

New Jack Theme

Living Colour

"New Jacks" was a term used to refer to crack cocaine dealers during the [crack epidemic](#) that devastated urban communities in the United States during the 1980's and early 1990's.

Buy and die; sell and be free	Some people say that my soul is lost
We are the New Jacks, this is our reality	I'll lose my life if I start to turn soft
Do unto others, leave no one alive	15 From where I am there is no turning back
This is our creed, we will survive	Crack is the master, I am a New Jack
5 No control is how I'm living	Can anybody see me?
On the edge of no forgiving	Can anybody hear me?
Things get rough when you've got time to kill	I'll never change, I'll never stop
You've got the cash, then I've got your thrill	20 I've got cold cash, I'm on the top
I make more money than a judge or a cop	We can get busy if you want to play
10 Give me a reason why I should stop	I'll have the last laugh when I blow you away
Large is how I'm living	Don't you see me?
On the edge with no forgiving	Can't you hear me?

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. From what point of view is the song written? Who is the speaker in the song? Why do you think the songwriter chose to approach the song this way?
2. How would you describe the "reality" (line 2) of the New Jacks? How does the speaker seem to feel about this reality?
3. What is the phrase "do unto others" (line 3) an allusion to? How does the speaker change the meaning, and why—how do you think he feels about the original version of that expression?
4. Discuss the rhetorical relationship between line 13 ("Some people say that my soul is lost") and lines 14-16. What point is the speaker making? What rhetorical device is used in line 16 ("Crack is the master"), and what does this phrase reveal about the speaker's complex relationship with power?
5. What literary device is employed in line 17-18 and 23-24? Discuss the meaning and purpose of these lines.
6. According to the lyrics, what reasons do crack dealers feel they have for doing what they do?
7. What themes does the song express? What do you think is the rhetorical purpose of the song?

Lyrics and Discussion Questions for "New Jack Theme"