INNER CITY BLUES (MARVIN GAYE)  
( From the album « What's going on »)

THE VIDEO

Where was this video filmed? ........................................................................................................................................

How can we guess? ........................................................................................................................................................

What are the people we can see in the video doing? ....................................................................................................

What can we read on their faces? ................................................................................................................................

Tell about two events you noticed in the video. .......................................................................................................... 

THE MUSIC

Tell about the voices? ....................................................................................................................................................

Which instruments can you hear in the musical arrangement? .....................................................................................

THE VIDEO AND THE MUSIC

Try to find links between what you see in the video and what you hear in the music (in the musical arrangement)
..................................................................................................................................................................................

THE LYRICS

According to Marvin Gaye, what is going wrong? Why does he « want to holler »? Explain and pick a few words in the text
..................................................................................................................................................................................
Inner City blues (Make me wanna holler)

Da, da, da ...
Verse 1
Rockets / moon shots
Spend it on / the have-not's
Money / we make it
'fore we see it / you take it

Chorus
Oh make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
This ain't living, this ain't living
No, no baby, this ain't living
No, no, no, no

Verse 2
Inflation / no chance
To increase / finance
Bills pile up / sky high
Send that boy off / to die

Chorus
Oh Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life

Da, da, da ...
Verse 3
Hang ups / let downs
Bad breaks / set backs
Natural / fact is
I can't pay my / taxes

Chorus
Oh Make me wanna holler
And throw up both my hands
Yeah, it makes me wanna holler
And throw up both my hands

Verse 4
Crime is / increasing
Trigger happy / policing
Panic / is spreading
God knows where / we're heading

Outro
Mother, mother
Everybody thinks we're wrong
Who are they to judge us
Simply because we wear our hair long

Playing the bongos rhythm
If you are right handed, your right hand is number 1
If you are left handed, your left hand is number 1
Never use the same hand twice in a row
First practice on a slow tempo, then play faster and faster to the right tempo.

Just try to feel the tempo
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I

Playing very low without any accent
1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I

<
<  <
then playing low again
1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I

<
<   <       <       <       <       <
1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I

<   <
<   <   <   <   <   <
1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I

<   <
<   <   <   <   <   <   <   <   <
1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2  1  2
I  I  I  I  I  I  I  I
Where was this video filmed?
In an American town, in the poor areas (disadvantaged district)

How can we guess?
There are very high buildings
a lot of black people

What are the people we can see in the video doing?
Walking in the street
sleeping
playing
talking
doing sport (fighting)
They are filmed in their everyday life.

What can we read on their faces?
They look worried, anxious, sad

Tell about two events you noticed in the video
firemen are putting a fire out
a man is sleeping outside
a young man is arrested by the police
two boxers are fighting
young men are playing pool
a hairdresser is doing a hair cut
a man is looking at bills
then he is wondering how he's gonna pay for them
people are skipping (a woman with a child in her arms)
an old woman is sitting among garbage
prison walls...
...

Try to find a link between what you see in the video and what you hear in the music (in the musical arrangement)
Watching the video, what do you notice? What does it show?

**Background**

After having worked under the (sometime unwelcome) guidance of Motown producer Berry Gordon, Marvin Gaye insisted that he be given more artistic freedom for the 1971 album What’s Going On. In stark contrast to the lighter fare from Gaye’s earlier career, What’s Going On takes a hard look at the bleak state of society, addressing Vietnam, race relations, and the generation gap. “Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)” focuses on life city life, pulling no punches in its start assessment of the start realities of life among the inner-city poor.

**Timed listening guide**

In contrast to the tightly-knit form seen on many earlier pop songs, “Inner City Blues” progresses at a leisurely pace, intertwining a relatively long, contemplative lyric with a brief refrain and sections of scat singing. The mood is subdued and bleak, and yet the performance is lively in its own fashion, as bass, percussion, and vocals, each in their own way, seem to exude energy and perseverance in the face of adversity.

0:00 Intro

A piano and triangle begin the song, accompanied by a steady drone and accentuated on the downbeats by a kick drum. Percussion instruments enter, gradually filling out the groove.

0:31 Verse 1a. Dah, dah, dah… Rockets, moon shots…

Gaye enters, along with an active, funk-propelled bass line, at first lightly scatting and then presenting the first verse. The vocals are performed in open octaves, contributing to the song’s hollow, bleak texture.

1:01 Refrain Oh, make me wanna holler…

The chord changes, as the song leaves the tonic (home) chord for the first time, as Gaye sings “Make me wanna holler.” This is the closest thing to a refrain in the song (since it is the only line repeated throughout the piece), but it is an unusual one, in that it falls in unpredictable places, here seemingly in the midst of the verse, rather than at the end of it.

1:11 Verse 1b This ain’t livin’…

The harmony returns to the tonic key; a saxophone darts in and then quickly retreats.

1:22 Verse 2a Inflation, no chance…

The instrumental and rhythmic texture of the first verse returns; halfway though it is augmented by the entrance of strings.

1:42 Refrain Oh, make me wanna holler…

The refrain is now performed in richer vocal harmonization, as the primary vocal line is joined by a lower part.

1:53 Verse 2b Dah, dah, dah…

Rather than sing new lyrics, as he had after the first refrain, Gaye scats, gently, sadly, over the tonic harmony of this extended passage.

2:28 Verse 3a Hang-ups, let-downs…

The lyrics become bleaker still, detailing one misfortune after another.

2:48 Refrain Oh, make me wanna holler…

As the refrain returns, the lower harmony is more pronounced yet, lending warmth to the song’s often desolate texture. Gaye ends the refrain with an emphatic holler.

2:59 Verse 3b Crime is increasin’… Gaye punctuates the opening line of the verse with a rousing, energetic “whoop.”

3:19 Refrain

The refrain is performed in juxtaposition with Gaye’s scatting, bringing together the two most prominent musical features of the vocal line.
3:40  Bridge
A sudden modulation interrupts the song’s progression. Gaye’s scatting continues, growing more elaborate, as a flute weaves in and out. Gaye punctuates texture with another holler, now even more assertive. A rising chord sequence in the piano ends the passage and leads to the outro.

4:28  Outro Mother, mother…
Gaye ends the piece with a sparsely accompanied reprise of a passage from “What’s Going On” (the title track of the album on which “Inner City Blues” appears), which fades out to end the song.

Key Features
Bleak texture: well-spaced piano chords, static harmony, active rhythms, and bass, plus Gaye’s vocals create a dark sound that matches the lyric.

Black music as social commentary.
More active rhythms: clear 16-beat rhythm.
Jazz influence: most evident in Gaye’s scat singing.