Analysis?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate how Michael Jackson's protest song "**They Don't Care About Us**" constructs discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment through Critical Discourse Analysis.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Academically, it contributes to undergraduate research in linguistics by demonstrating how CDA can be applied to popular music as a form of social discourse. It extends the application of CDA beyond traditional political or institutional texts, highlighting the relevance of linguistic analysis to cultural products that shape public consciousness.

Socially, the study underscores the role of language in representing racism and inequality, showing how popular music can articulate resistance and promote empowerment. By analyzing the linguistic construction of social injustice, the study provides insight into how discourse can influence attitudes toward equality and collective responsibility.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the linguistic analysis of **one song**, “*They Don’t Care About Us*.” The analysis focuses exclusively on the lyrical text and does not include musical, visual, or performance elements associated with the song.

As a qualitative CDA study, the findings are interpretive and context-dependent. While the use of an established analytical framework enhances validity, alternative interpretations remain possible. Additionally, the focus on a single text limits generalizability to Michael Jackson’s wider body of work or to protest music more broadly.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

- **Discourse Analysis (DA):** The study of language in use, focusing on how meaning is constructed through interaction between text and context (Brown & Yule, 1983).
- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** An approach to discourse analysis that examines how language relates to power, ideology, and inequality in society (Fairclough, 1995).
- **Discourse:** Language used in social contexts that both reflects and shapes social reality (Gee, 2011).
- **Ideology:** A system of beliefs and values that shapes how social groups understand and represent the world (van Dijk, 1998).
- **Empowerment:** The discursive construction of agency, resistance, and collective identity that enables individuals or groups to challenge domination.

2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) is an approach to language study that focuses on how meaning is constructed through language use in social contexts. Rather than analyzing isolated grammatical structures, DA examines how texts and spoken interactions function within particular cultural, institutional, and political settings (Brown & Yule, 1983). From this perspective, discourse is understood as “language in use,” where meaning emerges through interaction between language, participants, and context.

DA emphasizes the relationship between **text** and **context**, recognizing that meaning is shaped by factors such as speaker intention, audience, and social situation (Gee, 2011). It also examines how larger stretches of language—such as narratives, arguments, and conversations—are organized through cohesion and coherence (Schiffrin, 1994). Importantly, DA views language as a form of social practice, meaning that discourse both reflects and contributes to the construction of social identities, relationships, and realities.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) builds upon DA by explicitly focusing on the relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA views discourse as a site where social dominance, inequality, and resistance are produced and negotiated (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993). Unlike purely descriptive approaches, CDA adopts a critical stance that seeks to expose how language can legitimize or challenge unequal power relations.

According to Fairclough (1992), discourse is a form of social practice that is shaped by social structures while also shaping them. CDA therefore examines how linguistic choices—such as agency, modality, and evaluative language—construct representations of social actors and social problems (Fairclough, 1995). Van Dijk (1998) further highlights the role of ideology as shared social cognition, arguing that discourse reflects underlying beliefs and group identities, particularly in relation to race and power.

Because CDA connects micro-level linguistic features to macro-level social meanings, it is especially suitable for analyzing texts that engage with racism, inequality, and resistance. As such, CDA provides an appropriate theoretical lens for the analysis of protest-oriented song lyrics.

2.3 Models of Discourse Analysis

Several influential models have shaped discourse analysis research. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics conceptualizes language as a system of choices that serve three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1994). This model highlights how grammatical structures encode meaning and social relations.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model integrates discourse, cognition, and society, focusing on how power relations are reproduced through shared knowledge and ideological beliefs (van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk, 1998). This approach has been widely applied in studies of racism and media discourse.

Fairclough's model combines linguistic analysis with social theory by examining discourse at three interconnected levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1995). This integrative framework is particularly suitable for analyzing cultural texts such as song lyrics because it links language form to social meaning and ideology.

2.4 Analytical Framework Adopted in This Study

This study adopts **Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis** as its analytical framework. The model proposes that discourse should be analyzed at three interrelated levels:

- (1) **Textual analysis**, which examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, pronouns, transitivity, modality, and repetition;
- (2) **Discursive practice**, which considers how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted; and
- (3) **Social practice**, which links discourse to broader social and ideological structures (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1995).

This framework is appropriate for the present study because it allows for a systematic examination of how linguistic choices in "*They Don't Care About Us*" construct discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment while situating these meanings within wider social contexts and power relations.

2.5 Songs as Cultural and Discursive Texts

Songs function not only as artistic expressions but also as cultural texts that circulate meanings, values, and ideologies. Research in discourse studies has shown that song lyrics can shape identity, express

resistance, and position listeners toward particular social interpretations. Because songs are repeatedly consumed and emotionally engaging, they have significant persuasive potential.

From a CDA perspective, song lyrics can be analyzed as discourse that reflects and challenges social norms. Linguistic strategies such as metaphor, repetition, pronoun alignment, and evaluative language enable songwriters to frame social issues and moral responsibility. This makes songs a legitimate and productive object of Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly when addressing issues of inequality and social justice.

2.6 Songs as Social and Political Discourse

A growing body of scholarship has examined songs as forms of social and political discourse, particularly within protest music traditions. These studies suggest that protest songs articulate collective grievances, sustain awareness of injustice, and symbolically challenge dominant ideologies. While music may not directly cause political change, it can influence public consciousness by framing social problems and legitimizing resistance.

CDA-oriented research indicates that protest songs employ rhetorical and linguistic strategies that construct solidarity and opposition, allowing artists to challenge institutional power through discourse. This perspective supports the analysis of *“They Don’t Care About Us”* as a text that operates within a broader tradition of musical resistance.

2.7 Previous Research on “They Don’t Care About Us”

Previous academic work on *“They Don’t Care About Us”* has primarily focused on thematic interpretation and pragmatic meaning. Some studies have examined implicature and indirect meaning, demonstrating that the song relies on contextual knowledge to communicate its critique of racism and discrimination. These approaches show how meaning is intensified through inference and shared social knowledge.

However, much of this research does not apply a systematic multi-level CDA framework. As a result, limited attention has been given to how specific linguistic features—such as agency, pronoun usage, and repetition—operate together across textual, discursive, and social levels to construct ideology and empowerment.

While existing studies confirm that protest songs can articulate resistance and social critique, there remains a gap in research that applies Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model to *“They Don’t Care About Us”* with explicit focus on racism, equality, and empowerment.

The present study addresses this gap by offering a structured Critical Discourse Analysis that systematically links linguistic choices in the song to discursive practices and broader social ideologies.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** grounded in **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to explore meaning, interpretation, and ideological representation rather than to quantify linguistic patterns. CDA is particularly suitable for this research because it examines how language functions within power relations and how discourse can reproduce or challenge social inequality (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

The methodological design is guided by the research question, which asks how “*They Don’t Care About Us*” constructs discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment. The analysis therefore focuses on identifying and interpreting linguistic features that contribute to these discourses, and on explaining how such features relate to broader social and ideological contexts.

3.2 Data Selection

The data for this study consists of the lyrics of **Michael Jackson’s song “*They Don’t Care About Us*”**, released in 1995. The song was selected through **purposeful sampling** because it explicitly addresses issues of discrimination, marginalization, institutional neglect, and resistance, which align directly with the focus of the study.

The decision to analyze a single song allows for **in-depth, detailed analysis**, consistent with qualitative CDA principles. Rather than aiming for generalization, the study prioritizes analytical depth and close engagement with the text. Only the lyrical content is analyzed; musical composition, performance style, and visual elements are excluded in order to maintain a clear linguistic focus.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The study applies **Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis** as the analytical framework. This model conceptualizes discourse as operating at three interconnected levels: **text, discursive practice**, and **social practice** (Fairclough, 1992, 1995).

Fairclough’s framework is appropriate for this study because it enables systematic analysis of how linguistic choices in the song contribute to ideological meanings while situating these meanings within broader social structures. By integrating textual analysis with interpretation and explanation, the model allows for a comprehensive examination of discourse construction in popular music.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis follows Fairclough’s three analytical stages: **description, interpretation, and explanation**.

At the **textual level (description)**, the study examines specific linguistic features that are relevant to the construction of racism, equality, and empowerment. These features include pronoun usage, lexical choices, transitivity patterns, modality, repetition, and evaluative language. Each feature is analysed to determine how social actors are represented, how responsibility is assigned, and how ideological positions are communicated.

At the level of **discursive practice (interpretation)**, the analysis considers how the song functions as protest discourse within popular culture. This involves examining how the lyrics position listeners through collective pronouns and confrontational stance, and how meaning is shaped by the song’s circulation as a globally consumed cultural text.

At the level of **social practice (explanation)**, the findings are connected to broader social and ideological contexts, particularly issues of racism, inequality, and resistance. This stage explains how the song challenges dominant ideologies and legitimises empowerment by framing resistance as morally justified and socially necessary.

Table 3.1: Alignment of Research Question and Analytical Levels

Analytical Level	Focus of Analysis	Contribution to Research Question
Textual analysis	Pronouns, lexis, transitivity, modality, repetition	Reveals how racism, equality, and empowerment are linguistically constructed
Discursive practice	Production, circulation, listener positioning	Explains how the song functions as protest discourse
Social practice	Ideology, power relations, social context	Connects linguistic patterns to broader struggles over inequality and resistance

3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure **trustworthiness**, the analysis follows a clearly defined and systematic procedure grounded in an established CDA framework. Interpretations are consistently supported by explicit lyric excerpts, and analytical decisions are made transparent to allow readers to follow the reasoning process.

As the study analyzes publicly available song lyrics and does not involve human participants, no ethical approval or informed consent is required. All materials are cited according to academic conventions, and lyric excerpts are used solely for analytical purposes.

3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

The methodological approach has certain limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a **single song**, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study examines **linguistic content only**, excluding musical and visual elements that may also contribute to meaning. Finally, as CDA is interpretive by nature, alternative readings are possible; however, the use of a systematic framework and close textual analysis helps to minimise subjectivity.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis proceeds through three interconnected levels: **textual analysis (description)**, **discursive practice (interpretation)**, and **social practice (explanation)**. Through this framework, the chapter examines how the song constructs discourses of **racism, equality, and empowerment**.

The song contains explicit references to racial discrimination and includes derogatory terms. These terms are examined strictly as **discursive evidence of racism**, not as endorsements. All excerpts are quoted verbatim and analysed within an academic and critical context.

4.1 Textual Analysis (Description)

Textual analysis focuses on linguistic features that contribute to meaning-making, including **lexical choice, pronoun use, transitivity (agency), repetition, modality, and rhetorical questions** (Fairclough, 1995).

4.1.1 Construction of Racism and Exclusion

The discourse of racism is constructed through violent action verbs, derogatory lexical labeling, and patterns of agency that foreground systemic victimization.

Agency and Transitivity

The song repeatedly positions the speaker as the **affected participant** and an unnamed other as the **agent of harm**, as seen in clauses such as:

- *“Beat me, hate me”*
- *“Kick me, kike me”*
- *“Beat me, bash me”*
- *“Hit me, kick me”*

Grammatically, these clauses encode violence through material processes, with “me” consistently occupying the role of the recipient of action. The absence of a specific named agent contributes to the construction of racism as **systemic and institutional**, rather than individual. This aligns with CDA interpretations of how power is represented through abstraction and anonymization (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993).

Lexical Choices and Racial Labeling

The lyrics include explicit racialized and derogatory terms, such as:

- *“Skinhead, deadhead”*
- *“Kick me, kike me”*
- *“Black man, black mail”*

These lexical items represent the language of hate and racial stereotyping. Their accumulation and rhythmic repetition expose how racist discourse reduces individuals to stigmatized labels. Importantly, the song frames these terms within a protest structure, thereby **critiquing** rather than reproducing racist ideology.

Institutional Racism

The line *“I am a victim of police brutality”* explicitly situates racism within institutional power structures. This moves the discourse beyond personal experience and into the realm of systemic injustice, reinforcing CDA’s focus on power relations embedded in social institutions (van Dijk, 1993).

4.1.2 Construction of Equality and Rights Discourse

The discourse of equality is constructed through rights-based language, rhetorical questioning, and evaluative stance.

Rhetorical Questions

Questions such as:

- *“Tell me what has become of my life”*
- *“Tell me what has become of my rights”*
- *“Am I invisible ‘cause you ignore me?”*

function rhetorically rather than informationally. They presuppose that life and rights should be protected and recognized, framing their denial as morally unacceptable. This use of rhetorical questioning

positions the speaker as entitled to dignity and equality, while simultaneously accusing institutions of neglect.

Intertextual and Ideological References

The lyric *“But if Martin Luther was livin’, he wouldn’t let this be”* directly invokes Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. This is a clear and verifiable instance of **intertextuality**, in which the song recontextualizes historically authoritative discourse to strengthen its claim for equality (Fairclough, 1992).

Similarly, the reference to *“Your proclamation promised me free liberty”* draws on constitutional and civil rights discourse, reinforcing equality as a **legal and moral entitlement**, not a privilege.

4.1.3 Construction of Empowerment Through Resistance

Empowerment is constructed linguistically through collective identity formation, repetition, and discursive persistence.

Pronouns and Collective Identity

The repeated use of *“us”* in the chorus — *“they don’t really care about us”* — constructs a collective subject that includes the speaker and marginalized communities more broadly. In contrast, *“they”* functions as an abstract representation of institutional power and indifference. This *“us vs. they”* dichotomy is a well-established discursive strategy for constructing group identity and resistance (van Dijk, 1993).

Repetition as Resistance

The persistent repetition of the chorus serves as a rhetorical strategy that reinforces the protest message and resists silencing. Repetition increases salience, emotional intensity, and memorability, transforming personal grievance into collective empowerment. Within CDA, repetition is understood as a mechanism for stabilizing ideological meaning and mobilizing solidarity (Fairclough, 1995).

Table 4.1: Linguistic Features and Discursive Functions

Theme	Linguistic Feature	Verbatim Lyric Evidence	Discursive Function
Racism	Violent material processes	“Beat me, hate me”; “Kick me, kike me”	Represents victimization and power imbalance
Racism	Racial labeling	“Skinhead, deadhead”; “Black man”	Exposes dehumanizing discourse
Equality	Rights discourse	“What has become of my rights”	Frames equality as entitlement
Equality	Rhetorical questions	“Am I invisible ’cause you ignore me?”	Moral accusation and demand for recognition
Empowerment	Pronoun alignment	“care about us ” vs “ they ”	Constructs collective resistance

Empowerment	Repetition	Repeated chorus line	Reinforces protest and solidarity
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4.2 Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

At the level of discursive practice, “*They Don’t Care About Us*” functions as **protest discourse within popular culture**. The song draws on established protest conventions, including confrontation, repetition, and collective voice, enabling it to be interpreted as a critique of systemic injustice.

The lyrics position listeners to align with the marginalized “us” and to interpret “they” as institutional authority or social systems that perpetuate inequality. Through its circulation as a globally consumed pop song, the discourse of racism and resistance is transferred from political and legal domains into mainstream cultural space, increasing its ideological reach (Fairclough, 1992).

4.3 Social Practice (Explanation)

At the level of social practice, the song’s discourse reflects and challenges broader ideological structures related to racism, inequality, and power.

Racism is constructed as systemic and institutional, particularly through references to police brutality and legal neglect. Equality is framed as an unfulfilled social promise, grounded in civil rights ideology and constitutional discourse. Empowerment is constructed as collective resistance, achieved through public articulation of injustice and refusal of silence.

These discourses align with CDA’s view that language plays a central role in maintaining or challenging social power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

Table 4.2: Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model Applied

Analytical Level	Focus	Outcome
Textual	Lexis, pronouns, agency, repetition	Racism, equality, empowerment encoded linguistically
Discursive Practice	Protest genre, listener positioning	Audience aligned with marginalized “us”
Social Practice	Ideology, power, institutions	Racism exposed as systemic; resistance legitimized

5.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Here, the researchers discuss the findings of the study in relation to the research question and the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. It interprets how the linguistic patterns contribute to the construction of discourses of racism, equality, and empowerment in Michael Jackson’s “*They Don’t Care About Us*.” The chapter then presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis, outlines the limitations of the study, offers recommendations for future research, and concludes with a final summarizing statement.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate that “*They Don’t Care About Us*” functions as a form of **protest discourse** that challenges dominant representations of power, inequality, and social exclusion. Through the application of Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model, the analysis has shown how linguistic choices at the textual level are systematically connected to discursive and social meanings.

At the **textual level**, the use of violent material processes and agency patterns positions the speaker as a repeated target of harm while abstracting the perpetrators into generalized agents (“they” / “you”). This supports a CDA interpretation of racism as **systemic rather than individual**, consistent with previous CDA research on the representation of inequality (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993). The accumulation of derogatory labels and action verbs foregrounds how discriminatory discourse operates as both symbolic and material violence.

The discourse of equality is constructed through rhetorical questions and rights-based language that presuppose entitlement to dignity and recognition. Rather than presenting equality as a request, the song frames it as a violated norm. The explicit reference to Martin Luther King Jr. situates the song within a historically legitimized civil rights discourse, strengthening its moral authority through intertextual recontextualization (Fairclough, 1992).

Empowerment emerges through collective identity formation and discursive persistence. The repeated use of the pronoun “us” establishes a shared social position that extends beyond the individual speaker to a broader marginalized community. Repetition of the chorus functions as a rhetorical strategy that intensifies protest and resists silencing, aligning with CDA interpretations of repetition as a tool for stabilizing ideological meaning and promoting solidarity.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the analysis, this study reaches the following conclusions in direct response to the research question:

1. Racism in the song is constructed as systemic and institutional, represented through repeated patterns of victimization, abstraction of agents, and explicit references to police brutality and social neglect.
2. Equality is constructed as a denied but legitimate right, articulated through rhetorical questioning, rights-based discourse, and intertextual reference to civil rights ideology.
3. Empowerment is constructed through collective resistance, achieved by forming a shared “us,” employing repetition, and publicly articulating injustice as a moral issue.

These conclusions confirm that linguistic choices in the song are central to how social meanings are produced and that popular music can function as a significant site of ideological struggle.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings, several recommendations can be made:

1. **Future research** could expand the dataset to include additional protest-oriented songs to examine whether similar discursive strategies are used across different artists or genres.
2. **Multimodal approaches** could be adopted to analyze visual and musical elements alongside lyrics in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of meaning-making in protest music.

3. **Educational research** could explore how protest songs such as “*They Don’t Care About Us*” may be used pedagogically to develop critical language awareness and discussions of social justice in educational contexts.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This research has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a **single song**, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study examines **linguistic content only**, excluding musical composition, performance, and visual imagery that may also contribute to meaning. Finally, as a qualitative CDA study, the analysis is interpretive; although interpretations are grounded in explicit textual evidence and an established framework, alternative readings remain possible depending on social and cultural context.

5.5 Final Concluding Statement

In conclusion, Michael Jackson’s “*They Don’t Care About Us*” operates as a powerful discursive intervention that exposes systemic racism, challenges the denial of equality, and constructs empowerment through collective resistance. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, this study has demonstrated how language in popular music can function not merely as artistic expression but as a form of social critique that negotiates power, ideology, and identity. The findings reaffirm the relevance of CDA for analysing cultural texts and highlight the enduring role of protest discourse in articulating struggles for social justice.

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APPENDIX A

Lyrics of “They Don’t Care About Us”

Chorus All I want to say is that they don't really care about us Don't worry what people say, we know the truth All I want to say is that they don't really care about us Enough is enough of this garbage All I want to say is that they don't really care about us

Verse 1 Skin head, dead head Everybody gone bad Situation, aggravation Everybody allegation In the suite, on the news Everybody dog food Bang bang, shot dead Everybody's gone mad

Chorus All I want to say is that they don't really care about us All I want to say is that they don't really care about us

Verse 2 Beat me, bash me You can never trash me Hit me, kick me You can never get me Jew me, sue me Everybody do me Kick me, kike me Don't you black or white me

Chorus All I want to say is that they don't really care about us All I want to say is that they don't really care about us

Bridge Tell me what has become of my rights Am I invisible because you ignore me? Your proclamation promised me free liberty, now I'm tired of bein' the victim of shame They're throwing me in a class with a bad name I can't believe this is the land from which I came You know I really do hate to say it The government don't wanna indicate it Me yuh, some kickin', some doggin' Me yuh, don't you black or white and me.