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In the summer of 1990 the pioneering rap group Boogie Down Productions released the LP Edutainment. On its title track, KRS-ONE urged content creators and consumers to be innovative in their communication. In the context of his prophetic call, Long Beach Indie, an international film festival and artist summit, announces its 1st annual "Digital Edutainment" Conference in Long Beach, California August 27-31, 2014.

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The Hip in Hip Hop: Toward a Discipline of Hip Hop Studies

Monica Miller, Daniel White Hodge, Jeffrey Coleman, and Cassandra D. Chaney

For nearly four decades now, Hip Hop culture, something that was expected to only last a few years as a "fad," has developed into a trans-global phenomenon in almost every industrialized nation in the Western world. By securing its position through the five cultural modes of rap music (oral), turntablism or "DJing" (aural), breaking (physical), graffiti art (visual) and knowledge (mental),[1] Hip Hop has become an astute public teacher to those who cared to listen to its weighty messages and learn from its many lessons. That is, Hip Hop necessitates anything but 'easy' listening and passive consumption. Moreover, its messages of resistance, social awareness, personal consciousness, activism, pleasure and power, and community engagement have transcended its early days of locality in the Bronx and West Coast cities against the turmoil of post-industrialism. In 2013, Hip Hop remains a sustained voice for many and a space and place to express oneself in a manner that is both contextualized and legitimate. Furthermore, Hip Hop culture has seemingly transcended its initial "fad" trope and developed into more than just a musical genre; it is a voice; it is an identity; it is a movement; it is a force; it is a community of people seeking justice and higher learning; it is an environment for those seeking spiritual solace and cathartic release; it is performance art; it is, as KRS-One has argued, a place where both marginal and mainstream voices can be heard and flourish.

For many, Hip Hop emerged as a vehicle of artistic discourse which echoed the concerns, anger, hate, love, pain, hope, vision, anxiety, desire, and joy which had gone unheard in the public sphere known as the American media. Hip Hop was, as Chuck D once said, "Our CNN." It was the voice of a generation that had gone unheard for far too long, a voice that expressed and dramatized the turmoil being lived out in ghettos across the United States.[2] Through Hip Hop, one was able to discover the shared experiences and crises taking place in various urban cities, and realize that he or she was not alone or singled out. It was a narrative that needed to be heard and explained–one that would ultimately lay the ground for postmodern and post-soul[3] expression in

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[1] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. (New York: Macmillan, 2005)

[2] Otis Moss, "Real Big: The Hip Hop Pastor as Postmodern Prophet," in *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation*, ed. Ralph Watkins (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2007).

[3] This is a term used to describe the period and era which followed the soul era. Both of these terms, originated by Nelson George *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos : Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992)., are contextualized terms for what postmodernism is for Black, Latino, Urban, and Hip Hop contexts and which includes such societal shifts like the Civil Rights Movement, The Migrant Farm Workers Movement, and the Black Power Movement—to name a few— which helped shape postmodern elements of current societal mores See Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation : The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Experienced by African Americans (Previously Known as Blacks and before That Negroes)* (New York, NY: Viking, 2004); Daniel White Hodge, *Heaven Has a Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel & Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur* (Saarbrucken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller Academic, 2009)..

the years to come.[4] Hip Hop was and still is a way to construct knowledge and find a way to release and come to terms with anger, frustration, hate, social revolutionary worldviews, the questioning of authority, and rebellion. The field of Hip Hop studies is, arguably, a palpable growing field of study. Much like the advent of film studies during the late 1970s in which established disciplines asked, "Why do we even need to study film?" Hip Hop studies, over the years, has sought to embody the answer to that question and fill a void in scholarship across disciplines. Furthermore, when universities such as Harvard, Penn State, USC, UCLA, Stanford, Duke, Princeton, and NYU offer a variety of courses on the subject of Hip Hop culture specifically and conjoin that with the 2012 announcement by the University of Arizona about a Hip Hop Studies minor along with rap artists and journalists now doubling as visiting scholars and lecturers and co-teaching courses with academics (i.e. Anthony B. Pinn and rapper Bun-B at Rice University and formative Hip Hop journalist Jeff Chang who is also The executive director of the Institute for Diversity in the Arts + Committee on Black Performing Arts at Stanford University, among a host of other examples, you indeed have a field of study that is both growing and strong.

Until it became mainstream[5], Hip Hop's independent lyrical prophets predicted that years of racial animus and societal lethargy would not remain indefinitely and would one day be met by racial retribution. For example, in 1982, Hip Hop pioneer Grandmaster Flash released the culturally-poignant work *The Message.* In this piece, Flash articulated a multitude of ugly realities in the "jungle," his metaphor for chaotic life in the inner-city and warned, *"Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge, we're trying not to lose our heads."* For those that understood the message, the mounting frustrations of the inner-city would one day boil over, take center stage, and be noticed by the very world that had created the conditions of limitation to which they were responding to. Subsequently, the torch that was initially lit by Grandmaster Flash was passed on and flamed by other Hip Hop artists who further validated the collective marginalization of Blacks in the inner-city. Case in point: Years before the Los Angeles riots that immediately ensued upon the acquittal of the four white Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers that physically assaulted the late Black motorist Rodney King, Hip Hop artists such as Public Enemy ("Fight the Power"), N.W.A. ("Fuck the Police"), Bodycount's ("Cop Killa"), Dr. Dre ("The Day Niggaz Took Over"), Ice Cube ("Black Korea" and "We Had To Tear This Motherfucka Up"), and the Geto Boys ("Crooked Officer") collectively expressed strong disdain, frustration, and anger for the

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[4] The civil unrest in Libya, Egypt, and Paris had Hip Hop at its core voice and used U.S. artists such as KRS-One, The Roots, Tupac Shakur, Lauryn Hill, and N.W.A. (among many others) as social templates for social revolutions.

[5] It could be argued that Hip Hop became mainstream when DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince won the first Grammy Award for Best Rap Performance in 1989 for the song "Parents Just Don't Understand." From that point, rap music was considered "music." In 1992, Dr. Dre releases *The Chronic* and it made a "mainstream" sensation with record sales being made well outside the borders of the urban context. It was within these years that Hip Hop gained much traction in Hollywood and the public sphere with films such as *Juice* (1993), *Boyz In The Hood* (1991), and *Menace II Society* (1993) all giving Hip Hop a much larger platform in which to operate and a never before had audience capitulating to its music to operate.

recurring, wanton, chronic, and systematic abuse experienced by themselves and members in their neighborhood communities. Although the documented footage of King's beating on videotape provided irrefutable proof to cynics that questioned the validity of the claims made by Hip Hop revolutionaries against law enforcement in the years prior to the beating of King, in the wake of this national tragedy, Hip Hop became the cultural bullhorn by which the experiences of the "nameless," "faceless," and "voiceless" have received national and international attention.[6]

The study of Hip Hop spans, now, over two decades. Scholars such as Tricia Rose, Michael Eric Dyson, Cornel West, Anthony B. Pinn, Jeff Chang, Nelson George, Bakari Kitwana, and Murray Forman, among others, were among some of the first scholars to give Hip Hop academic "feet" and legitimacy. Rose's work *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, discussed the context and cultural attributes of Hip Hop culture and gave insight into the contextual elements of the culture and musical genre. Dan Charnas produced one of the most exhaustive books on how Hip Hop developed into a commercial, trans-global, multi-billion dollar entity and gives direct insight into how Hip Hop "lost its soul and went corporate" over the last thirty five years; a powerful historical account of the culture from a socio-economic posit.[7]

Using Black popular culture as a backdrop, much of Hip Hop scholarship engages the historical and socio-political areas of Hip Hop. Jeff Chang and Nelson George give accurate social portraits of the historical settings which gave rise to Hip Hop. Chang and George lay out Hip Hop's historical ontology and argue for the legitimacy of Hip Hop within the American pop culture scene.[8] While author's such as Bakari Kitwana describes what the Hip Hop generation is, including attention to white youth and their inclinations toward the culture. Yvonne Bynoe continued this conversation and asserted both the political leadership within Hip Hop and the growing need for it within the young Black community.

These works provide a firm academic foundation to the field of Hip Hop studies by legitimizing Hip Hop as a rightful academic endeavor – that is, this data is just as good as any other academic data set and worthy of serious consideration and reflection.[9] Hip Hop studies, as coined by many by the mid 2000's, is a field which

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[6] Aloi, Daniel. "Hip-hop's global culture 'affects everyone,' pioneers say." *The Cornel Chronicle*, 20 Apr 2011.

[7] Dan Charnas, *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop* (New York, NY: New American Libriary, 2010).

[8] The mid to late 1990s gave rise to a multitude of scholarship focused around Hip Hop culture. Scholars such as Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: State University of New York Press / Sunny Series, 1995); Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap : Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough for You? Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Mark Anthony Neal, "Sold out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music" (*Popular Music and Society* 21, no. 3 (1997), all gave treatment to the multi-levels of Hip Hop within communication, cultural, and African American studies. These works were critical in understanding Hip Hop beyond its historical aspects.

[9] This of course is arguable, but in the last decade of Hip Hop scholarship, most academic professional associations have had a section/ quad/ group on Hip Hop studies, and the growth of doctoral candidates doing their

encompasses sociology, anthropology, communication studies,[10] religious studies, cultural studies, critical race theory, missiological studies, and psychology in a multi-disciplinary area of study—much like the polyvocal and multiplicative culture of Hip Hop – it is not one, but rather, many things – a conglomerate of diversity that continues to grow in both scope, content and form.

Accordingly, over the last decade, the scholarship surrounding Hip Hop has grown exponentially, making its way into the disciplines of gender studies, critical race theory, communication and rhetoric studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnomusicology, popular culture studies, and religious studies. Given the complexity of issues involved in Hip Hop studies, more and more disciplines are beginning to take up Hip Hop for academic reflection; the birth of Hip Hop studies is now and it precisely why a journal like this exists. For too long Hip Hop scholars and practitioners have not had a space and place to engage with and dialogue about their work. Scattered among the various academic journals and professional conferences, Hip Hop scholarship has not had a "home" to call its own and a dedicated team of peers who know and understand the field who can give serious attention to their ongoing scholarship; until now.[11] *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* (*JHHS*) exists to fill this void – to create a space for scholars and practitioners working in and around a wide variety of Hip Hop data. Our hope is that this journal offers a place for concise and critical scholarship that contributes to the scholarly field of Hip Hop Studies. *JHHS* is published primarily for scholars seeking a deeper and more analytical understanding of Hip Hop culture and for those working in the fields of religious studies, communication studies, cultural studies, American studies, sociology, social psychology, and urban missions. But, the journal might also be of interest to scholars in related fields such as philosophy, history, social and political science, social and political theory, pop culture, Black and Latino(a) popular culture, Black and Pan African studies, biblical studies and those who practice the art and aesthetics of Hip Hop.

In the face of historical and contemporaneous forms of prejudice, discrimination, bigotry, intolerance, and oppression, Hip Hop has created a critical social mass of individuals that have unapologetically challenged the status quo and validated the voluminous experiences of marginal people in America and abroad. As an interdisciplinary teacher, Hip Hop has taught those who are ignorant of the marginal experiences why it is important to possess and develop an earnest desire to learn about the joy, pain, and resilience of people on the underside of the American Project. By

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dissertations on or around a Hip Hop issue is grounds to suggest that Hip Hop has, in fact, grown from just a sub-cultural study.

[10] A little known work published by Russell Potter examines the rhetorical aspects of Hip Hop culture from a communications point of view. 1995. *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: State University of New York Press / Sunny Series, was the first to argue that Hip Hop vernacular might in fact be part of the postmodern language.

[11] There have been academic journals that have been both sensitive and open to Hip Hop Studies which need mention: *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, The Bulletin for the Study of Religion, *Souls Journal*, *Black Theology Journal*, *Culture & Religion Journal*, *Religion & Popular Culture Journal*, and *The Journal of Negro Education*—to name just a few, have been allies for Hip Hop Studies.

speaking candidly about our past, validating our present, and looking optimistically to our future, Hip Hop has encouraged its pupils to become better individuals, partners, family members, and community partners. There is room at the table for anyone who has something to say and has a strong desire to say it. For almost four decades, Hip Hop pioneers such as Grandmaster Flash and Run DMC have paved the way for other notable Hip Hop contenders such as A Tribe Called Quest, Coolio, EPMD, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious Big, 'Lil Kim, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Nate Dogg and Warren G, Snoop Dogg, Nas, 50 Cent, Eryka Badu, Common, Lauryn Hill, Eminem, Joell Ortiz, Talib Kweli, and more recently 'Lil Wayne, 2 Chainz, Nicki Minaj, and Kendrick Lamar (to name a few). Given the current strength of Hip Hop's position in the world, there is also room at the table for up-and-coming Hip Hop artists who want us to experience their distinct way of viewing the world. For those who have ignored the many lessons that are inherent in historical and contemporary Hip Hop, *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* is a forum by which to listen and learn. Hip hop can no longer be ignored; it is now time to pay attention.

JHHS seeks to give that field a voice and a body of work in which to draw from. Our mission is to publish critically engaged, culturally relevant, and astute analyses of Hip Hop. Work that emphasizes Hip Hop's relationship to race, ethnicity, nationalism, class, gender, sexuality, justice and equality, politics, communication, religion, and popular culture are at the center of the scholarship. *JHHS* also explores the intersections of the sacred and profane for a better understanding of spirituality and religious discourses within the Hip Hop community. And, with this growing field, work around therapy and counseling with Hip Hop is also an area of study. *JHHS* has five broad aims, each of which adds a new and distinctive dimension to the academic analysis and study of Hip Hop:

1. The religious discourse and rhetoric of Hip Hop and rap

2. Culture, structure, and space within Hip Hop and rap

3. Race, ethnicity, identity, class, and gender in a Hip Hop and rap context

4. The sociology of religion in Hip Hop and rap

5. Hip Hop's influence and reach in other culture industries (fashion, sports, television, film); within the political sphere, and within educational spaces

All of these aims are addressed in the works that constitute this inaugural issue. For starters, Lillian-Yvonne Bertram's "Epic: An EP" resonates due to its fragmented and decentered yet buoyant qualities. The poem sashays across the page as confidently as a classic Hip Hop refrain and in the process manages to string together five numbered stanzas that cleverly use imagery of musical performances along with suggestions of bar room gossip and references to Christmas-season "love" as connective tissue. More specifically, words such as "Fingerplucking," "Band," "sways," "hat high" relate in interesting and unexpected ways. Similarly, the poem's final line, "rising home," not only possesses rich sonic quality, but manages to usher readers away from the bar and performance on a high note.

In a decidedly more sacred vein, Travis Harris explores the metaphysical underpinnings of Lecrae, a Grammy award-winning rapper (Best Christian Album, 2013) who may be unfamiliar to many Hip Hop scholars and fans, in "Refocusing and Redefining Hip Hop: An Analysis of Lecrae's Contribution to Hip Hop." Harris argues that Lecrae and other "Christian" artists possess the requisite talent and aesthetic appeal to help return Hip Hop to its community-centric roots. However, Harris makes clear that the sacred elements of the art form must first be acknowledged and embraced by the broader Hip Hop community and that the sacred/secular divide which is commonly used requires more attention.

For Samuel T. Livingston, Hip Hop is part of a more expansive and global community, one that stretches back to the Afro-Kemetic oral tradition. In the essay "Speech is My Hammer, It's Time to Build: Hip Hop, Cultural Semiosis and the Africana Intellectual Heritage," Livingston asserts that a Diasporic approach grounded in an African semeiotic system of analysis can help facilitate our understanding of the cultural history and political potential of Hip Hop.

Two controversial aspects of our cultural history figure prominently in Dustin Coleman's "Baadassss Gangstas: The Parallel Influences, Characteristics and Criticisms of the Blaxploitation Cinema and Gangsta Rap Movements." Coleman explores the socio-economic conditions that made both movements possible and later critiques the parallel artistic elements that made the two genres culturally significant. Coleman also examines the critical reception of each movement, especially the lively and often contentious dialogue that ensued within the African American community.

Graffiti art and rap take center stage in Duri Long's essay "Listen to the Story: Banksy, Tyler the Creator, and the Growing Nihilistic Mindset." Long addresses the presence of nihilistic tendencies and sentiments in contemporary urban environments. Specifically, Long examines how those tendencies inform the cultural productions of graffiti artist Banksy and rapper Tyler the Creator. Furthermore, the essay broadens its scope in an effort to explain why disillusionment and nihilism are becoming more and more ubiquitous in suburban as well as urban areas.

The last essay in our inaugural issue, "Typologies of Black Male Sensitivity in R&B and Hip Hop," comes from Cassandra Chaney and Krista D. Mincey. The two scholars conduct a qualitative content analysis of nearly eighty Rhythm and Blues and Hip Hop songs from the mid-1950s to the present in order to identify how emotion, especially sensitivity, is expressed by Black male performers. Chaney and Mincey seek to determine under which conditions the artists feel comfortable to unburden themselves from traditional and socially constructed expectations of masculine, if not hyper-masculine, modes of expression.

Thus, enter with us as we explore the study of Hip Hop and seek to broaden the academic study of Hip Hop. The works presented here in the journal you hold mark the beginning of a much needed area for focused scholarship.

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Epic: An EP

Lillian-Yvonne Bertram

1://   all bows out   finger plucking
season's alight wit   w/slight white
burns & mistletoe

2://   things I didn't do w/the bartender
while Band queued up::

3://   caught in the *clink*
fizz   a season smug
about love & the spaz who sways

4://   sways   adjusts hat   high

5://   another one   over here
another one please   for the ride
rising home

Refocusing and Redefining Hip Hop: An Analysis of Lecrae's Contribution to Hip Hop

Travis Harris

Abstract

Hip Hop scholarship has overlooked and separated emcees who publically identify themselves as Christians who exist to make God famous. This deficiency contributes to an inadequate understanding of Hip Hop and places Hip Hop in a dangerous position of alienating ostracized voices. This paper aims to draw attention to these shortcomings by analyzing Lecrae's contribution to Hip Hop. Influenced by his worldview, Lecrae leads a socially conscious movement and helps to bridge the "sacred" and "secular" gap. Lecrae redirects Hip Hop back to its roots. I will examine Lecrae's lyrics, websites, social media and interviews. Interviews of Lecrae will come from several mainstream Hip Hop websites and videos found on YouTube. The combination of all these areas of inquiry will present a holistic view of Lecrae. The goal of this paper is to provide one article about Christians in Hip Hop with the hopes of spurring more discussion around such a vast field of study.

> Eh, they don't know about us, they don't, they don't know about us
> They think we dum, dum diddy dum, dum
> But they gon' know, they gon' know about us – Lecrae and Tedashii, "Dum Dum"

Introduction

Out of the dust and ashes from apartment buildings burning in the streets of the Bronx, New York, among the disenfranchised Black and Hispanic youth rose Hip Hop. Hip Hop provided an identity and a voice to the voiceless; therefore, the exclusion of certain voices in contemporary Hip Hop is antithetical to the genre's foundation. Particularly, the voices of Christians in Hip Hop, whose focus is to make God famous, are rarely included in discussions by academic and Hip Hop communities. On September 4, 2012, Lecrae Moore released *Gravity*, his sixth studio album. *Gravity* debuted as the number one bestselling album on the overall iTunes chart and number three on the Billboards 200 chart. Despite the success of this album, the academic community has not given adequate attention to Lecrae. If Hip Hop scholarship does not pay attention to Lecrae and other Christians in Hip Hop then it will contribute to the very illegitimacy it fights against. American society has misunderstood, misrepresented and wrongfully accused Hip Hop. Hip Hop is notorious, not only in America, but around the world, for misogyny, the glamorization of gang violence and a seemingly insatiable pursuit of money. Therefore, there is a need for Hip Hop scholars to examine Christians in Hip Hop in order to help combat this limited view of the genre and

provide a comprehensive definition of Hip Hop, nationally and internationally. The absence of any voice within a group quite often leaves the entire group vulnerable to improper identification, disenfranchisement and oppression.

Christians have been a part of Hip Hop throughout its history. During Hip Hop's beginning, Charles Howard, in *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture*, discusses Sylvia Robinson's encounter with the Holy Spirit.[1] Stephen Wiley, who is recognized as the first "Christian Rapper," wrote the lyrics to the song "Basketball" performed by Kurtis Blow. In 1982, Peter Harrison, who goes by MC Sweet, released an album titled *Jesus Christ (The Gospel Beat)* on the Lection Record label. Wiley and Harrison were nationally known artists but there were several local emcees who were also Christians.[2] There is a whole community of Christians in Hip Hop that includes Lecrae; out of this community has grown a movement with Lecrae at the forefront.

The movement that Lecrae both leads and invests in challenges Hip Hop to go back to its roots of providing a voice to the voiceless and addressing the issues that the disenfranchised of American society confronts. As the face of the movement to mainstream American culture, Lecrae has also had success by winning a Grammy in 2013 in the Best Gospel Album category for *Gravity*. He is breaking down the barriers that have kept Christians out of rap music by bridging the gap between the church and Hip Hop. He amalgamates "Christian Hip Hop" and Hip Hop and offers new ways of conceiving what is considered "sacred" and "secular." Furthermore, Lecrae does not perpetuate negative stereotypes; he is one of many Christians who is not ostentatious in Hip Hop. He has chosen to "play the background," he raps: "Yeah, so if you need me I'll be stage right. Prayin' the whole world will start embracing stage fright. So let me fall back and stop giving my suggestions. Cause when I follow my obsessions I end up confessing. I'm not that impressive, matter of fact I'm who I are. A trail of star dust leading to the Superstar."[3]

Scholarship on Religion and Hip Hop

> I know when I first, at least in the circles that I ran in, started the conversation of hip hop, religion, and spirituality it was very much frowned upon and there just weren't that many resources. - Daniel Hodge, Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta's God

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[1] Charles Howard, "Deep Calls to Deep: Beginning Explorations of the Dialogue between the Black Church and Hip Hop," in *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide,* ed. Emmett G. Price III (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 34.

[2] Frank Hooker and the New Testament Troop were local emcees who were Christians. In 1982, Hooker had a song recorded and played locally in Washington, D.C. In 1984, New Testament Troop had a song called "Gospel Rappin." Further, there have been emcees, deejays, b-boys/girls and graffiti artist who have identified themselves as Christians through the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s. Most notable is D.C. Talk who was the first "Christian Rap" group to win a Grammy. D.C. Talk won four Grammys in the Best Rock Gospel Album category.

[3] Lecrae Moore, "Background," *Rehab* (Reach Records, 2010).

The dearth of scholarship on religion and Hip Hop is confined to several books published in 2011 and a few book chapters and articles. In addition to Utley, books on religion and Hip Hop are Anthony Pinn's *Noise and the Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*, Monica Miller's *Religion and Hip Hop* and Daniel Hodge's two books *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* and *Heaven Has A Ghetto: The Missiological Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur*. Michael Eric Dyson provides a thorough analysis of Tupac Shakur's Christology in *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex Culture and Religion*.

Scholarship on Christians in Hip Hop is even more limited than religion and Hip Hop. The one book that devotes several chapters to it is Emmett G. Price III's book *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide,* released in 2011. The only full account given to "Christian Hip Hop" is a dissertation by Shanesha Renée Frances Brooks-Tatum entitled: "Poetics with a Promise: Performances of Faith and Gender in Christian Hip-Hop," which was issued in 2010. Two articles focus on "gospel rap/hip-hop," Josef Sorett's article "Beats, Rhymes and Bibles: An Introduction to Gospel Hip Hop" and Sandra Barnes' article "Religion and Rap Music: An Analysis of Black Church Usage." Sorett's article is also included in Price's book. Pinn's book contains one chapter on Christian rap music.[4] Also, the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music* written by Mark Powell includes some history on several emcees. Other than that, scholars barely mention "Christian Rap."

Scholarly work on religion and Hip Hop has been primarily viewed through a "Christian" lens. Although Hip Hop's perspective of Christianity has been examined, more work still needs to be done. There aren't any books or articles that mention the New Testament Youth Troop, a group of Christians who released "Gospel Rappin" in 1984. The articles that have been written mention Stephen Wiley as the first "Christian Rapper," but Peter Harrison is not referenced at all. There are hundreds of artists on the Holy Hip Hop database website but other than the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, these emcees are seldom referenced, if at all. Intentionally or unintentionally, Hip Hop scholarship has overlooked Christians in Hip Hop. Now is the time for academics and the broader Hip Hop community to give Christian artists the attention they have earned and deserve.

Who is Lecrae?

> Listen, partner, they're lying to us, they're selling pies to us
> They teach us how to be gang bangers and nine shooters
> I've been where you've been, seen what you've seen
> Group up with old dawg, looking mean on the screen
> When Nas was street dreaming, and Biggie was still breathin'
> And cash ruled everything around me, creamin' – Lecrae, "Rise"

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[4] The chapter in Anthony Pinn's book *Noise and the Spirit* is entitled "African American Christian Rap: Facing 'Truth' and Resisting It" by Garth Baker-Fletcher.

Lecrae Moore was born in Houston, Texas. He was raised by his mother and lived in several cities during his childhood, including San Diego, Denver and Dallas. Lecrae lived in the "'hoods"[5] of these cities.[6] In an interview done by Desiring God, Lecrae provides further details about his upbringing.[7] A significant part of Lecrae's childhood, the departure of his dad due to drugs, mirrors the greater Hip Hop community. In "Just Like You," Lecrae raps about his struggle with fatherlessness, he states:

> I don't know another way to go, this is the only way they ever show. I got this emptiness inside that got me fightin' for approval cause I missed out on my daddy sayin, "Way to go." Didn't get that verbal affirmation don't know how to treat a woman, how to fix an engine, to keep the car runnin'. So now I'm lookin at the media and I'm followin' what they feed me. Rap stars, trap stars, whoever wants to lead me. Even though they lie they still tell me that they love me. They say I'm good at bad things, at least they proud of me.[8]

Lecrae's absent father left him searching for male role models. He then turned to the men in his 'hood for guidance which led to Lecrae being affiliated with gangs and drugs.

Lecrae's encounter with Christians in Hip Hop played an integral role in his "conversion." When he was nineteen years old, he saw some men who dressed liked him and talked like him. These Christians made Jesus relevant to Lecrae and invited him to a conference. Here, James White[9] presented the "clearest gospel presentation that [Lecrae] had ever heard." [10] Lecrae shares in the same interview the conviction he felt of his wrongdoing and that he had "hurt Jesus" after hearing the sermon. He then shared that he fell on his knees and asked forgiveness. After Lecrae graduated from the University of North Texas and married, he moved to a 'hood in Memphis, Tennessee. Lecrae's deep concern for the 'hood and Hip Hop created a drive to provide inspiration to people who were in the very same situation he was in. He partnered with Ben Washer and founded the record label Reach Records. Lecrae also founded and is President of ReachLife Ministries, which "exists to help bridge the gap between biblical truth and the urban context."[11]

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[5] 'hood is a common term used in Hip Hop which is short for neighborhood. The "neighbor" is dropped, leaving hood.

[6] "Lecrae's Biography," published online at http://reachrecords.com/artists/show/Lecrae (accessed December 12, 2012).

[7] "Lecrae Interview Part 1 of 3" *YouTube.* Online Video Clip, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeOVOjelO0E (accessed December 12, 2012).

[8] Lecrae Moore, "Just Like You," *Rehab* (Reach Records 2010).

[9] James White was one of the speaker's at the Impact conference Lecrae attended.

[10] "Lecrae Interview Part 2 of 3" *YouTube.* Online Video Clip, http://youtu.be/m_xxDo6XgNM (accessed on December 12, 2012)

[11] "About ReachLife Ministries," published online at http://reachlife.org/about/ (accessed December 20, 2012)

What is Hip Hop?

The world incorrectly identifies Hip Hop with the tool of delivering the message, rap, as the summation of Hip Hop. Tricia Rose, in her landmark book *Black Noise*: *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, discusses the dialectical views presented by Hip Hop. She states: "Rap music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society. Rap's contradictory articulations are not signs of absent intellectual clarity; they are a common feature of community and popular cultural viewpoint."[12] Rose refutes the incomplete understanding of rap music in American society and discusses the various factors worth considering in order to properly understand the full essence of Hip Hop.

Rose and several other Hip Hop scholars have done an excellent job explaining the various socio-economic and historic factors that have contributed to Hip Hop's development. In addition to Rose, Jeff Chang provides an in-depth history where he discusses Hip Hop's developmental environment in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation.* Hip Hop scholars have also repudiated the perception that Hip Hop is rap music. There are at least four elements of Hip Hop: DJing, B-Boying, MCing, and Graffiti Art. Scholars have shown that there are "conscious" Hip Hoppers who are aware of the social ills of American society and fighting against it. Some scholarly examples are Charise Cheney's *Brother's Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*, Jeffrey Ogbar's *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Cultural Politics of Rap*, and A. Sahid Stover's *Hip Hop Intellectual Resistance*.

Although Hip Hop scholarship has considered those that are "conscious," further attention to Christians in the culture is still required to develop a well-rounded definition of Hip Hop. Christians and "conscious" Hip Hoppers have homogenous goals. Christians have similar backgrounds and were just as involved with Hip Hop as much as the greater Hip Hop community. They grew up in 'hoods, listened to the same music, went to the same parties, were involved with gangs and experienced the same social ills that many Hip Hoppers experienced. Therefore Christians should be included in the conversation about identifying Hip Hop.

Hip Hop (Re)defined

> And I don't play church, partna, this is what I'm living
> Hey Bun called from Texas, told me Crae, I get it,
> You are no imposter, you spit it how you live it
> Them inmates tellin me keep spittin' n don't quit it
> Cause when that music play, they ain't worried about the sentence
> 25 to life boy the dead has risen, so tell Sing Sing, the king is coming back to get em - Lecrae, "Rejects"

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[12] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2.

Lecrae identifies himself as authentically Christian[13] and authentically Hip Hop. His identity of being authentically Christian shapes his worldview and does not always line up with certain aspects of the current representation of Hip Hop. He does agree with the perspective provided by Hip Hop scholars that Hip Hop is more than rap music, especially the music that is heard on radio and the videos seen on television. Lecrae contributes to a definition of Hip Hop an inextricable link between what he raps and how he lives. Inspired by Lecrae's faith, his life is committed to entering dark situations and providing light; whether that's to the fatherless young man in the 'hood or the pop stars who are secretly struggling. He does not see a contradiction between being a Christian and being Hip Hop. Essentially, Lecrae is Hip Hop and being Hip Hop means a desire to provide hope in a hopeless situation.

Two aspects of Hip Hop that Lecrae's Christian faith looks to refocus are "realness" and the aggrandizing of fortune and fame. Jeffery Ogbar, in *Hip-Hop Revolution*, provides a definition of "realness." Ogbar states: "At its most fundamental level, 'realness' in hip-hop implies intimate familiarity with the urban, working-class landscapes that gave rise to hip-hop in the 1970's. Additionally, it recognizes that the conditions in the South Bronx around 1974 are not unfamiliar to poor urban communities elsewhere… A brash intimacy with crime has also been assumed within the dominant definition of hip-hop authenticity during the last decade."[14] Ogbar goes on to explain how a "real nigga" is a "thug" and the two terms have become synonymous. "Thugs" are raised in the housing projects and "extol ghettoized pathology (drug selling, gang banging, violence, pimping etc) to affirm their realness."[15]

 Ogbar does provide examples within Hip Hop that challenged the "real niggas" identity including "conscious" rappers like Common and Talib Kweli, "black-conscious rebel" like Jay-Z and those of different races, such as Bubba Sparxxx, since "realness" usually associates with blackness. Lecrae adds another dimension to understanding "realness" in Hip Hop; someone who can stay true to their Christian faith and maintain Hip Hop authenticity. The combination of staying true to Christianity in the face of the pervasive identification of "realness" is quite difficult. Non-thug emcees are not as respected throughout Hip Hop. Lecrae's portrayal of "realness" is staying true to one's identity despite the disrespect.

Black Nationalist, Jeru the Damaja, offers another perspective to who is a "real nigga." Jeru recognizes himself as a "real nigga" in the song "One Day" in which he

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[13] In the interview with The PODIUM Magazine, Lecrae was asked what it means to be "authentically Hip Hop." Lecrae responded by saying that he is not doing "church boy rap" which is forced or contrived. He grew up in the 'hood and in the Hip Hop culture. He also names the elements of Hip Hop: graffiti and b-boying and states "I was bathed in it." "Lecrae Interview" YouTube. Online Video Clip, ThePODIUMChannel, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=ilS1rGFlvH8 (published November 6, 2012)

[14] Jeffrey Ogbar, *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 39.

[15] Ibid., 43

"rescues hip-hop from the corrupt, greedy and materialistic forces of the industry."[16] Jeru reveals that the popularity of Hip Hop has also led to the temptation of Hip Hop "selling out" for money. The possibility of gaining luxurious houses, cars, top of the line clothing and other materialistic possessions may be alluring to those in a lower socio-economic class. Hip Hop's pursuit of success is not inherently evil. The issue lies in Hip Hop losing its identity to attaining the maximum amount of material possessions. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Criteria of Negro Art,* asked this series of questions referring to what Blacks would do if their social circumstance changed:

> … suppose, too, you became at the same time rich and powerful -- what is it that you would want? What would you immediately seek? Would you buy the most powerful of motor cars and outrace Cook County? Would you buy the most elaborate estate on the North Shore? Would you be a Rotarian or a Lion or a What-not of the very last degree? Would you wear the most striking clothes, give the richest dinners, and buy the longest press notices?[17]

He then goes on to say: "Even as you visualize such ideals you know in your hearts that these are not the things you really want. … but nevertheless lived in a world where men know, where men create, where they realize themselves and where they enjoy life. It is that sort of a world we want to create for ourselves and for all America."[18] Hip Hop pioneer, Clive Campbell (DJ Kool Herc), agrees with Du Bois. He states: "To me, hip-hop says, 'Come as you are.' We are a family. It ain't about security. It ain't about bling bling. It ain't about how much your gun can shoot. It ain't about $200 sneakers. It is not about me being better than you or you being better than me."[19] Du Bois and Kool Herc are arguing against insurmountable assets and for the ability to create an identity as part of a loving family.

Lecrae's paradigm shift away from being a "thug" and avaricious is in line with Jeru, Du Bois and Kool Herc. In the song "Chase That," he makes a similar argument that Lauryn Hill makes in the song "Final Hour." Hill rapped "You could get the money/ You could get the power/But keep your eyes on the final hour."[20] Lecrae and Hill believe the issue is much deeper than the surface level pursuit of fame. They believe the real issue is a heart issue. The hook of Lecrae's song "Chase That" is:

And you can have the money
And you can have the fame
But me I want the Glory
I'm living for the Name
See life is just a picture
I see outside the frame
I'm living for a kingdom that I ain't never seen

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[16] Ibid., 43

[17] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" in *The Crisis*, October 1926, 510.

[18] Ibid., 510

[19] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 12 Reader I-book.

[20] Lauryn Hill, "Final Hour," *Miseducation of the Negro* (Sony, 1998)

Lecrae and Hill do not have a problem with getting money. Lecrae in "Confe$$ions" states: "Ain't nothing wrong with havin' it. Matter fact, go and get it."[21] The cautioning to Hip Hop is that pursuit of money and prominence may signify an empty and envious heart. Hill's warning about the final hour points to judgment by God. Hill mentions the 73rd Psalm which is a Psalm by Asaph pondering the prosperity of the wicked while the righteous suffer.[22] Hill realizes, despite the prosperity of the wicked, they will fall.

Lecrae argues that before judgment, pursuing fame will never satisfy the heart. In "Chase That," Lecrae goes on to say: "The same kind Alexander the Great felt, when the Earth ran out of room / He conquered all he could, but yet he's feeling consumed / By this never ending quest for glory he couldn't fuel." Lecrae believes that only God can quench the thirst of a human heart. Lecrae's presentation of Hip Hop pointing to Jesus for value provides a different image of Hip Hop and contests the popular perception of Hip Hop finding its identity in possessions.

Authentic Hip Hop does not prevaricate the glamour of amassing wealth. Lecrae is refocusing Hip Hop from the voracious quest of riches to what it was originally meant to be, empowerment to the disenfranchised providing purpose and identity. Dante "Yasiin" Smith, formerly known as "Mos Def," provides the clearest definition of Hip Hop as an identity. In "Fear Not of Man" Yasiin raps:

> "People always ask me, 'Yo, Mos what is happening with Hip Hop.' I tell them what ever is happening with us, if we smoked out then hip-hop is going to be smoked out, if we are fine then hip-hop is going to be fine, people be talking about hip-hop as if it is some type of giant sitting on the hillside, 'WE ARE HIP-HOP,' so the next time you wandering where hip-hop is going ask yourself where am I going, what I am doing."[23]

Yasiin articulates that Hip Hop finds its identity in the people and that people find their identity in Hip Hop. He articulates that Hip Hop's identity is not a distant entity; instead, it is interconnected with the community's life.

Kool Herc provides similar commentary that affirms the understanding of authentic Hip Hop being a way of life. He explains: "People talk about the four hip-hop elements: DJing, B-Boying, MCing, and Graffiti. I think that there are far more than those: the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you look, the way you communicate."[24]

Kool Herc then goes on and lays out a framework of the true essence of Hip Hop. He says: "There are a lot of people who are doing something positive, who are dong

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[21] Lecrae Moore, "Confe$$ions," *Gravity* (Reach Records, 2012).

[22] Psalm 73 is a Psalm by Asaph and he shares how, at first, he was envious of the wicked prospering while they were living immoral but he was living right and not prospering. In verse 17b – 19, he states: "[T]hen I perceived their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes; on awaking you despise their phantoms." New Revised Standard Version

[23] Dante Smith, "Fear Not of Man," *Black on Both Sides* (Rawkus Entertainment, 2002).

[24] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 12 Reader I-book., 12.

hip-hop the way it was meant to be done."[25] Kool Herc is arguing for Hip Hop to be active in the community and providing encouragement to the demoralized.

"Doing something positive" is exactly what Lecrae is doing and the depiction of authentic Hip Hop that Lecrae presents. Lecrae started by reaching out to young males who had problems with the law. He writes about this period in his life in the blog "Church Clothes – Purpose, Passion, Progression." He states: "That project (Real Talk) opened doors for me to travel a bit—mostly prisons, churches and inner city outreaches—and perform my songs."[26] Lecrae reached out to men in prison and in the 'hood. He also rapped at different churches. Lecrae's outreach started at the local, grassroots level.

As previously mentioned, after Lecrae graduated from college, he moved to Memphis, Tennessee. He says this about his time in Memphis: "Personally, I couldn't simply talk about change. I had to be a part of it, so I spent my life living in the inner city, doing foreign missions and serving in the local church. All of that was ammunition for my Rebel album. My life bled out in that project …"[27] Lecrae's ministry grew and so did he as an emcee. In addition to living in the inner city, he also went to other countries. Lecrae discusses his mission trip to Central America in the song "Go Hard" and references this period of his life in the song "Sacrifice." Lecrae has poured out his life in service to others; authentic Hip Hop.

This definition of Hip Hop Lecrae represents, involves his faith, which impacts his life and influences his music to paint a picture of hope. As Lecrae transforms and grows, Hip Hop grows. Lecrae is akin to an illustrator who paints a beautiful portrait of redemption that was birthed out of a filthy past. Initially, he thought he had to overtly scream Jesus in his music and life. His ascension in music, among other factors, has contributed to bridging a divide.

Bridging the Gap to Continue the Movement

> My, my, my generation is known for being complacent, but, don't change the station cause we might change the nation. – Lecrae, "Our Generation"

Derrick Alridge, Emmett Price, Charise Cheney and several other Hip Hop scholars have argued that there is a dissonance between the Civil Rights generation and the Hip Hop generation. Many leaders who are a part of the Civil Rights generation are also involved with the "Black Church." Alridge, in the essay "From Civil Rights to Hip Hop: Toward a Nexus of Ideas," explains: "Activists and scholars of the Hip Hop generation, in turn, often criticize the civil rights generation for being out of touch with contemporary 'real world' problems of black youth, for failing to reach out to black youth, or failing to understand the complexities of the postindustrial society in which

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[25] Ibid., 13

[26] Lecrae Moore, "Church Clothes – Purpose, Passion, Progression." Published online at http://reachrecords.com/blog/post/Church-Clothes-Purpose-Passion-Progression

[27] Ibid.

black youth live."[28] Scholars of religion and Hip Hop, including Lerone Martin, Daniel Hodge and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, have all argued that the church is responsible for taking the first step in bridging this generational chasm.

The divide between the church and Hip Hop has contributed to the divide between "Christian Hip Hop" and Hip Hop. Lecrae's ability to fill the void between the church and Hip Hop is significant in building relationships between Christians and Hip Hop. The church's inability to cooperate with Hip Hop jeopardizes the church's ability to meet its mission. Therefore, Lecrae's appropriation of an adequate theology that reaches Hip Hop is essential to both the church's and Hip Hop's identity of empowering the outcast of society.

Price discusses the discontinuity between the Civil Rights generation and the Hip Hop generation in *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture*. The first chapter, Alton Pollard's essay "From Civil Rights to Hip Hop," sparks the conversation by challenging the Hip Hop generation to continue the fight for social equality where the Civil Rights generation left off. He states, "However, I see the same divine presence that was at work during the era of civil rights and Black consciousness pervasive in Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture today. "[29] In order for the Hip Hop generation to continue the fight, "we need to join Hip Hop and faith where coexistence is possible and where mutual integrity and respect can be maintained."[30] Pollard believes in the aggregation of the church and Hip Hop.

Cheney discusses Hip Hop resistance to Christians in *Brothers Gonna Work it Out.* She states: "During the golden age of rap nationalism, Christianity no longer held center stage as the dominant theological structure of black liberatory philosophy--Islam gained prominence with a prophetic promise of the rise of the 'Asiatic Black Man'."[31] The prominence of Islam, Nation of Islam and Five Percent Nation directly contested Christianity. Further, Cheney explains, Black Nationalists argued that Christianity was a "white man's religion" that enslaved and oppressed Americans of African descent. Christianity was also critiqued for a number of other issues including immorality of black preachers, over emphasis on the "after life," and overall hypocrisy.

The oppositional views Black Nationalists presented against Christianity were not confined to "raptivists." Hip Hop has issues with the "Black Church's" presentation of Christianity. In 'hoods all across the United States where Hip Hoppers live and represent, churches are physically present but not present in bringing about real change. Martin discusses the church's lack of involvement with Hip Hop in the essay "Binding the Straw Man: Hip Hop, African American Protestant Religion, and the

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[28] Derrick P. Alridge,"From Civil Rights to Hip Hop: Toward a Nexus of Ideas," in Message in the Music: Hip Hop History and Pedagogy, ed. Derrick P. Alridge et al. (Washington, D.C.: Asalh Press, 2010), 37.

[29] Alton Pollard, "From Civil Rights to Hip Hop: A Meditation," in The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide, ed. Emmett G. Price III (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 7.

[30] Ibid., 7

[31] Ibid., 121

Dilemma Dialogue." He states: "Rap music is not the oxygen of homophobia, sexism, and misogyny; rather, it is simply our society's and faith community's 'mirror mirror on the wall.' Attacking, scapegoating, and ignoring Hip Hop is tantamount to 'shattering' the mirror."[32] The church's unwillingness to see its own sin leaves Hip Hop avoided.

The church's inadequate theology propagates the avoidance of Hip Hop. Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, argued that the church does not have a proper theology for the disenfranchised. He states:

> I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that I have heard a sermon on the meaning of religion, of Christianity, to the man who stands with his back against the wall… The masses of men live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the disposed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs.[33]

As Rose and many other Hip Hop scholars have indicated, Hip Hop comes from the margins. Thurman contends that the churches he encountered had nothing to offer the outcast of society. This still stands; churches are theologically deficient in reaching the marginalized of American society, namely Hip Hop. The result of the church not developing an adequate theology for ministering to the oppressed is stagnation and lack of engagement with Hip Hop.

Theology that can be used by the church in reaching Hip Hop has been explained by Hodge and Michael Eric Dyson. They believe that a "nit grit" theology, one that people from the 'hood can relate to is necessary for reaching those in the 'hood. Dyson uses Tupac as an example and discusses Tupac's song "Black Jesuz."[34] In the song, Tupac says: "Somebody that hurt like we hurt. Somebody that smoke like we smoke. Drink like we drink. That understand where we coming from."[35] Hip Hop is looking for someone that relates to them.

Lecrae, being authentically Christian and Hip Hop, fits this mold. He effectively bridges the incongruity between Hip Hop and the church. Lecrae's background provides him with a unique perspective and relevance to Hip Hop. His background is significant in the development of a theology that provides sustenance to those in a needy situation. In several interviews, Lecrae talks about Tupac's influence on his life. This is important because he could fall in line with developing a theological view that Dyson and Hodge are putting forth. In the Desiring God interview, Lecrae shares how

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[32] Lerone Martin, "Binding the Straw Man: Hip Hop, African American Protestant Religion, and the Dilemma of Dialogue," in The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide, ed. Emmett G. Price III (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 60.

[33] Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited (New York: Abingdon Press, 1949), 13.

[34] Michael E. Dyson, *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture and Religion* (New York, NY: Civitas Books), 2003.

[35] Tupac Shakur, "Black Jesuz," *Still I Rise* (Interscope Records: 1999)

he was drawn to Tupac because Tupac also grew up in the inner city and was well read.[36]

In an interview with Vincent Funaro of Christian Post, Lecrae states: "The thing I loved about [Tupac] was that he wasn't afraid to talk about God or faith, and his misunderstandings, or understandings of it. He just talked about that, [faith] and I think it's healthy. We need people to talk about these realities and ask these questions, and its dope to do that within hip-hop."[37] Tupac encouraged Lecrae's transparency in his music and to rap about real life struggles.

Lecrae's background has allowed him to understand the issues the underprivileged are facing.[38] Lecrae's description of his past struggles provides insight and a connection to Thurman's critique of the church. In "Release Date," he raps:

Outgrown and on my own/ They say when in Rome
Do as the Romans do/ But I found when I do that I die like Romans too
Yeah, I'm reading Romans 2 (What's it say)
Your words are on my heart (truth)
But I ain't got no excuse (no)
It's time to play my part

Lecrae's exposition of his past immediately relates to Thurman's critique of the church. Thurman explains: "It was this kind of atmosphere that characterized the life of the Jewish community when Jesus was a youth in Palestine. The urgent question was what must be the attitude toward Rome."[39] Thurman discusses how Jesus, a Jew, lived under Roman oppression. The Jews, at that time, struggled with pursing freedom from domination or staying bound at the brink of nihilism.

Thurman continues and says: "[T]his is the position of the disinherited in every age. What must be the attitude toward the rulers, the controllers of political, social, and economic life? This is the question of the Negro in American life."[40] Lecrae could relate. He makes the connection between the pressures of living in the 'hood with the Jews living in Rome. When he does "do like the Romans" he "dies" or, as Thurman describes, loses his identity. Lecrae then mentions Romans 2 and communicates that the law is written on his heart.[41] Although he is not a Jew and does not have the actual law

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[36] "Lecrae Interview Part 1 of 3" YouTube. Online Video Clip, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeOVOjelO0E Accessed December 12, 2012.

[37] Vincent Funaro, "Lecrae Talks Tupac, New Album 'Gravity,' and Staying True to Hip-Hop" published on line at http://global.christianpost.com/news/lecrae-talks-tupac-new-album-gravity-and-staying-true-to-hip-hop-78914/#dT5f0sJfF50p6QRU.99 [cited July 26, 2012] (accessed December 12, 2012)

[38] Lecrae talks about these issues in several songs: "Black Rose," "Just Like You," "Change," "Violence," "Sacrifice," "Cold World" and "Rise."

[39] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1949), 22.

[40] Ibid., 23

[41] In chapter 2, Paul is arguing that God's judgment is righteous. In verses 12 through 16, Paul discusses the judgment and justification of Gentiles who do not have the law. The law was given to specifically to the Jews to reveal right and wrong. Since the Gentiles did not have the law, Paul is arguing

given by Moses, there is still no excuse because God's word penetrates his heart and impacts his conscience.

Lecrae and Thurman articulate that any effective outreach to Hip Hop involves recognition of the struggles that the outcast of American society endure. The song "Cold World" fully discusses issues that people from the 'hood encounter.[42] Lecrae is "conscious"[43] of the issues crippling 'hoods that many Hip Hoppers come from and represent, and his consciousness has contributed to his development of a theological view to reach Hip Hop. He discusses this in an interview with David Holzemer of "Collidephoto" that is posted on YouTube.

In the interview, Lecrae recognizes himself as an apologist and a missionary. Lecrae's theology of reaching Hip Hop is to "speak as if people who don't believe in what I believe in are in the room… How can I say things that resonate and relate but still unpack the truth? The church has to look at different people from different cultures as missionaries. The church is not used to indigenous missionaries. We are from a particular culture and we are going back into it."[44] Lecrae articulates that effective ministry acknowledges that others have differing theological views. He aims to find common ground first and then present the truth.

Lecrae, as a Hip Hop and faith-oriented revolutionary, will put him in line with what Cheney describes as a "raptivist." Cheney, in "Representin' God: Rap, Religion and the Politics of a Culture" defines a "raptivist" as a rap artist who uses rap as a tool to be political and is influenced by faith, in most cases, the Nation of Islam. One raptivist she identifies is Paris who believes that "raptivists" are "dedicated to producing music 'to spark a revolutionary mind-set'."[45] Paris, in the song "Brutal," states: "Best believe I won't stop / teachin' science in step with Farrakhan / drop a dope bomb, word to Islam / peace my brothers up on it 'cause I'm / Black and now

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that it is written on their hearts. Verse 14 and 15 of chapter 2 states: "When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them." The translation used the is the New Revised Standard Version

[42] Lyrics to "Cold World" that talk about issues in American society are "And don't nobody care though, the schools ain't teaching / McDonalds selling poison, got people working for cheap and / The military, drug's, or prison only way to eat, man / It's cold in the streets, let the track bring the heat in / This world's cold like no clothes and snow blown/ Like when the devil take the breath out of a baby's nose/ And the people won't hear more metaphors and word-play / My sister's sick of stripping, she need hope up in my words, man."

[43] Lecrae's consciousness does not fit the traditional understanding of a "conscious rapper," such as Common. In the song "Good Life," he does not outright agree with the claim of being "conscious." He is "conscious" to the extent he recognizes social issues including but not limited to problems in the school system, poverty, hunger, fatherlessness, females stripping and degradation of women, pre-mature death, and crime.

[44] "Comfortable in his own skin. An interview with Lecrae" *YouTube*. Online Video Clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n10oML_Vv5A (accessed December 12, 2012)

[45] Charise Cheney, "Representin' God: Rap, Religion and the Politics of a Culture," *The North Star: A Journal of African American Religious History* Volume 3, Number 1 (Fall 1999) pg. 1.

you know I'm brutal."[46] Cheney argues that Paris has an agenda that aligns with many Black Nationalists who speak out and fight against social injustice.

Cheney mentions several raptivists in Hip Hop that are challenging the negative social views of black males. She states: "From East Coast groups such as Public Enemy, KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions, and X-Clan to West Coast artists like Ice Cube, Paris and Kam, rap nationalists intentionally conjure a tradition of model, and militant, Black manhood."[47] Cheney provides a framework in describing how a rap artist is more than an emcee. Reviewing Lecrae through this lens, he fits the "raptivist" categorization. As already mentioned, Lecrae listened to many of these artists when he was younger. In the Desiring God interview, he said that listening to these "raptivists" made him very "ethnocentric and rough around the edges."[48]

Lecrae's political agenda does not match up to what Adolph Reed, Jr. is arguing for in *City Notes*.[49] Reed would argue that Lecrae is not "political" enough. Lecrae does align with Cheney's description of politics and what Reed refers to as "infrapolitics" via Robin Kelley and James Scott. Lecrae is "political" in that he raps about and addresses issues that the lower class of society deals with. Lecrae's Christianity compels him to care for the disenfranchised of American society. He talks specifically about his faith and how it influences his lyrics in an interview with Hard Knock TV:

> If I am trying to do anything for people it is give them hope. Paint a picture of inspiration, tell a story from an entirely different paradigm. There's a lot of issues and a lot of realities that's not spoken on in music. I enjoy talking about fatherlessness because they need to hear this issue and hear that hope.

Lecrae is unique because, although he is not a Nation of Islam Black Nationalist, he aims to provide hope to the hopeless as a Christian. He has the same drive, passion and militancy as a Black Nationalist raptivist to encourage the downtrodden, transform a culture and lead a movement that impacts the world. Lecrae ends "Cold World" with: "A lot of people thinking I'm on a hopeless endeavor / nah, I know someone who can change the weather forever, ever."

Rethinking Sacred and Secular

> And when I started penning lyrics / I wasn't thinking bout no cypher
> I was thinking about them addicts / And them juvies and them lifers
> Well this is what the people lose they life for
> And what they give up all they rights for

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[46] Ibid., 1.

[47] Ibid., 1.

[48] "Lecrae Interview Part 1 of 3" *YouTube.* Online Video Clip, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeOVOjelO0E (accessed December 12, 2012).

[49] In *City Notes,* Reed argues that currently, there is no Black Political Movement. What he means by that is there is no "force that has shown capability, over time, of mobilizing popular support for programs that expressly seek to alter the patterns of public policy or economic relations" (Reed, 3).

…Some want to call this gospel rap / Naw homeboy this is sacrifice! – Lecrae, "Sacrifice"

Lecrae's mission of reaching Hip Hop and providing hope inextricably links to his life. As Lecrae described in the song "Sacrifice," the music he creates and the mission flow seamlessly together. Therefore, the most accurate understanding of Lecrae as an emcee is to understand the unification of his life and music; they are one in the same. Based on this definition, the sacred and secular divide requires reexamination which means that the label of "Christian Rapper" also needs reconsideration.

Several scholars have talked about the limitations of the terms "sacred" and "secular" including Cheney, Andre Johnson, James Cone and Charles Howard. "Sacred" and "secular" should no longer be used in discussing Hip Hop and African American music in general. The breaking down of the sacred and secular wall would lead to the recognition of Lecrae and other Christians as a part of Hip Hop and not a distinct group. Therefore the terms "Holy Hip Hop," "Christian Hip Hop," "Christian Rap," and "Gospel Rap," should be used cautiously.

 Cheney briefly discusses the sacred and secular divide in her analysis of Paris as a raptivist. She states that Paris "declares in 'Brutal' his mission is both sacred and secular. Cheney makes this claim because in "Brutal," Paris raps about the Nation of Islam and educates with his music as a part of the revolution. Paris' mission is "sacred," in that Paris is from the Nation of Islam. It's "secular," in that he is educating about science. Although his mission is "sacred" and "secular," it is still one mission, which means that it is unnecessary to split the mission into two categories.

Cone believes that there should not be two categories of "sacred" and "secular." In *Spirituals and the Blues*, Cone states:

> Both the spirituals and the blues are the music of black people. They should not be pitted against each other, as if they are alien or radically different. One does not represent good and the other bad, one sacred and the other secular. Both partake of the same black experience in the United States.[50]

Cone articulates how the spirituals and blues both came out of the same experience of oppression. African Americans use music as an expression of their life experiences and, according to Cone, this expression of their life should not be separated to a "sacred" experience and a "secular" experience. The "sacred" experience should not be categorized as good and the "secular" experience categorized as bad. R. Dannie Bartlow, in "Defying Gender Stereotypes and Racial Norms: Naming African American Women's Realities in Hip Hop and Neo-Soul Music," provides more insight into the direct connection between music and African American life.

Bartlow explains the connection with support from James Standifer. Standifer states: "If African music and music behavior teach a lesson, it is this: such music and

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[50] James Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, (New York: Orbis, 1992), 39.

musical behavior are about people–the way they move, the way they feel, the things they experience, the sounds they make."[51] Bartlow goes on to explain and restate Standifer:

> Standifer points out that the 'black musical experience is frequently a facing of realities and, often, a relieving of the burdens of living.' He asserts that 'Black musical behavior often chronicles, interprets, and sometimes transforms reality. However it never loses touch with life, for that, after all, is the very essence of the behavior.' Thus, 'music and the responses to it become a remaking of reality.[52]

Bartlow and Standifer make the direct link of black music to black life. They argue, similar to Cone, that Blacks deal with their struggles through music. Just as the spirituals and the blues addressed the adversity the slaves endured, Hip Hop addresses the adversity today's generation faces.

Howard enters this discussion of the sacred/secular divide by challenging the term "Christian Rapper" with the article "Deep Calls to Deep: Beginning Explorations of the Dialogue between Black Church and Hip Hop." He states:

> What is it that makes the former sanctified and the latter not? Is it baptism or church membership? Apparently not, since Snoop was baptized and even sang in the church choir at one time! Is it rapping about Jesus? Does that mean Kanye West should be mentioned on the first list? Or rather is it the way that they live their lives? What does that mean for ministers and Christians who find themselves caught in some of the very terrible public scandals that we see from time to time?[53]

Howard makes a convincing argument against categorizing someone as a "Christian Rapper." He also talks about mainstream emcees that are not overtly Christian in their music but have faith. These questions cannot be answered without a contradiction if the label of "Christian Rap" stands and the terms "sacred" and "secular" continue to be used.

Primarily, Christians are responsible for isolating themselves and propagating the sacred/secular divide. The term "Christian Rap" started with Stephen Wiley and his first album *Bible Break*.[54] On the cassette tape cover was the phrase "Christian Rap."

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[51] R. Dannie Bartlow, in "Defying Gender Stereotypes and Racial Norms: Naming African American Women's Realities in Hip Hop and Neo-Soul Music," in *Message in the Music: Hip Hop History and Pedagogy,* ed. Derrick P. Alridge et al. (Washington, D.C.: Asalh Press, 2010), 163.

[52] Ibid., 164.

[53] Charles Howard, "Deep Calls to Deep: Beginning Explorations of the Dialogue between Black Church and Hip Hop" in *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide,* ed. Emmett G. Price III (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 37.

Howard is referring to a statement made by Baker-Fletcher in his article African American Christian Rap, which stated: "L.G. Wise, BB Jay, Lil Raskul, King Cyz, E-Roc, ad Easop all were homies from the streetz. The feeling, tone and attitude of their rap music similar to that of secular rappers like Eminem, Dr. Dre Snoop Dog, Notorious B.I.G., Tupac Shakur, Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, and Ja Rule. Their overall sound still "reaches homies" because they still sound like homies-just sanctified!

[54] Bible Break is recognized as the first nationally distributed "Christian Rap" album.

Lecrae followed suit. In his first album *Real Talk*, in the song "Nothing," he states "Cats say they gon' change the game / This is Christian rap, why they barely using the savior's name."[55] He also said in an interview with Reyna Day that he "used be a Jeremiah type of cat."[56] Lecrae preached hard and up front against wrongdoing without fully showing grace. His goal was to say Jesus as many times as possible so that Jesus would be glorified through his songs and not himself.

The label "Christian Rapper" limited Lecrae's ability to go beyond the church and his immediate surroundings. He discusses on the blog: "Sure, some were rejecting the Gospel but others didn't give it a spin at all due to the labels placed on it. I was respected by my non-religious friends, but my music to them was very limited and didn't speak to any areas of life other than salvation and living right."[57] Lecrae faced the challenge of maintaining his convictions as a Christian but opening up his outreaches' accessibility to those who wouldn't necessarily define themselves as Christians.

The barriers that Lecrae encountered led to his growth. He shared that he "was led to books by people like Francis Shaffer, CS Lewis" and provided a list of books at the bottom of the blog.[58] The whole premise of Lecrae's new way of looking at the world is that one's worldview impacts all areas of life. He explains: "We limit spirituality to salvation and sanctification. As long as we are well versed in personal piety and individual salvation, we think we're good. But most Christians have no clue how to engage culture in politics, science, economics, TV, music or art… We are missing out on the gospel's power of redemption and glorification in all things."[59] Lecrae argues for Christians to expand their worldview beyond "salvation" to all areas of life.

Lecrae talks about his growth in the song "2 Human":

You used to print your whole sermon in your songs, now you sounding kinda watered down
Man what's going on?
Homie I had to mature
I have so many issues at heart
Thought that screaming through my art made me better, set me apart
If I never get to make another rebel, it's cool
That was a season in my life that is settled
And I live a new season

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[55] Lecrae Moore, "Nothing," *Real Talk* (Reach Records, 2004).

[56] "KING FM's Reyna Day Interview's Lecrae," YouTube, Online video clip, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4WFPVvytUs (accessed December 12, 2012)

[57] Lecrae Moore, "Church Clothes – Purpose, Passion, Progression." Published online at http://reachrecords.com/blog/post/Church-Clothes-Purpose-Passion-Progression

[58] This is the list provided: Biblical Worldview Testing - http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/peers_test.htm, Francis Shaffer - http://amzn.to/KnKnab,Charles Colson - http://amzn.to/JWeM1Y, Nancy Pearcy - http://amzn.to/Lng2Q7, CS Lewis - http://amzn.to/J9A4bs, Tim Keller - http://sermons2.redeemer.com/category/sermon-hierarchy/mission/renewal/arts

[59] Ibid

Lecrae's growth outside of the church and personal contacts led to a growth in his music. The "I never get to make another rebel" line refers to the aforementioned *Rebel* album. In this "new season," Lecrae is making music and impacting people with substance that is relevant, accessible and covers a variety of issues. Lecrae has been able to do this by removing the label "Christian Rapper."

In the same blog, Lecrae discusses the sacred and secular divide and the label of "Christian Rapper." He describes how the sacred and secular divide actually started thousands of years ago with Plato. Plato believed that matter preexisted and could be evil. Lecrae goes on to portray from his Christian worldview that only God preexisted and creator of all. All that God created is good. The verses he cites are Psalm 24:1, Genesis 1, and 1Timothy 4:4.[60] Therefore, classifying matter as "secular" and or "evil," according to Lecrae, is incorrect.

Lecrae provides another explanation in an interview with Nick Barili of Hard Knock TV. Primarily, Lecrae argues that music does not have faith. He states:

> I don't think they call Brand Nubian a Muslim Rapper or Lupe (Fiasco) a Muslim Rapper. I think it's Hip Hop and we should give Hip Hop a chance because it's Hip Hop. Everybody is coming from a particular perspective or worldview. I'm a Christian but my music is not a Christian. Music doesn't have a faith, I have a faith. If I'm a plumber, I'm not a Christian plumber.[61]

Lecrae is arguing that music was not preexisting and that it is not inherently evil. Music does not have a heart or faith, humans have faith. The evil that comes from the music actually comes from humans and not the music in and of itself.

Lecrae's presentation of "sacred" and "secular" unites the abovementioned arguments against the sacred and secular divide that were presented by Cheney, Cone and Howard. In Cheney's argument, Paris is not recognized as a "Nation of Islam Rapper." Lecrae argues that Brand Nubian and Lupe are not called "Muslim Rapper," even though they are Muslims. Lecrae should not be called a "Christian Rapper."

Lecrae confirms Cone's argument of African Americans creating the spirituals and the blues out of their experiences. Lecrae articulates how all emcees portray a certain worldview in their music. In the interview with Reggie Legends, he explains that a "worldview" is how people perceive the world from a particular perspective and paradigm. The direct connection to Cone is that Hip Hoppers' experiences influence their worldview. The stamina, perseverance and hope provided through the spirituals compares to Lecrae's music and mission. The inextricable link between music and life enables Lecrae in "Sacrifice" to rap, *"Well this is what the people lose they life for*," when referring to writing lyrics to address drug addicts and those serving a life sentence in jail.

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[60] In the blog, Lecrae states: "Psalm 24:1 'The Earth is the Lord's and all it contains.' In Genesis 1, God repeatedly identifies His creation as good, meaning no part of creation is inherently bad or evil. Paul in 1 Tim 4:4 says, 'Everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.' "

[61] "Best of Hard Knock TV: Lecrae talks Jeremy Lin, Christian Rap, Lupe, Kendrick, J. Cole + more," YouTube, Online video clip. http://youtu.be/FRIrOYHOul4 (accessed December 12, 2012)

Lecrae addresses the concerns presented by Howard by pushing to get rid of the label altogether. In the interview with Reggie of MalachiVEVO 6, he pinpoints the limitations of "Christian Rap" or "Christian Hip Hop," which is once Christian is added to something, it is automatically thought of as "whack or corny"[62] He goes on to talk about Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin; he says that "they are not pros because they are Christians; they are pros because they are good."[63] Lecrae is arguing for the acceptance of Christians based on their artistic ability. Maintaining the "Christian Rap" label will continue to be a barrier for quality Christian artists and an inadequate understanding of Hip Hop for Hip Hop scholars.

Looking at Lecrae, who is authentically Hip Hop and Christian, provides fresh ways in understanding the link between music and life. He reveals how the growth in his ministry experience affected both his ability to have a wider audience and his music. Lecrae also makes strong arguments to eradicate the categories "Holy Hip Hop," "Christian Hip Hop," "Christian Rap," and "Gospel Rap." Andre Johnson makes a brief statement in his interview with Ebony Utley that points to Lecrae and addresses the category of "Holy Hip Hop." He states: "Also been listening to Lecrae. I think he is beginning to redefine the holy hip hop scene. By the way, there is really no such thing as holy hip hop; it's all hip hop."[64]

Conclusion

Lecrae's success requires more attention than this analysis. Based on previous categorization of Hip Hop emcees, Lecrae would have been classified as underground because his songs were not played on the radio or on music television. Lecrae's success from "underground rapper" to number one on iTunes deserves more research in the social realm. Some obvious factors to consider are technology and social media. One question to be considered is how can an emcee become popular if they are never seen on music television and their songs are never played on the radio?

Lecrae's ability to reach thousands of people around the United States and the world as a Christian presents a new model of evangelism. The religious studies community and the church should take note and investigate. Songs about substitutionary atonement, total depravity, ecclesiology, missiology, and soteriology are played in 'hoods in Memphis, Houston and all over the United States. In addition to 'hoods, these songs are being played in suburbs and churches where congregations are predominately White; which leads to another question: "How is Lecrae able to reach such a diverse group of people and still stay true to the gospel?"

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[62] "Lecrae: Meet The Musician (2012 Interview) YouTube, Online video clip. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=5FDM2RIyLWM (accessed December 12, 2012)

[63] Ibid.

[64]Ebony Utley, *Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta's God,* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012.) 3021 Kindle Edition.

Shanesha Brooks-Tatum, in her dissertation "Poetics with a Promise: Performances of Faith and Gender in Christian Hip-Hop," explores issues of masculinity in examining Lecrae. She also discusses female identities. This analysis and Brooks-Tatum did not fully cover these areas. In 2011, Reach Records released *Man Up* which discusses "Biblical Manhood" and includes a full length movie, album and conferences. Lecrae has numerous songs about respecting women and staying faithful to one wife on the soundtrack. A full exploration of these issues from future scholars should contribute greatly to our understanding of Lecrae and his ability to resonate with audiences across theological and racial categories.

This analysis of Lecrae only grazes the plane of the impact he and the movement are having on America and the world. Lecrae is not an aberration. Several other Christians in Hip Hop have reached iTunes and Billboard success. In addition to the success musically and on stage, they are in the streets, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, speaking out on social injustices, and the list goes on. Lecrae is redefining Hip Hop socially and theologically, but will he spark a scholarly discussion? If Hip Hop blocks out Christian voices, is it really Hip Hop?

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Speech is My Hammer, It's Time to Build: Hip Hop, Cultural Semiosis and the Africana Intellectual Heritage

Samuel T. Livingston

Abstract

The article examines Hip Hop music's relationship with African cultural symbolism and the discipline of Africana Studies. The author maintains that Africana Studies must reclaim the study of cultural semiosis, which may be used to contextualize Hip Hop praxis. Examining semeiotic traces within African and Afrodiasporic primary sources, including Hip Hop lyrics, the article posits that Hip Hop is the latest development in a long tradition of Afro-Kemetic oral artistry, semeiotic systems and the uses of these dual literacies as modes of resistance and affirmations of Black historical and cultural agency. The article adapts Harryette Mullen's literary model of African Spirit Writing and Elaine Richardson's Hip Hop Literacy studies to discuss specific constructs that affirm an African Diasporic worldview and foster resistance to the dominant political-economy that frames Black agency.

Tracing a Du Boisean cultural-racial line, Tricia Rose posits in *Black Noise: Rap music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* that it is the "dynamic and often contentious relationship between… larger social and political forces and (B)lack cultural priorities— that centrally shape and define hip hop."[1] This paper explores the "African" side of Du Bois and Rose's dialectic and challenges Western approaches to the study of Hip Hop (HH) signification and semeiotics by offering a cultural history that synthesizes Africana cultural texts as crucial components lacking in HH cultural studies. I share Harry Allen's desire to know HH's origins; a query he articulates in his essay, "Dreams of a Final Theory," which examines the dawn of the HH cultural universe when its core elements "were united in one never-to-reappear 'superforce.'"[2] The present article pursues the cultural and historical dialectic that programmed HH's impulse toward originality and systems of sign-making. This is a challenge to the Western cultural studies canon, yet I do not seek to dismiss any voices. Instead, I argue for bringing pre-colonial African cultural voices to the table of discussion to enrich the dialog.

The paper synthesizes pre-colonial Africana cultural texts and artistic traditions, which should inform Hip Hop cultural studies, as the artistic culture exhumes, reinvents, and presents its own provocative challenge to semeiotic tradition by claiming that it is among the newest and oldest of signifying art forms. In some regards the present work follows the sociologist Mark Gottdiener as he argues for a historical approach to the study of mass culture:

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[1] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap music and Black Culture in Contemporary America,* Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994, p.23.

[2] Harry Allen, "Dreams of a Final Theory," in J. Chang, *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip Hop.* Cambridge: Basic Civitas, 2006, p.7-8.

Finally, the study of mass culture as signification involves the identification of those codes that, in structuring the behavior of producers and consumers, thereby explain the meaningful relation of human subjects to objects and, in turn, to each other. Basically, therefore, the semeiotic approach often involves a historical sociological study of codes that have been discovered and identified by the analyst.[3]

Taking up Gottdiener's challenge to uncover mass culture's codes of communication, calls for a framework and context for the study of HH iconography, lyricism, and musical artistry as a part of a suppressed artistic culture of meaning making that resists dismissals of HH cultural agency.

Raising the question of cultural semiosis addresses what are the African sources of HH's oral and aural hieroglyphic traditions that often serve as hidden allegories within hidden transcripts. My objectives in this study are: 1) demonstrating African origins of cultural semiosis, 2) connecting texts, cultural power and the sociology of African oral artists, 3) relating Afro-Kemetic orality to Afro-diasporic culture, 4) suggesting an African-centered interdisciplinary model of HH cultural semiosis.

Africa matters: Hip Hop studies and the missing classical African cultural matrix

What Cheryl Keyes calls "Rap music and its African Nexus" evident in the cultural heritage indicated by Nation-conscious rappers is of particular interest for several reasons. First, it signifies the experiences of African Diasporic cultures that converged in the 1970s Bronx to create HH culture. Second, it indicates resistance by people of color, generally, and African-descended people in particular to Western cultural othering. Third, it draws attention to two significant HH cultural institutions, the Universal Zulu Nation founded by Afrika Bambaattaa and the Five Percent Nation. Both institutions base their core beliefs around African-centered themes. Fourth, significant though latent aesthetic practices inspired by the African Nexus suggest the appropriateness of an Africana Studies, if not African-centered cultural philosophy and methodology. That an African-centered semeiotic context pertains to HH culture is consistent with scholarship that argues that Black culture and language are extensions of African agency,[4] especially Hurston's instinct and research as she suggested the

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[3] Mark Gottdiener, "Hegemony and Mass Culture: A Semeiotic Approach," *American Journal of Sociology*, 90, no.5, 1985, p.988.

[4] Hurston *Sanctified Church*, 50-53; Herskovitz, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past.* Boston: Beacon Press, [1941] 1958; Turner, Lorenzo D. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002; Puckett, N. N. (1926) *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*. New York: Dover; *ibid.,* "Names of American Negro slaves" in G. P. Murdock (ed.), *Studies in the Science of Society.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937; *ibid., Black Names in America*, Murray Heller (ed.). Boston: G. K. Hall, 1975; Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," *Phylon,* Vol. 14:No.1 (1953), p.45-61; Holloway, J. E. and Vass, W. K. *The African Heritage of American English*. Bloomington 1997; Salikoko S. Mufwene, (ed.) *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Origins of Black America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our*

agency of African cultural continuity in establishing African American oral culture. Finally, the growth of HH in Pan-African communities sheds light on the art form as a global phenomenon.

Despite the persistence of these themes, and with notable exceptions discussed below, Africana studies scholars have failed to investigate HH rigorously possibly due to "the predominance of popular culture as opposed to national culture" as Karenga suggests.[5] While African-centered scholars do face social and cultural opposition from the West,[6] this assumed oppositionality, unnecessarily encumbers sustained engagements between African-centered Africana Studies and HH culture.

Accepting Hebdige's assertion that "everybody writes in time," and his use of Afrodiasporic *dub* or versioning as an aesthetic process, the article addresses how Africana Studies may engage cultural production as a mode of resistance.[7] The present *versioning* of HH's cultural history considers the dialog between present-day cultural work and an ancient, but vivid, Afro-Kemetic[8] civilization and its impulse toward semeiotic oral artistry. In this context, Hip Hop culture (HHC) is viewed as part of a larger sign-oriented epistemology that is a direct response to disruptive fluctuations and ruptures in the flow of African Diasporic cultural history. Bridging the gaps between these ruptures, HH cultural semiosis is a series of signposts for reading the African experience as it considers questions of ontological integrity, the pursuit of meaning and truth, cultural origins, group life-chances, and the nature of oppression and optimal responses to it. Three cultural historiographic propositions frame the present consideration of HHC: First, a Diopian reading of African cultural development, which emphasizes the disciplined study of cultural and linguistic continuities between Nile valley, Niger valley and other civilizations of Africa from ancient times to the present.[9] Second, Afrodiasporic cultures are a part of this history as many captives were taken from African cultural regions with demonstrated cultural continuities with Nile valley civilization. Third, HH develops within a sociopolitical context of struggle, which frames its artistic consciousness. When Nation conscious HH artists access icons from this Afro-Kemetic culture, it may serve as a special set of user

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Countrymarks. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999; Cheryl Keyes, "At the Crossroads: Hip Hop and Its African Nexus" *Ethnomusicology,* Vol.40 No.2, (Spring/ Summer1996), p. 223-248.

[5] Maulana Karanga, "Society, Culture, and the Problem of Self-Consciousness," in L. Harris, *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917.* Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2000, p.251.

[6] J. Everett Green, "Is the Afrocentric Movement a Threat to Western Civilization?" in L. Harris, *idem*, pp.357-372.

[7] Zora Neal Hurston, *The Sanctified Church.* Berkeley: Turtle Island Books, 1983, p.49; Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music.* London: Routledge, 1987, p. xii.

[8] *Kemet*, "the Black country/state" is the original name for 'ancient Egypt;' "Egypt" is a Greek term. See Bernal,

[9] Diopian Africanists include but are not limited to Cheikh A. Diop, *Pre-Colonial Black Africa*, Chicago: Lawrence-Hill Publishers, 1987, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity.* London: Karnak House, 1989; Theophile Obenga, *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*. London: Karnak House, 2006; Jacob H. Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr Divine Speech: A Historiographical Reflection of African Deep Thought from the Time of the Pharaohs to the Present*, London: Karnak House, 1995.

codes contextualizing their creative production.[10] Fourth, HH has become a *lieu de memoir* where several Afro-Kemetic icons are employed to construct memory and to "orchestrate identity toward an unadulterated presentation of self."[11]

Diggin' in the crates of history: African origins of cultural semiosis

What are the contours of Afro-Kemetic cultural semiosis? It is a sign tradition that has received scant attention both as a source of cultural semeiotics and relative to Africana studies approaches to HH despite Zora Neal Hurston's observation that "the Negro thinks in hieroglyphs."[12] True to her empirical observation and instinct, the historic origins and development of Black oral artistry owe much to Classical and Pre-colonial African sign writing and cultural semiosis. This over-sight is largely due to the history of Western semeiotics, which ignores the African extraction of the discipline. Semeiotic analysis emerged during the first half of the Twentieth century from the parallel efforts of three significant scholars—the American physicist, Charles S. Peirce, the Swiss linguist and Ferdinand de Saussure advanced semiosis using John Locke's branch of philosophy, "semeiotike.[13]" Both the Enlightenment-era concept and the modern discipline are drawn from the Greek root words *semeion*, "sign," *semeiotikos*, "observant of signs," and *semeiousthai*, "to interpret signs." Following the research of Theophile Obenga, Congolese linguist and historian of African philosophy, who discusses the Kemetic origins of Greek philosophy, these terms likely, derive from an Afro-Kemetic intellectual milieu.[14] Such a borrowing was possible based upon Greek sources suggesting direct contact between Ancient Philosophers like Pythagoras who "received lessons from the (Kemetic) Priest Oinuphis."[15] Significantly, according to these sources, Plato, who pioneered the theory of forms, ideal and manifest, studied at Memphis with the priest Khnuphis and at Heliopolis with Sekhnuphis.[16] Significantly,

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[10] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," in D. L. Lewis (ed.), *W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader*, New York: Henry Holt, 1995, pp. 509-515; Leroi Jones, *Blues People*. New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963, p.65; Hebdige, *Cut*, xi-xii, 8, 9.

[11] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," in G. Fabre and R. O'Meally (eds.) *History and Memory in African American Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.284-300; David Wall Rice, *Balance: Advancing Identity Theory by Engaging the Black Male Adolescent.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008, pp. 12-13, 62-64; *idem*, "Rakim, Ice Cube then Watch the Throne: Engaged Visibility through Identity Orchestration and the Language of Hip-Hop Narratives" Lecture, Morehouse Pan-African Global Education Program, Cape Coast, Ghana, July 17, 2012.

[12] Zora Neal Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Folk Expression," in G. D. Caponi (ed.), *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.294.

[13] Hugh Silverman, *Cultural Semiosis: Tracing the Signifier*, New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 1-3; John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book IV, Chapter 21, paragraph 5, 1689 (http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/ publications/locke_understanding.html, accessed Monday, March 11, 2013).

[14] See Obenga, *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa,* London: Karnak House, 1992, p. 62-63 and Bernal 1991, 124-126 on interactions between an Afro-Kemetic and Greek intellectual community.

[15] Plutarch quoted in Obenga 1992, p. 87.

[16] Obenga 1992, 62-63; see also Bernal 1991, 124-125.

Plato challenged the Sophist position that signs retained a universally held meaning that inhered in their very composition; it is the state's cultural matrix, aspiring to universality, which defines the sign. Perhaps most relevant in discussing the Greek roots of semeiotics is Socrates who constructs his *semeion* in a manner consistent with the Kemetic episteme of signs as messages from God, (*Medu Neter* or "words of God") and their connection to an ethical order that is *Ma'atic, i.e.,* true, just, morally right, reciprocal and universal. Socrates' *semeion* is an inner voice of morality pointing to the correct path when in doubt. Thus said, Plato/Socrates posited that meaning inhered in human apperception not the sign itself. Circa 360 BCE, Plato ostensibly recorded the conclusion to the Gadfly's dialogue with his friend Crito on the eve of his impending death,

This is the voice which I seem to hear murmuring in my ears, like the sound of the flute in the ears of the mystic; that voice… prevents me from hearing any other… Yet speak, if you have anything to say.
Cr(ito): I have nothing to say, Socrates.
Soc(rates): Then let me follow the intimations of the will of God."[17]

Plato's Socrates is committed to Justice (Ma'at), the will of God as a voice of inspiration and sign/*semeion* indicating proper and correct behavior. Through their introduction of foreign doctrines, Socratic philosophers echoed aspects of Afro-Kemetic language and culture, which grew into the Western intellectual tradition culminating in the poststructuralist cultural-linguistic readings of Lacan, Derrida, Hall and Foucault.

While further research is required, the particular origins of the Greek word, *semeion* may be found in the syncretizing of several synonyms and metonyms for the more ancient Kemetic word <u>*sm3*</u>, (sema), a verb meaning, "to unite" or "to associate" as in an analogy. Other Kemetic words that share a similar semantic and homophonic value are <u>smtr</u>, *semeter*, "to examine,"[18] <u>sm3t</u>, *semat*, "a union", and <u>sm3ta</u>, *semata* "a (symbolic) offering."[19] This presaged and possibly influenced the Greek word *semeion*, which is akin to attaching meaning through analogously or symbolically related concepts. Following this line of reasoning, the Greek practice of *semeiousthai*, "interpreting signs" may have emerged from the Kemetic phrase, <u>sm3</u> <u>t3wy</u>, *sema tawy*, "to unite the two lands," a colloquialism for the process of interpreting signs by aligning symbols with their universal archetype. Thus to unite the two lands would be to align the realms of the mundane and that of ideal forms in the Platonic sense.[20] Far from idle speculation, the Kemites are well known for taking a material reality, creating

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[17] Plato, *Crito.* Translated by Benjamin Jowett. New York: Fordham University (accessed Sept. 17, 2011) http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/plato-crito.txt.

[18] Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1991, p. 229.

[19] Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary*, p.226 and Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*. 3rd Ed. Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1982, p.463, sign F$_{36}$.

[20] Ani, *Yurugu*, p. 35-37.

a sign (ideographic and phonographic), and deriving an intellectual or esoteric construct from it. The *semiousthai - sema tawy* connection bears further research; however, there is a much more well-founded and relevant construct related to the African origins of semeiotics or signifying. Again, the Kemetic word, *sema* presents its importance. In its most archaic form, *sema* designated a "wild bull" or *semat,* "wild cow."[21] According to Martin Bernal, author of *Black Athena,* the Kemites derived the idea that cows were a standard of beauty, wealth, utility, and "offerings" from a prehistoric cattle culture from which the dynastic Egyptian people descend.[22] What Hurston refers to as "the Negro's greatest contribution to language," "metaphor and simile, the double descriptive and the use of verbal nouns," resonates with its Afro-Kemetic sign-oriented linguistic predecessors. The relevance of Kemetic signifying or (sema) to Afrodiasporic signifying practice is discussed below relative to specific ancient texts to which serious students of HH must visit in order to apprehend the classical origins and imperatives of its oral sign-based culture.

Texts, cultural power and the sociology of African oral artists

Twentieth century Kenyan scholar of oral artistry, Wanjiku M. Kabira suggests that there are two general classes in the sociology of African oral artists—professional and communal—into which all of the occupations (*djeli*, *griot*, *okyeame*, etc.) may be categorized.[23] Kabira's classification scheme, with modifications, is useful in discussing issues of class, social power and cultural authenticity in ancient and modern oral cultures. Kabira posits that Professional oral artistic institutions originated in feudal societies to sanction the power of rulers while carrying out their proscribed duties. Examples abound. The *Imty* (Vizier) office in Ancient Egypt (Kemet) functioned as spokesperson for the pharaoh. In Mandekan societies, dating back to at least the Eleventh century CE and continuing to this day, the *Djeli faama* is the royal oral historian for the noble families including the Mansa (emperor). The Mandinka *Sundiata* cycle is the product of re-telling primarily by *Djeliu faama*. A regular *Djeli* is defined in Mande as the "blood of the people" and serves as a paid oral historian for common families.[24] In Asante society, an *Okyeame* serves as spokesman for the *hene* (chief) at any level up to the Asantehene. These nobility-oriented societies direct great attention to preserving the historical record and establishing the sanction to rule by maintaining oral artists.

On the other hand, Kabira's Communal oral artists are defined by their commitment to giving agency to common people in society and are mainly

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[21] Faulkner, p.226.

[22] The cattle-culture origin thesis of the Ancient Egyptians is supported by Robert Bauval and Thomas Brophy, *Black Genesis: The Prehistoric Origins of Ancient Egypt.* Rochester: Bear and Company, 2011, pp.13, 66, plates12-15 and Michael Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs: The Prehistoric Foundations of Egyptian Civilization.* New York: Knopf, 1979, p.236-237.

[23] W. M. Kabira, *The Oral Artist.* Nairobi, Kampala: East African Educational Publishers, 1983.

[24] See Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr*, p.72-73.

unsanctioned and unpaid storytellers. In their stories, the protagonists are often lowly folk or small animals who face larger adversaries that are more powerful. The stories advocate justice for commoners and masses. Kabira states that, "The oral artist in this (type of) society is the spokesman of the little people. It is as if he is telling the society that it must look after each and every one of its members and consider them as equally important."[25] In North America, the enslaved African reproduced the Greco-Ethiopian Aesop's animal fable cycle through Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, etc.—a particular versioning by enslaved Africans relevant for its forecasting of similar themes and techniques in HH. While both models—communal and professional—are found in HH, the most engaging M.C.s have evoked a communal/grassroots (*drylongso*) perspective to achieve authenticity and to give agency to voices long-silenced by cultural, race and class repression. Mirroring the grassroots earthiness of their cultural patron, James Brown, HH artists like Poor Righteous Teachers, Public Enemy, N.W.A., Boogie Down Productions, Goodie Mob, Outkast, and current artists like Kendrick Lamar achieve a distinct voice by speaking for their hood/nation from outside of socially sanctioned spaces.

Afro-Kemetic oral literature and the semeiotic tradition

Hip Hop oral artists trace their lineage to the Kemetic oral tradition, which includes both classes of oral artists while demonstrating the role of *medu nefer* (good speech) in preserving Kemetic historical consciousness, cultural identity and national unity. Two classic narratives document the ethics and orality of Kemetic culture: "Khufu and the Magician (Djedi)," dating between 2000-1800 BCE (Fifteenth Dynasty) and the "Story of the Farmer Whose Speech was Good" from the turbulent First Intermediate period (c.2185 to 2055 BCE).[26] Literal and Semeiotic "dub" versions of each story are presented as HH's classical African archetype.

The tale of "Khufu and the Magician"

Khufu and the Magician" was written in the Middle Kingdom as a part of a collection of stories contained in the Westcar Papyrus. The story is about a storytelling session by Pharaoh Khufu, the Old Kingdom builder of the Great Pyramid and three of his sons.

Literal *version*. At its face value the story is about the character Djedi, whose name, on one level, may be translated "I speak" and through whom the reader gains perspective. A literal version of the story has Khufu sending his son, Prince Hordjedef, to bring Djedi to the royal court to demonstrate his power to restore the dead to life. Khufu's ulterior motive was to find a secret passage to the sanctuary of Djehuty, the god of writing and wisdom. The 110-year-old man complied, bringing his children and

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[25] Kabira, *Oral Artist*, 32.

[26] Obenga, *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*, p. 33-34; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. I. Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1973, p. 218, 106; Jennifer McKeown, "The Symbolism of the Djed Pillar in the Tale of King Khufu and the Magicians," *Papers on Ancient Egypt*. No.1 (2002), p.55.

"his writings." When the king called for a prisoner to be the subject of this gruesome experiment, the old man refused, saying, "But not a human being, O king, my lord! Surely, it is not permitted to do such a thing to the noble cattle!"[27] Without being offended, Khufu complied with the old man's injunction and brought a goose, another bird, and an ox to be beheaded. Djedi spoke words of power, rejoined the heads and brought the animals back to life. This portion of the Westcar Papyrus ends with Djedi being rewarded with a home in the estate of Prince Hordjedef.[28]

Semeiotic *dub version*. A close reading of "Khufu and the Magicians" suggests that the oral tradition, not the written, was the dominant mode of communication in the Kemetic Old Kingdom. The names of the central characters are significant as they demonstrate the power of speech: Prince Hordjedef is rendered, "the God Heru speaks {through} him" or "Heru established him." This prince proffered the wise sage, Djedi to Pharaoh Khufu as a living wonder. Djedi was gifted with the "wisdom of those who have passed on" referring to the collected ancestral knowledge.[29] Jennifer McKeown offers a penetrating discussion of the Djedi character as symbolic of the deified Djed pillar of Ptah and Osiris. She suggests that when Hordjedef helps Djedi to rise up from his reed mat, he is performing the rising of the djed pillar ceremony, which has at least four layers of meaning. First, from pre-dynastic times, the djed pillar represented a bundle of corn stalks; therefore it symbolically renewed crop fertility. Second, the djed pillar by the 5th Dynasty was associated with Ptah, thus its resurrection renewed the creativity of artists for whom Ptah was a patron deity. Third, by the 12th Dynasty, the djed was a sign associated with Osiris and the resurrection of all people after death. Fourth, because the Pharaoh was the personification of the son of Osiris, the Djed resurrection, like the Sed festival renewed the endurance of the Pharaoh and the entire state of Kemet. Thus, we can see at least four different ideological systems—horticultural, artisanal, religious, and political—operating within the Djedi mythoform, which may explain why a pharaoh in the turbulent First Intermediate Period would commission its re-inscription and retelling.[30]

The "Story of the Eloquent Peasant"

The "Story of the Eloquent Peasant", or the "The Farmer Whose Speech was Good," dates from Kemet's Middle Kingdom. Four incomplete copies of the story in the Berlin Papyri collection, held in the British Museum, were translated to form the complete story.[31]

Literal *version*. The Eloquent Peasant" is a story told with a narrative introduction and then nine poetic stanzas that, ostensibly, record the appeals of a

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[27] "Noble cattle" is a euphemism for people as the property of God similarly used in the "Instruction to King Merikare," "well tended is mankind—God's cattle"(Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* Vol. I, p. 106).

[28] *ibid*., *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. I, p.217-20.

[29] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. I, p.218.

[30] McKeown, "The Symbolism of the Djed Pillar" *Papers on Ancient Egypt*, p.55

[31] Lichtheim, AEL, Vol. I, p. 169.

farmer named Khun Inpu who was on a journey to take herbs and comfort food to his children in the city. After he is robbed at the hands of a greedy countryman, Nemtynakhte, he protested his treatment and was granted retribution based on his *Medu Nefer* or good speech.[32] Nemtynahkte's crime was especially heinous since he violated the first specific affirmation of innocence, "I have not robbed with violence."[33] Khun Inpu (the eloquent farmer) made the following appeal to Nemtynakhte (the strong robber), who had beaten him and stolen his donkey and his goods:

You beat me, you steal my goods, and now you take away the complaint from my mouth! O Lord of Silence, give me my things, so that I can stop crying to your dreadedness!"[34]

In his nine appeals, Khun Inpu first beseeched Nemtynakthe, then the High Steward, Rensi, who passed the case on to the council of elders who defer to the Nisw Bity (Pharaoh), Nebkaure. After Khun Inpu made a series of pointed charges, Nebkaure commanded that his scribes record the farmer's words and eventually restored justice by returning his goods.

Semeiotic *dub version*. The Nine Petitions of Khun Inup (K.I.) is a significant part of the Afro-Kemetic canon for two reasons: First, the allegory and its mythoforms contribute to a national ethos of *Ma'at*, *Mdw Nfr* and *Mdw Ntr*. While I accept Carruthers's contention that the story's composition was based on a historical reality, we cannot ignore the narrative's several mythic elements. Carruthers, himself, goes the farthest in unpacking the story's elements as an allegory or *Sema*-system. First, Khun Inup (KI) is a farmer, symbolic of the economic and social base of Kemetic society. As his well-being goes, so goes the nation. In the story, KI was robbed and the social order, consistent with the First Intermediate period, had been partly overturned. Secondly, Khun Inup's origins are symbolic; he is from a region to the West of the Delta called Wadi Natron or "the salt fields." Natron salt was a preservative used in the culturally significant mummification ritual. The West was the final place of judgment or ultimate justice. This relates to the literal meaning of the name "Khun Inpu" : "He who is protected by Anubis." In Kemetic religion, Anubis guided the dead to the final judgment before Osiris. The place where Khun Inpu was robbed, a town called Perfety is symbolic as it is translated as a "Den of vipers." Additionally, he was robbed by a man named Nemtynakhet, "the strong robber," the son of Isri, "the whip." Carruthers clarifies that his brutalization by his father explains, "why Nemtynakht turned out to be a thug." Through the initial exposition of KI's experience, we learn that he was the victim of a crime with three offenses: 1) strong-armed robbery, 2) the denial of a person's freedom of speech, and 3) the perversion of justice.[35]

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[32] Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr*, pp.143, 146 and 147.

[33] See E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead (Papyrus of Ani).* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), p. 347.

[34] Lichtheim, *AEL*, Vol. I, p. 171; See also William Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p.35.

[35] Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr,* p.146-52.

A second reason why this story is a part of the Afro-Kemetic canon is the ethical standard that it evokes. The story and its *Medu Nefer* or 'good speech' allegory reaches across the ages to M.C.-centered Hip Hop culture. Khun Inup, as well as Djedi, are grassroots elders who speak out against injustice to restore *Ma'at* for themselves and the whole society. Khun Inpu serves as an exemplar of Kabira's Communal M.C. as his appeals are couched in the third person interrogative form suggesting that he is appealing for a whole class of people or even the nation itself. He implores, "he who should fill for someone else pilfers his belongings, he who should rule according to the laws orders robbery, so who then will redress wrong?"[36] Although it is his plight, which he presents here, his concern is for the common people. His effective use of *Mdw Nfr* provides an example for all grassroots Kemites.

The Eloquent Peasant's aesthetic form also deserves greater attention as it is typical of African orature and resonant with Hip hop culture. The noted Egyptian linguist, Raymond O. Faulkner describes the "Story of the Eloquent Peasant" in a manner that could easily be applied to Rap music, "the peasant's speeches are, to modern taste, unduly repetitive, with high-flown language and constant harping on a few metaphors."[37] Afrodiasporic musical forms, especially HH, are noted for their heavy use of repetition, vivid metaphorical imagery, and improvisation on central themes. The importance of rhythm as an aesthetic canon is suggested by several students of Afrodiasporic cultures. Afrocentric scholar of African dance, Kariamu Welsh-Asante states that African culture presents itself with a polyrhythmic and polycentric character" that makes it "immediately recognizable and distinctive."[38] Dick Hebdige dedicates his book, *Cut 'n' Mix* "to the power and value of repetition. The very structure of the book *insists* on repetition, (which is) the basis of all rhythm and rhythm is at the core of life."[39] M.K. Asante suggests that a major goal of the employment of rhythm within African and Afrodiasporic orature classical orature is the removal of discord and the establishment of harmony, and "equilibrium among the various factors impinging upon communication."[40] While, Asante's discussion is of contemporary African literature and orature, the thrust of his argument holds: African texts (oral, written, danced, et al.) deserving of canonization attempt to articulate suppressed truth, reconcile competing viewpoints and ultimately establish *Ma'at*.

Africana dub *version*. A nuanced reading of both stories reveals a great deal of Kemetic epistemic tradition and presents a pattern of claims relevant to the study of hip hop artistry and culture. First, Afro-Kemetic is an orally-based civilization with constructs that have made their way into other African cultures and languages. Second, Afro-Kemetic orality (AKO) traditionally has a great concern for social justice. Third,

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[36] Lichtheim, *AEL,* Vol. I., p.37.

[37] *ibid.*, p. 31.

[38] Molefi K. Asante and Kariamu Welsh-Asante, *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity,* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 71.

[39] Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, London & New York: Routledge, 1987, p. p.xvii

[40] Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, pp.177-78.

one of the defining characteristics of AKO in its communal orientation is the employment of personas that demonstrate a bottom-up perspective toward society. Both Djedi and Khun Anpu serve as archetypes for the African belief in elders as masters of the divine word; they both epitomize the definition of speech, *djed medu*, "to speak words," ⌐⌐𓇌𓆣⌐𓏤, which is closely associated with elders. This is apparent in the presence of the symbol for the walking stick, 𓎛, in the word medu.[41] Interestingly, the medu staff is possibly the model for the 1990s Brooklyn-based X-Clan's "Verb Stick" wielded by Professor X (Lumumba Carson, now deceased) who served as the elder of the group. Fourth, Western Sudanic AKO institutions like the *djeli faama* demonstrate a strong emphasis on supporting the power of the royalty/social elite. As we develop our appreciation of the meaning of cultural semiosis in Hip-Hop we must observe the significance of the spoken word in African (Niger-Congo) languages, from which it descends. These stories are significant for their attempts to maintain the *Ma'atic* ethos, the apparent contrast between communal and professional oral artists, and their insights into Kemetic concepts of social power and social contract. Additionally, vivid examples of the Kemetic signifying tradition are evident in the stories.

Afro-Kemetic orality and Afro-Diasporic culture

Several scholars of African history note a symbiotic relationship that exists between the classical Nile Valley and the Sub-Saharan African traditions.[42] This symbiosis is essential in understanding Afrodiasporic culture and subsequently HH. The significance of the spoken word in Niger-Congo languages is a primary concern, particularly, the themes of the Divine Power of Speech and Speech as a Cultural and Political Force.

Speech as a divine power

Carruthers directs the student of Afrodiasporic orality to the master oral traditionalist of the Upper Niger valley, Amadou Hampaté Ba, who illustrates the Mande construction of speech as a creative power. The Senegambian people–Mande, Bambara, Wolof, Fula, and Mende-related traditions— made up as many as 14% of the 500,000 enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage leg of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade voyage into North America.[43] In his seminal essay, "The Living Tradition,"

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[41] Alan Gardiner refers to this symbol noting its importance "for the use as a walking-stick (in) the title *mdw i3w*, (*medu yao*), 'the staff of old age. *Egyptian Grammar.* 3rd Ed. Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1982, 510.

[42] Carruthers 1998, p. 87; Diop, *Civilization*, p. 309; Farmo Moumouni, *Aux sources de la connaissance directe: la parenté entre L'Égyptien Ancien et le Songhay; (The Sources of Direct Knowledge: the kinship between Ancient Egyptian and Songhay.)* Paris: Menaibuc, 2008, and Ayi Kwei Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent,* Popenguine: Per Ankh, 2010.

[43] Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Countrymarks.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p.65; W. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999, p.46 notes that Senegambians represented 19.7% of all enslaved Africans imported into South Carolina between 1716 and 1807.

Ba draws upon the oral traditions of the Upper Niger to describe the cosmology that undergirds Afro-Kemetic Orality in the Niger River Valley region. He introduces the Mande Creator, *Maa Ngala* who created man, *Maa* with three potential powers of ability, willing and knowing. Ba describes human speech as a three-stage process of disseminating divine energy from the Creator to and amongst mankind: first, the creation of ideas, second, the articulation of ideas into words, and lastly the apprehension and sharing of meaning from speech. Ba clarifies that the Bambara *Komo* society teaches that the word or *Kuma* in Bamana, is a fundamental force emanating from the Supreme Being himself. He states, "As they came down from *Maa Ngala* [the Creator] towards man, words were divine... After their contact with corporeity they lost something of their divinity but took on sacredness."[44] In this worldview, speech is a powerful generative force. It is the active agent in African traditional systems, which view the visible as the manifestation of the spiritual, living universe, consisting of forces in perpetual motion. Speech is one medium at the disposal of Maa (Man) as a guardian of harmony. Through the agency of Africans in America practicing the Ring shout, field hollers, Blues and preaching traditions, the development of Hip Hop owes a great deal to the persistence of Senegambian orality.

Speech as a cultural and political force

The appropriate genealogy of HH, the cultural setting for numerous verbal battles, is the AKO culture, which reveres the spoken word, and produced significant examples of discourse as the preferred mode of settling disputes. The Sudanic classic, SonJara, embodies the power of the spoken word as examples of orality in its spiritual, social, artistic and political (verbal combat). A cursory review demonstrates the critical role of orality in the story's arc. SonJara (SJ) received his first praise name at birth;[45] was crippled by an opponent's words[46] and gained his praise names at a sacred baobab tree.[47] Apparently, his ascent connects positively with his association with the Kouyate clan of *Djeliu faama*.[48] SonJara's antagonist is Sumanguru, the oppressive king of the Susu people who abused the Mandinka people before SonJara's reign. According to Mande tradition, Sumanguru fought using verbal magic. He ordered that calabashes be used to silence the Mandinka ancestor shrines from which they could receive oracular wisdom.[49] After three failed attacks, SonJara's sister Sogolon discovered Sumanguru's fetish and secret words, which SonJara and his Djeli Fa-Koli used to defeat the tyrant king. The power of speech is also apparent in prosaic history. The Songhay emperor, Askia Muhammad Touré, exemplified the use of the word to maintain justice. With all

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[44] Ba, "Living Tradition," p.170;

[45] Fa-digi Sisoko, *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition*. Translated by J. W. Johnson. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, Verse 1123.

[46] Sisoko, *Son-Jara*, verse 1151.

[47] *ibid*, verse 1460.

[48] *ibid.,* verse 1866   .

[49] *ibid.,* verse 1905.

due respect to differences in history, the Mandekan djeli use of word play as verbal battle cannot be overstated in its archetypal connections to HH's history of rap battles.

Interdisciplinary models of Hip Hop as cultural semiosis

A growing body of scholarship contributes to our understanding of African Diasporic signifying or Semeiotic traditions. Houston Baker is instructive in his injunction that greater emphasis should be placed on cultural history over theory as a primary conditioning force for the construction of African American canonical processes. The present article follows Baker's lead away from excessive theorization and toward history as a primary force for considering HH works among the Africana cultural arts canon.[50]   Accepting canonization as a form of cultural semiosis, the ordering of systems of allegories, I approach HH in light of Africana Studies scholarship that clearly points to a sign-oriented epistemic context as appropriate for Black Diasporic culture. By doing so, I hope to achieve a greater "self-conscious perspective on…the active implications and imperatives" of the present historical situation.[51] African Diasporic cultural histories that affirm an Afrodiasporic worldview and foster resistance to the dominant political-economy framing Black agency are offered by several scholars: Errol Henderson's Kimera Theory, Welsh-Asante's *Nzuri* approach, Marimba Ani's *Asili* paradigm, Robert Farris Thompson's treatment of African Diasporic art, Sheila Walker's Afrogenic concept, Haryette Mullen's African Spirit Writing, and Elaine Richardson's HH Literacy.[52] Of these works, the two latter theses force us to address the question of how have African oral traditions been reconfigured within HH and employed as a site of identity reconstruction, resistance against othering, and vehicles of cultural and historical agency for Diasporic Africans? First, the literary scholar, Haryette Mullen in her provocative essay, "African Signs and Spirit Writing," challenges Henry Louis Gates' "erroneous Eurocentric assumption that African cultures developed no indigenous writing or script systems."[53] Her work echoes Stuckey's critique of intellectual integrationists as "spiritually rootless."[54] Central to Mullen's erudite exploration of "connections between African signs and African-American spirit writing" is her association of African Diasporic literacy, spiritual episteme and visual arts, which provides an integrated interdisciplinary

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[50] Houston Baker, "The Promised Body: Reflections on Canon in an Afro-American Context," *Poetics Today*, 9, No.2 (1988), p.340-41; See also, Leroi Jones, *Blues People.* New York: Morrow Quill, 1963, p.65 who discusses the history of the Blues tradition.

[51] Baker, "The Promised Body," p. 340.

[52] Kariamu Welsh-Asante (ed.), *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993; Ani, *Yurugu*; Walker, Sheila. (2001) *African Roots, American Cultures*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield; Haryette Mullen, "African Signs and Spirit Writing," in Winston Napier (ed.) *African American Literary Theory: A Reader.* New York: New York University Press, 2000, pp.623-642; Elaine Richardson, *Hiphop Literacies.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

[53] Mullen, "African Signs," p.624

[54] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Origins of Black America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.231.

approach to Black artistic culture. Coupled with a semeiotic framework and a reconstruction of Afro-Kemetic orality and episteme, Mullen's "African Signs" is an exemplary interpretation of African literacy's evolution of the cultural sign providing a ready-made unit of analysis for HHC. Similar to Mullen, Elaine Richardson's critical discourse analysis of HH amends Walter J. Ong's critical yet Eurocentric thesis on literate and orally-based societies and relocates HHC in the context of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Richardson's approach to "Black Folk's Discourses" examines HH Literacy and insurgency as "a site of cultural production and identity negotiation."[55]

Richardson's application of critical discourse analysis on speech acts of artists such as Outkast suggests a model of semeiotic analysis that exposes class, race and cultural forces relevant in the present study. She asks, "How do rappers display, on the one hand, an orientation toward their situated, public role as performing products, and, on the other, that their performance is connected to discourses of authenticity and resistance?"[56] These discourses position HH as a signifier of the African experience, in significant ways, highly relevant to the Africana Studies scholar's examination of identity formation, the sociology of HH artists, and the diasporic historic dialectic as the culture's primary context. Just as enslaved Africans trace descent from a Pan-African admixture, HH culture's creators and practitioners also reflect a similar demographic formation. HH developed out of the mix of five Africana cultures: Barbadian, Jamaican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and African American, all of which "shared Kongo qualities of sound and motion," particularly the *rumba abierta* and the breakbeat.[57] These musical tendencies along with a strong oral episteme both have roots that are readily apparent in African languages, from which HHC descends linguistically and culturally.[58] The application of Malian and Congo-Angolan cultural contexts as a template for HH is highly appropriate as Senegambian people brought with them a powerful oral tradition, as we will discuss below. Although HH borrows greatly from African orality, it created a cultural philosophy, unique among world cultures that may be described as a microcosm of the larger African experience. Indeed, Du Bois' observation on slavery era freedom songs pertains to HH songs in that "the dark throb and heat of that Ancient of Days is in and through it."

The question of how does the cultural institution of the Hip Hop M.C. relate to African oral artistry is framed saliently by Harryette Mullen who queries,
How, historically, have African-American attitudes toward literacy as well as their own efforts to acquire, use, and interiorize the technologies of literacy been shaped by what art historian Robert Farris Thompson calls "the flash of the spirit of a certain people armed with improvisatory drive and brilliance?"[59]

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[55] Richardson, *Hip Hop Literacies*, p.1.

[56] *ibid.*, p.1.

[57] Robert F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983, p. 213-16.

[58] J. R. Rickford and R. J. Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000, p.76-77.

[59] Mullen, "African Spirit Writing," p. 625.

We may address Mullen's question on the history of Black Artistic literacy in America by observing the African Enslavement as a foundation of five themes relative to HH: 1) Ritualistic dance, particularly the Ring Shout (Break dance); 2) powers of the drum (DJing); 3) language consolidation and distinctiveness from other American ethnicities resulting in AAVE; 4) storytelling and the rise of neo-African oral institutions like the Black Christian Priest; 5) the centrality of race as a metaphor within Black art and orality. Presaging the HH interaction between M.C. and D.J., Stuckey (via Herskovitz) processes the Powers of the Drum evident in the Congaree story of Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit wields the Senegambian fiddle, using it to: 1) summon the forces, spirits and ancestors to be present in the realm of the living, 2) articulate the messages from ancestral entities in the first power, and 3) send the spirits and ancestors back to their realm at the close of the rite.[60] Stuckey's discussion of the Congaree anecdote may be applied to the powers of the turntable, Breakbeat and sample as HH artists make selective use of the past toward the development of a unique aesthetic frame of reference.

Sema(Ba)oun, Hip Hop orality, and Afro-Kemetic cultural semiosis: A framework for tracing the signifier

Our remaining objective is to present an Africana Studies semeiotic paradigmatic model for the study of HH by stating semeiotic lines of questioning that African cultures pose of HH. If we revisit Socrates' interpretation of Afro-Kemetic sign systems and Ba's discussion of Western Sudanic orality, we observe a generative cultural context of the Hip Hop M.C. This pattern is apparent in Gottdiener's Cultural Semiosis Schema. (See Figure 1) Often, communal/nation conscious Hip Hop artists suggest a symmetry between the African ancient past and present-lived conditions of the oppressed in what Gottdiener terms the second stage of semiosis, or the stage at which the Hip Hop cultural agent (User) defines the sign based upon his/her own user codes[61] (AKO/NOGE worldview & vocabulary). Several M.C.s construct signs using codes informed by an Afro-Kemetic cultural context. An African-centered semeiotic framework, dubbed *Sema(Ba)oun*, by the present author would draw from Afro-Kemetic intellectual universe, particularly the sema concept and an analysis of signs framed by the Ubuntu cultural grammar to analyze the dialectic within HH...[62] The "(Ba)oun" root and suffix derives from the work of Farmo Moumouni, a historical linguist who demonstrates correlations between Songhoy and Ancient Egyptian languages.[63] The

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[60] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, p.19-20.

[61] Gottdiener, "Hegemony and Mass Culture," 994.

[62] The Ubuntu model is construed in the Kinyarwandan grammar of Alexis Kagame in Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: African Art and the Western World,* New York: Grove-Weidenfeld, 1990.

[63] Moumouni, Farmo. *Aux sources de la connaissance directe: la parenté entre L'Égyptien Ancien et le Songhay; The Sources of Direct Knowledge: the kinship between ancient* Egyptian and Songhay. Paris: Menaibuc, 2008; idem, Lecture Notes, "Nile Valley Conference II: From the Nile to the Niger to the Mississippi," September 23, 2011.

Ubuntu model is relevant due to its historic adaptation by the Zulu Nation's Afrika Bambattaa and uses by scholars of Afrodiasporic cultural arts including James G. Spady's Mu-word construction 'and Jahnheinz Jahn's Muntu model.

Sema(Ba)oun/Ubuntu Model
1. Muntu-describe the artist's person: demographic data affecting her/his life work.
2. Hantu – Historiographic context, when and where did/do they live and how do these factors affect the artist's works?
3. Kintu/The Signifier – a concise detailed description of what symbols/signs/images are employed,
   a. Central Characters?
   b. Symbolic Settings
   c. Other symbols
4. $Kuntu_1$/ The Signified - what do the signs mean in the context of the song or album?
   a. Arc of the story as it involves Central Characters -
   b. Symbolic Settings indicate what ideas/values/ideologies/philosophies
5. $Kuntu_2$/Significance – Drawing from Foucault's discussion of power and discourse, how do the signified concepts and ideologies cohere together and speak to the construction of power in the society in which they are created?
   a. What ideological systems operate within the story or undergird the story?
   b. What idea(s) does the allegory push back against/attempt to negate?
   c. Are mythoforms presented by the signs that address the ideological superstructure?
6. Bantu – what does the song mean to the artist's audience?
   a. Initial Reaction without Semeiotic Transcript
   b. Audience yields its own semeiotic transcript of the art
   c. Sample Reactions after Reading Semeiotic Transcript
7. Ubuntu/Ma'at – discuss the work relative to Asante's evaluative ideal: does the work raise contentious issues, reconcile discord and establish harmony, and how well does the author maintain "equilibrium among the various factors impinging upon communication?"[64]

A brief example of Kendrick Lamar as paradigm

Hip Hop represents a profound synergy between oral and written traditions mirroring Afro-Kemetic method of sign composition[65] and use of symbol scripts.

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[64] Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, pp.177-78.
[65] Rose 1994,

Examples abound of HH's dialectical drive toward unearthing found sound and ideas to renew the art form. The artist, Kendrick Lamar serves as an exemplar, for now, and will allow us to illustrate the *Sema(Ba)oun* semeiotic model. Lamar is a young Master of Ceremony from Compton, California whose second and third albums powerfully frame problems of dislocation, alienation, and nihilism in the context of the African American struggle for empowerment. Lamar's (K.Dot's) work (HiiiPower/2011, Good Kid mA.A.d City/2012) deserves attention as he forces his listeners to, simultaneously, reckon historically with Reagan-era social ideology and policies while examining social forces impinging on young people of color. His attention to his craft indicates an appreciation for the value and uniqueness of HH, particularly in his heuristic employment of Afro-Kemetic imagery on his 2011 album, *Section.80* and anthem of resistance, "HiiiPower."[66]

Hantu. The etiology of Lamar's Afro-Kemetic themes is complex and does not suggest an essentialist instinctual impulse toward symbolic thought. Instead, artists like Eric B. and Rakim, Yasin Bey, Jean Grae, Aceyalone, Talib Kweli, and Lamar indicate the thoughtful and sincere claim to the Nile Valley heritage, which has a clear historic vector through the Black power history of Southern California. Los Angeles has been a primary setting for the Afrocentric movement since, at least, the mid-1960s. The L.A. Black Panthers, US organization and allied community centers and independent schools created a powerful network of Afrocentric cultural agency. Under the leadership of Queen Nzingha Ratibisha Heru, the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) was headquartered in L.A. beginning in 1984 with its first national meeting at Southwest Community College, L.A.. In the 1980s and 1990s, primary schools like Marcus Garvey Shule and The Extraordinary Place (both on Slauson Ave) taught the Kemetic legacy in its daily curriculum. Most relevant to HH, KDAY in 1984 became America's first all-HH radio station and in subsequent years, the Goodlife Cafe, featured conscious HH groups like Abstract Rude and the Freestyle Fellowship. Growing out of the Goodlife open mic night in 1989, Project BLOWED located in the African village of Leimert Park became a grassroots HH collaborative where Afrocentric voices competed on Thursday nights. One also has to mention the sporadic, but consequential career of Ras Kass, as a predecessor of Lamar. Both artists combine Afrocentric and grassroots/street knowledge in their oral artistry; Ras Kass' *Soul On Ice* is a classic in that regard.

Kintu. Lamar uses discreet examples of Afro-Kemetic semeiotics to challenge his listeners to cultivate a life of the soul and mind that balances multiple competing agendas. Lamar's work facilitates what psychologist, David Wall Rice aptly terms "balance" relative to identity orchestration efforts. We see Lamar's balancing act on the song, "The City," a collaborative effort with fellow Los Angeles M.C., Game. Lamar inveighs to his listeners, "Recognize my life, ridicule my fight… In the midst of the hier-O-GLYPHS, my fingertips start to write." His emphatic use of the word "hieroglyphs,"

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66 Kendrick Lamar, "HiiiPower," *Section.80.* Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment, 2011; TopDawgEntTDE, "HiiiPower," YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep0hay4Qw54.

indicates the persistence of the tactical and strategic use of words that at once indicate the speaker's alienation from the present moment and spatial context (the inscrutability of hieroglyphs), and connection to an alternate, othered, contextual source of meaning (hieroglyphs, like graffiti, as a resistant mode of written and spoken agency). This evokes what Dyson refers to as africeture or "the practice of people of African descent writing themselves into existence" and giving voice to the misrepresented community from which he comes.[67] "The City" is a song that attempts to place Compton as a paragon of classic HH, but undergirding the ostensive effort is a reference to an Afro-Kemet and Afrodiasporic context that deserves explication.

Combining striking visual symbols and text evoking cultural signifiers: Malcolm X and Tupac Amaru Shakur, his 2011 video for the song, "HiiiPower" begins with a rapid series of apparently random test patterns, including a hieroglyphic image evoking the Kemetic (Ancient Egyptian) eye of Heru. This occurs at the tenth framed image, two seconds into the video (See Figure 3A)

$Kuntu_1$. This pastiche of the eye of Heru, along with lyrical references to pyramids and hieroglyphs on his album both signify: 1) his awareness of the Black freedom struggle from which he draws the album's three core thematic values: "heart.honor.respect." and 2) his attempt to balance an older heritage—Afro-Kemetic culture as a resource and tool to navigate the dystopian Los Angeles megapolitan landscape. Akin to Bay-Area crew, Hieroglyphics' triple eye logo (Fig3C) and fellow Los Angelinos, Dilated Peoples, which employs a Cyclopean logo (Fig.3B), Lamar's eye is a sign of the complex and productive culture that he challenges his listeners to construct, while also serving as a contextual foil to the violence and oppression in the urban African American condition.

$Kuntu_2$. In the video, Lamar, with bowed head leans forward, like a bluesman, silent for the first five seconds. He breaks the silence, after a subtle head and shoulder bob, by flatly speaking a bluesy epigraph in a voice distorted by over- amplification:[68] "The sky is fallin', the wind is callin', stand for somethin' or die in the morning/Section 80 HiiiPower." The song's imagery evokes the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring Protests, all set to a minor key loop that is Blues-laden, ominous, and subtle yet energetic with tones distorted beyond recognition of their original timbre. The distorted bluesy notes evoke the sonic quality of a guitar harmonic and the imperceptible overtone series, which though silenced, give the audible note fidelity. Within the song's musical setting, the harmonic phantasm stands as a signifier of Lamar's transience in America's sociopolitical context. Akin to the blues man's guitar, when the MC speaks, a chorus of constituent ancestral voices also speaks. As Lamar enjoins his listeners on "HiiiPower's" chorus to follow his lead by getting off "the slave ship" and to "build your own pyramids, write your own hieroglyphs," he is not employing passing allusions of little consequence. He is speaking to a local and national Black tradition exemplified by his expressed admiration of Tupac Shakur and Malcolm X.

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[67] Dyson, *Born to Use Mics: ,* p.109.

[68] See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise.* Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994, p.75 on distortion and 'working in the red,' as sonic signifiers of resistance.

Conclusion

We have established that Afro-Kemetic orality and semeiotics are both salient in the study of HH. AKO culture's symbols and constructs indicate a generative context for analyzing and synthesizing new information in a Western intellectual culture that, too often, ignores African agency. We have affirmed that a symbiotic relationship exists between the classical Nile Valley and the Sub-Saharan African tradition and that of Greece.[69] While the discipline of Semeiotics gestated in Europe, a tradition of oral semeiotic practice developed in the lived traditions of African cultures, which would culminate in the languages (spoken, aural, visual, and kinesthetic) of Nsibidi, Adinkra, Vèvè, and HH. We have also affirmed that communal and professional elements of an African sociology of oral artistry persist in framing the perspective of HH artists. An African-centered semeiotic would add historical depth to Black Atlantic readings of HH music as a mere counterculture of Western modernity.[70] Finally, HH's origins must be understood in the Africana cultural context where artists like Rakim and Kendrick Lamar are to be placed in conversation with Djedi, Khun Inpu, Djeli Kouyate, and the anonymous slave poets.

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[69] Carruthers 1998, p. 87; Diop, *Civilization*, p. 309.

[70] Henry L. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993.

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Appendix

Figure 1:
Music – denotes →style
          connotes→ sub-culture
                    denotes → lifestyle
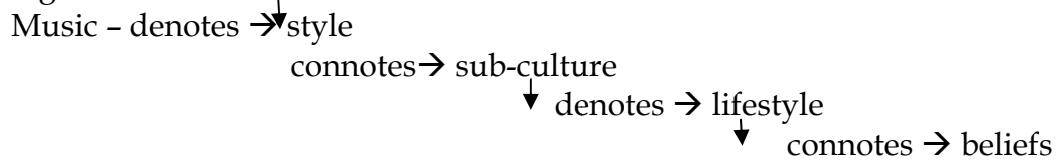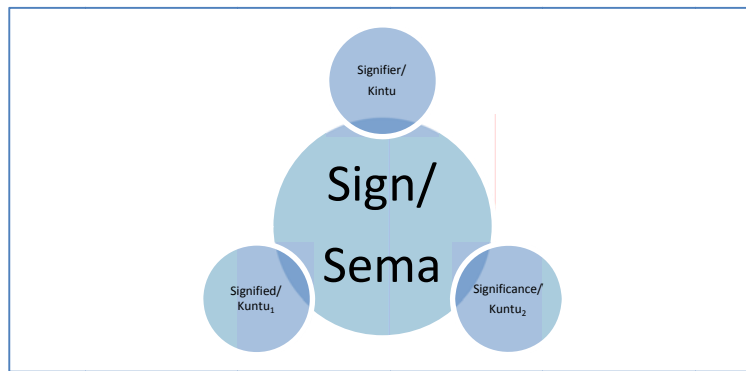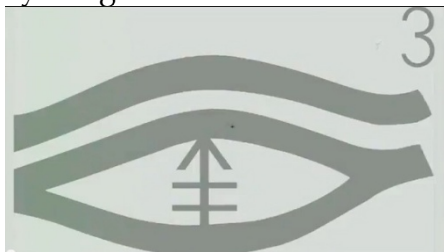   connotes → beliefs

Figure 2: Tracing the Africana Signifier

Figures 3A: K.Dot's Eye of Heru/3B: Dilated People's Cyclops/3C: Hieroglyphs Third Eye Logo

Baadassss Gangstas: The Parallel Influences, Characteristics and Criticisms of the Blaxploitation Cinema and Gangsta Rap Movements

Dustin Engels

Abstract

Serving as two of the most visible African American cultural movements, blaxploitation cinema and gangsta rap played essential roles in giving African American artists an outlet to establish a new black identity for mainstream audiences. After exploring the similarities between the cultural and economic conditions that spawned both movements, this essay examines the parallel techniques by which the preeminent entries in both genres established themselves as culturally relevant for African American audiences. These techniques included a reliance on place and space to establish authenticity, as well as employing African American myths and folklore such as the Signifying Monkey and the badman. By establishing themselves as mainstream representations of black identity, the harshest critics and staunchest defenders of both movements came from within the African American community, a clear indication of the important role each would play in establishing a new era of black representation in popular culture.

In October 2012, New Orleans rapper Curren$y released a mixtape online for his fans entitled *Priest Andretti*. Taking its name from the main character of the 1972 blaxploitation film *Super Fly*, this fourteen-track mixtape frequently pays homage to the blaxploitation movement that occurred in the early 1970s by incorporating clips from *Super Fly* throughout, as well as including songs entitled "Max Julien" (star of the 1973 film *The Mack*) and "Cleopatra Jones" (title character of the 1973 film *Cleopatra Jones*). Two months later, in December 2012, director Quentin Tarantino released his newest film, *Django Unchained*. The film, which employs many of the same tropes commonly seen in blaxploitation cinema, includes a soundtrack containing an original song written by Rick Ross, "100 Black Coffins," as well as a mash-up of James Brown's "The Payback" and 2Pac's "Untouchable" entitled "Unchained." The animated series *Black Dynamite*, a parody of blaxploitation cinema based on the critically acclaimed 2009 film of the same name, recently featured rapper Snoop Dogg (aka Snoop Lion) voicing a formidable villain on the show. Even though the blaxploitation cinema movement ended nearly 30 years ago, these recent examples serve as a clear illustrations of the continued cultural relevance of blaxploitation and offer an intriguing look at the persisting and complex relationships and intersections between blaxploitation cinema and rap music.

In the years following the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans attempted to establish a cultural identity within a society that frequently continued to ostracize and systematically neglect them. By the late 1960s, angered by the lack of progress

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toward "first-class citizenship," many African Americans began calling for the abandonment of non-violent protest and adoption of a militant resistance to white culture. The rise of the Black Power Movement resulted in many African Americans calling for the establishment of a separate, self-defined black culture, which included Black Art.[1] Artistic depictions in popular culture served as one of the potentially visible and influential ways in which the African American community could create a controlled image of black culture that reflected a self proclaimed identity while simultaneously illustrating the community's continued struggles. Through film, music, television and various other outlets, African American artists began using their mediums to appeal directly to black audiences in an attempt to spawn cultural movements that would display and bring to the forefront the cultural, social and economic struggles of the African American experience. Two of the more visible African American movements that have occurred in popular culture over the past 50 years are the blaxploitation cinema explosion of the early 1970s and the gangsta rap movement that took hold nearly two decades later. While gangsta rap has proven to be a more durable and influential movement, blaxploitation cinema played a pivotal role in providing African American artists a means to redefine black representation in mainstream popular culture, with the potential to result in either empowering or problematic impacts for the community.

Analyzing the genesis of these two subgenres, one can easily identify many similarities in the qualities and characteristics used to classify works as either blaxploitation films or gangsta rap. Because early blaxploitation films and gangsta rap served as parallel subgenres established by African American artists attempting to establish a new identity reflecting the social, political and economic issues impacting the African American experience (even in a metaphorical sense) within their respective mediums, cultural critics and mainstream consumers identified and classified the movements by many of the same qualities and characteristics upon their inception. Likewise, both modes of expression endured much of the same praise and criticisms from within the African American community as they served as battlegrounds for defining black identity in America. In this essay, I first plan to explore the cultural and economic circumstances that spawned each movement and the inherent similarities in both. Next, I will examine gangsta rap and blaxploitation's shared reliance on place and setting as well as African American myth and folklore as a means to establish cultural relevance for African American audiences. Finally, I will consider the polarized responses to these movements within the African American community, and more importantly, how these reactions serve to highlight the important and complex role these movements would play in establishing a mainstream cultural identity for African Americans.

Two Movements Born

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[1] Mark A. Reid, "The Black Action Film: The End of the Patiently Enduring Black Hero," *Film History* 2, no. 1 (1988): 23-24.

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As with many cultural phenomena, it can be difficult to strictly define and classify blaxploitation cinema. However, in his book *Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide*, author Josiah Howard gives a reasonably straightforward and concise definition that broadly describes the movement. He defines blaxploitation as "1970s black-cast or black-themed films…created, developed and most importantly, heavily promoted to young, inner-city, black audiences."[2] For the purposes of this analysis, the three main films being discussed as the forebears of the blaxploitation movement are Melvin Van Peeble's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), Gordon Parks' *Shaft* (1971) and Gordon Parks Jr.'s *Super Fly* (1972). Not only are these films most relevant to the discussion because of the important role they played in establishing the trends and initiating the explosion of black-centered films in the early 70s, but they also all share the distinction of being directed by African American filmmakers, a trend that did not necessarily persist for the duration of the movement but plays a crucial role in analyzing how black artists used their mediums to appeal to black audiences and create a new mainstream identity.

In order to engage in a meaningful analysis of blaxploitation cinema, one should first understand the conditions and circumstances under which the movement began. Ultimately, blaxploitation cinema would prove to be a product of the combined effects of changes in the political and social structures affecting African Americans and a financially vulnerable Hollywood in desperate search of an economic boom. Entering the 1970s, African Americans emerged from a decade that had produced the first African American movie star, Sidney Poitier. As the first African American actor to win a Best Actor Academy Award (for 1963's *Lilies of the Field*) and the most successful box office star of 1967 (the year he acted in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *In the Heat of the Night* and *To Sir with Love*, three box office hits), Poitier had become a full-fledged movie star, and his widespread popularity (including among white audiences) meant he served as a mainstream representation of the cultural image of the African American community. However, many African Americans resented Poitier's success, believing his popularized filmic image promoted black emasculation and assimilation into white society.[3] Black audiences showed increasing dissatisfaction with the narrowly defined roles he portrayed in these films, and as author William R. Grant IV writes in his book *Post-Soul Black Cinema: Discontinuities, Innovations and Breakpoints, 1970-1975*, "The Poitier persona was obviously unable and incapable of addressing the growing desires and expectations for a liberated and empowered Black male able to reflect, articulate and represent the changing times."[4]

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[2] Josiah Howard. Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide. (Guildford: FAB Press, 2008), 7.

[3] Mia Mask, Contemporary Black American Cinema: Race, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 7.

[4] William R. Grant IV, *Post-soul Black Cinema: Discontinuities, Innovations, and Breakpoints, 1970-1995*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32.

With the rise of the Black Panthers and Black Power Movement in the late 1960s, scores of young African Americans sought to emphasize resistance and violent revolt against white society as a means to achieve desired social and political change.[5] As a result, more engaged and demanding black audiences, unsatisfied with the narrowly defined roles that popular culture assigned to them, desired a new, liberated filmic identity. As Ed Guerrero points out in his book *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, this "translated into a large black audience thirsting to see their full humanity depicted on the commercial cinema screen."[6] The mainstream image of the black man that had always been defined in film by the visions of white filmmakers no longer served as a relevant or suitable characterization. These audiences now demanded a shift from what they saw as the subservient, white-framed characters portrayed by Poitier to commanding characters and stories created by black artists from a black perspective.

Simultaneously, the Hollywood studio system endured the most financially troubling times in its history. The increasing popularity and relevance of the television coupled with the increased cost of business and an impending recession led to devastating economic conditions for the movie business.[7] However, these economic conditions served as the impetus by which a more engaged and demanding African American audience could influence the market and allow a space for rebellious filmmakers such as Melvin Van Peebles to create films that spoke to the changing culture, challenged political and social assumptions and expectations, and set off a new film movement.[8]

Similarly, the ascendance of gangsta rap as the dominant mainstream image of African Americans in the late 1980s through the works of artists such as Ice-T and N.W.A. shared a similar path of emergence, reflecting the same dissatisfaction amongst young urban dwellers. Born in the ghettos of Los Angeles in the late 1980s, gangsta rap gave an outlet for the black youth who were neglected and had their communities ravaged by policies of the Reagan administration who used their art form to establish a similarly rebellious, independent and admittedly controversial identity. As author Eithne Quinn describes in her detailed analysis of the rise of gangsta rap, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*, rappers established a rebellious presence by "self consciously repudiating uplifting images of black life in a deliberate gesture of rebellion and affront."[9] As young black males in urban locales found

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[5] Marshall Hyatt and Cheryl Sanders, "Film as a Medium to Study the Twentieth-Century Afro-American Experience." *The Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 2 (1984): 167.

[6] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 104.

[7] Grant, *Post-soul Black Cinema, 28.*

[8] In describing the rise of the genre, Susan Hayward emphasizes the "irony of the sub-genre's cooptation by White people." This point highlights the persistent trend in the industry (largely run by white men) to focus on profits above all else, embracing anything that sells regardless of content (Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, Fourth Edition.* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 48).

[9] Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 32.

themselves trapped in vicious cycles of crime and poverty and realized they were largely being abandoned by the outside world, the party rap and socially-conscious rap movements no longer seemed relevant. Instead, the focus shifted to music that disrespected authority and purposefully spoke of breaking the rules and laws of an oppressive society, a seemingly parallel (if not more aggressive) evolution of the Black Power cultural influences found at the beginnings of blaxploitation. Gangsta rap can similarly thank an entertainment industry seeking to quickly maximize profits for its rapid mainstream proliferation.[10] These social and economic constructs demonstrate the ways in which the genesis of both blaxploitation films and gangsta rap emerged from similar conditions and appealed to African American urban dwellers' desire to construct a unique and independent identity that simultaneously challenged white society. These conditions and circumstances not only help introduce the initial cause of these movements, but also explain why these movements share so many of the same attributes and employ many of the same techniques to establish cultural relevance and authenticity.

Keepin' It Real: Establishing Authenticity

One of the most important and easily identifiable characteristics shared by blaxploitation and gangsta rap involves the use of and reliance on place, space, and setting to establish cultural relevance, authenticity, and credibility among African American audiences. Many writings on blaxploitation cinema movement analyze and give interesting perspectives on the importance of place for these movies. In her book *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film*, author Paula Massood devotes a substantial amount of time discussing the importance of location and setting. Discussing the ways in which the directors took the time to establish the locales, she states that these films depicting ghetto locations were "framed by an almost near-obsession with providing details of the cityscape, a project facilitated in party by the fact that the majority of films were shot on location. More important, part of what gave black ghetto films their impact was their inclusion of clearly identifiable urban, black monuments, even to uninitiated audiences."[11] She goes on to state that the prominence of the ghetto in these films serves as "not only background for the narrative but also is active in influencing the events unfolding onscreen. The complicated and interwoven dynamics of these films become clearer when it is understood that the city enables events."[12] By analyzing the important role of place and location in early blaxploitation cinema, this "near-obsession" can easily be identified in the vivid depiction of the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, but even more strikingly in the introduction credit sequences of *Shaft* and *Super Fly*.

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[10] Mtume Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap." *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 304.

[11] Paula Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 85.

[12] Ibid.

Both *Shaft* and *Super Fly* begin with extended credit sequences set to their iconic soundtracks that play an essential role in establishing the setting of the movie. In *Shaft*, the film begins with a wide shot of New York City, followed by various establishing shots of the streets, all filmed with no backing score or soundtrack, only the sounds of the honking cars and the chatter and noise from the pedestrians walking the streets. After a few seconds, Isaac Hayes' iconic title song begins as the camera focuses on Shaft emerging from the subway onto the streets of the city. The remainder of the credit sequence (lasting for over four minutes) consists solely of Shaft walking the streets of New York, shoving through sidewalks and streets crowded with pedestrians and taxis, encountering hustlers hawking knock-off watches and other iconic images commonly associated with New York in the '70s. In his essay "The Genre Don't Know Where It Came From: African American Neo-Noir Since the 1960s," author William Covey gives this opening a close reading and describes it as a "carnivalesque celebration of the emergence of black men's identities into mainstream genre films."[13] Shaft's emergence from the subway symbolically represented the arrival of a new type of black hero never seen before in mainstream cinema while simultaneously establishing authenticity.[14] In a similar fashion, *Super Fly*'s credit sequence follows the main character, Priest, as he drives through the streets of Harlem, illustrating a vivid depiction of the harsh, unforgiving streets of the 'hood. As he cruises through familiar urban locales in his well-maintained Cadillac, he seems to exude a commanding presence in the neighborhood.[15] Both of these intros seemingly do little to enhance or advance any sort of narrative. In fact, in director Isaac Julien's documentary *BaadAsssss Cinema: A Bold Look at 70s Blaxploitation Films* (2002), famed director Quentin Tarantino criticizes the credit sequence of *Shaft* for neglecting to fully utilize its iconic title track by seemingly allowing nothing to transpire for the entire scene.[16] However, this criticism seems to overlook the important emphasis blaxploitation directors often placed on establishing the setting and place for the story to help lend their works a sense of street authenticity.

This reliance on the importance on place and authenticity through emphasis on the local is prevalent in gangsta rap in music as well. In his article " 'Represent': Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music," author Murray Forman discusses rap music's emphasis on local setting and the importance of this trend. Specifically discussing the lyrics of gangsta rap artists such as Ice T and N.W.A., Forman looks at the ways in which they

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[13] William Covey, "The Genre Don't Know Where It Came From: African American Neo- Noir Since the 1960s." *Journal of Film & Video* 55, no. 2/3 (2003): 64.

[14] Covey also underscores how Isaac Hayes' track "Shaft" employs the call and response technique associated with African American music and its role in further establishing authenticity.

[15] Further giving credence to the importance of establishing authenticity, the Cadillac driven by Priest was actually owned by KC, a well-known pimp in Harlem, which established a recognizable symbol of the neighborhood almost immediately (Charles Michener, "Black Movies: Renaissance or Ripoff?" *Newsweek*, October 23, 1972, 78).

[16] *BaadAsssss Cinema: A Bold Look at 70s Blaxploitation Films,* directed by Isaac Julien (2002. New York: Docurama, 2002), DVD.

incorporate the 'hoods of South Central Los Angeles within the narrative framework of their songs. He states:

> The subgenre's narrative descriptions of spaces and places are absolutely essential to an understanding of the ways that a great number of urban black youths imagine their environments and the ways that they relate those images to their own individual sense of self. The spaces of Compton and other similar black communities that emerge through their work are simultaneously real, imaginary, symbolic and mythical.[17]

In other words, in a way similar to how blaxploitation films went to great lengths to emphasize their authentic urban locales, gangsta rap's emphasis on the importance of settings and place as a means for establishing a cultural identity for the music lent itself to credibility in the African American community. It does not seem coincidental that one of the most successful and influential entries into the gangsta rap genre so closely parallels the early blaxploitation's trend to quickly introduce and establish the location and setting for the film. Just as *Shaft* and *Super Fly* did with their opening scenes, N.W.A. begins their album with the title track, "Straight Outta Compton" (1988). Wasting no time, N.W.A. delivers a series of fiery verses that depict graphic violence and flagrant sexuality, while always using the final line of each verse to attribute the events and attitude to the authentic location of Compton.

This emphasis on the local and establishing street authenticity also translates visually through N.W.A.'s music video for "Straight Outta Compton." In her essay "Gangsta Rap, the War on Drugs and the Location of African-American Identity in Los Angeles, 1988-92," author Elizabeth Grant describes how this visual representation of the song serves to highlight the importance of its Compton setting and N.W.A.'s relationship with the streets. Analyzing the video's opposing perspectives that follow N.W.A. as they walk the streets of Compton attempting to evade the police and the LAPD as they attempt to stop and arrest the group, Grant explains:

> As the video moves between the counter-perspectives, shots of NWA on Compton's streets and images of the highlighted map, black-clad, black individuals, NWA and Compton itself become interchangeable entities. Moreover, NWA's internal relationships to one another and external ties to Compton create a semiotic formulation between the street knowledge and skills of the gangsta/rapper and his origins to Compton that legitimizes NWA's perspectives with the stamp of authenticity that urban, African American perspectives in commercial hip hop warrant.[18]

Just as the group does sonically with the track, N.W.A. uses this visual translation to tie themselves to Compton and establish genuine street cred. The video reinforces to

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[17] Murray Forman, " 'Represent': Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music," in *That's the Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader, Second Edition,* ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2012), 264.

[18] Elizabeth Grant, "Gangsta Rap, the War on Drugs and the Location of African-American Identity in Los Angeles, 1988-92." *European Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 1 (2002): 9-10.

audiences their authenticity and allows them to more effectively appeal to the urban perspective.

These examples highlight the ways in which blaxploitation directors and gangsta rappers understood that in order to successfully connect with African American audiences and establish a level of authenticity needed to successfully appeal to them, they needed to portray a familiarity with and understanding of the unique characteristics and pressures associated with 'hood life. While the characters and situations depicted in these works did not always appeal to audiences on a literal level, the authenticity allowed the works to successfully connect on a metaphorical level. African American audiences watching *Super Fly* may or may not have found that the story of a successful cocaine dealer attempting to break free from a life of crime translated directly to their own lives, but many could relate to an individual attempting to break free from the social and economic constraints and systematic discrimination they still faced on a daily basis, even post-Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, while many African American listeners probably had less than more in common with the literal interpretation to the unrestrained and incendiary lyrics of N.W.A., they still found ways to connect with the insurgent narrator that challenged authority and attempted to create an identity that breaks free from the constraints of white society. In his analysis of authenticity in rap music, Michael Jeffries describes how " 'real' blackness entails loving and celebrating the hood as a spatial reference point for collective identity while trying to escape it as a material reality."[19] Both Blaxploitation filmmakers and gangsta rap songwriters created fictional, mythical stories, but they relied on setting to endow their works with this "real blackness" that could ground the narratives in a reality and relevancy with black audiences while simultaneously depicting characters that challenged the limitations of the 'hood.

Identifying with the Badman

Blaxploitation and gangsta rap also share a common respect for and reliance on the application of African American myths and folklore, particularly in employing the myths of the trickster as seen in characters such as the Signifying Monkey as well as the badman, most commonly associated with the character of Stackolee.[20] Found throughout African American culture, the Stackolee myth's frequent invocation represents "the radical impulse to challenge authority and institutions that seek to repress African American freedom, improvisation, and harmony."[21] In the article "Sweetback's 'Signifyin(g)' Song: Mythmaking in Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*," author Courtney E.J. Bates introduces the discussion by describing the

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[19] Michael P. Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 75.

[20] For a more on popular African American folklore, see *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* by John W. Roberts (1989).

[21] Tolagbe Ogunleye, "African American Folklore: Its Role in Reconstructing African American History." *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 4 (1997): 450.

importance of cultural myth and folklore, stating that one can view African American folklore as "artifacts of the social, cultural, and political history of black people in the United states."[22] Based on this assumption that African American myth and folklore serve as a creative means through which African Americans could respond to the black experience and carry forward these myths for future generations, it is not surprising that movements in black modern American popular culture would cull influence from this tradition. The most recognizable myth shared across both blaxploitation cinema and gangsta rap depicts the story and character of the badman, often reflected in the tale of Stackolee.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song played an essential role in establishing the badman as a new archetype for black actors in film. *Sweet Sweetback* follows the exploits of the title character, a brothel employee and sex show performer, as he makes his way to the Mexican border in an attempt to evade the police as they hunt him down for the brutal assault of two officers. Using his sexual prowess, his willingness to do anything necessary to survive and with the help of others in the black community, *Sweet Sweetback* portrayed a new black archetype in film that audiences had never seen before – an independent and rebellious black man willing to go to the extreme in order to maintain his freedom and fight the system. In Bates' (2007) article, she describes how the title of the film already sets up the main character's badman status by employing the term Baadasssss, which "explicitly links Sweetback to African American vernacular and illustrates his status as a Badman,"[23] (Josiah Howard (2008) explains that the "oddly spelled title was created so that newspapers and magazines would not object to printing the word 'Ass,' " a piece of trivia that further highlights the revolutionary tendencies of the film itself.[24]) Bates goes on to point out how Sweetback's fearlessness, his "violent acts and general disregard for institutions such as the police," and his ability to "elude the police" all serve as means by which the film further cements his status as the badman archetype.[25] In a sense, the film presented a contemporary version of the Stackolee story that updated itself to maintain a level of relevance for restless and rebellious black audiences hoping to discover a new filmic identity.

Two pivotal scenes in *Sweet Sweetback* perfectly illustrate how director Van Peebles adopted the badman archetype for his main character. The first scene serves as the inciting incident early in the movie that sets in motion the rest of the events that unfold. After Sweetback is picked up by the police and is en route to the station, the officers detain a black militant named Mu-Mu. Minutes later, Sweetback finds himself witnessing the officers as they beat Mu-Mu on the side of the road. In a fit of rage, Sweetback uses the handcuffs dangling from one of his wrists to brutally beat the police officers. He then starts his run for the Mexican border, the journey that will be depicted throughout the rest of the film. Black audiences had never before been exposed to a

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[22] Courtney E.J. Bates, "Sweetback's 'Signifyin(G)' Song: Mythmaking In Melvin Van Peebles' Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song." *Quarterly Review Of Film & Video* 24, no. 2 (2007): 171.

[23] Ibid., 179.

[24] Howard, *Blaxploitation Cinema, 204.*

[25] Bates, *Sweetback's 'Signifyin(G)' Song*, 179

black character like this on film. Not only had he used his ferocious power to overcome the police officers, a symbol of systematic oppression for many African Americans, he had committed the act using the handcuffs chained to his wrist, an object of literal confinement that also serves as an obvious symbolic representation of the struggles African Americans have endured since slavery. Sweetback's escape simultaneously served as a symbol for fearless resistance to oppression by any means necessary as well as harsh retribution for white transgressions.

Making the film even more unconventional and impactful for black audiences at the time was its ending. Given the precedents set in film at the time, audiences expected an unforgiving ending where Sweetback would receive severe punishment for what would be seen as a brutal crime under the law. However, the punishment never came. Instead, Sweetback makes it to the Mexican border and escapes just as the credits begin to roll. The ending shocked (and often delighted) African American audiences. Recounting the audience reaction at a screening of the film, Van Peebles recalled, "When Sweetback got away, there was a stunned silence and then the place just exploded."[26] They had never seen anything like it. White criminals in film often rode off in the sunset and escaped punishment for their crimes, but blacks never did. By maintaining his remorselessness and successfully eluding the police, Sweetback completed his transformation into the mythical badman.

Gangsta rap relies heavily on the same myths, as evidenced by the many explicit and unmistakable instances of gangsta artists evoking the Stackolee character and myth in both lyrics and stage personas. Eithne Quinn argues that gangsta rap is a clear extension of myths such as Stackolee and states, "Artists reoriented and extended the mythic tales of the past, keeping hold of the bold surrealism, while incorporating a documentary quality."[27] As we see consistently across N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988), the group maintains many of the same qualities seen in Sweetback. Through tracks like "Fuck tha Police," N.W.A. shows a similar resistance and disdain for not only law enforcement, but for the seemingly discriminatory practices of white culture as a whole. The group creates a narrative that emphasizes the repression of authority, but also "seeks retribution" for their seemingly unjust actions.[28] As they show frequently throughout the album, they also share the consistent reliance on sexuality and extreme violence that Sweetback shows as a means to break through these barriers and maintain their freedom. These myths and themes cannot only be seen in N.W.A.'s work but are also seen regularly in the works of other gangsta rap acts. In his article "Gangsta Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death," Nick De Genova describes how the genre more broadly embraced the role of the badman. Invoking other gangsta rap acts such as the Geto Boys and Compton's Most Wanted, Genova states that "gangsta rap serves up white America's most cherished gun-slinging mythologies…in

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[26] *BaadAsssss Cinema.*

[27] Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang*, 97.

[28] Donn C. Worgs, "'Beware of the Frustrated…': The Fantasy and Reality of African American Violent Revolt." *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 1 (2006): 36.

the form of its worst and blackest nightmares, while it empowers Black imaginations to negate the existential terror of ghetto life (and death) by sheer force of the will."[29]

Not only did the forbears of both the blaxploitation cinema and gangsta rap movements evoke African American myths such as the badman as an homage to the tales passed between generations, but they also took the opportunity to transform these stories, giving them a contemporary cultural relevance. At their core, these myths reflected the social, political and economic conditions that plagued African Americans, and the artists responsible for these movements utilized the stories and archetypes as a means to emphasize the cultural rebellion and resistance inherent in their works. Serving as two of the most prominent representations of African Americans in popular culture within their respective mediums and time periods, blaxploitation cinema and gangsta rap serve as contemporary extensions of this legacy.

Establishing a New Cultural Identity

Given the inherently controversial nature of blaxploitation and gangsta rap music as well as the unprecedented mainstream success both garnered, it does not seem surprising that these works would serve as sources of impassioned debate. However, the most interesting and fervent responses came from within the African American community itself. The battle to define these movements in the African American community had political roots, and as Ed Guerrero points out in his book, blaxploitation continued the debate regarding a historic divide in the African American community – "the impulse to integrate with the system and the urge to separate from it."[30] He goes on to state that films like *Sweet Sweetback* "brought to the surface of African American discourse the subtle fissures and cracks of class tension, ideological conflict, and aesthetic arguments that had been simmering in the black social formation since the winding down of the civil rights movement."[31] Criticizing blaxploitation as exploiting black filmmakers, actors, audiences and the community as a whole, those against the cinematic movement blasted the films and the industry for producing films that "glorified drugs, imitated successful white stereotypes, set forth impossible and ultimately debilitating fantasies, developed a negative image of the American black man and woman, and took no real cognizance of black oppression in the United States."[32] In fact, the term blaxploitation, a combination of *black* and *exploitation*, was coined by Junius Griffin, the head of the Los Angeles NAACP at the beginning of the blaxploitation explosion.[33]

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[29] Nick De Genova, "Gangster Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death." *Social Text* 43 (1995): 107.

[30] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 71.

[31] Ibid., 87.

[32] Daniel J. Leab, From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 258.

[33] Lewis Beale, "1970s Blaxploitation Films. A Lot Has Changed, But Much Has Stayed the Same." *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2009.

Given the purposefully controversial nature of the content and themes in these films, concerns with allowing the films and their main characters to serve as symbolic representations of the African American community understandably arose. These clearly were not traditional heroes and they definitely did not engage in the actions of a role model. Priest of *Super Fly* spends the duration of the film attempting to get his life straight and exit the drug business, but ironically, he must execute the largest drug deal of his career and commits a series of crimes as a means to do so. Sweetback is a hyper-sexualized criminal on the run. However, these films clearly framed the protagonists as heroes. As Mark Reid points out, *Sweet Sweetback* "was criticized by both black cultural nationalists who wanted politicized black films and by other blacks who wanted films in which blacks were identified with middle-class values."[34,35] Similar criticisms would be leveled against other entries into the genre as well. For instance, critics blasted *Super Fly* for "its blatant celebration of cocaine use and the hero's self-indulgent, drug pushing, hustling lifestyle."[36] Additionally, many critics in the African American community "reserved their harshest criticism for black actresses and actors who appeared in these movies" and prominent stars of the movement such as Pam Grier found themselves "a frequent target of scorn for taking roles that critics said favored titillation over substance."[37] To some African Americans it seemed as though the genre (and the black stars that personified the movement) did nothing progressive for the black image in America, but rather, simply perpetuated stereotypes and seemingly confirmed them given the box office success of these films within the African American community.[38]

On the other hand, many African Americans supported the films because they gave them a visible mainstream cultural outlet and depicted a filmic identity that they had never seen before. The early filmmakers had broken free from the subservient image of the black male that had been presented by white directors and had access to a new, radically different set of protagonists. In fact, during *Sweet Sweetback*'s opening credits, Van Peebles lists "The Black Community" as one of the stars, clearly bringing to the forefront his reclamation and presentation of this new identity. Not only that, but

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[34] Reid, "The Black Action Film," 29.

[35] It is important to note that members of the Black Power movement viewed blaxploitation cinema with mixed opinions. While it may seem as though these films highlighted and captured the essence of the violent resistance principle espoused at the time, many black nationalists criticized blaxploitation for undermining the movement or not taking a firm revolutionary stand. In fact, while Huey Newton, the Black Panther Party Minister of Defense, came out as one of the largest defenders of *Sweet Sweetback* and applauded it for its revolutionary perspective, just two years later he criticized black action films such as *Shaft* and *Super Fly* for omitting this perspective or worse yet, making it look "stupid and naïve" (Michener, "Black Movies").

[36] Ed Guerrero, "The Spectacle of Black Violence as Cinema," in *Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film, Second Edition*, edited by Jean-Anne Sutherland and Kathryn Feltey (Washington D.C.: Sage Publications, 2013), 92.

[37] Yvonne D. Sims, Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2006), 73.

[38] For more detailed analysis of criticisms of Blaxploitation films, see Richard Simon's "The Stigmatization of 'Blaxploitation'" in *Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure* (1998).

the criticisms of these films created a double standard for the necessary morals of black filmmaking that rarely existed in white films. As Mark Reid points out, white audiences had for years enjoyed the violent action and revenge films that similarly held up actors such as Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson as heroes.[39] The films of these white stars rarely endured the same levels of scrutiny or criticism over a seeming lack of morals that blaxploitation films did.

Additionally, many African Americans within the industry supported the movement because of the barriers the movement broke in Hollywood regarding African Americans' access to jobs. For instance, in an interview in *BaadAsssss Cinema*, Fred Williamson, a frequent actor in many blaxploitation films, discusses how he never understood how the genre exploited African Americans since it finally supplied many acting and production jobs in the business and sometimes highlighted legitimate aspects of black culture. Even though the majority of blaxploitation films may have been funded and distributed by white producers and white-run studios, the movement did open up both acting and production jobs that had previously been off limits due to discriminatory union practices in Hollywood.[40]

However, on the most fundamental level, many felt that the criticisms against the film neglected to realize the real-life foundation of the metaphorical themes around which many of these films built themselves. In a 1972 interview with *Jet* magazine, Curtis Mayfield, who wrote and performed the iconic score for *Super Fly*, defended the films as symptoms of the problem, not a cause. He stated, "I don't see why people are complaining about the subject of these (Black) films…The way you clean up the film is by cleaning up the streets. The music and movies today are about conditions that exist. You change the music and movies by changing the conditions."[41] While the stories these films depicted were often outlandish and unrealistic, they still existed in a realistic world of black oppression and discrimination.

Almost twenty years later, gangsta rap would endure similar criticisms and praise inside the black community. As gangsta rappers seemed to revel in the lifestyle of the ghetto and embrace the badman myth, critics in the community similarly faulted them for seemingly embracing negative stereotypes and establishing them as the prominent black identity.[42] Conversely, just as with blaxploitation, gangsta rap dealt with its own double standards. Thirty years before N.W.A. burst on the scene, Johnny Cash had "shot a man in Reno just to watch him die" in "Folsom Prison Blues" (1957) but received virtually none of the same criticism for perpetuating violence that gangsta rappers would face.[43] Furthermore, just as blaxploitation had done before it, gangsta rap served as a way for urban black youth to challenge the ways in which the government and society surrounding them systematically disadvantaged African

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[39] Reid, "The Black Action Film," 30.

[40] Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade*, 259.

[41] "More Black Movies Will Deal With Drugs: Mayfield." *Jet*, October 12, 1972, 58.

[42] Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang,* 23-24.

[43] Jeanita W. Richardson and Kim A. Scott. "Rap Music and Its Violent Progeny: America's Culture of Violence in Context." *The Journal of Negro Education* 71, no. 3 (2002): 182.

Americans. As Ian Peddie explains in his book *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, "most listeners to badman stories and songs did not emulate the original gangsta…What thrilled them was imagining someone who recognized no limitations, legal, moral or physical, whatever the consequences when their lives were hemmed in by limitations and consequences."[44] As the living conditions and opportunities for young African American urban dwellers continued to deteriorate and diminish, these listeners found a new means of expression with which they could relate. Even though rappers often presented controversial themes and stories and frequently celebrated acts of sexism and violence that seemed hard to defend, the artists claimed their songs served to portray the perils of urban life.[45] Specifically analyzing the message inherent in the themes of N.W.A.'s lyrics, author Anthony Pinn states, "the anger and violence expressed in gangsta rap is reflective of American society in general. In other words, violence and crime do not originate with rap music, but are part of the American fabric and merely magnified by musical expression."[46] Similar to Curtis Mayfield's defense of blaxploitation, acts such as N.W.A. would defend the music by arguing the songs served as one of the many symptoms of an underlying problem, not the cause. As rapper David Banner stated in a 2007 congressional hearing on hip hop lyrics, "I can admit that there are some problems in hip hop, but it is only a reflection of what is taking place in our society. Hip hop is sick because America is sick."[47]

It should not seem surprising that blaxploitation and gangsta rap would serve as the subject of such intense debate from within the African American community. Because of the levels of mainstream relevance and influence these two movements had throughout popular culture, the debate became a central part of the discussion over black identity in America. The rise and fall of such visible and permeating cultural representations would no doubt play a role in the ways in which African Americans would establish a cultural identity. If the critics of blaxploitation cinema and gangsta rap were correct, the reinforcement of negative stereotypes and the aggressive rejection of white culture could serve as a hindrance to their ability to make progress toward equality and dismantling discrimination and racism in America. If supporters of the movements were correct, African Americans would be given a new empowered voice that could establish a self-created identity and possibly serve to counteract cultural

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[44] Ian Peddie, The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 87

[45] N.W.A.'s Ice Cube has been cited as defending the obscene nature of his work by arguing that "the fundamental thrust of his work is socially responsible and only utilizes vulgarities in order to communicate with people who would otherwise be disinterested" (Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Slouching toward Bork: The Culture Wars and Self-Criticism in Hip-Hop Music." *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999):170).

[46] Anthony Pinn, "Rap Music and Its Message: On Interpreting the Contact between Religion and Popular Culture." In *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, *Revised Edition*, ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 261.

[47] U.S. Congress. House. Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection. *From Imus to Industry: The Business of Stereotypes and Degrading Images*. 110th Cong., 1st sess., September 25, 2007, 57.

oppression. Regardless of the outcome, these two movements extended beyond the boundaries of entertainment and became a battleground for African Americans to attempt and define a new black identity.

Conclusion

While gangsta rap has endured and still persists as a relevant and influential art form, blaxploitation movies did not successfully weather the cultural shifts that continued throughout the 1970s. Just as the economics of Hollywood played an essential role in the birth of blaxploitation cinema, they would play an equally consequential role in its death. Soon after the blaxploitation movement began, another film movement ascended as well – the blockbuster. As Novotny Lawrence explains in his book *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre*, blockbusters such as *The Godfather*, *Jaws* and *Star Wars* "profited from both Black and white audiences and effectively eliminated the need for Hollywood to continue producing films targeted specifically toward blacks."[48] Studios operate on market demand and the justification for blaxploitation productions no longer existed. However, even though the blaxploitation movement experienced a relatively brief period of success in Hollywood, the cultural significance and legacy that began with its earliest and most influential entries continue to play an important role in the analysis of contemporary African American popular culture. Blaxploitation cinema not only shares the same characteristics and influences, but serves as an influence on gangsta rap itself, as shown by the links and continuity between the movements explored in this analysis. First, gangsta rappers frequently reference and pay homage to the characters, images and stories depicted within blaxploitation movies in their lyrics as well as their music videos.[49] However, on a more significant level, the blaxploitation cinema explosion set the stage for more authentic and varied depictions of African Americans and urban life (even if they were controversial) in popular culture. It serves as one of the earliest examples of mainstream audiences being exposed to the gritty streets of urban life presented from a black perspective. While blaxploitation movies and gangsta rap may have pulled a large part of their identities from pre-existing myth and folklore and a culture that places a premium on local identity and authenticity, blaxploitation cinema played a critical role in introducing controversial illustrations of urban life to widespread audiences and set the stage for a new era of black representation in popular culture.

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[48] Novotny Lawrence, *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 25.

[49] Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang*, 96.

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Listen to the Story: Banksy, Tyler the Creator, and the Growing Nihilistic Mindset

Duri Long

Abstract

Art, as an expression of feelings, worldviews, and personal beliefs, is a reflection of our environment and how we interact with it. In this way, urban art such as rap music and graffiti can serve as a lens through which we are able to examine the state of the urban environment. Building on community literature that addresses the presence of nihilism in rap music, this work will establish that nihilism is a prevalent theme in the work of two artists: Tyler the Creator's rap music and BANKSY's graffiti art. By examining the growing subculture and appeal of urban art in relation to these two artists, this paper will argue that BANKSY and Tyler the Creator belong to a new wave of urban art, one that appeals to and originates from people of all races and classes. The current work will then examine these artists' motives in including nihilism within their art in order to argue that the disillusionment and nihilism once found primarily within inner cities is now spreading to new frontiers. Using this analysis, the current work will raise questions as to the possible causes and consequences of this spreading nihilistic mindset.

Introduction

Art acts as a collective mirror through which we can more closely examine and learn about our society, our surroundings, and ourselves. As John Lennon once said, "My role in society, or any artist's or poet's role, is to try and express what we all feel. Not to tell people how to feel. Not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all".[1] We can learn about an oppressive government from the art of the oppressed; we can learn about the insane asylum from the art of the patient; we can learn about the jail from the art of the inmate. It follows, then, that we can learn about urban environments by examining the art of the urbanite. This paper will examine the work of two urban artists, Tyler the Creator and BANKSY, in order to argue that the disillusionment and nihilism once found primarily within inner cities is now spreading to new frontiers.[2] Originally, urban artistic expression such as graffiti art and rap music served as a way to respond to the growing nihilistic mindset in the inner cities, but today a broader subculture is beginning to utilize this tool to express their dissent. Using graffiti artist BANKSY and rap artist Tyler the Creator as models of this new frontier of urban art, this paper will establish that nihilism is a prevalent theme within their work and use this analysis in order to raise questions as to the possible causes and consequences of this spreading nihilistic mindset.

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[1] Anderson, Jennifer Joline. *John Lennon: Legendary Musician & Beatle* (Edina, Minnesota: ABDO Pub. Co., 2010), 1.

[2] It is common to present the pseudonyms of graffiti artists in all capital letters, and that is the style that will be used throughout this paper.

Charis E. Kubrin's essay "I See Death Around the Corner: Nihilism in Rap Music," provides the most relevant and comprehensive examination of nihilism in urban artistic expression within the current literature. In her essay, Kubrin engages in an in-depth analysis of over four hundred rap songs from 1992 to 2000 and explores how the nihilistic themes in these songs reflect the street code present in black youth culture in the inner city.[3] Kubrin focuses her work specifically on *gangsta rap*, a genre of rap pioneered by gang members describing "life in the ghetto from the perspective of a criminal."[4]

This paper will build upon Kubrin's work by examining the work of rap musician Tyler the Creator and graffiti artist BANKSY in an effort to focus in on a new, post-2000 wave of urban art. This new direction of urban art draws heavily on the same themes of nihilism as in the past, but arises from a broader subculture and appeals to a wider audience. Originally, Kubrin did not explore post-2000 music due to the increasing influence of record labels on rap lyrics and the fear that more recent lyrics would focus more on "exaggerated fantasies" than on real issues.[5] Through the example of Tyler the Creator, this paper will propose that although such fantasies may not always represent reality on the streets, they are reflective of a larger nihilistic attitude and mindset that is a reality within the urban community and beyond.

"Nothing is true, nothing is good, God is dead": What is Nihilism and Why Do We Care?

There are two branches of nihilism, negative nihilism and reactive nihilism. Negative nihilism refers to the degradation of life through the belief in higher values—by believing in the fiction of higher values, we then render the rest of life unreal. There are no higher values, as they are inherently fictional, and thus no life, as the belief in the fictional has rendered reality nonexistent.[6] Reactive nihilism is the response to the realization of negative nihilism. Realizing that higher values only depreciate life, the reactive nihilist begins to reject higher values, coming to the conclusion that, to paraphrase Nietzsche, "Nothing is true, nothing is good, God is dead."[7,8] This paper

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[3] Charis E. Kubrin, "I See Death Around the Corner: Nihilism in Rap Music," *Sociological Perspectives* 8,

[4] Kubrin, "I See Death Around the Corner," 435. No. 4 (2005): 433, accessed August 28, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sop.2005.48.4.433.

c.f. Kubrin p. 434-439 for more information on gangsta

rap, its origins, and how it serves as a reflection of the urban community.

[5] Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough For You?: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), 69, quoted in Charis E. Kubrin, "I See Death Around the Corner: Nihilism in Rap Music," *Sociological Perspectives* 8, no. 4 (2005): 442-443, accessed August 28, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sop.2005.48.4.433.

[6] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 147.

[7] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 148.

[8] Johan Goudsblom, *Nihilism and Culture* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 30-34.

will focus specifically on reactive nihilism. The three characteristics of nihilism that Kubrin chooses to focus on in her analysis are: "bleak surroundings with little hope, pervasive violence in the ghetto, and preoccupation with death and dying."[9] Based on the literature consulted, this paper will utilize a broader definition. [10,11] The three characteristics I will focus on are: the rejection of higher values, the devaluation of life and property, and the loss of hope in one's surroundings.

This definition of nihilism raises a number of important questions. If we are examining the work of nihilistic artists, and nihilists reject everything, then do the artists believe in nothing? How can art be about nothing? And, more importantly, why should we care about nothing? In addressing these questions, we must make two important distinctions. First, the art we are examining contains nihilistic themes; this does not mean that the artists themselves are necessarily nihilists. Artists who paint battle scenes are not by default war hawks; they are, on the contrary, painting an image that reflects an aspect of reality, and depending on the content of the painting, it is equally likely that the artist could be critically commenting on the battle depicted. As we will discuss in more depth later in the paper, BANKSY and Tyler the Creator either purposefully include nihilistic themes in their work as a direct act of protest, or include these themes in a personal effort to disseminate nihilistic feelings originally directed towards some other entity (i.e. the government, the structure of society, authority figures).

Second, although it seems pointless to care about nothing, it is vitally important to care about the causes and the consequences of nothing. If a broad audience is drawn to the themes of nihilism that Tyler and BANKSY utilize in their work, we need to ask ourselves why such a large portion of society is feeling a loss of hope in their surroundings, rejecting higher values, and devaluing life and property. These are all actions and feelings that, at heart, undermine the current structure of our society, government, and cities. Anticipating the possible consequences of these feelings can help us to resolve the structural issues causing them.

The Spontaneous Urge to Create: What is Urban Art?

Within the current literature, the phrase *urban art* is thrown around as being synonymous with terms such as *street art* or *graffiti art*. The definition of urban art tends to vary from source to source, ranging from the general "art created within an urban center" to the more specific "un-commissioned graffiti art." In order to clarify this broad term, within this paper we will define urban artistic expression as art containing the following three characteristics:
1. The artistic form must originate within an urban environment.

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[9] Kubrin, "I See Death Around the Corner," 444.
[10] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 147-148.
[11] Goudsblom, *Nihilism and Culture,* 30-34.

2. The artistic form must consistently refer to and draw from its urban roots.

3. The artistic form is accessible to and originated from the common urban man. Please note that by *common*, I do not mean to insinuate that the urban artistic form must originate from the lower class, just that it is accessible to everyone, regardless of formal education or wealth.

Urban art is such a broad category comprised of such diverse genres of art that it is difficult to ascribe one particular set of aesthetic features to it. For the sake of this paper, we will focus on urban art as a location and theme related genre, and focus on aesthetic features within the more specific subgenres of graffiti art and rap music. In order to define these aesthetic features, and to establish that BANKSY's graffiti art and Tyler the Creator's rap music are modes of urban artistic expression, it is necessary to engage in a deeper discussion of rap and graffiti.

Defying Conformity: The History and Aesthetic of Graffiti Art

In his essay "Art in the Streets," Jeffrey Deitch, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, describes graffiti art as being created by teenagers, "…emerg[ing] from housing projects, subway yards, and bleak suburban parking lots."[12] According to Deitch, graffiti art exploded in the 1970s within urban centers, becoming more mainstream in the 1980s with artists introducing graffiti to galleries and giving the art form "artistic credibility."[13] Graffiti art also permeated mainstream culture through other publicly accessible mediums such as music videos or popular films. [14] Interestingly, Deitch also describes graffiti art as paralleling the hip-hop movement, the "artistic vocabulary [of graffiti] spilling over into break dancing, street fashion, and the language and rhythms of rap music."[15] Largely due to the increased enforcement of anti-graffiti laws, street art stagnated during the late '80s and early '90s, rejuvenating in later years with the work of artists such as COST, REVS, Barry McGee, Shepard Fairey, and, of course, the Bristol-based anonymous street artist commonly referred to as BANKSY.[16]

During graffiti's heyday in the 1970s and '80s, style wars would often break out. During these, graffiti crews would compete with each other to create the largest, most stylistically complex artwork in the most visible, hard-to-reach places in order to earn fame and respect. These style wars were especially prominent in New York City, often called the birthplace of modern graffiti.

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[12] Jeffrey Deitch, "Art in the Streets," in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Brooklyn Museum (New York City, New York: MOCA, 2011), 10.

[13] Deitch, "Art in the Streets," 10-11.

[14] c.f. Deitch pages 11-12 for more information on the growth of graffiti art through music videos and films.

[15] Deitch, "Art in the Streets," 10.

[16] Deitch, "Art in the Streets," 13-14.

Looking at graffiti aesthetically, it is important to note that graffiti as a genre of art is much more difficult to describe than hip-hop as a genre of music. Although hip-hop is defined by clear aesthetic features (i.e. a beat overlaid with spoken word), the only true defining characteristic of graffiti is that it is art painted illegally on another's property, and even that definition has become fuzzy recently with graffiti artists who paint on legal walls. To avoid confusion, within this paper we will focus on un-commissioned graffiti art, or art created by the urban populace without the permission of the government or community.

In addition, although most often we associate graffiti with the aesthetic of the New York style wars (complex letter distortions, bright colors), graffiti has a broad enough definition that truly any type of illegal art could be included under its umbrella.[17] BANKSY's graffiti style, for example, does not strongly resemble that of New York graffiti giant FUZZ 1's work, nor does it resemble the work of Lebanon graffiti artist duo Omar and Mohamed Kabbani. In addition, although graffiti is typically found in the spray paint medium, there is no rule saying that an unsanctioned sculpture cannot be graffiti too.

Having said that, within the spray paint sector of graffiti, styles typically fall into one of four categories: tags, throw-ups, pieces, and productions.[18] A tag is an artist's basic signature, which serves as a sort of "I was here" sign for the writer, allowing him or her to achieve fame. A throw-up is a larger, more elaborate tag, or as photographers James and Karla Murray put it in their book *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC*, "quickly executed block or bubble-shaped letter outlines, with or without a layer of spray paint for fill-in."[19] Pieces, short for masterpieces, are even more elaborate signatures, with complex lettering, typography, and various colors. Finally, a production is an elaborate mural that can include lettering and/or characters.[20]

Still, this definition remains broad. Graffiti too then is perhaps best defined thematically. In her 1998 study *Writing on the Run: The History and Transformation of Street Graffiti in Montreal in the 1990s*, Louise Gauthier identified two different categories of graffiti: political and personal. According to Gauthier, political graffiti is primarily "…anonymous [and] culturally motivated…" while personal graffiti is focused on "getting up" your name/tag and achieving fame.[21]

I argue that there is some grey area within Gauthier's distinction. There is, of course, the ambiguity of artists like BANKSY, who have tags that they paint side by side with productions containing strong political messages. Similarly, the idea of personal

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[17] See Appendix A, Figure 1 for an image depicting the "wild-style" of the New York style wars.

[18] See Appendix A, Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 for examples of a tag, throw-up, piece, and production, respectively.

[19] James and Karla Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2002), 39.

[20] Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC*, 39.

[21] Steven T. Olberg, *Political Graffiti on the West Bank Wall in Israel/Palestine* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 20.

fame achieved via a pseudonym (i.e. BANKSY, Blue, Phase 2) also makes the categorization of graffiti difficult.

More significantly, I would argue that all graffiti is political in a sense. Graffiti by its very nature is a protest—whether you paint a simple tag or a complex piece, you are painting it on property that does not belong to you, and this very act serves as a protest against the owner of the wall you are painting on, the establishment that forbids you from painting on that wall, and/or the theoretical concepts of authority and law. Regardless of the content of your painting, this is a powerful statement. The common practice of racking, or stealing, painting supplies only adds to this anti-authoritarian stance. In the words of graffiti artist West One, "…there is something naturally rebellious about it [graffiti]. Young kids aren't afraid to defy conformity, to defy the public and be like, 'FUCK IT, I'm going to take this risk to paint.' "[22]

Having said that, the distinction Gauthier makes is key in defining the graffiti aesthetic. The majority of what she dubs personal graffiti centers on the "…typographical design of the letter…" and the manipulation of this design (i.e. tags, throw-ups, and pieces).[23] Political graffiti, although often still utilizing typography, draws more on the style of murals and productions containing characters and depictions of a scene.

The Urban Calligrapher: BANKSY and Graffiti as a Model of Urban Art

Although not originally a strictly urban art form, modern graffiti has grown within city centers, perhaps because the city offers so many natural canvases, from subway walls to bridges and highways. BANKSY humorously relays this idea in his book *Wall and Piece* with images of spray-painted cows and pigs, juxtaposed with the caption "If you grow up in a town where they don't have subway trains you have to find something else to paint on. It's not as easy as it sounds because most subway train drivers don't wander around with shotguns."[24]

Every work of graffiti also inherently refers back to the city, as the wall or sign it is painted on is both part of the city and part of the art. In BANKSY's words, graffiti is "…actually one of the more honest art forms available. There is no elitism or hype, it exhibits on the best walls a town has to offer and nobody is put off by the price of admission."[25] BANKSY continues in his *Advice on painting with stencils*: "A regular 400 mL can of paint will give you up to 40 A4 sized stencils. This means you can become incredibly famous/unpopular in a small town virtually overnight for approximately ten

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[22] Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC, 105.*

[23] Roger Gastman, Caleb Neelon, and Anthony Smyrski, *Street World: Urban Art and Culture from Five Continents* (New York: Abrams, 2007), 129.

[24] Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London: Century, 2006), 152.

[25] Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 8.

pounds".[26] Even if you don't have ten pounds (or dollars), it is common among some graffiti artists to rack, or steal, their spray paint and supplies.[27]

Graffiti is a unique art form in the sense that it is ever changing. In a way similar to Internet forums and sites like Wikipedia, graffiti is constantly being edited. As pointed out by John Hudson in his essay "BANKSY: The story so far . . . ," even BANKSY's work sometimes falls "victim to fellow graffiti artists."[28] This speaks to the honesty of graffiti—as it is constantly being edited, the current popular opinion is always on top.

Some, like Hudson, question how BANKSY is still able to truly represent the popular opinion of the common urban man when he displays his pieces in galleries and sells them for millions to celebrities like Angelina Jolie. However, in the words of Paul Gough in his essay "BANKSY: The Urban Calligrapher," "BANKSY may have entered the mainstream, stepping out of the shadows of urban Britain into the glitz of Hollywood, but…he still has an unerring ability to pass penetrating comment on the hot issues of the day."[29] Regardless, in order to prevent inaccuracies, this paper will focus specifically on BANKSY's graffiti art, not his gallery work.

As a result, graffiti art can be classified as a model of urban art, as it has flourished within urban centers, it continuously references the urban environment via the location of the painting as well as its content, and it is accessible and relevant to the common urban man.

The Story of the City: The History and Aesthetic of Hip-Hop Music

Paul Gilroy, Professor at the London School of Economics and author of a chronicle of African cultural history entitled *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness,* describes rap music as "a hybrid form nurtured by the social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound system culture was transplanted during the 1970s and put down new roots."[30] Hip-hop as we know it today grew from these urban roots, and rap music still continuously references and draws from its origins. As stated earlier, hip-hop centers around the musical aesthetic of a beat overlaid with spoken word, but, like graffiti, its thematic aesthetic and cultural significance is perhaps more relevant.

Hip-hop is, at heart, a storytelling device; in the words of Thomas R. Britt in his essay *The Mobile Hood: Realness and the Rules of the Game*, "One of the foremost virtues of

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[26] Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 237.

[27] Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC*, 29.

[28] John Hudson, "Banksy: The Story So Far," in *Banksy: The Bristol Legacy*, ed. Paul Gough (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd., 2012), 23.

[29] Paul Gough, "Banksy: The Urban Calligrapher," in *Banksy: The Bristol Legacy*, ed. Paul Gough (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd. , 2012), 145.

[30] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 33, quoted in Lisa Calvente, "The Black Atlantic Revisited : Nihilism, Matrices of Struggle, and Hip Hop Culture" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002), 51-52.

the rap genre is a unique capacity to connect lived experiences with various lyrical inventions and extrapolations." [31] This speaks to the concept of reality and fantasy mentioned earlier, mixing authentic experiences with exaggerated imagery. Britt describes rap music as having a cinematic quality, demanding "heroes and villains"; in this sense, hip-hop takes real experiences and issues and dramatizes or expounds on them in order to place an emphasis on that reality.[32] Ultimately, the aesthetic at the heart of rap music is that it tells a story; the political story of cultural oppression, the self-success story of fame and wealth, the story of poverty, the story of family and community, the story of frustration, anger, and death, the story of the city.

Representin': Tyler the Creator and Rap Music as a Model of Urban Art

As American philosophy professor Crispin Sartwell points out in his essay *Rap Music and the Uses of Stereotype*, this reference to urban surroundings is made apparent in "the rapper's claim to be 'representing'…some constituency."[33] In this way, "Rap refers its authority to represent to the hood, gang, or crew, and makes an issue of whether the rapper has stayed true to that constituency or turned her back on them."[34] The realness and authority of a rap artist amongst the urban constituency are dependent upon the rapper's ability to represent the urban reality.[35] Additionally, the medium of rap music, like that of graffiti, is easily accessible to the masses. The spoken word is free, and the need for a well-known label to gain popularity is quickly diminishing; artists like Tyler the Creator and his collective Odd Future spread their music and found notoriety through the internet, releasing EPs, posting videos, and blogging online.[36] This technology-based growth is analogous to the spread of graffiti through music videos and popular films in the 1980s.[37] Due to this, rap music can be classified as urban art: it originated in the urban environment of the South Bronx, it consistently represents these roots, and to this day rap music is still art of the common urban man, often starting on the streets and later gaining widespread popular appeal. Now that we have established an aesthetic and historic basis for rap music and graffiti art and identified these two genres as urban art, we can begin to discuss the growing subculture and appeal of urban art.

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[31] Thomas R. Britt, "The Mobile Hood: Realness and the Rules of the Game," in *Habitus of the Hood*, ed. Chris Richardson and Hans A. Skott Myhre, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 217.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Crispin Sartwell, "Rap Music and the Uses of Stereotype," in *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy*, ed. William H Hardy, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2000), 375.

[34] Sartwell, "Rap Music and the Uses of Stereotype," 375.

[35] Sartwell, "Rap Music and the Uses of Stereotype," 375.

[36] Thomas Conner. "To Odd Future rapper, 'it's funny' that rape, murder lyrics anger people," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 12, 2011, sec. Entertainment, accessed November 27, 2012, http://www.suntimes.com/entertainment/music/6477157-421/hot-button-hip-hop.html.

[37] Deitch, "Art in the Streets," 11.

"Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud": A Broader Subcultural Basis for Urban Art

If we are aiming to raise questions about the causes of nihilism in hip-hop and graffiti, it follows that we should examine the subcultures that these genres grow from. Much of the current literature, including Kubrin's research, focuses on rap music as stemming from the African-American urban community, and therefore it may seem that rap music is more representative of an African-American reality than an urban reality. However, recent shifts in the lyrics and style of rap music suggest that hip-hop is moving away from defining the African-American persona and towards defining the urban citizen. USC School of Cinematic Arts professor and pop culture expert Todd Boyd discusses this recent phenomenon in his book *Am I Black Enough for You?*, stating that:

> Audience members of all races use the music as a form of resistance or rebellion, with the truly disadvantaged Black male serving as the supreme representative of adolescent angst, minority disenfranchisement, and an overall sense of cynicism about American society. Thus gangsta rap provides a vehicle for cathartic expression well beyond an exclusively Black space.[38]

Boyd goes on to discuss the white rapper Vanilla Ice, and his identification with the African American experience because he "grew up in the midst of…poverty and was once a victim of gang violence."[39] In this sense, his lower-class upbringing, not his race, made him "Black."[40] Boyd expands on this idea, referencing the film *The Commitments* in which working class white Dubliners aspire to create the world's greatest soul band. Boyd asserts that "…the group members can identify with African American [soul] music because of their multiple oppression as Northern Irish working-class Catholics" and highlights a quote from the main character of the movie: "The Irish are the Blacks of Europe, and the Dubliners are the Blacks of Ireland, and the Northsiders are the Blacks of Dublin. So say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud."[41] In this sense, anybody dealing with oppression is, on a certain level, able to identify with the black experience and thus utilize traditionally African-American forms of expression such as hip-hop in order to express themselves. Lisa Calvente, assistant professor of Intercultural Communication and Performance Studies at DePaul University, reinforces this point in her essay *The Black Atlantic Revisited: Nihilism, Matrices of Struggle, and Hip Hop Culture*, stating that "…hip hop music is a form of musical expression that unifies multiple sites of struggle. It is not an exclusively black musical expressive form".[42] It is important to

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[38] Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough For You?: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), 64. Kubrin, like Boyd, acknowledges that rap artists today have shifted away from discussing the general black experience to more specifically addressing the experience of lower-class urban citizens (c.f. Kubrin p. 435).

[39] Ibid, 40.

[40] Ibid, 40.

[41] Ibid, 41.

[42] Lisa Calvente, *The Black Atlantic Revisited: Nihilism, Matrices of Struggle, and Hip Hop Culture* (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002), 67.

note that this does not discredit hip-hop as an expression of black culture, stating only that it also speaks to and, more recently, originates from a larger, not solely African-American, whole.

Similarly, in her book *The Graffiti Subculture*, qualitative and ethnographic research specialist Nancy MacDonald conducts an in-depth analysis of the different positions on why the graffiti subculture exists. She presents arguments focusing on class struggle, race, youth, and masculinity. Ultimately, through an extensive analysis, she argues that the primary two factors in the creation of the graffiti subculture are youth and masculinity.[43]

Initially, the absence of race and class from these determining factors was surprising to me. However, Baruch College ethnographer and sociologist Gregory Snyder supports MacDonald's argument in his book *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*. Snyder asserts that, "[Graffiti] [w]riters are white-skinned, brown-skinned, light-skinned and dark-skinned; they are rich and poor, smart and dumb; most are male… ."[44] New York graffiti artist LADY PINK agrees with this point, saying, "…basically everybody in the world believes that most writers are either from the inner city, from the ghetto, black and Puerto Rican, but white is never really discussed. There were a lot of white writers from wealthy families, from upper-middle-class and middle-class backgrounds."[45] LADY PINK herself states that she has lived in mostly middle-class neighborhoods in New York City.[46]

Susan A. Phillips, a criminal justice reform expert conducting field work and research at Pitzer College, also writes in her book *Wallbangin'*, "Mixed areas with racially integrated high schools may wind up with racially integrated [graffiti] crews; many times these are in more middle-class parts of town. In the inner city, where racial divisions even within mixed neighborhoods are more marked, crews may continue to be solidly one thing or another," emphasizing the fact that there are not clear racial or class demarcations that allow one to participate in the graffiti subculture.[47]

Although Snyder argues that MacDonald ignores women graffiti artists in her analysis, he does admit that "While graffiti talent is not gendered, graffiti writers must literally fight for their reputations, and this turns off many women, who often choose to concentrate their efforts on legal walls."[48] Even female graffiti artists LADY PINK and DIVA agree that there is not a lot of support for female artists within the graffiti community. Both of them stated that they had to work a lot harder to earn their name

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[43] Nancy MacDonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity, and Identity in London and New York* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), c.f. MacDonald pgs. for a more thorough explanation and analysis.

[44] Gregory Snyder, *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2.

[45] Ivor, Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 17.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Susan A. Phillips, *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 332.

[48] Snyder, *Graffiti Lives*, 4.

in the graffiti world, and even after having established themselves as talented artists, many of their male peers refuse to paint next to them. For these reasons, most females initially interested in graffiti drop out or pursue other art forms.[49]

Graffiti, then, also appears to belong to a wider culture, perhaps even in a greater sense than hip-hop music. Although hip-hop is strongly rooted in African-American culture, and has recently expanded to a wider audience, graffiti as a method of expression has existed since ancient times, even appearing in the ruins of Pompeii.[50] Although modern graffiti is most often associated with the style wars of the 1970s and 80s in New York City, the popularity of graffiti spurred by this time period has spawned a myriad of styles used across the world and by people of all types. In the words of former graffiti artist and current art critic Roger Gastman, "The power and visibility for the street's stage have brought the world's diverse subcultures together to share the same space."[51]

In conclusion, although the graffiti and hip-hop subcultures originated due to many different factors including youth, masculinity, race, and class status, ultimately the factor that connects the two is a feeling of oppression that, in the case of rap music, allows one to connect with the African-American experience, or, in the case of graffiti art, provokes one to express dissent via a violation of property norms. Tyler the Creator and BANKSY are both prime examples of this expansion of the graffiti/hip-hop subcultures, with Tyler as a rap artist born and raised in Ladera Heights, a middle-class Los Angeles neighborhood, and BANKSY as a white European graffiti artist.

Breaking Down Walls: The Growing Appeal of Urban Art

Tyler the Creator and BANKSY also appeal to a broad audience, having both gained their fame and recognition primarily via the Internet. Through this medium, they were able to reach a much wider audience than their original urban environment, connecting with people worldwide. Just as the graffiti and hip-hop subcultures are expanding within the urban environment, their audience is expanding outside of it. BANKSY and Tyler are unique in that they appeal to a wide audience composed of many races and classes. In their book *Arabic Graffiti*, Arabic typographer Pascal Zoghbi and graffiti artist, writer, and publisher Dan Stone Karl describe BANKSY's graffiti art in Bethlehem and Jerusalem as "…engag[ing] a Western audience and contribut[ing] to an awareness of the reality on the ground and the asymmetrical power struggle between Palestinians and Israelis.[52] BANKSY's images in particular communicate this

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[49] Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC*, 165.

[50] J.A. Baird and Claire Taylor, *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

[51] Gastman, Neelon, and Smyrski, *Street World*, 30.

[52] Don Stone Karl and Pascal Zoghbi, *Arabic Graffiti* (Berlin: From Here to Fame Publishing , 2011), 65.

to a mass audience via the media and Internet with flabbergasting economy and efficiency."[53]

Similarly, in her article Odd Future, L.A.'s Hottest Nihilistic Art Rap Collective, Will Turn Their Tumblr Into a Photography Book Ann Binlot explains how "OFWGKTA earned a cult following through *its webpage*, streaming music videos, its Tumblr, and various Twitter accounts . . . ."[54] Although admittedly in a different way than BANKSY, Tyler appeals to an audience that extends beyond the typical hip-hop subculture, attracting the "…angsty teen set that twenty-five years ago probably would have been listening to punk rock."[55]

Also important in this transfer of communication is the aspect of travel. According to Gastman, "Travel and exploration are near the essence of street cultures, and the travelers who have used their passions to cross the boundaries of nations are at the heart of the process of cultural change."[56] According to identity politics and education expert Stephen T. Olberg, back in the train era in New York City, painting on highly mobile subways allowed graffiti to "originate in poor neighborhoods and travel throughout the city into areas of greater affluence…cross[ing] sociological and ethnographic boundaries and break[ing] down walls that normally block communication."[57] Today, in many cities around the world, train graffiti is still prevalent. But where it is not, graffiti artists aim to place their art in the most highly visible spots a city has to offer, and some, like BANKSY, travel the world to spread their message.

BANKSY and Tyler's enormous popular appeal emphasizes the cultural relevance and influence of graffiti art outside of the city center. This popularity serves as a venue for widespread knowledge of the issues in urban environments and the potential for change.

The theme of nihilism in BANKSY and Tyler's artwork is worth examining precisely because it has implications for such a wide audience.

A. The Rejection of Higher Values
1. BANKSY

The first characteristic of nihilism, the rejection of higher values, is seen primarily through two themes in BANKSY's art: the rejection of law and the rejection of religion. The rejection of the law can be seen in BANKSY's many paintings depicting policemen in compromising or degrading positions. For example, on page 1 of his book *Wall and*

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Ann Binlot, "Odd Future, L.A.'s Hottest Nihilistic Art Rap Collective, Will Turn Their Tumblr Into a Photography Book," *ArtInfo (New York)*, (2011): URL: http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/38314/odd-future-las-hottest-nihilistic-art-rap-collective-will-turn-their-tumblr-into-a-photography-book.

[55] Colton S., "Tyler, The Creator – Wolf Album Review." *The Versed,*(2012): URL: http://theversed.com/2013/04/01/tyler-the-creator-wolf-album-review/.

[56] Gastman, Neelon, and Smyrski, *Street World*, 34.

[57] Steven T. Olberg, *Political graffiti on the West Bank wall in Israel / Palestine* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 27.

Piece is an image of one of BANKSY's works, featuring a policeman flipping off the viewer; on page 25 is another rebellious policeman, spray painting the words *Thug for Life* onto a wall in purple lettering.[58,59] Page 84 presents another law enforcement officer, sitting nonchalantly on a bench next to the word *arse* framed above his head, and on page 37 is a British soldier pissing on a wall.[60,61,62] Placing figures of authority in such situations diminishes their power and transforms the law into a laughable matter. Along the same lines, a number of BANKSY's images promote anarchy and disorder through direct statements or symbols. For instance, on page 67 of *Wall and Piece*, BANKSY tags a monument with the phrase "Designated Riot Area," and in Figure 6, a British soldier paints the anarchy symbol on a wall, openly rejecting the institution of which he is purportedly a member.[63]

The rejection of religious values is seen in BANKSY's use of traditional religious figures such as angels. Page 112 of *Wall and Piece* features a dejected and downtrodden male angelic figure with a bottle of alcohol and a cigarette.[64] This reflects a distinct loss of faith in the higher state of being traditionally represented by angels. Similarly, in another one of BANKSY's images, a female angel is shown with a gun hovering amidst her halo.[65] This contradictory imagery depicts a peaceful figure worshiping a symbol of violence, implying hypocrisy and diminishing the angel's traditional role as a guardian.

2. Tyler the Creator

Tyler the Creator also demonstrates the rejection of higher values through the rejection of religion and social institutions. Lyrics such as "Jesus called, he said he's sick of the disses/
I told him to quit bitching/this isn't a fucking hotline for a fucking shrink" [66] or "My only problem is death/Fuck heaven, I ain't showing no religion respect" [67] degrade traditional religious figures and dismiss the concept of religion. Tyler is a self-proclaimed atheist and the rejection of religion is a theme throughout his music.

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[58] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 1.

[59] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 25.

[60] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 25.

[61] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, garage wall in Highbury. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 84.

[62] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Borough, London. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 37.

[63] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Trafalgar Square. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 67. See Appendix A, Figure 6.

[64] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006 page 112.

[65] Banksy. *Untitled,* Stencil Painting, Naples, Italy. *Wordpress..*
http://galamee.wordpress.com/2008/09/19/banksy-the-greatest/ (accessed November 27, 2012).

[66] Tyler the Creator, *Yonkers,* 2011 by XL, MP3.

[67] Tyler the Creator, *Nightmare,* 2011 by XL, MP3.

Odd Future's music also contains many lyrics that echo Nietzsche's sentiment "Nothing is true, nothing is good, God is dead".[68] Lines such as "Kill people, burn shit, fuck school/Odd Future here to steer you to what the fuck's cool/ Fuck rules, skate life, rape, write, repeat twice" demonstrate Tyler's headfirst dive into negative nihilism, depreciating social institutions and higher values with a vehemence so strong that his lyrics are often interpreted as being ironic.[69]

B. The Devaluation of Life and Property

1. BANKSY

The devaluation of life and property is seen through various themes in BANKSY's work, including property abuse and BANKSY's use of rats as symbols of the urban citizen. Graffiti is inherently a devaluation of property ownership; in order to create graffiti in the traditional, illegal sense, one has to devalue the authority of the law and the concept of ownership to some degree. Renowned New York art critic Carlo McCormick reinforces this point in his essay "The Writing on the Wall," describing graffiti art as "inherently anti-institutional."[70] An overt example of this devaluation of property is seen in Figure 7, which is an image of a BANKSY stencil reading "Designated Graffiti Area."[71] This piece, duplicated in many cities around the world, undermines the traditional view of property as belonging to and being controlled by one entity and instead opens it up as a public art space.

In addition to a disregard for property rights, BANKSY's art often features violent imagery, as seen in the previously mentioned depiction of the angel with a gun over her head. BANKSY also has a series of photos that juxtapose famous figures, such as the Mona Lisa, with imagery. This contraposition reflects a devaluation of life by icons representative of society, and can be seen in BANKSY's stencil painting in Soho, New York entitled *Mona Lisa with Rocket Launcher*.[72]

Finally, a great deal of BANKSY's work centers on images of rats. BANKSY describes his use of rats in his book *Wall and Piece*, saying that, "They exist without permission. They are hated, hunted and persecuted. They live in quiet desperation amongst the filth. And yet they are capable of bringing entire civilizations to their knees. If you are dirty, insignificant and unloved then rats are the ultimate role model."[73] In this sense, the rat serves as a symbol for the underprivileged urban citizen. By juxtaposing the image of the rat with phrases such as *Welcome to Hell*, *Because I'm Worthless*, or the anarchy symbol, BANKSY presents these rats as being lawbreakers and

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[68] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 148.

[69] Odd Future, *Pigions*, 2010 by Odd Future Records, MP3. See Appendix B: *Rejection of Higher Values* for additional lyrics of this nature.

[70] Carlo McCormick, "The Writing on the Wall," in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Brooklyn Museum, (New York City, New York: MOCA, 2011), 19.

[71] See Appendix A, Figure 7.

[72] Banksy, *Mona Lisa with Rocket Launcher*, Stencil Painting, Soho, New York City. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 27.

[73] Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 95.

having negative attitudes.[74,75,76] This reflects the devaluation of the urban citizen to the form of a rebellious street animal.

2. Tyler the Creator

The devaluation of life and property is also seen in the works of Tyler the Creator and Odd Future, primarily through violent imagery and the degradation of women. This is demonstrated through lyrics such as "While you niggas stacking bread, I can stack a couple dead/ Bodies, making red look less of a color, more of a hobby" or "Honey on that topping when I stuff you in my system/Rape a pregnant bitch and tell my friends I had a threesome".[77] These are some of Tyler's most controversial lyrics, and imagery similar to this is seen throughout his body of work.[78]

C. A Loss of Hope in One's Surroundings

1. BANKSY

In BANKSY's work, the loss of hope in one's surroundings is shown primarily through the juxtaposition of happy images with violent or tragic imagery. Often, he contrasts youthful figures—symbols of hope, innocence, and happiness—with weaponry or tragic circumstances. In one of his images, he depicts a young boy painting the words *I remember when this was all trees* on the wall of a derelict car factory in Detroit.[79] In another, two little boys are shown playing in the sand on the Israeli-Palestinian dividing wall, and in yet another, a girl is shown hugging a bomb like a teddy bear.[80] Page 96 in *Wall and Piece* features a similar girl clad in a gas mask.[81] A comparable juxtaposition of images is seen in Figure 12, with the happy image of a picnic contrasted with the harsh concrete jungle of the urban landscape.[82] Similarly, in *Wall and Piece,* the image of an army helicopter wrapped in a gift bow is shown next to the phrase "Have a nice day!"[83] These contradictory images suggest that negative aspects of society have corrupted traditional symbols of hope.

2. Tyler the Creator

A number of Tyler's songs feature him talking to a therapist (all of his albums, *Bastard, Goblin,* and *Wolf* center around this theme), and he frequently entertains suicidal thoughts. These thoughts echo his loss of hope in life. One example of this is found in Tyler's song "Bastard," when he states, "I know you fucking feel me, I want to

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[74] See Appendix A, Figure 8.

[75] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 94.

[76] See Appendix A, Figure 9.

[77] Tyler the Creator, *Tron Cat,* 2011 by XL, MP3.

[78] See Appendix B: *Devaluation of Life and Property* for additional lyrics of this nature.

[79] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Detroit. In *Banksy: The Man Behind the Wall*, by Will Ellsworth-Jones. London: Aurum Press, Ltd., 2012, Page 11 of insert.

[80] See Appendix A, Figures 10, 11.

[81] Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 96.

[82] See Appendix A, Figure 12.

[83] Banksy, *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Location Unknown,. In *Wall and Piece,* by Banksy. London: Century, 2006, page 40.

fucking kill me".[84]   Similarly, in "Yonkers," Tyler speaks of the suicide of first his conscience and then himself: "('Fuck everything, man') That's what my conscience said/Then it bunny hopped off my shoulder, now my conscience dead/Now the only guidance that I had is splattered on cement/Actions speak louder than words, let me try this shit, dead."[85]

"Laugh Now but One Day We Will Be In Charge": The Motivation

Nihilism, then, is clearly a prevalent theme in urban artistic expression; the question is: why? Why do these artists choose to include nihilistic themes within their work and do these motivations change from artist to artist?

Although the images analyzed certainly reflect nihilistic themes, a sector of BANKSY's artwork reflects a more revolutionary and hopeful strain of thought. For example, the BANKSY painting shown in Figure 13 features an ape, which, like the rat discussed earlier, is representative of the impoverished and oppressed urban citizens, juxtaposed with the statement "Laugh now but one day we will be in charge."[86] This is an image of hope, a call for future change. In this image lies the meaning and purpose of BANKSY's work: to highlight the issues with the current urban environment, and then to take this one step further and ignite a change. Thus, although nihilism is prevalent throughout BANKSY's artwork, it is present because it is a reflection of the urban environment. BANKSY, then, is not a nihilist—just an artist using nihilistic themes to highlight an issue and inspire a change.

Tyler the Creator, on the other hand, is a bundle of contradictions.   He puts it beautifully in his song "Yonkers": "I'm a fucking walking paradox, no I'm not."[87] Within his music, Tyler recognizes his inconsistencies, creating various different personas for himself, including Tron Cat and Wolf Hayley, both bad-influence personas, Dr. TC, his conscience and therapist, and Ace Creator, Tyler's more emotional and personal side. As he says in his song *Nightmare,* "One ear I got kids screaming, 'O.F. is the best'/The other ear I got Tron Cat, asking where the bullets and the bombs at/So I can kill these levels of stress, shit."[88]   This shows the contrast between the different sides of his multi-faceted personality.

Some propose that Tyler's music is satirical—an ironic representation of hip-hop culture, poking fun at the nihilistic themes often found in rap music by taking them to the extreme. They excuse his violent imagery with the fact that it is just that—imagery; he never lives out any of the fantasies he envisions. This is an interesting testament to the fact that Tyler is a rap artist raised in a middle-class neighborhood; unlike artists such as Tupac or The Notorious B.I.G, he fantasizes about violence and death without

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[84] Tyler the Creator, *Bastard,* 2009 by Odd Future Records, MP3.
[85] Tyler the Creator, *Yonkers.* See Appendix B: *Loss of Hope in One's Surroundings* for additional lyrics of this nature.
[86] See Appendix A, Figure 13.
[87] Tyler the Creator, *Yonkers.*
[88] Tyler the Creator, *Nightmare.*

actually living it. Another interesting point to consider in relation to this aspect of Tyler is the concept that these fantasies are not just his own—the popularity of his music indicates that they are fantasies shared or at least enjoyed by a larger part of the population. In his biography, *Decoded,* rap artist Jay-Z discusses how businessmen often listen to his music as motivation before important presentations, and the point he makes through this is summarized nicely by Zach Baron in his article "On Odd Future, Rape and Murder and Why We Sometimes Like Things That Repel Us":

> …with art like this you never identify with the victim, the proverbial 'you'; you identify with the person speaking, and that person is a bad motherfucker, and thus so is the listener. Through this type of identification, art allows us to explore the weird frisson between reality and fantasy, the gulf between who we are and who we'd like to be.[89]

In this sense, the issues that are being raised by BANKSY and Tyler the Creator are issues that don't necessarily apply to just the state of the urban environment; they may speak to a larger question of the state of mind of the modern population—why do we idealize the nihilistic imagery in urban art? Why is it something we look up to and want to identify with? And what does this mean about us?

Others assert that Tyler is simply nihilistic and misogynistic, spouting lyrics about violent rape fantasies, and yet another interpretation is that Tyler is just a screwed up teenage boy, messing around with his friends and making songs without really thinking about their consequences. Seemingly supporting the latter, Tyler explained his graphic lyrics in an interview with *The Chicago Sun Times*, saying, "Sometimes it's us seeing who comes up with the sickest shit, the most disgusting thing they can throw in."[90]

The real Tyler is most likely a combination of the three—a creative teenage boy messing around with his friends, at times poking fun at everyone and everything around him, at other times completely serious. One can never really tell the difference between the latter two—it is difficult to decipher when Tyler is actually confessing the thoughts that go on inside his messed-up head or when he is just trying to mess with our heads. Is he, like BANKSY, trying to prove a point through the nihilism in his music? Or is he just blowing off steam; making the music for the "nigga that's in the mirror rapping," as he asserts in his song "Goblin"?[91] Again, it is most likely a combination of the two.

Writer, poet, and musician Dominic Fox recently wrote a book entitled *Cold World: The Aesthetics of Rejection and the Politics of Militant Dysphoria*, addressing this same issue. Fox, using analyses of poetry, black metal music, and radical militancy, examines the relationship between rejection and rebellion, ultimately coming to the

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[89] Zach Baron, "On Odd Future, Rape and Murder, And Why We Sometimes Like the Things That Repel Us," *The Village Voice* (blog), November 10, 2010, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2010/11/on_odd_future_r.php.

[90] Conner, "To Odd Future rapper, 'it's funny' that rape, murder lyrics anger people."

[91] Tyler the Creator, *Goblin,* 2011 by XL, MP3.

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conclusion that the "adolescent in revolt" (via his nihilism and rejection of higher values) is "a militant in prototype."[92] However, he also points out that "the world…provides many opportunities for cathexis, the connection of a drive-stimulus with some object that has the power to relieve it, to draw off its energies and dissipate them elsewhere."[93] Art is one of these opportunities for cathexis, allowing artists, or in this case "adolescent[s] in revolt" to disseminate their internal conflicts via song and spray-paint. For Fox's "militant prototype[s]" to become actual militants, they must first reject these means of cathexis.[94]

In this sense, Tyler is using music as a form of cathexis, releasing his frustration and anger through his artwork. Through his graffiti, BANKSY is doing the same thing, although he makes it clearer that his release of frustration is a direct act of protest. This use of art as a means of cathexis is not unique to Tyler and BANKSY—it is part of what spawned the growth of hip-hop and graffiti culture in the first place. New York graffiti artist KENN describes this phenomenon in relation to graffiti, stating, "We could have been doing other things or we could have been robbing people, killing people, joining gangs, but we chose graffiti. Graffiti was an outlet for most of us born and raised in New York City."[95] Similarly, in his book *No More Prisons,* former graffiti artist and social activist William Wimsatt states that, "Hip-hop grew out of the South Bronx gang culture of the early '70s…as a reaction and an antidote to the drugs, violence and cynicism of the post-Black Power era."[96] Today, graffiti and hip-hop are being utilized by a wider audience as a method of cathexis, and this yet again begs the question—why?

"Listen to the Story": The Causes and Consequences of Nihilism in Urban Artistic Expression

Here, this paper turns from argument to speculation. It is impossible to determine the cause of a nihilistic mindset from a case study of two artists' work, but it would be a disservice to skip over the reason behind the nihilistic mindset identified in this paper. Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam, responded to a 1990 *Newsweek* article decrying the graphic themes in rap music by saying, "Surely the moral outrage in this piece would be better applied to contemporary American crises in health care, education, joblessness."[97] But what if's graphic themes and Simmons's American crises are one and the same? Jeffrey Deitch points out that although most artistic movements

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[92] Dominic Fox, *Cold World: The Aesthetics of Dejection and the Politics of Militant Dysphoria* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2009), 44.

[93] Ibid, 60.

[94] Ibid, 44.

[95] Murray, *Broken Windows: Graffiti NYC*, 106.

[96] William Upski Wimsatt, *No More Prisons: Urban Life, Homeschooling, Hip-hop Leadership, The Cool Rich Kids Movement, A Hitchhiker's Guide to Community Organizing, and Why Philanthropy is the Greatest Art Form of the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, Inc., 1999), 105.

[97] Hoby, "Rappers and Rape."

occur during times of prosperity, both hip-hop and graffiti exploded in the 1970s during a time of economic hardship caused by the Vietnam war, a decline in the stock market, and the 1973 oil embargo.[98] Graffiti and rap music exploded as a direct result of these hardships, and they served as a form of artistic release and a way to voice dissent. Tyler's music and BANKSY's graffiti art are modern examples of this same concept. For Tyler, BANKSY, and urban artists like them, the themes present in their art are mirror images of larger societal issues. The devaluation of life and property, the loss of hope in one's surroundings, the rejection of higher values—these are just the details hovering in the reflection behind the artist "that's in the mirror rapping."[99]

In a world where we often avoid casting our eyes on the more difficult aspects of life, the popularity of urban artists such as BANKSY and Tyler the Creator forces us to look more closely at these details. In the past, as Kubrin focuses on in her essay, the roots of nihilism in rap and graffiti stemmed from street code related to inner city gang violence. As the appeal of rap music and graffiti with nihilistic themes spreads to adolescents of all races and classes, one has to wonder why. Is this just a new method of expressing age-old feelings of adolescent rebellion, a replacement for punk, as suggested in music review website The *Versed's* review of Tyler's new album *Wolf*?[100] Todd Boyd suggests that anyone feeling oppressed is able to relate to the black-experience manifested in hip-hop—are more of us feeling oppressed by some greater authority? If so, what authority? The government? Society as a whole? These are questions with complicated answers, but having established that nihilism is a prevalent theme in this new wave of urban artistic expression is the first step towards finding a solution. In Tyler's words, "It's fucking art, listen to the fucking story."[101]

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[98] Deitch, "Art in the Streets," 10.

[99] Tyler the Creator, *Goblin*.

[100] Colton S., "Tyler, The Creator – Wolf Album Review." *The Versed,* (2012): URL: http://theversed.com/2013/04/01/tyler-the-creator-wolf-album-review/.

[101] Hoby, "Rappers and Rape."

APPENDIX A: IMAGES

All photos included below are licensed under Creative Commons (either under their Attribution CC-BY, Attribution- ShareAlike CC BY-SA, or Attribution NoDerivs CC BY-ND license, or in the public domain). You can view the terms of the copyright on their website: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/.

Figure 1: Wild-style graffiti art.

Morgaine (Flickr username). *Graffiti* [Image of painting], 2010. Antwerp, Belgium. Color photograph. Available from: Flickr Commons, http://www.flickr.com/photos/morgaine/4937791648/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Flickr username Morgaine.

Figure 2: Graffiti tags.

Unknown. *Graffiti tags 2* [Image of painting], 2009. Helsinki, Finland. Color photograph. Available from: Wikipedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Graffiti_tags_2.JPG. Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

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Figure 3: Graffiti throw-up.

Erokism (Flickr username). *Ayre* [Image of painting], 2011. Color photograph.
Available from: Flickr Commons,
http://www.flickr.com/photos/10295270@N05/6083903909/ (accessed May 14, 2013).

Figure 4: Graffiti piece.

Arden. *Piece HDR* [Image of painting], 2008. Amsterdam. Color photograph. Available
from: Flickr Commons, http://www.flickr.com/photos/ardenswayoflife/2891925235/
(accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Arden (Flickr username: ardenswayoflife).

Figure 5: Graffiti production.

A Syn. *UA Production?? LosAngeles Graffiti Art* [Image of painting]. Los Angeles, CA. Color photograph. Available from: Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/24293932@N00/2418566365/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of A Syn (Flickr username: anarchosyn).

Figure 6: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Shoreditch, London. Photographed by Stuart (silverfox09), 2005. Available from Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/silverfox09/11951114/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Stuart (Flickr username: silverfox09).

Figure 7: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. Photographed by Count in Fives (Flickr username), 2008. Available from Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/cat91/3068710278/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Flickr username: Count in Fives.

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Figure 8: *Welcome to Hell* rat, also featuring a perfect example of how even Banksy's graffiti is written over.

Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, location unknown. Photographed by Stuart (silverfox09), 2005. Available from Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/silverfox09/22425161/in/photostream/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Stuart (Flickr Username: silverfox09).

Figure 9: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Unknown Location. Photographed by John Erling Blad, 2007. Available from Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Banksy-rat-crop.jpg (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of John Erling Blad (Wikimedia Username: jeblad).

Figure 10: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, London. Photographed by Michael Reeve, 2004. Available from Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Banksy.bomb.jp g (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Michael Reeve.

Figure 11: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Bethlehem. Photographed by Markus Ortner, 2005. Available from Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mauer-betlehem.jpg (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Markus Ortner.

Figure 12: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, unknown location. Photographed by eddiedangerous (Flickr username). Available from Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/eddiedangerous/1856891861/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Flickr username: eddiedangerous.

Figure 13: Banksy. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, London. Photographed by Gary Knight (Flickr username: garyknight). Available from Flickr Commons: http://www.flickr.com/photos/garyknight/6898873822/in/photostream/ (accessed May 14, 2013). Courtesy of Gary Knight (Flickr username: garyknight).

Appendix B: Additional Tyler the Creator Lyrics

Album/Year	Song	Devaluation of life and property	Loss of hope in one's surroundings	Rejection of higher values
Bastard (2009)	AssMilk	"Fuck rap, I'll be a landlord so I can rape the tenant's daughter" "I'll beat the fuck out your bitch anonymous, Ike Turner" "Fuck her in a Hummer while I rape her then I put her in a slumber/It's not a figure of speech when I tell you that I dumped her"		
Bastard (2009)	Bastard		"My father's dead, well I don't know, we'll never fucking meet/ I cut my wrist and play piano cause I'm so depressed." "I know you fucking feel me, I want to fucking kill me" "My wrist is all red from the cutter/Dripping cold blood like the winter, the summer"	"I'm doing Big Style Willie couldn't touch 11/Seven, what's religion nigga? I am legend"

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			"My goal in life is a Grammy, hopefully momma will attend the/Ceremony with all my homies, I'm suicidal"	
Bastard (2009)	Blow	"A wealthy white girl without the facelift/Lure her with expensive dinners and a nice bracelet/Leave the bitch breathless, what the bitch don't know is that/I'm a mothafuckin' sellout and a rapist" "You call this shit kids, well I call these kids cum/And you call this shit rape but I think rape's fun"		
Bastard (2009)	French	"Yo I'm fucking Goldilocks u in the forest/In the three bear house eating their mothafuckin' porridge/I tell her it's my house, give her a tour/In my basement, and keep that bitch locked up in my storage/Rape her and record it, then edit it with more shit"		"I'm opening a church to sell coke and Led Zeppelin/And fuck Mary in her ass"
Bastard (2009)	Inglorious		"My father died the day I	

			came out of my mother's hole/And left a burden on my soul until I was old enough/To understand that the fucking faggot didn't like me much"

"Birthdays, Christmas my only fucking wishlist was CD's (and a father"

"Now this counselor is trying to tell me that I'm emo, she don't give a fuck/D-low where's the trigger, I'll let this bullet play hero.. bang" | |
Bastard (2009)	Parade			"Go to college, get a job, marry, have a kid/Watch them grow and then you die? No, nigga fuck the system"
Bastard (2009)	Pigs Fly		"Fatherless kids, orphans like me and Domo is/A fuck that we will never give is like our pops"	
Bastard (2009)	Sarah	"I want to tie her body up and throw her in my basement/Keep her there, so nobody can wonder where her face went"		
Bastard (2009)	Session		"Blind fucking hate inside my	"I'm a self-racist"

			heart, guaranteed"	
				"Fuck the biz apparent, Odd Future errant"
Bastard (2009)	Seven	"'Fuck 'em all!' I'm chanting…" "We go skate, rape sluts and eat donuts from Randy" "Hop off my dick and make a fucking sandwich"		
Bastard (2009)	VCR	"I don't want to play you, I just want to tape you undressing/And then I'll lay you down and record soft porn/If it's romance then it's hardcore, if it's horror/Pop the pop corn, the thoughts to rape you really turns me on" "You're my favorite show, any chance I get I try to watch/Die hard fan can't stop with the tapings/Sort of like a psycho when I can't stop with the rapings"		
Goblin (2011)	Bitch Suck	"By the way, we do punch		

	Dick	"bitches" "Got the bops in the house, socking bitches in they mouth" "Gun to her head make your bitch massage my shoulders" "Swag, swag, punch a bitch"		
Goblin (2011)	Fish	"Tell her that I love her and by next week/You can hear her shriek from the gashes in her cheeks" "Now I get daughters and tie them and clink/Got my dick harder than iron and zinc/Now they just rot up, arms caught in the sink/Where they get cut up to fit my physique" "Ooh, hide your daughters, hide your sisters, hell hide grandmamma too/Cause the fisherman's raping		

		everybody in the pool, he on the loose, yeah"		
Goblin (2011)	Goblin	"Wow, life's a cute bitch full of estrogen/And when she gives you lemons, nigga, throw 'em at pedestrians"		"Therapy's been sinning and niggas getting offended/They don't want to fuck with me cause I do not fuck with religion" "The devil doesn't wear Prada, I'm clearly in a fucking white tee"
Goblin (2011)	Golden		"Ending it is all I fucking think about, that's the shit I think about/All alone, bawling 'til my mothafuckin' eyes bleed" "And I'm not even human, I'm a body shaped demon/With some semen in my sack and some problems in the back/And a life that's filled with crap/and a finger filled with hate/And a gat that's filled with love, now let opposites attract "	
Goblin (2011)	Nightmare	"When mommy cusses out cousin, some knives get shown/Now she's really fucking pissed, so the	"Life is a bitch and my cock's soft, the Glock's cocked/My hands trembled, my finger's slipped, the wall's red/Her	

		knives get thrown/And hit her in the fucking neck, now her throat's all gone/Looking like a fucking monster from the Twilight Zone"	life is fucked, she's sad now, her son is dead" "When I was younger, I would smile a lot/I'm getting older, getting older, but a wiser top/Now I'm drunk driving, lap's full of Budweiser tops" "Love? I don't get none, that's why I'm so hostile to the kids that get some/My father called me to tell me he loved me/I'd have a better chance of getting Taylor Swift to fuck me/Annoying and I'm ugly, most niggas wannna punch me/I'm surprised the fucking doctor even touched me/Feel like Humpty, you hoping that I'll fall? Fuck y'all"	
Goblin (2011)	Radicals	"Kill people, burn shit, fuck school/I'm fuckin; radical, nigga/I'm motherfuckin' radical"		
Goblin (2011)	Sandwitches	"Let's buy guns and kill those kids with dads and moms/With nice homes,		"Nigga had the fucking nerve to call me immature/Fuck you think I made Odd Future

		41k's, and nice ass lawns" "I'll push this fucking pregnant clown into a hydrant stuck in the ground/step through the stomach, replace the baby with some fucking pounds"		for?/To wear fucking suits and make good decisions?/Fuck that nigga, Wolf Gang" "Come on kids, fuck that class and hit that bong" "The Golf Wang hooligans, is fucking up the school again/And showing you and yours that breaking rules is fucking cool again" "Then you smoke a J of weed, and take his kids to the churches/Uh, fuck church, they singing and the shit ain't even worth it/In the choir, whores and liars, scumbags and the dirt, bitch/You told me God was the answer/When I ask him for shit, I get no answer, so God is the cancer/I'm stuck in triangles, looking for my angel/Kill me with a chainsaw, and let my balls dangle/Triple six is my number, you can get it off my

				Tumblr"
Goblin (2011)	She	"One, two, you're the girl that I want/Three, four, five, six, seven, shit/Eight is the bullets if you say no after all this/And I just couldn't take it, you're so motherfuckin' gorgeous/Gorgeous, baby you're gorgeous/I just wanna drag your lifeless body to the forest/And fornicate with it but that's because I'm in love with you, cunt"		
Goblin (2011)	Transylvania	"I'm Dracula bitch/Don't got a problem smacking a bitch/Kidnapping, attacking, with axes and shit/'till I grab them throats and start smacking them shits" "Goddamn I love bitches/Especially when they only suck dick and wash dishes/And make me and the Wolf Gang sandwitches"		

| Goblin (2011) | Tron Cat | "This is the type of shit that make a Chris Brown want to kick a whore/That make songs about the wet blockers when it rains and pours/(Umbrella)"

"Game of duck-duck-duck tape with a dead goose/She running 'round this motherfucking dungeon, her legs loose/Until I accidentally get the saw to her head, oops"

"They asked me what it was, I told them fuckers it was ketchup"

"Nutty like my Chex-Mix, she bleeding from her rectum"

"Starve her 'til I carve her then I shove her in the Rover/Where I cut her like a barber with a Parkinson's disorder/Store her in a | | "I'll be the only wetback who ain't really touched the water/Cause I'll be too fucking busy tryna flirt with Jesus' daughter/(Fuck Mary)" |

		portable freezer with me to Portland"		
Goblin (2011)	Window		"And five minutes from suicide, I biked it to the park"	"You can hear it when that little fucka's reciting my lyrics, yeah I'm rebel nigga/Cheer it, dead parents everywhere, it's smelling like teen spirit"
Goblin (2011)	Yonkers	"I'll crash that fucking airplane that that faggot nigga B.o.B. is in/And stab Bruno Mars in his goddamn esophagus/And won't stop until the cops come in" "I'm Wolf, Tyler put this fucking knife in my hand I'm Wolf, Ace gon' put that fucking hole in my head/And I'm Wolf, that was me who shoved the cock in your bitch"		"Jesus called, he said he's sick of the disses I told him to quit bitching this isn't a fucking hotline/For a fucking shrink"

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BANKSY. *Untitled*, Stencil Painting, Detroit. In *BANKSY: The Man Behind the Wall*, by Will Ellsworth-Jones. London: Aurum Press, Ltd., 2012, Page 11 of insert.

Discography

This is a list of the songs cited in this article, including the songs referenced in Appendix B. Written lyrics were obtained from http://rapgenius.com/.

Odd Future. "Pigions." 2010 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "AssMilk." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.

Tyler the Creator. "Bastard." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Bitch Suck Dick." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Blow." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Fish." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "French." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Goblin." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Golden." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Inglorious." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Nightmare." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Parade." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Pigs Fly." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Radicals." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Sandwitches." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Sarah." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Session." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Seven." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "She." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. Transylvania." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Tron Cat." 2011 by XL. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "VCR." 2009 by Odd Future Records. MP3.
Tyler the Creator. "Window." 2011 by XL. MP3
Tyler the Creator. "Yonkers." 2011 by XL. MP3.

Typologies of Black Male Sensitivity in R&B and Hip Hop

Cassandra Chaney and Krista D. Mincey

Abstract

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the lyrics of 79 R&B and Hip Hop songs from 1956-2013 to identify the ways that these Black male artists expressed sensitivity. The songs were determined by Billboard Chart Research Services, and Phenomenology provided the theoretical foundation on which the themes were identified. Qualitative analysis of the lyrics revealed Black male sensitivity in R&B and Hip Hop to be based on the following four typologies: (a) Private Sensitivity; (b) Partnered Sensitivity; (c) Perceptive Sensitivity; and (d) Public Sensitivity. Private Sensitivity occurred when the Black male is alone; feels lonely; disguises or hides his tears from his romantic partner or others; and expresses a determination to not cry and/or continue crying. Partnered Sensitivity occurred when the Black male encourages and/or connects with his romantic partner, other men, and/or members of the Black community through crying. Perceptive Sensitivity was demonstrated when Black men acknowledge the tears shed by others, and shed tears themselves while being conscious of society's expectation that men suppress emotion and/or refrain from crying. Public Sensitivity was exemplified when the Black male cries publicly and verbally expresses that he does not care what others think of him. Qualitative examples are provided to support each of the aforementioned themes.

R&B and Hip Hop are two music genres that have gained global appeal in recent years. This appeal may be a reflection of a wider audience's ability to identify and relate to the lyrics used by R&B and Hip Hop artists.[1] Early R&B was used as a way for artists to express their feelings about the world, life, as well as experiences associated with the

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[1] Aloi, Daniel. 2001. "Hip-hop's global culture 'affects everyone,' pioneers say." Retrieved from: http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/April11/HipHopCover.html; Cheney, Charlise L. (2005). *Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press; George, Nelson. 1998. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking Penguin; Hoffmann, Frank W. 2006. Rhythm & Blues, Rap, and Hip Hop. Infobase Publishing, New York; Kopano, Baruti N. 2002. "Rap Music as an Extension of the Black Rhetorical Tradition: 'Keepin' it Real'." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4: 204; Mitchell, Tony. 2001. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press; Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 170-171; Price, Jr., Robert J. 2005. "Hegemony, Hope, and the Harlem Renaissance: Taking Hip Hop Culture Seriously." *Convergence* 38, no. 2: 55-64; Ralph, Michael. 2009. "Hip-Hop." *Social Text* 27, no. 3: 141-146; Osumare, H. Beat streets in the global hood: Connective marginalities of the Hip Hop Globe. 2001. *Journal of American Comparative Cultures 2*: 171-181; Ramsey, Guthrie P. 2003. *Race Music: Black Cultures from Be-Bop to Hip Hop*. California: University of California Press; Stewart, James B. 1979. "Relationships between Black Males and Females in Rhythm and Blues Music of the 1960s and 1970s." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 3, 86-96; Carl and Virgil Taylor. 2007. "Hip hop is Now: An Evolving Youth Culture." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15, no. 4, 210-213; Watkins, S. Craig. 2005. Watkins, S. Craig. 2005. *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

civil rights movement.[2] While the lyrical content associated with R&B has changed, artists still draw from personal experiences for many of their lyrics.[3]

Hip Hop also evolved as a means of expression for many social ills taking place within the Black community using rhyming and rapping lyrics in contrast to R&B lyrics which traditionally are sung.[4] While R&B is a softer music genre that lends itself to the free expression of feelings, Hip Hop is a genre more recently known for its misogynistic views toward Black women as sexual objects.[5] Even though Hip Hop is associated with negative displays of Black women, research has found that men in Hip Hop desire love as long as it fits into the parameters of male dominance and heterosexuality.[6] Research that has examined how love is expressed in Hip Hop and R&B songs have found the traditional discourse of hegemony to be particularly evident in R&B love songs.[7]

Given the global appeal of R&B and Hip-Hop,[8] few studies to date have examined how Black male sensitivity is expressed in these genres. Thus, the following question was foundational in the development of this study: *What do the discourses revealed in R&B and Hip Hop suggest about Black male sensitivity?* Before we answer this question, we began by providing a general overview of scholarship related to Black masculinity as well as how Black masculinity is expressed in different realms of society.

In particular, this scholarly overview will focus on conceptualizations of Black male sensitivity, both within and outside of R&B and Hip Hop. Next, we provide the theoretical framework on which the current study is based. Then, we discuss the methodology that was used in this study. After this, we discuss the significance of the current study before presenting what these songs revealed. Finally, we will end by discussing what the four typologies of masculinity revealed in R&B and Hip Hop songs suggest about Black male sensitivity, the expression of Black male sensitivity, as well as implications of Black male sensitivity for Black male-female interpersonal relationships and the Black community more broadly.

Review of Literature

Research in the area of masculinity and Black men has suggested that Black men define manhood through self, family, human community, and spirituality and

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[2] Stewart, James B. 2005. "Message in the Music: Political Commentary in Black Popular Music from Rhythm and Blues to Early Hip Hop." *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3: 196-225.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ralph, Ibid; Stewart, 2005, Ibid.

[5] Ralph, Ibid.

[6] Jeffries, Michael. "Can a Thug (get some) Love?: Sex, Romance, and the Definition of a Hip-Hop Thug." *Women and Language* 32, no. 2 (2009): 35-42.

[7] Eddie S. Meadows 2010. Blues, Funk, Rhythm and Blues, Soul, Hip Hop, and Rap: A Research and Information Guide Taylor & Francis.

[8] Aloi, Cheney, George, Mitchell, Nichols, Osumare, Pough, Price, Ramsey, Stewart, Taylor and Taylor, and Watkins.

humanism.[9] These ideas of manhood differ considerably from those inherent within White masculinity whereby dominance over women and avoiding displays of emotions, vulnerability, or weakness are highly regarded.[10] Since the 1970s, research has suggested that male stereotypes of stoicism and the inability of men to express emotion make it especially hard for them to show weakness or vulnerability when in the company of other men or their wives.[11]

According to Lewis,[12] a large part of men's stoicism is based on the few examples of male emotional intimacy provided them as well as the promotion of traditional male role expectations of avoiding personal vulnerability and openness, which make achieving emotional intimacy difficult for men. In more recent work on male perceptions of intimacy, Patrick and Beckenbach[13] found that male stereotypes of not expressing vulnerable emotions makes achieving intimacy with women difficult. This study also found that some elements of intimacy for men involved them having the ability to share (emotions, thoughts, words, and physical expressions) and present the worst part of themselves.[14] While societal constraints oftentimes prevent Black men from expressing masculinity in the same way as White males,[15] this does not mean that Black men do not develop alternate ways of expressing masculinity.

[9] Chaney, Cassandra. 2009a. "Boys to Men: How Perceptions of Manhood Influence the Romantic Partnerships of Black Men." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 2: 110-122; Hammond, Wizdom Powell and Jacqueline S. Mattis. 2005. "Being a Man About It: Manhood Meaning Among African American Men." *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 6(2), 114-126; Hunter, Andrea G. and James Earl Davis. 1992. "An Exploration of Afro-American Men's Conceptualization of Manhood." *Gender & Society* 6, no. 3: 464-479.

[10] Connell, Robert W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Los Angeles: University of California Press; Connell, Robert W. 2002. *Gender*. Malden, MA: Polity Press; Doyle, James A. and Michele Antoinette Paludi. 1991. *Sex and Gender: The Human Experience*. Dubuque, IA; Brown, Timothy J. "I Am Who I Am": Black Masculinity and the Interpretation of Individualism in the Film *Barbershop*. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* Vol. 9, Iss. 1, 2008, pp. 46-61; McClure, Stephanie M. 2006. "Improvising Masculinity: African American Fraternity Membership in the Construction of a Black Masculinity." *Journal of African American Studies* 10, no. 1: 57-73; Wallace, Danielle M. 2007. "It's a M-A-N thing:" Black Male Gender Role Socialization and the Performance of Masculinity in Love Relationships." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no. 7: 11-22; White, Joseph L. and James H. Cones. 1999. *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.

[11] Lewis, Robert A. 1978. "Emotional Intimacy among Men." *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no. 1: 108-121.

[12] Lewis, Ibid.

[13] Patrick, Shawn and John Beckenbach. 2009. "Male Perceptions of Intimacy: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of Men's Studies* 17, no. 1: 47-56.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Hughey, Matthew W. 2012. "Black Guys and White Guise: The Discursive Construction of White Masculinity." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41, no. 1: 95-124; Jamison, DeReef F. 2006. "The Relationship between African Self-Consciousness, Cultural Misorientation, Hypermasculinity, and Rap Music Preference." *Journal of African American Studies* 9, no. 4: 45-60.

Black Masculinity. Almost twenty years ago, Franklin[16] suggested that Black men develop masculinity through the interaction of three main groups, namely their primary group, their peer group, and mainstream society. Essentially, this scholar asserted that direct or indirect influence from either of these groups could alter the type of masculinity that Black men display. Interestingly, Franklin's assertion has been supported by more recent work in which Black fraternities foster the public masculinities of Black men by helping them develop an individual, group, and collective identity.[17]

Some studies have found a relationship between Black masculinity and sexuality. In a qualitative study by Bowleg et al. (2011)[18] regarding the ideologies of masculinity and HIV risk in Black men 19-51, participants expressed a belief that Black men should have sex with multiple women. These findings were similar to those by Harris, Palmer, and Struve (2011)[19] in which the expression of Black masculinity on a college campus were associated with "engaging in sexist and constrained relationships with women," or the ability to pursue sexual relationships with many different women.[20] In addition, this study also found that Black college men demonstrated masculinity by being unemotional and handling difficult situations in a calm manner.[21] Essentially, these findings suggested that Black masculinity was associated with sexuality and controlled emotionality under trial.

The Media and Black Masculinity**.** To date, most research on masculinity and Black men has centered on masculinity construction and particularly on how masculinity is defined and displayed in different areas such as pop culture. In *Appropriating Blackness*, Johnson stated in the '60s real blackness was associated with wearing African clothing while western clothing was associated with Whiteness and upward mobility.[22] In Henry's[23] review of *Shaft*, he suggested movies in the media continue to depict a narrow view of Black masculinity wherein Black men are tough

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[16] Franklin, Clyde W. 1994. "Men's studies, the men's movement, and the study of Black masculinities: Further demystification of masculinities in America." In Richard G. Majors and Jacob U. Gordon (Eds.), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future* (3-19). Chicago: Nelson-Hall, Inc.

[17] Raymon Demar Jenkins. Black Fraternal Organizations: Understanding the Development of Hegemonic Masculinity and Sexuality, 2012.

[18] Bowleg, Lisa, Michelle Teti, Jenne S. Massie, Aditi Patel, David J. Malebranche, and Jeanne M. Tschann. 2011. "What does it take to be a man? What is a real man?': Ideologies of masculinity and HIV sexual risk among Black heterosexual men." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 13, no. 5: 545-559.

[19] Harris III, Frank, Robert T. Palmer, and Laura E. Struve. 2011. "'Cool Posing' "on Campus: A Qualitative Study of Masculinities and Gender Expression among Black Men at a Private Research Institution." *Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 1: 47-62.

[20] Ibid, p. 54.

[21] Ibid.

[22] E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity. 2003.

[23] Henry, Matthew, *He Is a "Bad Mother*$%@!#": "Shaft" and Contemporary Black Masculinity.* African American Review, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 119-126.

and thugs. This assessment is similar to Brown[24] who stated popular culture has consistently provided negative images of Black masculinity and the continual display of these images has perpetuated a negative Black masculinity in which Black male sensitivity is non-existent. In a recent study, Ford[25] found that societal views of Black men as a "thug," which were based on frequent portrayals in music videos, caused some Black men to display masculine characteristics that were consistent with society's depictions of them.

Other scholars have found a relationship between the media's representation of Black masculinity and the form of Black masculinity actually demonstrated by Black men. Jamison (2006)[26] found that the type of rap music Black males listened to was found to represent their identification with White culture. Additionally, he concluded that one's cultural orientation (identifying with Black or White culture) and their rap music preference also influence how Black males perceive masculinity. In general, scholars that have examined the interpretation of music lyrics, Black men, and Black masculinity have primarily focused on the influence of Rap and Hip Hop Rap on different segments of the population as well as its portrayal of women and violence.[27]

Herd[28] argued that while an increase in violent rap lyrics in the late '80s to early '90s may have been a reflection of the level of violence in society at the time; the continuation of violent rap lyrics in the late '90s may have been driven by the music industry's desire to increase record sales. The idea that rap lyrics may be produced as a way to sell records is of great importance when one considers the influence that rap has on youth who may be easily influenced by the images of Black masculinity portrayed in this music genre.[29] In her examination of the portrayal of women in music videos, Emerson[30] found great complexity in how Black women were portrayed in these videos. In particular, while some videos portrayed Black women as over sexualized and the object of male desire, other videos, mainly those by female artists, portrayed Black

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[24] Tinothy J. Brown, "I Am Who I Am": Black Masculinity and the Interpretation of Individualism in the Film *Barbershop*. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* Vol. 9, Iss. 1, 2008, pp. 46-61.

[25] Ford, Kristie A. 2011. "Doing Fake Masculinity, Being Real Men: Present and Future Constructions of Self among Black College Men." *Symbolic Interaction* 34, no. 1: 38-62.

[26] Jamison, DeReef F. 2006. "The Relationship between African Self-Consciousness, Cultural Misorientation, Hypermasculinity, and Rap Music Preference." *Journal of African American Studies* 9, no. 4: 45-60.

[27] Emerson, Rana, A. 2002. "Where my Girls at?" Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos." *Gender & Society* 16, no.1: 115-135; Herd, Denise. 2009. "Changing Images of Violence in Rap Music Lyrics: 1979–1997." *Journal of Public Health Policy* 30, no. 4: 395-406; Oware, Matthew. 2011a. "Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music." *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 1: 22-39; Oware, Matthew. 2011b. "Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy: Black Male Rap Artists' Views of Fatherhood and the Family." *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 3: 327-351; Taylor, Carl and Virgil Taylor. 2007. "Hip hop is Now: An Evolving Youth Culture." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15, no. 4, 210-213.

[28] Herd, Ibid.

[29] Taylor, 2007, Ibid.

[30] Emerson, Ibid.

women as simultaneously independent and establishing a sense of sisterhood between themselves and other Black women.[31]

While the aforementioned studies speak to the need for Black men to demonstrate forms of masculinity that are consistent with the dominant white culture, Black men are capable of publicly expressing emotional vulnerability. Tyree[32] showed another side of emotional vulnerability in Black rappers by examining how mothers and baby mamas were portrayed in rap lyrics. Through her examination of Rap lyrics, Tyree found that Black rappers can simultaneously openly express love and adoration for their mothers while verbally disrespecting and degrading their baby mamas. This difference in findings could mean that if a Black male has positive feelings toward his baby mama he may be more inclined to express emotional sensitivity toward her. In her qualitative study regarding the commitment and intimacy demonstrated by the protagonists in R. Kelly's melodrama "Trapped in the Closet," Chaney[33] found that even when infidelity had occurred, the male protagonists publicly and privately expressed sensitive love expressions through tears. Thus, the findings from this study suggest that some Black men may find it easier to cry publicly if the situation in which they find themselves (e.g., infidelity, death) make it virtually impossible for them to mask their true emotions.

To further support the notion that Black men are capable of publicly expressing emotional vulnerability, Oware[34] examined rap lyrics that specifically discussed friendship between men. Although it is generally assumed that rappers are emotionally distant, tough, and unable to express emotion, this scholar highlighted Black rappers' ability to demonstrate emotional vulnerability and expressiveness. For example, Oware[35] noted that although the Hip Hop artist Kanye West stated: "You can still love your man and be manly dog" in his song "Family Business," this does not necessarily mean that men who show affection for other men are homosexual, or are not true men. In light of these findings, other scholars have examined the masculinities demonstrated by some particular Black musical artists.

Although the openly gay, Black rapper Caushun embraces competing masculinities, specifically "thug" masculinity and "queen" femininity, Means and Cobb[36] argued that the music and music videos of this artist do not provide a clear understanding into the ways that these dual masculinities are expressed. Essentially, by situating himself within a society and Hip-Hop culture that is primarily hyper-

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Tyree, Tia C. M. "Lovin' Momma and Hatin' on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representations in Songs about Rappers' Mothers and Baby Mamas." *Women & Language* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 50-58.

[33] Chaney, Cassandra. 2009b. "Trapped in the Closet: Understanding Contemporary Relationships in the African-American Hip Hop Community." *Women and Language* 32, no. 2: 59-67.

[34] Oware, 2011a. Ibid.

[35] Ibid p. 28.

[36] Means, Robin R., and Jasmine Cobb. 2007. "No Way of Seeing: Mainstreaming and Selling the Gaze of Homo-Thug Hip Hop." *Popular Communication*: *The International Journal of Media and Culture* 5, no. 2, 89-108.

masculine, violent, and homophobic, Caushun further privatized how he authentically expresses masculinity and femininity.[37] The potentially problematic nature of presenting various forms of Black masculinity has been identified by other scholars as well. For example, Warwick's[38] recent work revealed how the Public Sensitivity presented by the late pop-icon Michael Jackson during childhood was generally seen as less appealing and problematic during his adult life. Therefore, in light of recent scholarship that has explored the attitudes of members of the Black community toward gay men,[39] it is important that scholars focus on the empowering and encouraging messages that are provided by Black males in rap music.

Although the aforementioned studies focused on the public or private masculinities expressed by Black men, we did locate one study that presented the intersectional masculinities that motivated two Black men to establish two separate pro-feminist men's organizations. Essentially, by "becoming aware" of an injustice to a woman that generated negative emotions, and "becoming active" in the pro-feminist men's movement, these men were able to transfer negative emotions into positive ones and create a form of Black masculinity that made it possible for them to be sensitive to the pain of others and pro-active catalysts to eradicate this pain. Essentially, this study highlighted how the stigmatization of Black men's emotions (that men suppress emotions) exacerbate differences in emotion norms between themselves and women and obscured the ways that men experience and demonstrate sensitivity in their lives.[40] Since masculinity is a social construction,[41] for the purpose of this study Black male sensitivity will be defined as the words that Black males use to express emotional sensitivity and/or emotional connectedness to others.

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology. This theoretical framework recognizes that reality is based on people's *perception* of reality. Phenomenologists, or "interpretivists" [42] study human behavior in terms of how people define their world based on what they say and do, and are strongly committed to understanding how individuals perceive their world, from the "actor's" point of view. In their book *Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black*

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Warwick, Jacqueline. 2012. " 'You Can't Win, Child, but You Can't Get Out of the Game': Michael Jackson's Transition from Child Star to Superstar." *Popular Music & Society* 35, no. 2: 241-259.

[39] Lemelle, Anthony J., and Juan Battle. 2004. "Black Masculinity Matters in Attitudes toward Gay Males**."** 2004. *Journal of Homosexuality* 47, no. 1: 39-51.

[40] White, Aaronette M., and Tal Peretz. 2010. "Emotions and Redefining Black Masculinity." *Men & Masculinities* 12, no. 4: 403-424.

[41] Jackson, R. L., & Dangerfield, C. (2004). "Defining Black Masculinity as Culturalproperty: Toward an Identity Negotiation Paradigm." In R. L. Jackson (Ed.), *African American communication and identities: Essential readings* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

[42] Denzin, Norman K., & Lincoln, Yvonne S. (1998). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation, Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore[43] skillfully used such an approach. In order to elicit the views of the producers and consumers of Hip Hop, these scholars used narratives to validate the experiences of multiple "actors": Black male rappers, Black women who worked in strip clubs (and are recruited to star in music videos), Black women who worked as video models, Black gay men, Black female rappers, and young impressible Black women who view Hip Hop videos. A phenomenological approach recognizes that what constitutes "reality" for one "actor" may not hold the same salience for another "actor."

Phenomenology's use of everyday knowledge,[44] "practical reasoning,[45]" language and subjectivity will be particularly useful in this study. Since the experiences of individuals differ in meaning and importance, the principle of subjectivity recognize that two individuals may not share the same views or experiences regarding sensitivity, or may cry for different reasons.[46] In particular, this study will focus on the thematic content of song lyrics as well as how Black men discuss and conceptualize masculinity, sexuality, and sensitivity vis-à-vis lyrical talk. Essentially, this approach acknowledges that Black men in R&B and Hip Hop cry for different reasons, the societal events that make crying more (or less) acceptable, the changes that have occurred in Black masculinity, sexuality, and sensitivity over time, as well as the implications of Black men's sensitive discourses for Black women and the Black community, more broadly.

Significance of the Current Study

There are three reasons why this study is important. First and foremost, this study gives a voice to Black men that represent the genres of R&B and Hip Hop. In *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*, Alford A. Young[47] wrote: "Thus, it is important to what people articulate as their own understanding of how social processes work and how they as individuals might navigate the complex social terrain, rather than simply looking at their actions." Thus, by focusing on the lyrical talk of Black men in Hip Hop and R&B, this paper will highlight how Black men demonstrate masculinity as well as how they express sensitivity.

Second, this study contributes to the growing scholarship related to Black masculinity[48] and reveals the nuanced ways in which Black males express sensitivity.

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[43] Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore. *Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation*, 2006.

[44] Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

[45] Pollner, Melvin. 1987. *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[46] Shamir, Milette. 2002. *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* New York: Columbia University Press.

[47] Young, Alford A. 2004. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 10.

[48] Squires, Catherine R., Laura P. Kohn-Wood, Tabbye Chavous, and Prudence L. Carter. 2006. "Evaluating Agency and Responsibility in Gendered Violence: African American Youth Talk about

Last, this study's focus on the expression of Black male vulnerability in the form of emotional expression (e.g., tears) in Hip Hop and R&B uncovers an aspect of Black male sensitivity that has generally been minimized or ignored by most people in society. Ultimately, by focusing on tears, our purpose is not to advance the view that Black male sensitivity is feminine, or for that matter anti-feminine, but rather to highlight the nuanced ways in which Black male sensitivity is expressed in various contexts. Thus, this study reveals the conditions that facilitate and impede Black men expressing sensitivity in the form of tears.

Method

This study used a qualitative approach that examined contextual themes present in song lyrics. In order to determine the songs that were chosen, several steps were taken. First, all songs had to be sung by Black men and had to have the word "cry," "crying," "tears," or "teardrops" in the song title and/or lyrics. Sole singers and groups were included in the analysis if the song's title and/or lyrics met the aforementioned criteria. In addition, songs in which the male singer had a featured female singer were included as her lyrics supplemented those of the Black male. This involved analyzing the song titles of over 4,000 songs between the years 1956-2013 from Billboard Chart Research Services. Second, the complete lyrics of all songs were then analyzed, which were obtained from the following websites: http://www.aaalyrics.com/, http://www.lyrics-now.com/, http://www.metrolyrics.com, http://www.sing365.com/index.html and http://www.songs-lyrics.net/. [The song title, singer or singers, year released, the individual or individuals that composed the song and the genre are provided in Appendix A].

Second, after the songs were identified by the first author, the next part of the study involved: (1) identifying whether the song was provided by a solo artist or a group; (2) determining the year that the song was released; (3) providing the individual or individuals that composed the song; (4) identifying the music genre; (5) providing direct quotes from the songs that directly supported Black male sensitivity; (6) providing a rationale regarding why the quotes selected directly supported Black sensitivity; and (7) running statistical analyses on the aforementioned.

The data were entered into a Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and frequencies revealed 57 songs (72%) were provided by a sole-artist, 18 songs (23%) were provided by an all-male singing group, and 4 songs (5%) were provided by the artist and a featured singer. In addition, 19 songs (24%) were written by the artist, 17 songs (22%) were written by the artist and another individual or individuals, and 43 songs (54%) were written by an individual or individuals other than the artist. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of songs (68) were provided by R&B artists

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Violence and Hip Hop." *Sex Roles* 55, 725-737; White, Cameron and Susan McCormack. 2006." The Message in the Music: Popular culture and Teaching in Social Studies." *Social Studies* 97, no. 3, 122-127.

(86%), ten songs (12%) were provided by Hip Hop artists, and one song (2%) was provided by an artist that represented both genres. This systematic approach allowed us to respond to the questions of interest and established the validity and reliability of the research.[49]

Third, all songs were content analyzed using an open-coding process.[50] Although the research questions were determined at the beginning of the study, in keeping with normal open-coding techniques, no a priori categories were imposed on the narrative data. Instead, themes were identified from the lyrics. In order to concentrate on the primary themes that would serve as the focus of the current study, words and phrases were the units of analysis. This involved a *word by word* and *line by line* examination of the complete lyrics of all songs, keeping track of any emerging themes that were present, and using those themes to answer the question of scholarly interest.

Essentially, this method allowed the first author to determine the patterns within and between songs as well as identify the sensitivity typologies that were described in the songs. In general, 4-8 phrases comprised each theme. For example, the phrases "I cry the tears of a clown when no one's around," "Lonely teardrops," "Sometimes I cry when I'm all alone," and "Don't' want you to see me cry," were all regarded as concrete descriptors of Private Sensitivity, or the Black male's need to disguise or hide his tears from others. Through this process, the first author determined the four major categories related to Black male sensitivity, and confirmed the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings by providing the lyrics of all songs to the second author and having her go through the aforementioned process.

To further increase the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of these categories and subcategories, the first author created a Word file that included the song title, author, and complete lyrics of the 79 songs that were included in the study. The second author was instructed to become familiar with the masculine typologies identified by the first author, to thoroughly read the lyrics of all songs, and indicate in a separate column the typology or typologies of sensitivity identified in all songs. After a 92% coding reliability rate was established between the first and second author, it was determined that a working coding system had been established, and thus minimized the likelihood that personal biases from the authors informed the outcomes presented herein.

Results

Typologies of Sensitivity

An analysis of 79 R&B and Hip Hop lyrics revealed Black men express sensitivity in one of four ways. Although these themes are not mutually exclusive, in general,

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[49] King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

[50] Strauss, Anselm and Juliet M. Corbin 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures, and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Black men demonstrate sensitivity based on the following topologies: (a) Private Sensitivity; (b) Partnered Sensitivity; (c) Perceptive Sensitivity; and (d) Public Sensitivity. *Private Sensitivity* occurred when the Black male was alone; felt lonely; disguised or hid his tears from his romantic partner or others; and expressed a determination to not cry and/or continue crying. *Partnered Sensitivity* occurred when the Black male encouraged and/or connected with his romantic partner, other men, and/or members of the Black community through crying. *Perceptive Sensitivity* was demonstrated when Black men acknowledged the tears shed by others, and shed tears themselves while being conscious of society's expectation that men suppress emotion and/or refrain from crying. *Public Sensitivity* was exemplified when the Black male cried publicly and verbally expressed that he does not care what others think of him.

Interestingly, the artist Mario's song "The Hardest Moment" (2009) is the first where a Black man proudly states that he is "not afraid to cry." Of the four typologies provided, Private Sensitivity was demonstrated in 44 songs (56%), Partnered Sensitivity was demonstrated in 11 songs (14%), Perceptive Sensitivity was demonstrated in 12 songs (15%), Public Sensitivity was demonstrated in 11 songs (14%); and one song (1%) represented the partnered, perceptive, and Public Sensitivity theme. [Typology of Sensitivity, Description of Sensitivity, Songs and Singers that Demonstrate the Typology of Sensitivity are presented in Appendix B].

Discussion

This study of 79 R&B and Hip Hop songs revealed four Black male sensitivity typologies related to how Black men demonstrate and express sensitive emotions through tears. Since the experiences of Black men within and between these genres are not the same, Phenomenology was used to examine the lyrical realities expressed by Black men in Hip Hop and R&B.[51] While a discussion of the implications of the four Black male sensitivity typologies will soon follow, the limitations of the current study must be noted.

For one, our focus on Black male artists in R&B and Hip Hop suggests the findings in this study cannot be generalized to Black male artists who represent other music genres (i.e., Country, Pop, Blues, or Alternative), or to men of various races in other music genres, more broadly. Furthermore, that the overwhelming majority of the songs were representative of the R&B genre further limits the generalizability of our findings. An additional limitation of the study was its focus on the lyrical content and emotional expression that was embodied in one song by a single artist. In other words,

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[51] Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge; Essed, Philomena and David Theo Goldberg. 2002. *Race Critical Theories*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing; Paradigm Smalls, Shanté. " 'The Rain Comes Down' ": Jean Grae and Hip Hop Heteronormativity." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 1 (January 2011): 86-95.

our analysis of these 79 R&B and Hip Hop songs did not examine how Black male sensitivity in the form of tears may have changed or remained static for a particular Black artist over time. To make this point more clear, an artists' sensitivity, or his willingness and/or ability to cry, may have increased, remained the same, or diminished over time.

In spite of these limitations, however, this study highlights the voices (realities) of Black men in general,[52] contributes to the growing scholarship related to Black male sensitivity[53] and unearth the conditions that facilitate and impede Black men in society from expressing sensitivity in the form of tears.[54] We will now turn attention to the four sensitivity typologies revealed in the lyrics of the 79 R&B and Hip Hop songs featured in this study.

Theme 1: Private Sensitivity

In support of Stewart's[55] earlier findings, the Private Sensitivity theme validates the current and emerging ways that Black men in society express their emotional vulnerability. Essentially, this theme recognizes that most Black men find it hard to cry, and may actually prefer to do so alone.[56] The idea of being unable to cry is evident in songs like "*Lonely Tear Drops*" by Jackie Wilson (1958) in which the artist shares that his pillow "never dries" because of his tears, "*Song Cry*" by Jay-Z (2002) in which he is forced to make the "song cry" because he finds it impossible to cry, and "*Sometimes I Cry*" by Eric Benet (2010) where the singer clearly states "Sometimes I cry babe when I'm all alone." Essentially, the Private Sensitivity theme suggests three things.

For one, the proliferation of songs related to the loss experienced by a man whose partner ended the romantic relationship suggests that although Black men who are not artists may outwardly appear unaffected by this loss, the end of a romantic relationship affects him in deep, personal, and profound ways. This idea was seen in Chaney's[57] review of R. Kelly's melodrama, "Trapped in the Closet" where the male protagonist became very emotional after learning of his wife's infidelity. Also, solitary moments are valuable opportunities for Black men in general to get in touch with their sensitive emotions and express these through tears. Additionally, this theme suggests that solitary moments are the only or one of the few times that some Black men in society can express their true feelings. Thus, women who are in romantic relationships with Black men need to realize that there are times when Black men need to grieve in

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[52] Young, 2004, Ibid.

[53] Squires, Catherine R., Laura P. Kohn-Wood, Tabbye Chavous, and Prudence L. Carter. 2006. "Evaluating Agency and Responsibility in Gendered Violence: African American Youth Talk about Violence and Hip Hop." *Sex Roles* 55, 725-737; White, Cameron and Susan McCormack. 2006." The Message in the Music: Popular culture and Teaching in Social Studies." *Social Studies* 97, no. 3, 122-127.

[54] Chaney, 2009b, Ibid.

[55] Stewart, 1979.

[56] McClure, Stephanie M. 2006. "Improvising Masculinity: African American Fraternity Membership in the Construction of a Black Masculinity." *Journal of African American Studies* 10, no. 1: 57-73; Wallace, Danielle M. 2007. "It's a M-A-N thing:" Black Male Gender Role Socialization and the Performance of Masculinity in Love Relationships." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no. 7: 11-22.

[57] Chaney, 2009b, Ibid.

private. While a part of Black men's need for solitude may be linked to their personality, family background, or past romantic experiences, other men may have been socialized to believe that "real men" do not show emotional vulnerability to anyone as doing so would suggest they are weak and/or incapable of controlling their emotions.[58] Therefore, it is important that Black women not pressure or threaten the men in their lives to share emotions that they find difficult to share or are not ready or willing to share at that moment. While we are careful to not extend what has been presented in the lyrical data to the experience of Black men in general, the lyrics in these songs speak to the need for individuals who are part of the lives of Black men to respect their private space. In addition, these lyrics also hint that Black male artists may create private spaces which would allow them to grieve, when necessary. Although societal norms dictate that men should be emotionally stoic, individuals in the community can create "safe spaces" for Black men to personally and collectively express their grief, and thus grow emotionally closer to those around him in deeper and more profound ways.

Theme 2: Partnered Sensitivity

Consistent with the findings in earlier studies,[59] our study showed that with Partnered Sensitivity, Black men within society connect with their partner, other men, and/or members of the Black community through crying, yet may still feel uncomfortable expressing emotion.[60] Essentially, while Black men may feel that it is permissible to show emotional vulnerability in certain situations, they may still shun the idea of a Black man crying around people he knows on a regular basis.[61]

The feeling that crying is warranted in certain situations but may still be uncomfortable is seen in two songs dealing with crying that include a female artist "I Cry" by the artist Ja Rule (featuring Lil Mo) (2001) whose lyrics say "I'm a man and we cry. We can cry, we can cry, we can cry together" and "Cry" by LL Cool J (featuring Lil Mo) (2008). In the song "I Cry" by Ja Rule, he expresses confidence in his masculinity ("I'm a man") while encouraging him and his partner to deal with past hurt and pain by crying together. In a similar vein, in the song "Cry" by LL Cool J, this artist views his wedding as the emotionally appropriate site to connect with his partner through crying as he and his bride start life together as a married couple.

Women who are in relationships with Black men should realize that while these men may not cry daily, there may be times when these men feel crying is appropriate and emotional vulnerability is warranted. As was evidenced in the songs "Ain't That Peculiar" by Marvin Gaye, "Standing In The Shadows of Love" by The Four Tops, "Starting All Over Again" by Johnnie Taylor, "Cry Together" by The O'Jays, "Don't Say Goodbye" by Tevin Campbell, "Me & My Bitch" by The Notorious B.I.G., "Cry" by Michael Jackson, "Down the Aisle" by LL Cool J (featuring 112), and "World Cry" by Lloyd (featuring R. Kelly, Keri Hilson, & K'naan), Black men in society may develop greater intimacy, understanding, trust, and commitment to his romantic partner and

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[58] Harris et al, 2011.
[59] Chaney 2009b, White and Perez 2010.
[60] White and Perez 2010.
[61] Chaney 2009b,

members of the community through crying. Therefore, Black men that feel uncomfortable crying in front of those with whom he frequently interacts may actually be more inclined to cry in the company of his female partner.

Communally, those in the company of Black men must understand that while these men may be skilled at publicly mastering the "cool pose,"[62] this does not mean that these men are incapable or unwilling to express emotion. To support this, "Cry" by the artist Michael Jackson and "World Cry" by Lloyd specifically speak to the desire of Black men to connect with those who are suffering in the world by crying with them. Additionally, by being a "shoulder" to cry on, those in the lives of Black men can validate their sensitivity, and thus cause these men to feel more comfortable with expressing emotional vulnerability in the form of tears to their romantic partners.

Theme 3: Perceptive Sensitivity

Interestingly, similar to Partnered Sensitivity, Perceptive Sensitivity was found in approximately the same number of songs. In regard to Black male sensitivity, the findings in this study support Collins's[63] work in that Black male artists in Hip Hop and R&B have the ability to be aware of and acknowledge the emotional hurt and pain of others. For example, in the song "What's Going On," (1971) the artist Marvin Gaye demonstrates his sensitivity to the pain felt by mothers who lost their sons in the Vietnam War when he sings, "there's too many of you crying." Similarly, in the song "Don't Want You To See Me Cry," (2005) Hip Hop artist Lil Wayne not only feels empathy for fellow New Orleans residents who lost all of their material possessions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina but gives way to tears himself. Although Lil Wayne cries, he still expresses the need to not have anyone "see him cry." Thus, this artist's words may reflect the idea that although Black men in society may cry, they are still uncomfortable with publicly expressing emotion because they feel that strong men should suppress their feelings.[64]

Essentially, Black men may want to express their emotional vulnerability but may be held captive to society's ideal that men should not express sensitive emotions through crying.[65] This idea is seen in "Tears" by the group Force MD's (1984) and "Cry No More" by Chris Brown (2009) where Brown sings "Who says a man is supposed to cry. Wish I could crawl under a rock somewhere and just die."

Again, while we cannot extend what has been presented in the lyrical data, women that are romantically involved with Black men need to understand that the man in their lives may have a strong need to express emotions but may be unsure about the reaction of his partner and others around him, a need that is especially salient in a

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[62] Majors, Richard and Janet Mancini Billson. 1993. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[63] Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought (2nd ed.).* New York: Routledge; Collins, Patricia Hill. 2006. "Examining Racial Identity and Masculinity as Correlates of Self-Esteem and Psychological Distress in Black Men." *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development* 34, no. 2: 94-104.

[64] Harris III, Frank, Robert T. Palmer, and Laura E. Struve. 2011. "'Cool Posing' "on Campus: A Qualitative Study of Masculinities and Gender Expression among Black Men at a Private Research Institution." *Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 1: 47-62.

[65] Connell, 2002; White and Cones, 1999.

society that says men should not be emotional. Women can actively combat this idea by assuring the man in their lives that crying is not only healthy and acceptable but that they will not think that he is less than a man if he expresses his emotions. In a community setting, the lyrics in these songs suggest that people intimately involved with Black men make it permissible for these men to express their emotions. This can be done by letting these men know that the expression of emotional vulnerability is natural for men and does not make them less of a man.

Theme 4: Public Sensitivity

In a slight departure from what was found in Stewart's[66] 1975 study, the findings in our study, which were unexpected, support the idea that a Black man can be emotionally secure enough to verbally express that he does not care how people perceive him if and when he cries in public. Based on the lyrics related to this theme, Black men cry publicly when a romantic relationship ends ("I'm Gonna Cry (Cry Baby)" by Wilson Pickett, 1964; "Ohh Baby Baby" by Smokey Robinson, 1965; "Stay In My Corner" by The Dells, 1968; "Sideshow" by Blue Magic, 1974; "Done Crying" by Lyfe Jennings, 2010) when he is in love ("I'm in Love" by Wilson Pickett, 1968), and when he grieves the premature death of his peers ("So Many Tears" by Tupac Shakur, 1995, and "When Thugs Cry" by Tupac Shakur,2001). Thus, in each of these contexts, the Black male artists demonstrate that they are not paralyzed by society's view that men should not show emotion to be considered a man.[67]

Interestingly, the "thug" masculinity exemplified by the openly gay Black rapper Caushun in the scholarship of Means and Cobb[68] was later reiterated by the late heterosexual Hip Hop artist Tupac Shakur's acknowledgement that even "thugs" cry. Thus, in the song "When Thugs Cry," Shakur bravely announces to the Black community and the world that "thugs" or Black men who are seemingly dangerous, violent, and emotionless, publicly cry. Interestingly, Lyfe Jennings and Mario, who both represent the R&B genre, extend Shakur's pain by also publicly expressing emotion and not apologizing for doing so in front of others.

In *Cry*, Lyfe Jennings proudly states, "But over the years I've learned to understand that I don't really give a damn what nobody say, I'm a man and we cry." Likewise, in "The Hardest Moment," Mario (2009) unashamedly admits, "And I'm crying baby I don't care who's watching baby." Thus, women who are in relationships with Black men who exhibit this type of masculinity may find it easier to develop intimacy with these men as they do not have to frequently urge them to express their innermost feelings. Therefore, due to the amount of support that they receive, these men may become increasingly more comfortable expressing their emotions and may be less likely than other men to feel that they can only shed tears privately.

When Black men in society publicly express sensitivity in the form of tears, they can be catalysts of healing for the Black community. The song "Cry" by Lyfe Jennings illustrates this point. The artist speaks to the healing power of tears when he sings, "See

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[66] Stewart, 1975.
[67] Connell, 1992, 2005.
[68] Means and Cobb, 2007.

crying is like taking your soul to the Laundromat." Another song spoke to the healing power of communal crying and Black men being instrumental in this process.

In "Cry Out," 'Lil Wayne (2008) says, "I hope you ain't too tired to cry, and I hope you know that you ain't never too live to die" and then "gets a lump in his throat" when he ponders the pain experienced by inner-city Blacks related to police brutality ("The five o killed naughty good boy dead / Man you woulda thought they killed corn bread / Shot 'em up face down on the lawn / Not to mention with his handcuffs on / Not to mention they had plain clothes on"), incarceration and death ("The jail house and the morgue is too fuckin' crowded") and the unwillingness of his biological father to be a part of his life and the closeness that he establishes with his mother ("And all I no 'bout my real pops is that he had money / No bank account, that brown paper bag money / Yea he might hit me off with a little brag money / But the nigga still wouldn't be a dad for me / But look how I turned out I hope he glad for me / But that's why when I see him I act mad funny / Cause he's a joke to me / Don't message, don't call, don't talk to me / It's just me and my mama how it's supposed to be"). If more Black men in society openly express their emotions, current and future generations of Black men may understand that emotions are natural, their experiences are similar, and crying publicly does not make them less of a man.

Directions for Future Research

There are six ways that future scholars can build upon the findings presented in this study. For one, the four sensitivity typologies revealed in this study beg future scholars to continue to delve into the multi-contextual realities that increase the likelihood that Black male sensitivity will be expressed in private, partnered, perceptive, and public ways. Simply put, through the use of an ecological perspective, future scholars can more easily pinpoint the individual, familial, neighborhood, and societal factors that facilitate and/or discourage sensitivity in Black men in the form of tears.

Second, future scholars can examine the similarities and differences between the sensitivity expressed by Black male and Black female artists in the R&B and Hip Hop genres. Although it is commonly assumed that Black men and women in Hip Hop are at odds, or that Black women must embody a masculinized identity to successfully compete in a genre dominated and controlled by men, such an exercise would reveal the similar and divergent ways that Black male and female artists express emotional vulnerability. In short, a study such as this one would reveal the shared ways that Black men and women in society express pain, disappointment, and hurt.

Third, increasing public attention surrounding Caushun, the openly gay Black male artist who bills himself as "The Black Gay Rapper" might urge scholars to examine what if any distinctions exist regarding how emotional sensitivity is expressed within and between Black men in society who identify as heterosexual or gay. Although the lyrics in the present study primarily focused on the demise or dissolution of romantic

relationships between men and women, a growing body of scholarship has focused on the relationship between masculinity, homosexuality, and Hip Hop.[69]

Fourth, future scholars can specifically examine the perspectives of those who listen to the sensitivity expressions provided by Black male artists. In particular, researchers would focus on how listeners feel about that Black artist, and Black male sensitivity, more broadly. Essentially, scholars would be interested in how listeners feel about Black male artists who are known for their sensitivity, the level of respect that they have for Black artists who do and do not admit that they cry, as well as the circumstances that make it permissible for Black men in society to cry.

Fifth, future scholars can examine the extent to which Black artists in the R&B and Hip Hop genres are able to lyrically express themselves under the confines of a larger music industry. In other words, a study of this nature would be interested in whether record executives choose the sensitive songs that will be sung by their artists, whether artists make these decisions, or whether the decision of what sensitive songs are sung is a shared one by the music executives and the artist. Scholarship related to this recommendation would reveal whether Black male sensitivity is driven by the artist or the label to which they are signed. Lastly, future scholars should specifically examine how Black women in the R&B and Hip Hop genres express Black sensitivity via emotional vulnerability. Such a comparison would unearth the nuanced ways in which Black femininity is expressed within a dominant culture that limits the opportunities of Black men, discourages same-sex love between women, and encourages women to be subservient to men.

Conclusion

As Black male artists in R&B and Hip Hop continue to reveal how they express sensitivity in private, partnered, perceptive, and public ways through song, it is imperative that the world listen. For far too long, Black men in society have been expected to adhere to norms associated with White masculinity, yet they have courageously and unapologetically expressed their most vulnerable feelings in song. In support of previous studies in which Black men create an alternate masculinity that is not constrained by white hegemonic norms,[70] the Black male artists in Hip Hop and R&B featured in this study revealed the complexities in which Black male artists in these music genres express sensitivity.

Although there are times when Black men may need to grieve in solitude (Private Sensitivity), they have the ability to establish intimacy through crying with others (Partnered Sensitivity), demonstrate awareness of the hurt, pain, and disappointment of those around them (Perceptive Sensitivity), and courageously and publicly show emotion in the form of tears (Public Sensitivity). Thus, the 79 songs representative of the R&B and Hip Hop genres are a solid testament to the ways that Black men singly and collectively express sensitivity over a 57-year period.

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[69] Hill 2009; Means and Cobb 2007; Shimeles 2010.

[70] Chaney 2009b; Hughley 2012; Jamison, 2006; Means and Cobb 2007; White and Peretz 2010.

As Black women, we look with anticipation to the ways that Black men in these genres and others express sensitivity in the form of tears. In addition, we hope that this study will motivate future scholars to use theoretical approaches that continue to honor the lyrical talk of Black men[71] and results in the development of new conceptual frameworks related to the various ways that Black men demonstrate sensitivity. Given the global appeal of R&B and Hip Hop,[72] it is time for scholars to give attention to a side of Black men that has been ignored for far too long, namely their emotionally vulnerable and sensitive side that allows them to cry.

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[71] Hopkins and Moore 2006; Shamir 2002.

[72] Aloi 2011; Chaney 2005; George 1998; Mitchell 2001; Nichols 2006; Osumare 2001; Pough 2004; Price 2005; Ramsey 2003; Stewart 1979; Taylor and Taylor 2007; Watkins 2005.

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Appendix A

Song Title, Singer, Year Released, Composer, and Genre

Song Title	Singer/s	Year	Composed By	Genre
"Drown in My Own Tears"	Ray Charles	1956	Henry Glover	R&B
"Lonely Tear Drops"	Jackie Wilson	1958	Tyran Carlo (the pen name of Wilson's cousin Roquel Davis) and a pre-Motown Berry Gordy	R&B
"Tears on my Pillow"	Little Anthony and The Imperials	1958	Sylvester Bradford Al Lewis	R&B
"In The Rain"	The Dramatics	1960	Tony Hester	R&B
"I Count the Tears"	Ben E. King	1960	Ben E. King	R&B
"Rainin' In My Heart"	Slim Harpo	1961	James Isaac Moore and Jerry West	R&B
"I Cried My Last Tear"	Ernie K-Doe	1961	Allen Toussaint	R&B
"Stand by Me"	Ben E. King	1961	Ben E. King, Jerry Leiber, and Mike Stoller	R&B
"A Little Bit of Soap"	The Jarmels	1961	Bert Berns	R&B
"You Don't Miss Your Water ('Til The Well Runs Dry)"	Otis Redding	1961	William Bell (Later Recorded by Otis Redding in 1965)	R&B
"Cry to Me"	Solomon Burke	1962	Bert Berns	R&B
"I Couldn't Cry If I Wanted To"	The Temptations	1962	Edward Holland, Jr. and Norman Whitfield	R&B
"My Heart Cries for You"	Ben E. King	1964	Guy Mitchell	R&B
"I'm Gonna Cry (Cry Baby)"	Wilson Pickett	1964	Wilson Pickett, Don Covoy,	R&B
"Ohh Baby Baby"	Smokey Robinson & The Miracles	1965	Smokey Robinson and fellow Miracle Pete Moore (produced by Robinson)	R&B

"The Tracks of My Tears"	Smokey Robinson & The Miracles	1965	Miracles members: Smokey Robinson (lead vocalist), Pete Moore (bass vocalist), and Marv Tarplin (guitarist)	R&B
"River of Tears"	Ben E. King	1965	Ben E. King	R&B
"It's The Same Old Song"	The Four Tops	1965	Brian Holland and Lamont Dozier (Holland-Dozier-Holland)	R&B
"Ain't that Peculiar"	Marvin Gaye	1965	The single was produced by Smokey Robinson, and written by Robinson, and fellow Miracles members Ronald White, Pete Moore, and Marv Tarplin	R&B
"It Tears Me Up"	Percy Sledge	1966	Ivy and Marlin Greene	R&B
"Standing in the Shadows of Love"	The Four Tops	1966	Brian Holland and Lamont Dozier (Holland-Dozier-Holland)	R&B
"Tears of a Clown"	Smokey Robinson & The Miracles	1967	Stevie Wonder, Hank Cosby, and Smokey Robinson	R&B
"Tears, Tears, Tears"	Ben E. King	1967	Ben E. King	R&B
"I Wish It Would Rain"	The Temptations	1967	Norman Whitfield, Barrett Strong, and Roger Penzabene	R&B
"(Loneliness Made Me Realize) It's You That I Need"	The Temptations	1967	Norman Whitfield and Edward Holland, Jr.	R&B
"Come See About Me"	Jr. Walker	1967	Brian Holland and Lamont Dozier (Holland-Dozier-	R&B

			Holland)	
"Stay In My Corner"	The Dells	1968	Bobby Miller	R&B
"I'm In Love"	Wilson Pickett	1968	Wilson Pickett	R&B
"I Heard It Through The Grapevine"	Marvin Gaye	1968	Norman Whitfield & Barrett Strong	R&B
"These Eyes"	Jr. Walker & The All Stars	1969	Harvey Fuqua	R&B
"I Can Sing a Rainbow"	The Dells	1969	Arthur Hamilton	R&B
"Honey (I Miss You)"	O.C. Smith	1969	Bobby Russell	R&B
"How I Miss You Baby"	Bobby Womack	1969	Bobby Womack and Darryl Carter	R&B
"Walk on By"	Isaac Hayes	1969	Burt Bacharach and Hal David	R&B
"What's Going On"	Marvin Gaye	1971	<u>Renaldo "Obie" Benson</u>, <u>Al Cleveland</u>, and <u>Marvin Gaye</u>	R&B
"Starting All Over Again"	Johnnie Taylor	1972	Phillip Mitchell	R&B
"Sideshow"	Blue Magic	1974	Vinnie Barrett	R&B
"Joy Inside My Tears"	Stevie Wonder	1976	Stevie Wonder	R&B
"Cry Together"	The O'Jays	1978	Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff, and Bunny Sigler	R&B
"I Can't Live" "Without Your Love"	Teddy Pendergrass	1981	Leon Huff and Cecil Womack	R&B
"Lately"	Stevie Wonder	1981	Stevie Wonder	R&B
"A House Is Not A Home"	Luther Vandross	1981	Burt Bacharach and Hal David	R&B
"Tears"	Force MD's	1984	Doug Wimbish; Antoine Lundy; The Force M.D.'s; Robin Halpin; Keith LeBlanc	R&B
"4 The Tears In Your Eyes"	Prince	1985	Prince	R&B
"Cryin Through The Night"	Stevie Wonder	1987	Stevie Wonder	R&B

"I Need Love"	LL Cool J	1987	James Todd Smith	Hip Hop
"If It Isn't Love"	New Edition	1988	James Harris and Terry Lewis	R&B
"It Ain't Over Til It's Over"	Lenny Kravitz	1991	Lenny Kravitz	R&B
"Don't Say Goodbye"	Tevin Campbell	1993	Burt Bacharach, Sally Jo Dakota, and Narada Michael Walden	R&B
"Cry for You"	Jodeci	1993	DeVante Swing	R&B
"Lately"	Jodeci	1993	Stevie Wonder	R&B
"Me & My Bitch"	The Notorious B.I.G.	1994	The Bluez Brothers, Chucky Thompson, and Sean "Puffy" Combs	Hip Hop
"So Many Tears"	Tupac Shakur	1995	Tupac Shakur, G. Jacobs, R. Walker E. Baker, and S. Wonder	Hip Hop
"Tears"	Babyface	1997	Babyface	R&B
"What I Feel/Issues"	R. Kelly	1998	R. Kelly	R&B
"When Thugz Cry"	Tupac Shakur	2001	Johnny "J"	Hip Hop
"I Cry"	Ja Rule (featuring 'Lil Mo)	2001	'Lil Mo	Hip Hop
"This Woman's Work"	Maxwell	2001	Musze (Maxwell's publishing moniker) and Hod David	R&B
"Cry"	Michael Jackson	2001	R. Kelly	R&B
"Song Cry"	Jay-Z	2002	Shawn Carter Douglas Gibbs Randolph Johnson and Justin Smith	Hip Hop
"Burn"	Usher	2004	Usher Raymond Jermaine Dupri, and Bryan-Michael Cox	R&B
"Cry"	Lyfe Jennings	2004	Lyfe Jennings and Rhemario "Rio"	R&B

			Webber	
"Don't Want You To See Me Cry"	'Lil Wayne	2005	Gillie da Kid Drake	Hip Hop
"Down the Aisle"	LL Cool J (featuring 112)	2006	Lyfe Jennings, Trackmasters, Keezo Kane	Hip Hop
"So Sick"	Neyo	2006	Mikkel S. Eriksen, Tor Erik Hermansen, Shaffer Smith	R&B
"Cry"	LL Cool J (featuring 'Lil Mo)	2008	Atkins, Blackshere, Dombrowski, Gamble, Huff, Lorenzo, Loving, Mays, Sigler, Smith	Hip Hop
"Cry Out"	'Lil Wayne	2008	Nicolas Warwar (aka STREETRUNNER)	Hip Hop
"The Hardest Moment"	Mario	2009	Elvis Williams, Harold Lilly, & Mack Woodward	R&B
"Cry No More"	Chris Brown	2009	Chris Brown	Hip Hop/R&B
"Fistful of Tears"	Maxwell	2009	Musze (Maxwell's publishing moniker) and Hod David	R&B
"Sometimes I Cry"	Eric Benét	2010	Eric Benét and George Nash	R&B
"Done Crying"	Lyfe Jennings	2010	Lyfe Jennings, T-Minus, & Troy Taylor	R&B
"World Cry"	Lloyd (featuring R. Kelly, Keri Hilson, & K'naan) (2011)	2011	King David "The Future", Polow da Don (co.), Jason "Pooh Bear" Boyd	R&B
"Heart Attack"	Trey Songz	2012	Tremaine Neverson (Trey Songz), Richard	R&B

			Butler, Lex, Benjamin Levin	
"Stay"	Tyrese	2012	Brandon Hodge, Asaleana Elliott, Aaron Sledge, Christopher Lacy, James Smith, Tyrese Gibson	R&B
"Pray for Me"	Anthony Hamilton	2013	A. Hamilton, A. Dixon, K. Edmonds, P. Smith.	R&B
"Thinking About You"	Frank Ocean	2013	Frank Ocean	R&B

Appendix B

Typology of Sensitivity, Description of Sensitivity, Lyrical Examples, Songs and Singers that Demonstrate the Typology of Masculinity

Typology of Sensitivity	Description of Sensitivity	Lyrical Examples	Songs and Singer/s that Demonstrate the Typology of Sensitivity
Private Sensitivity	A version of sensitivity in which the male is alone; feels lonely; disguises or hides his tears from his romantic partner or others; and expresses a determination to not cry and/or continue crying.	"Now there's some sad things known to man, But ain't too much sadder than The tears of a clown, when there's no one around" from the song "Tears of a Clown" by Smokey Robinson and The Miracles (1967) "Red, red My eyes are red Crying for you Alone in my bed"	• "Drown in My Own Tears" by Ray Charles (1956) • "Lonely Tear Drops" by Jackie Wilson (1958) • "Tears on my Pillow" by Little Anthony and The Imperials (1958) • "In The Rain" by The Dramatics (1960) • "I Count the Tears" by Ben E. King (1960) • "Rainin in my Heart" by Slim Harpo (1961) • "I Cried my Last Tear" by Ernie K-Doe (1961)

		from the song "I Can Sing A Rainbow" by The Dells (1969)	• "A Little Bit of Soap" by The Jarmels (1961)
			• "You Don't Miss Your Water ('Til The Well Runs Dry)" by Otis Redding (1961)
		"Sometimes I cry babe When I'm all alone" from the song "Sometimes I Cry" by Eric Benét (2010)	• "Cry to Me" by Solomon Burke (1962)
			• "I Couldn't Cry If I Wanted To" by The Temptations (1962)
		In too deep, can't think about giving it up But I never knew love would feel like a heart attack It's killing me, swear I never cried so much Cause I never knew love would hurt this f*ck*n' bad The worst pain that I ever had from the song "Heart Attack" by Trey Songz (2012)	• "My Heart Cries For You" by Ben E. King (1964)
			• "River of Tears" by Ben E. King (1965)
			• "It's The Same Old Song" by The Four Tops (1965)
			• "It Tears Me Up" by Percy Sledge (1966)
			• "Tears of a Clown" by Smokey Robinson and The Miracles (1967)
			• "Tears, Tears, Tears" by Ben E. King
			• "Loneliness Made Me Realize It's You That I Need" by The Temptations (1967)
		Dear God if you're listening now I need you do a thing for me. You see my baby, she done up and walked out I need you bring her back to me. I know that I was wrong, I was guilty as sin Probably not	• "Come See About Me" by Jr. Walker (1967)
			• "These Eyes" by Jr. Walker & The All Stars (1969)
			• "I Can Sing A Rainbow" by The Dells (1969)
			• "Honey I Miss You" by O.C. Smith (1969)
			• "How I Miss You

| | | priority
But dear God if you're listening now
Down here
Dying
Begging
Crying
Somebody need to pray for me from the song "Pray for Me" by Anthony Hamilton (2013)

A tornado flew around my room before you came
Excuse the mess it made, it usually doesn't rain
In Southern California, much like Arizona
My eyes don't shed tears, but, boy, they bawl from the song "Thinking About You" by Frank Ocean (2013) | Baby" by Bobby Womack (1969)
• "Joy Inside My Tears" by Stevie Wonder (1976)
• "I Can't Live Without Your Love" by Teddy Pendergrass (1981)
• "A House Is Not A Home" by Luther Vandross (1981)
• "Tears" by Force MD's (1984)
• "4 The Tears In Your Eyes" by Prince (1985)
• "Cryin' Through The Night" by Stevie Wonder (1987)
• "I Need Love" by LL Cool J (1987)
• "If It Isn't Love" by New Edition (1988)
• "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over" by Lenny Kravitz (1991)
• "Don't Say Goodbye" by Tevin Campbell (1993)
• "Cry for You" by Jodeci (1993)
• "Tears" by Babyface (1997)
• "What I Feel/Issues" by R. Kelly (1998)
• "Song Cry" by Jay-Z (2002)
• "So Sick" by Neyo (2006)
• "Sometimes I Cry" by Eric Benét (2010)
• "Heart Attack" by Trey Songz (2012) |

			• "Pray for Me" by Anthony Hamilton (2013) • "Thinking About You" by Frank Ocean (2013)
Partnered Sensitivity	A version of sensitivity in which the Black male connects with his partner, other men, and/or members of the Black community through crying.	"Maybe baby you think these tears I cry are tears of joy" from the song "Ain't that Peculiar" by Marvin Gaye (1965) "I'm a man and we cry We can cry, we can cry, we can cry together" from the song "I Cry" by Ja Rule (featuring 'Lil Mo) (2001) "When we're laughing together, and we're crying together Having kids together, my life begins right now" from the song "Down the Aisle" by LL Cool J (featuring 112) (2006) "I hate to see the whole world cry" from the song "World Cry" by Lloyd (featuring R. Kelly, Keri Hilson, & K'naan) (2011)	• "Ain't That Peculiar" by Marvin Gaye (1965) • "Standing In The Shadows of Love" by The Four Tops (1966) • "Starting All Over Again" by Johnnie Taylor (1972) • "Cry Together" By The O'Jays (1978) • "Don't Say Goodbye" by Tevin Campbell (1993) • "Me & My Bitch" by The Notorious B.I.G. (1994) • "I Cry" by Ja Rule (featuring 'Lil Mo) (2001) • "Cry" by Michael Jackson (2001) • "Down the Aisle" by LL Cool J (featuring 112) (2006) • "Cry" by LL Cool J (featuring 'Lil Mo) (2006) • "World Cry" by Lloyd (featuring R. Kelly, Keri Hilson, & K'naan) (2011)

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| Perceptive Sensitivity | A version of sensitivity in which the Black male acknowledge the tears shed by others, and shed tears themselves while being conscious of society's expectation that men suppress emotion and/or refrain from crying | "Everyone knows that a man ain't supposed to cry But listen, I got to cry, cuz crying, ooooooooh, Is the pain, oh yeah" from the song "I Wish It Would Rain" by The Temptations (1967)

"I know a man't ain't supposed to cry but these tears I can't hold inside" from the song "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" by Marvin Gaye (1968)

"Mother, Mother, there's too many of you crying" from the song "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye (1971)

"Who says a man is supposed to cry Wish I could crawl under a rock somewhere and just die" from the song "Cry No More" by Chris Brown (2009)

Girl I wanna take the time and thank you Just for putting up | • "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" by Marvin Gaye (1968)
• "Walk on By" by Isaac Hayes (1969)
• "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye (1971)
• "I Can't Live Without Your Love" by Teddy Pendergrass (1981)
• "Lately" by Stevie Wonder (1981)
• "Lately" by Jodeci (1993)
• "This Woman's Work" by Maxwell (2001)
• "Burn" by Usher (2004)
• "Don't Want You To See Me Cry" by 'Lil Wayne (2005)
• "Cry No More" by Chris Brown (2009)
• "Fistful of Tears" by Maxwell (2009)
• "Stay" by Tyrese (2012) |

		with me And I'm sorry that you even had to deal with me Even though I made you cry, I wanna make it right Just give me some time to make it right I go the extra mile to make you smile and Just to make your day from the song "Stay" by Tyrese (2012)	
Public Sensitivity	A version of sensitivity in which the Black male cries publicly and verbally expresses that he does not care what others think of him.	"And now I can't have you, baby You know I'm all upset, child, oh, yeah And I'm gonna cry, yes, I, yes, I (Cry, cry baby, cry baby)" "I lost you what a price to pay I'm cryin'" from the song "Ohh Baby Baby" by Smokey Robinson (1965) "To the world I'd cry out loud How I love you" from the song "Stay In My Corner" by The Dells (1968) "I can shout about it, yeah	• "I'm Gonna Cry (Cry Baby)" by Wilson Pickett (1964) • "Ohh Baby Baby" by Smokey Robinson (1965) • "Stay In My Corner" by The Dells (1968) • "I'm in Love" by Wilson Pickett (1968)

		(love, love, love) I can cry about it sometime (love, love, love)" from the song "I'm in Love" by Wilson Pickett (1968)	
			• "Sideshow" by Blue Magic (1974)
		"Hurry, hurry, step right up See the sideshow in town for only fifty cents….See the man who's been cryin' for a million years, so many tears (So many tears)" from the song "Sideshow" by Blue Magic (1974)	
		"I lost so many peers, and shed so many tears" from the song "So Many Tears" by Tupac Shakur (1995)	• "So Many Tears" by Tupac Shakur (1995)
		"Let the children hear when thugs cry" from the song "When Thugs Cry" by Tupac Shakur (2001)	• "When Thugs Cry" by Tupac Shakur (2001)
		"But over the years I've learned to understand that I don't really give a damn what nobody say I'm a man and we cry" from the song "Cry" by Lyfe	• "Cry" by Lyfe Jennings (2004)
			• "Cry Out" by 'Lil

		Jennings (2004)	Wayne (2008)
		"I hope you ain't too tired to cry" from the song "Cry Out" by 'Lil Wayne (2008)	• "The Hardest Moment" by Mario (2009)
		"And I'm crying baby I don't care who's watching baby" from the song "The Hardest Moment" by Mario (2009)	
		"When your best friend told me that You're done crying (She said you're done crying)" from the song "Done Crying" by Lyfe Jennings (2010)	• "Done Crying" by Lyfe Jennings (2010)

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