Empowerment and Enslavement: Rap in the Context of African-American Cultural Memory

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EMPOWERMENT AND ENSLAVEMENT: RAP IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL MEMORY

By

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Keith; my mother, Richardine; and my belated sister, Deloris.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... vii

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

2. Cultural Memory and its Relationship to African-American Musical Styles ........................................................... 17

3. Cultural Memory in Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture ........................................... 50

4. Slave Culture and Contradictory Views of the Perception of African-American Males in Rap and Hip-Hop Culture .......... 78

5. Cultural Memory: Misogyny .................................................................................. 106

6. Intellectualism and/or Anti-Intellectualism .............................................................. 132

7. Empowerment and/or Enslavement ....................................................................... 167

8. Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 194

GLOSSARY .................................................................................................................. 203

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................... 207

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .......................................................................................... 219
ABSTRACT

There is an interconnective relationship between African-American music of the past and contemporary rap. The past and present along with their accompanying music genres are linked through an important practice called cultural memory. Author and musician, Samuel Floyd, defines cultural memory as being the ability to access and transmit previous communal information with or without the benefit of formal training. This information which is “privileged” to associates of a specific culture serves to connect its members through common and subjective knowledge and practices that are knowingly and unknowingly bequeathed to generations. Eventually these knowledge and practices become more objective and inherent as they are incorporated into normative cultural practices.

Cultural memory is a catalyst for cultural retention and recollection of the past and may involve and/or manifest itself in rap music in two ways: theoretically and culturally. Theoretically, music of the past is continued through intertextuality. Older music is altered and integrated with this contemporary music genre to form more innovative versions. Culturally, a conflicting discourse revolving around the creation, performance, and influence of earlier music of African-Americans has played an important role in the life and music of African-American culture throughout the history of black Americans. The influence of these music genres on the general public were also subjected to much scrutiny.

Rap music has followed the tradition of its former African-American-created music ancestors. It, too, has become a catalyst for preserving the musical bonds within the African Diaspora through cultural memory. Through intertextuality, signifyin(g), and through the incitement of divergent points of view, rap not only embodies memories that extend across the generations, it also reconnects contemporary black-America with African-Americans of the past.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Mainstream American rap music represents the newest version of an ongoing conflict taking place within the African-American community. Opposing viewpoints concerning rap’s objectification of women in its lyrics and music videos, frequent use of volatile names such as nigger and bitch, promotion of unsavory lifestyles, devaluation of human life, and the endorsement of excessive materialism and anti-intellectualism contribute to the continuing contradictory discourse which is also associated with earlier African-American music styles.

There has been an undocumented history of the relationship of rap with earlier debates concerning disreputability, negative stereotyping of African-Americans and the lack of creator control which contributes to the decline in the quality of the music. This dissertation will explore these and other interconnected discourses. Additionally, the refashioning and incorporation of older African-American music and concepts with the new to produce newer and different musical byproducts will be examined. The following is an example of this new hybrid music.

Jesus Walks – God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down
Jesus Walks with Me – The only thing that I pray is that my feet don’t fail me now
Jesus Walks – And I don’t think there is nothing I could do now to right my wrongs
Jesus Walks with Me – I want to talk to God but I’m afraid because we ain’t spoke in so long¹

In the song lyrics above, rapper, Kanye West experiments with musical intertextuality and appropriates the well-known African-American spiritual, “I Want Jesus to Walk with

Me.” Through the revision of this spiritual and the accompanying device which West incorporates, the past is linked to the present through a practice called cultural memory.

Cultural memory refers to the transmission of prior cultural information, many times without direct training; but may also refer to early societal information transmitted either through oral or written means and incorporated and known mainly by members of a specific culture.\(^2\) This is an important practice and a significant characteristic of many rap songs. In an era of technological musical sampling in which music of pre-hip-hop culture is referenced and integrated with newer music and lyrics, rap might be interpreted as an extension and continuation of African-American musical cultural traditions which reflect general African-American culture.

Uncovering elements of these extensions and continuations by relating the ancestral connections between rap music and its musical and cultural antecedents is the purpose of this dissertation with emphasis being placed on the African-American spiritual and its corresponding slave culture. Investigative commonalities and contradictory ideologies existing within this contemporary style will be explored with the idea of determining the extent to which cultural memory plays in rap and hip-hop culture as well as, determining whether a sense of empowerment or enslavement exists.

One form of cultural memory which has been a source of contention within African-American society because of its serious verbal cutting contests and its faux talk of gangsterism is the rappers’ use of signifying. Signifying (signifyin’), an African-derived tradition refers to the fluid use of language in a subversive manner as a means of resistance through the conveyance of double meanings or a competitive spirit of jesting and undercutting between two people. These forms of signifying remain controversial because of rappers’ double-talk promoting a life of criminality and because of the serious verbal contests which have resulted in the deaths of two of its participants.

The call-and-response, double-talking, word-play type takes place between two people who undercut each other through boastful criticism in an attempt to prove verbal

superiority. This type of signifying permeates rap more directly through witty, competitive rap battles. Indirectly, more serious verbal wars are more widespread in contemporary rap amongst East and West coast rappers (Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls); between those on the fringe of rap and hip-hop culture (Russell Simmons and Conrad Muhammad); between female rappers (Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim); between rappers of different generations—old school and new school (KRS-1 and Nelly), and between current rap artists (50 Cent and Jay Z, and lastly, 50 Cent, who has recently declared verbal war on Kanye West. West has not yet responded). Verbal wars between those on the fringe of rap and hip-hop culture are often attempts to change the direction of contemporary rap from one of gangsterism, materialism, and misogyny to that which is more politically conscious and more representative of African-American life.

Double-talking through word play represents an element of signifying that is comparably as debatable as the serious verbal wars. In this form the rappers exaggerate, glorify, and pontificate on the positive aspects of the thug life even though this lifestyle may have never been experienced or is no longer subscribed to by the artist. Christopher Wallace, also known as The Notorious B.I.G., states in his song, “Ready to Die,”

My shit is deep, deeper than my grave G
I'm ready to die and nobody can save me
Fuck the world, fuck my moms and my girl
My life is played out like a jheri curl, I’m ready to die

yet, according to his VH1 interview, “Behind the Music: The Notorious B.I.G.,” after receiving death threats via phone calls after the murder of Tupac Shakur, Wallace feared for his life. He mentions waking up in a state of paranoia and scaredness. He

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states, “I believe someone is trying to kill me. I be waking up paranoid and scared to death.”

Because of the double-meanings associated with the messages gangsta rappers are spewing and because of its emergence and transformation into a commercially-commodified genre which no longer “captures the same frustration as some Negro spirituals,” its own innovators have complained of the new gangster direction it has taken. “I stopped listening to hip-hop 10 years ago,” says Darryl McDaniels, the D.M.C. in Run D.M.C. He points out “We weren’t choirboys, but we had multiple points of view. This past decade it seems like hip-hop has mostly been about parties and guns and women. That’s fine if you’re in a club, but from 9 a.m. till I went to bed at night, the music had nothing to say to me. So I listened to classic rock.” Some others have resorted to listening to underground rap due to its more socio-political, conscious themes.

Also observing the limitations of rap music themes and its negative portrayal of black men and women and the possible influences on young aficionados, rapper, Will Smith asked that rappers be accountable as positive role models. On the other hand, Remy Ma, the female rapper and member of Fat Joe’s Terror Squad stated that she is not responsible for rearing other people’s children. This is another example of diverging, contradictory viewpoints borne as a result of the new direction taken by commercially-commodified rappers and their promoters.

Inclusive in this new direction of rap is the adoption of and signification of the word, “nigger/nigga,” when referencing African-American men. According to the African American Registry, the word “nigger,” is believed to have derived from the Latin word “niger,” which means black. Eventually, this widely-used word was transformed to its

negative, white Southern mispronunciation of “Negro,” during the African-American slave era.

The usage of the word, “nigger/nigga” in Gangsta rap has resulted in three differing sets of opinions in reference to the proper usage of this emotion-laden and historically-charged word. One group believes that this word should not be used at any time because even in the 21st century it continues to be a principal symbol of racism. One person supporting this belief is comedian, Bill Cosby. Another, led by university law professor, Randall Kennedy, believes that through continued usage of this word it will become dis-empowered. And yet another group, which includes rapper Ice Cube and filmographer, Spike Lee, believes that the word should be used only among African-Americans since it serves as a term of endearment or insider camaraderie. This word has brought to the forefront, the many viewpoints related to its usage and has established the significant need to address issues such as these through intelligent discourse within the African-American community.

Not only has the use of “nigger/nigga” fostered divisive dialogues in the black community; the reverberated use of other names have also. Degrading, animalistic, names such as “bitch” and “whore/ho” when referring to African-American women have also begotten and are now encouraging dialogue between and within the African-American generations and genders. While some younger women seem to be accepting of these negative names and titles given them by male (and female) rappers, others (young and older) are resentful of these names. Nelson George in his book, Hip-Hop America tells of his early experience at a conference at Spelman College in which a group of young women lambasted him for his remarks of misogyny pointed at 2 Live Crew’s Luther Campbell. George states, “Again I tried to understand how people could defend Campbell’s diatribes. If you called Luther Campbell a cultural drug dealer who sold quick hits of danceable misogyny, his young defenders would counter that Luther Campbell was just trying to get paid—which meant that getting paid justified everything.
On some level they were arguing that his music’s content had no meaning outside of whether it made money.  

Magazine leaders and readers such as those of Essence magazine, as well as many others are making efforts to counter the negative, stereotypical images portrayed in the media. Essence’s “Take Back the Music” campaign’s mission statement is as follows: “We at Essence have become increasingly concerned about the degrading ways in which Black women are portrayed and spoken about in popular media, particularly in popular urban music and music videos. Aware that these images may be having a negative impact on our children, we realized that, as Black women, it was up to us to take a stand…But respond we must. As Michaela Angela Davis, our campaign spokesperson explains, ‘We’re not trying to tell people what to think about this; we simply want to encourage them to think.’”

It is commonly conceded that a lack of critical thinking and a spirit of nescience permeate commercial American rap and hip-hop culture. This feeling of obliviousness within the culture is exemplified through the words of Carolyn West, a University of Washington professor who articulates, “Many adults are quite ignorant about what’s out there. We can’t afford to pretend it doesn’t exist…” Polemical views relating to anti-intellectualism, as with other imperative issues, have caused division within African-American contemporary dialogue. Old School rapper, Kool Moe Dee describes anti-intellectualism among gangsta rappers in the following lyrics of his rap song, “Knowledge is King”:

Knowledge is infinite / Suckers ain’t into it
Ignorance is bliss / And they’re kin to it
Party and dance / And don’t ever glance

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At a book or look / For their mind to advance
Caught in a rut / Chasing butt
Trying to get a dollar / Or trying to get a nut
Evil feeds / Off a source of apathy
Weak in the mind / And of course you have to be
Less than a man / More like a thing
No knowledge you’re nothin’ / Knowledge is king¹¹

Many feel that commercialized rap music discourages young listeners from pursuing educational goals. Rap music, as perceived by many, is considered to be anti-intellectualistic. Vernon Reid, guitarist and founder of the ’80s band, Living Colour, says, “There’s a vicious amount of anti-intellectualism in our recorded arts. Black music was the music everybody came to for emotional truth. That’s what soul was….”¹² When discussing Gangsta rap and people’s perception of it as strength and survivability, Will Smith states, “What I’m trying to present and what a lot of other artists are presenting is a different approach to survival and a more sound approach to survival. It’s a more long-term approach based on intellect and skills that can’t be taken away from you: The smartest dude survives the best.”¹³ A differing opinion is that certain artists are the intellectual saviors of commercialized rap music. In his argument about rap’s anti-intellectualism, Michael Eric Dyson, in his description of Tupac and his legacy, states, “Tupac’s profound literacy rebutted the belief that hip-hop is an intellectual wasteland…Tupac helped to combat the anti-intellectualism in rap, a force, to be sure, that pervades the entire culture.”¹⁴ According to “About Entertainment Rap-Hip/Hop Newsletter” writer, Ife Oshun, in her article about “Why Rap Radio Sucks,” states, “Some [people] think there’s too many lyrics that speak of drugs, hoes, money

and not enough that deal with spirituality, love, or knowledge. There are many people who have the misconception that all rap music is violent, misogynist or just plain ignorant. Many people feel there is a ‘corporate conspiracy’ designed to keep rap music and fans ignorant. There are many opinions and points of view, but eventually they all come to the same conclusion: too many people feel rap radio is not on point.”

Antithetical feelings about issues pertaining to rap music are becoming more common. These issues include: its criminal direction; its misogynistic, materialistic, and anti-intellectualistic themes; as well as, the state of the corporate industry and its relationship to rap artists. As a result, contradictory ideas about the state of rap have been proposed by several people whose beliefs are that rap and its corresponding culture can and do promote either a sense of empowerment or enslavement. Both viewpoints are well represented by activists, intellectuals, promoters, aficionados, and rap artists themselves.

Civil rights leader, Al Sharpton, labeled gangsta rappers “well-paid slaves” during the hosting of a summit about social responsibility in the hip-hop industry. He stated, “Don’t let some record executive tell you that cursing out your mama is in style. Anytime you perpetuate a slave mentality that desecrates women and that desecrates our race in the name of a record…I consider you a well-paid slave.” In the article, “Culture: Rhyme and Resist,” which addresses the raising of social consciousness, it states “Public Enemy inspired a generation to exchange huge gold rope chains, which the group likened to slave shackles, for Malcolm X medallions.” Southern rappers, Eightball and MJG in 1999 produced the video “We Started This,” which “depicts in a slave metaphor the exploitation of hip hop artists by rich record executives. The video shows black males being trapped, shackled, and then forced to rap into microphones hanging

from a factory ceiling. The suit-clad executives appear throughout the video laughing and throwing hands full of money at the artists under their control.”\(^\text{18}\)

Not everyone believes that rap music and hip-hop culture are forces of enslavement. Because of the rapper’s freedom of choice to pursue his/her profession, Tricia Rose, author of Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America states that, “it’s utterly fundamental to distinguish slavery from contemporary circumstances, and many people use it easily in a way that diminishes the utter brutality as well as the total domination of people when they are physically enslaved.”\(^\text{19}\) Michael Eric Dyson, hip-hop author and university professor believes that despite certain elements of hip-hop that may have negative consequences, he believes that there is a sense of empowerment that also permeates this culture. He says that hip-hop culture “has accentuated the profound reality of Black culture and has given hundreds and thousands of young people a viable means of making a living and furthermore encourages millions of people around the globe to examine their own lives.”\(^\text{20}\)

Rap mogul Russell Simmons believes that hip-hop culture has spawned a new entrepreneurial spirit among hip-hoppers. He says, “When I was sixteen, I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but selling weed was one of the few options open to me. Today, however, young people are inspired to have higher aspirations because of hip-hop. Young people now have all these people visible who make the choice to be entrepreneurs and inspire them to do the same. It’s now a cultural thing in our community. Being a teacher maybe, or a doctor, these used to be the hopes and aspirations of our community. But now hip-hop is all they talk about. Lower-middle-class blacks in New York City were the absolute dumbest young kids you could find anywhere, same as you would in the projects down the block. Well, it’s the same dumb

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) No Name Given, Jet. December 2000.
people who broke the mold, because they were so hip-hop and so angry and so … this, I’m going to make it on my own. It’s like, own a company."21

Rappers are also becoming involved in other financial business dealings with lucrative results. Kimberly L. Allers, staff writer at Fortune magazine mentions that rappers are getting paid through the sales of rap CDs, DVDs, porn, ring tones, and product placement. She also states, “It’s hard to hate on the get-rich part of this game. That rappers are becoming more astute businessmen, branching out into multiple industries, is a good thing.” She quotes Bryan Leach, vice-president of Integrated Marketing of A & R at TVT Records as saying, “Rap music was making a lot of money for the corporate world, and artists realized that they’d rather pimp themselves than be pimped.”22

Even though there are many who concur or disagree with one of the two sides of the enslavement/empowerment issue, hardly anyone disputes the fact that rap music and hip-hop culture could be a force needed for self-reflection, something that is necessary for collective self-improvement. One can also not ignore the fact that rap /hip-hop culture, though divisive in nature, is merely an orally-transmitted, contemporary continuation and extension of African-American music and culture and all that it represents, or as some would argue, misrepresents.

Survey of Literature

Although there is an increased interest in rap music and hip-hop culture, extensive research in related areas and issues is lacking. Areas of lack include signifying, comparative cultural African-American relationships and other related issues. Scholarly research in this musical style and cultural type consists mainly of the historical, socio-political, and continuing global impact on contemporary culture. With the exception of Rose’s (1994 ) work in which she reveals some conflictual elements of rap (such as the

East/West Coast “war,” etc.) and the manner in which society perceives it, currently there are no books which more completely emphasize the many contradictions that exist within rap and hip-hop culture. There are also no works which wholly accentuate the corresponding relationship of rap music to antecedent African-American cultures, specifically slave culture or blues, ragtime, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul “culture.” Scholars such as Cheryl Keyes (2002), and rap artists, Afrikaa Bambaataa and Professor X have related the West African bard tradition and techniques to rap music and hip-hop culture. Lhamon (1998) speaks about the retention of and importance of cultural characteristics stemming from the blackface/Jim Crow era which have contributed to styles leading to hip-hop. Additionally, some articles depict scholars, civic leaders and others as either, comparing or negating the economical and political aspects of a hip-hop/slave cultural relationship. Currently, no in-depth study exists which comparatively probes cultural memory, musical intertextuality, and systematic facets of slave and hip-hop culture.

The bulk of existing literatures and materials specifically related to rap music and hip-hop culture is found in such media as newspaper, magazine, and internet articles, television and big-screen movies and biographies, and CD cover booklets—basically, those that cater to popular culture and hip-hop aficionados, rather than to academe. Much of these media types appear to have pursued one main path—namely, financial with the goal of extending rap and hip-hop culture’s influence. Some others use these media in a more revisionist manner to publicly dispel and eradicate negative components of rap music and hip-hop cultural stereotypes or chastise those who participate in the proliferation of negative associative images. While Kilson’s article (2003) admonishes African-American hip-hop leaders for changing the Civil Rights path and dishonoring its early leaders, Hutchinson (2002) writes to educate about the odious history surrounding the usage of the “N-Word.”

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23 N-Word is a more politically correct manner of saying “nigger.”
Print biographies as well as biographies offered via television and big-screen movies are also being sanctioned by family members, serving either as print or technological memoirs or desperate pleas for help in “righting the wrongs” associated with the untimely deaths of the related hip-hop artist. Authorized by Afeni Shakur, his mother, the life and times of Tupac Shakur has been biographically illustrated in his movie, “Tupac: Resurrection,” (2003). Through the use of his own music and spoken words, he tells his own story. As with Shakur, biographical and semi-biographical movies about rappers are becoming more prominent.

Much of the more popular and available literatures pertaining to rap music and hip-hop culture emphasize the degradation of African-American women through misogynistic lyrics and negative music videos. Although the primary literature types emphasizing this theme are newspaper, magazine, and internet articles, a variety in literature has recently begun to change. With the 2005 publication of Karrine Steffans’ memoir, Confessions of a Video Vixen, misogyny, as told by this former music video dancer, has been propelled to the rap/hip-hop culture spotlight even further. Though it is not considered to be scholarly research, her cautionary words shed light and foster research pertaining to the condescension of black women in rap music and hip-hop culture.

The subordination of education or intellectualism in favor of making money as mentioned in Moon’s article (2004) and the glorification of rap and hip-hop culture as a means of empowerment by rap entrepreneur, Russell Simmons in Gates’ work (2004) represent two of many contradicting ideologies that are prominent in this contemporary style and culture.

In this dissertation, through comparisons of slave and hip-hop cultures, I will present a historical and analytical way of interpreting rap music while observing the continuation and transmission of the African-derived traditions such as signifying and other cultural memory types. Polemical viewpoints as presented by intellectuals, political activists, and the rappers themselves will be discussed within the context of this music and the written
and spoken words. Because of the return of similar elements originating from slave culture and integrated into hip-hop cultures, this dissertation has developed from the idea that there is a connection between the two cultures. My intent is to illuminate these similarities and furthermore, to highlight the cultural memory and signifying elements which are indicative of existing contradictions. This information will be used to determine whether this music serves as a form of empowerment or enslavement.

For the sake of clarity I should like to call all rap music styles stemming from the late 1980s through the present time and which embrace and promote criminality (drugs, violence, gang activities), misogyny, and materialism, gangsta rap. American commercialized and mainstream rap music will also be used synonymously in reference to this music genre especially since these themes are most prominent in the current, popular commercial medium in which popular rap might be heard. Rap which begins in the 1970s up until the birth of gangsta rap will be termed old-school rap while present-day socially- or politically-conscious rap music shall be referred to as conscious or underground rap.

Although some gangsta rap also includes racist and homophobic lyrics, the main focus of this dissertation will be on subject matters mentioned above which directly relate to cultural memory in music within the African-American community. This in no way devalues the incitement of violence that may have been perpetuated by gangsta rap (or other) music against those of differing ethnic and gender backgrounds and preferences. This author fully recognizes the grave injustices that may have resulted from prejudicial attitudes spawned by those with different belief systems.

Additionally, this author recognizes that rap music and hip-hop culture were not solely created by African-Americans, but also by and with Latinos who continually play an important role in the development and continuation of this genre and movement. The fact that Latinos are infrequently mentioned throughout this dissertation does not diminish their importance nor contributions to this genre. I also posit that rap music’s and hip-hop culture’s creation and development also exhibit influences that stem from
Jamaican culture. Despite the contributions of Puerto Rican and Jamaican cultures, the emphasis, as stated in the title, is on African-Americans, their culture, and their community. This is the sole purpose for the exclusion of the other contributors.

Even though rap music currently exists on the global level, the focus of this dissertation is on commercialized rap music, also sometimes referred to in this dissertation as gangsta rap or mainstream rap music which was created and performed in the United States of America. References to other rap styles have been included. Even though this author recognizes that the name “America” denotes more than one country, in this dissertation this name shall hereby be used to refer to the United States of America for the purpose of simplicity.

Furthermore, it is the author’s intention to remain true to the popular culture from which rap music and hip-hop culture have originated and currently thrives. Therefore, the quotations, urban slang-word usage, and spellings have been written in the manner stated. Any possible changes made were purely for the sake of enhancing the reader’s understanding. A glossary has also been added to further aid in comprehension.

Finally, this writer has spent much time in thought trying to determine the best possible and most accurate way of presenting information without offending the readers. It must be noted that much of the language and its exact quotations in this dissertation are different from that which the author is accustomed and do not truly reflect this author’s value system. But, however, the author will remain as faithful to factual evidence as possible. Therefore, in many cases, certain degrading words will be spelled as quoted in song lyrics. Otherwise, a less offensive spelling will be utilized.

**Chapter Summaries**

Beginning chapter 2, various African-American musical styles and their relationships to continuing cultural traditions such as contradictory discourses are surveyed. The eras of concern range from pre-slavery to the pre-hip-hop. Diverse
musical genres and examples are used to define and distinguish the importance of African-American music to American culture.

In chapter 3, cultural memory is applied specifically to rap music and hip-hop culture. While exploring “signifying” as a subgenre of cultural memory, artistic techniques and social issues form the basis of discussion in which the past is compared to the present. These artistic techniques and social issues include: call-and-response utilizing verbal rivalries, effects of signifying through double-talking and meanings, and the sampling of music from earlier times.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with negative historical aspects and usage of specific names assigned to African-American men and women in rap and music videos. Multiple representations of contradictory views as to the proper usage of the “N-word,” or the acceptance or rejection of the various stereotypical names and views surrounding black women are presented.

Chapter 6 continues the concept of contradicting viewpoints, except now it extends to the idea of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism as they relate to rap and hip-hop culture. The idea that rap music is being used as a means of keeping subscribers ignorant is investigated and compared to slave culture which prevented the education of slaves.

Chapter 7 illuminates the opposing viewpoints about rap music and hip-hop culture as a source of empowerment or enslavement manifested in the attitudes, lifestyles, and practices of those involved. These opposing viewpoints include issues such as: rap music fostering empowerment or enslavement; spawning an entrepreneurial spirit or promoting institutional unemployment; and encouraging political activism or anti-establishment.

In chapter 8, the conclusion, the presentation of cultural memory and contradicting perspectives are related and used as the basis of interpreting rap and hip-hop music in this comparative, historical dissertation. The evidence proves that there is no monolithic stance in the African-American community in terms of positions relating to rap music.
and hip-hop culture. This evidence also shows the need for new dialogues with hopes of reconciliation between genders, generations, and the common African-American and general populations.
CHAPTER TWO
CULTURAL MEMORY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSICAL STYLES

There is an interconnective relationship between African-American music of the past and those of the present era. These two eras and their accompanying music genres are linked through an important practice called cultural memory. Cultural memory is defined as the ability to access and relay previous communal information such as motivations, actions, and beliefs without direct previous knowledge or the benefit of formal training. This information which is “privileged” to associates of a specific culture, serves to connect its members through common and subjective knowledge and practices that are knowingly and unknowingly bequeathed to generations. Eventually these knowledge and procedures become more objective and inherent as they are “remembered,” utilized, and incorporated into normative cultural practices and performances such as African-American music-making.

The idea of “remembering” privileged information is clarified in Joseph Roach’s identification of a relationship between memory, performance, and substitution. He proposes that through cultural reproduction, re-creation, and forgetting, memory is embodied within the members of a culture through various performance types which include funeral rites, parades, carnivals, music and other art forms, customs, gossip, proverbs, and even physical gestures. Roach states,

These three definitions of performance—that it carries out purposes thoroughly, that it actualizes a potential, or that it restores a behavior--commonly assume that performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. Hence flourish the abiding yet

vexed affinities between performance and memory, out of which blossom the most florid nostalgia for authenticity and origin.\textsuperscript{25} 

In noting the three-fold relationship between the memory, performance, and substitution, Roach points out that memory is duplicated and transmitted through performance and substitution from one societal member to another. When a member “performs,” another member learns (memorizes) and embodies performances learned from the first. When the “performing” member leaves, the second becomes a surrogate or replacement for the first when the latter can no longer “perform” thus, maintaining human and cultural continuities.

Roach ascribes memory as being regulated by three constituents: the kinesthetic imagination, vortices of behavior, and displaced transmission. The kinesthetic imagination refers to the transmission of memory through bodily movement such as gestures, habits, and traditions passed down through unspoken means. Vortices of behavior represent the center, place, or site in which societal people “inherently” gather or are drawn together to associate with each other, therefore, forming memories. Lastly, displaced transmission indicates the adaptation of historic traditions to a modified and/or different situation.\textsuperscript{26} In this element, traditions change, new ones are established, and old ones are modified. This cultural situation exemplifies repetition and revision, a technique and form often found in music.

The above-mentioned constituents are important to African-American musical styles because they serve as catalysts for cultural retention and recollection of the past. Cultural memory is a way of validating and accounting for the personal, mystical quality of the musical and artistic behaviors of a culture. It might also involve and/or manifest itself in music in two ways: theoretically and culturally.

Theoretically, past music is continued through intertextuality. Music intertextuality is a practice in which a piece of music is referred to, quoted, or even


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 26-29.
parodied by another musical work. In this case, older (and sometimes, current) music or non-musical works of art are altered and integrated with contemporary music to form more innovative versions. Because these innovative versions evoke the past, they also serve to communicate and make aware, knowledge that might not be communicated otherwise, or which the listener might not have been privileged. Just as a physical artifact functions to relay cultural information about the past to those of the present, music intertextuality does the same. Earlier songs that are accessed or signified upon serve to orally and continually relay and convey historical and cultural information to contemporary listeners which, in turn, enhances their appreciation for the past, present, and the future. Through cultural memory, members of the group become unified through their expanded knowledge of the past.

Culturally, there is a conflicting discourse revolving around and resulting from the creation and performance of the music of African-Americans. This discourse, which began in the past and continues presently, entails antagonism concerning African-American music genres and their manner, the purpose, the places of performance, and resultant influence on the black-American population. The African-American genres which will be discussed in this chapter share many of the same contentious stances. Many have incited critical stances and have polarized the black community into gender, generation, class, and educational divisions. Many have been criticized for their "devilish" associations. Many have been opposed because of their "red-light" district links. Many have been criticized because of their "negative" influence on the community. Many have been decried because of their "anti-establishment" ideals or incitement of violence. All were created as a result of the accompanying socio-political system in place and the feeling of disenfranchisement. Because of the theoretical and cultural aspects, cultural memory has continued to play an important role in the life and music of African-American culture throughout the history of black Americans.

Cultural memory has been the means by which African and African-American cultures and music have been conserved. From before the time the first Africans
stepped off of the Dutch ships onto American soil in 1619, music had been an integral part of their lives. Music was utilized and integrated throughout all societal aspects to include festive/social, ritualistic/religious, and entertaining/recreational purposes and occasions. Throughout American history, music continued to play an important role in the lives of those who had become enslaved and continues to be of importance throughout contemporary African-American society. Slaves, though stripped of their culture, were forced to deny their past and adhere to the lifestyles of their enslavers, yet they managed to preserve cultural and musical elements from Africa through previously-established oral traditions.

Tilford Brooks contends, “…it is unreasonable to assume that, under the conditions of the kind of life experienced by Blacks in the South both during slavery and after emancipation, the Blacks could have departed completely from the African musical tradition. Blacks lived in a society in which separation of the races was at least the custom if not always the law. The separation of the races minimized outside musical influences and perpetuated the survival of African musical characteristics. The experiences of the African in the New World milieu did not drive out of existence the musical tradition that he brought with him from Africa.”

As the African slaves were enculturated into American/Western society and practices, the two cultures were syncretized, allowing for an easier transition. Slaves were able to find comparable cultural elements such as religion, with which they were able to relate. John W. Blassingame conveys, “The similarities between many European and African cultural elements enabled the slave to continue to engage in many traditional activities or to create a synthesis of European and African cultures. In the process of acculturation the slaves made European forms serve African functions. An example of this is religion.” The religious beliefs of both cultures involved an all-

powerful god that served as creator; lesser gods or saints; traditional ritualistic practices and ceremonies which included prayers and foods/feasts, religious ornaments, charms, and images; festivals; and most importantly, music.

Music also served as an aid to American acculturation and a means of continuing African customs and belief systems. The extensive use of music in every aspect of the slaves' lives (which basically revolved around work) catered to helping them adjust to the dire circumstances which they faced on the daily basis. Slaves worked almost endlessly in the plantation house, artisan shop, or mostly, in the field. The music reflected the various work environments and included many secular genres such as work songs, play songs, field or street calls, cries, hollers, shouts, and spirituals, which have sacred overtones.30

The Negro Spiritual

The Negro Spiritual is the embodiment of a hybrid music born of the integration of African and European musical and religious elements. Known by many other names such as shout songs, slave songs, folk songs, and jubilees, the Negro Spiritual arose as a reflection and expression of the anguish, tribulation, and apathy experienced by the African slaves who had no means of returning to their civilization, and yet, saw no end to their ongoing plight. These songs, which combined African (and possibly European) melodies and African rhythms, European harmonies and forms, and the English lyrics spoken in America, were used to express deep sentiments. While most spirituals expressed feelings such as pain, sadness, life, love, hope, justice and mercy, others expressed jubilation and heartfelt exuberance and were born of the daily experiences in which the slaves lived.

This new music which was created by African-Americans, served as the primary source for the preservation of African musical elements. These elements included
textural devices such as call and response; heterogeneous interjections of hums, wails, shouts, etc.; and body rhythmic responses such as hand clapping, foot stomping, etc.  

Other contributing factors in the preservation and shaping of African-American culture were the cultural responses of the slave owners, the slaves themselves, and during the Reconstruction period, the cultural responses of the general African-American public to this music.

The emphasized use of the voice rather than instruments was the result of the slave owner’s belief that certain instruments such as the drum incited riots. Slave owners also believed that the use of the drum and dancing was barbaric, unattractive, and heathenish. Because of these beliefs, the slaves were prohibited from using certain instruments and as a result, incorporated their own bodies for sound production and singing accompaniment. Musical acculturation took place. Hildred Roach states the importance of the oral tradition in the preservation of African legacy, “The method of oral tradition was greatly responsible for the maintenance of the samples of African heritage which miraculously survived the centuries. Because of the illiteracy of most Blacks (at least in the English language) and because of the diversity of African languages, a process of rote teaching was instrumental in sustaining the legends and music of old Africa. Although some Africans had composed their own symbols to represent language sounds, the oral tradition was still by far the most common practice in Africa for decades, and remained the most effective method of reaching the thousands of slaves in America.”

Although there was a suppression of certain instruments which was used at certain times, the slaves substituted everyday functional materials such as gourds as instruments of music-making. Generally, though, music was allowed and in some

31 This author has examined the Negro Spiritual in greater detail in an unpublished paper entitled, “The Diaspora and Publishing of the Negro Spiritual after the Civil War.”
32 Blassingame, The Slave Community, 35.
33 Roach, Black American Music, 8.
cases, even encouraged because it served as entertainment. It also motivated the slaves to work faster and longer, thus resulting in increased production. Music, especially singing, served varied functional purposes for the slaves. Because of the strong oral tradition, singing was used for teaching, gossiping, or signaling. Serving as a form of resistance to the unbearable situations endured by the slaves, singing was an important form of communication, comparable to the present-day newspaper.

Though communication was of utmost importance to the survival and self-emancipation of the slaves, communication via singing was also indistinct. This was due to the double meanings associated with the lyrics being sung. Many times the songs would have a religious overtone, but would convey a more functional meaning necessary to the survival of the slaves. These functions aided the slaves in alerting overseers as to their location, alleviated the pain of enslavement and the monotony of banal and hard work, aided in successful escapement, but most importantly, allowed the slaves to communicate covertly since they were not allowed to assemble.

This dual-coded idea may be observed in the spirituals found below. “Wade in the Water” speaks of and was used in baptism rites, and yet, was also used to communicate directions concerning traveling by water to the slave escapee. Traveling by water allowed the escapee to elude capture by preventing his/her scent from being picked up by bloodhounds. Harriet Tubman, often referred to as “Moses,” and her slave escapees are alluded to in verse two which speaks of “band that Moses led.”

The “God’s a-gonna trouble the water” phrase probably refers to Moses leading the Israelites through the parted Red Sea. In pursuance of the Israelites, the Egyptians were harmed and prevented from achieving their goal. If the slaves “kept the faith,” as did the Israelites, they would also be protected from those wanting to re-enslave them. Harm would come to the enemy just as it did for Moses and his people.

Wade in the Water, wade in the water, children,

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Wade in the water, God's a-gonna trouble the water.

See that band all dressed in white—God's a-gonna trouble the water.

The leader looks like an Israelite,—God's a-gonna trouble the water.

See that band all dressed in red—God's a gonna trouble the water.

It looks like the band that Moses led.—God's a-gonna trouble the water.\textsuperscript{36}

In “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “band of angels,” refers to the abolitionists on the other side of the river and “Jordan” refers to the Ohio River. This song was sung at funerals when the dead would return to their “real” home since this world was not their home. “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” was also used to communicate information to slaves escaping by way of the western route of the Underground Railroad.\textsuperscript{37}

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home!

1. I looked over Jordan and what did I see,
   Comin' for to carry me home,
   A band of angels comin' after me,
   Comin' for to carry me home.

2. If you get there before I do,
   Comin' for to carry me home,
   Jess tell my friends that I'm a comin' too,
   Comin' for to carry me home.


3. I’m sometimes up and sometimes down,
   Comin’ for to carry me home,
   But still my soul feels heavenly bound,
   Comin’ for to carry me home!\(^{38}\)

Spirituals were also indistinct in that there was a relationship between the sacred and the secular songs. Depending on the situation, many songs were adapted to the situation at hand through the changing of the lyrics. What would be sacred in one situation would be secular in another. Dave Watermulder and others stated, “Spirituals arose out of the songs the slaves would sing working in the fields on the plantations….Early spirituals acted for a number of practical functions for the slaves:”\(^{39}\) religious ritual, work, play/entertainment, and even lullabies. Ella Sheppard, Fisk Jubilee pianist and singer, stated that “her mother used to rock her to sleep singing ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.’”\(^{40}\)

Through improvisation and communal participation within many different settings, most daily activities were accompanied with music—whether sacred or secular. An example of one song which was considered sacred and secular was “Michael Row the Boat Ashore.” Its lyrics are:

Michael, row the boat ashore, Halleluja
Michael, row the boat ashore, Halleluja.
1. Sister help to trim the sail, Halleluja
   Sister help to trim the sail, Halleluja.
2. Jordan’s river is deep and wide, Halleluja
   Meet my mother on the other side, Halleluja.
3. Jordan’s river is chilly and cold, Halleluja
   Chills the body but not the soul, Halleluja.

http://www.gwu.edu/~e73affram/dw-ah-ek.html#wade.
\(^{40}\) Cooper, *Slave Spirituals and the Jubilee Singers*, 40.
Michael, row the boat ashore, Halleluja
Michael, row the boat ashore, Halleluja.  

According to Cecil Adams, “Like many spirituals, "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" combines religious expression ("hallelujah") with quotidian detail ("row the boat ashore"). The boat is a musical boat -- the slaves often expressed themselves creatively by starting with their musical instrument ("Little David play on your harp") and the boat was the "instrument" of the rowers. Note other religious images (Jordan River, chills the body but not the soul, milk and honey). Historians of spirituals classify the song as both a spiritual and a work song, and some argue that it is more properly a sea chanty."

Vincent Dion Stringer states, “Spirituals go back to the slavery experience in America. You can't trace them to a particular person or place. They're songs that were created by many people. They are songs that reflected the experience that the slaves had in their religious experience, in their master's churches. And music that was created during their work experience.”

Even though most of the existing music preserved from the days of slavery are those of a religious nature, it has been speculated that perhaps, secular music accounts for more of the actual music utilized by the slaves. The majority of songs were gathered mainly in the places where the slaves had been converted to Christianity and therefore, tended to be religious. These were places in which neither secular songs nor musical instruments were heard, sung, and played. This being the case, spirituals and other religious songs would have been used as accompaniment for sacred and secular situations such as various types of plantation work.

With the demise of slavery and the desire to forget the associated negative reminders of it, the spiritual faded into obscurity because of its negative associations. The freedom that was so often sung about in the spirituals had arrived and many blacks

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felt that there was no longer a need for this music. Roach states, “certain of his [African-American] songs were buried and forgotten after Emancipation having outgrown their purpose. He no longer felt the need for “Steal Away” in quite the same way as had Nat Turner, the minister-insurrectionist, and perhaps the composer of the song. Now the Afro-American wished to retain only that which was free—free of anything peculiar to the illusions and institutions of slavery.”

It was not until the Fisk Jubilee Singers lifted many of the Negro Spirituals out of obscurity in their quest to seek financial security for Fisk University that the spirituals became appreciated as truly “American” works of art. Roach contends that “Fortunately, the Fisk Singers were finally persuaded to sing the spirituals in order to raise funds for the school, not then a university. The sincere desire to continue their education inspired them to abandon former prejudices against the spirituals. This desire also helped them to convey the depths of emotions found in these long rejected compositions to their audiences. Since then, spirituals enlightened the world to their messages and emotions, becoming the penetrating force in both popular and classical music of the modern period.”

The fame of the Fisk Jubilees and the increased attention to the Negro Spiritual were firmly established after many successful performances throughout the northeastern portion of the United States and Europe. These songs which were disdained by pro-slavery advocates before the Civil War, reviled by its creators as a negative reminder of their bondage and tortuous days of enslavement after the Civil War, were now beloved by the world—all through the work of one group who sought an education and desired to help their school in need. Because they saved Fisk University and introduced the world to the religious songs that aided in the survival of strong-minded people, the Fisk Jubilee Singers will forever be remembered.

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45 Ibid., 35.
46 Cooper, *Slave Spirituals and the Jubilee Singers*, 71.
The impact that the Black spiritual has had on American music has been great. Its influence has been felt in music in the European tradition, beginning with Antonin Dvorak’s journey to this country in the 1890s and in the beginnings of jazz in the same decade. Although America was late in discovering the worth of this indigenous music, its value was realized before it became extinct, with the result that it has been largely preserved for posterity.47

Ragtime

Not only was the dramatic influence of the Negro Spiritual felt in music of the European tradition. It has also effectively and forever changed the makeup of African-American musical culture. Affected by such elements as call-and-response and complex, syncopated rhythms which stem from West Africa and preserved via the Spiritual, other African-American musical genres and styles were born. One such style was ragtime.

Ragtime was a style of music originated within the African-American community that is characterized by its emphatic usage of complex, syncopated rhythms. Even though there are many theories as to its beginning, ragtime is believed by some to have evolved from the patting juba dances that allowed slaves to communally participate in music- and merry-making because of prohibitions against drums and African drumming.48 Handclapping and patting different parts of the human body were the next best things to performing and keeping the rhythm percussively during music making.

Characterized as a style of music which emphasizes syncopation in its melody and a consistent, regular, alternation of a bass note with a blocked chord, ragtime was derivative of spirituals, popular “coon songs” from the minstrel music traditions, cakewalk dance and Euro-American sources such as marches and various other music types. Despite the various theories as to its origination and influences, ragtime is an impressive American (U.S.) style which began as an oral (instrumental) tradition

47 Brooks, America’s Black Musical Heritage, 42.
48 This author has examined ragtime in greater detail in an unpublished paper entitled, “The Impact of Ragtime on American Life.”
because most ragtime players were musically illiterate. This genre eventually became a written tradition where formally trained musicians used music notation in the creation of this music.

Although ragtime is believed to have evolved into a form during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, its first works (song and piano piece) were published not by black men, but by two white men (Ben Harney and William Krell) in the years 1895 and 1897, respectively. For this reason, many scholars consider the beginning of ragtime as being the date of the first published ragtime work—1895. It was not until late 1897 that the first ragtime piano piece by an African-American was published and not until 1899 that the first ragtime work ("Maple Leaf Rag" by Scott Joplin) which sold over 100,000 copies, was published.

"The position of Blacks in American society determined the status of ragtime music for a considerable part of its early history. It was developed and heard in the White underworld, which contributed to the rejection of ragtime by many elements of society that would have been likely to accept it had they been able to consider the music apart from its unfavorable environment."\(^{49}\)

The piano was the instrument of choice for much ragtime music, although there were ragtime songs and ragtime pieces played by bands. It was more available and more affordable to pay one musician rather than an orchestra to provide music for listening and dancing. With the demise of slavery and few career choices available to African-Americans, itinerant pianists and other musicians worked predominantly at the houses of ill-repute in the red light districts, which were the prime employers of ragtime musicians. "Ragtime’s real spawning-ground was undoubtedly the parlours of bordellos, partly because its foremost practitioners, the predominantly black ‘jig pianists’, could not find work elsewhere. Most of the great pianists and composers…started there, and hence the style was frowned on by the more prudish American music critics."\(^{50}\)

\(^{49}\) Brooks, America’s Black Musical Heritage, 78.
Music critics were not the only ones to find this music particularly adverse. Traditional musicians such as those of the American Federation of Musicians found the music to be indecent, and of a “lower class” and prohibited its membership from participating in its performance. Joplin states in his exercise book, “What is scurrilously called ragtime is an invention that is here to stay. That is now conceded by all classes of musicians….That real ragtime of the higher class is rather difficult to play is a painful truth which most pianists have discovered. Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at “hateful ragtime” no longer passes for musical culture.”

Ragtime’s African-American critics were not unlike the white critics of certain elements of slave music and worship. Just as early white Christians rejected particular “heathenish” facets of African-American slave music and worship, black Christians generally felt the same way about “secularized” music. John W. Work stated, “Many grand songs have been eschewed by the church because they had been used too commonly in non-religious activities.” One song that was considered to be too secularized was the spiritual, “Wasn’t That a Mighty Day When Jesus Christ Was Born,” which was sung by minstrel quartets. “So strong were the demands of the Negro church upon a member that he was forced to refrain from singing all songs of a secular nature….I have found it impossible to persuade church members to sing a work song or a social song for me, because it was ‘sinful.’ The church placed the same ban on secular songs in entertainments and suppers that it sponsored.”

52 Blassingame, The Slave Community, 35.
Likewise, African-Americans who championed Christian fundamentalist ideals as a result of the second and third Great Awakenings also found ragtime to be offensive. Jeffrey Chappell states, “Joplin met with opposition to his chosen art form throughout his life. The fact that Joplin was black does not account for all of this opposition, since the black clergy crusaded against his music. Ragtime was seen as degenerate and even dangerous to the moral health of the nation. It was, in fact, music that was performed frequently in brothels.”

Despite the general public’s ribald reaction to ragtime, brothel owners and prostitutes embraced it because aside from its innovative sounds that were conducive to their business, they and the musicians themselves were able to financially benefit from this developing musical genre.

Scott Joplin, ragtime’s chief and most well-known promoter, did much to bring this music to the forefront of the American musical public. At first musically illiterate, Joplin later took formal piano and theory lessons which enabled him to further develop his music skills and piano-playing style. He formed a partnership with John Stark, a white publisher who allowed him to collect royalties and a fee for his published works. This was uncommon especially since slavery had ended only about thirty-five years earlier. With Stark’s assistance, Joplin was able to establish himself and gain respect as an African-American composer of serious music. This was something he had hoped to accomplish.

Although now considered as art music and performed by pianists as such, ragtime began as music which was used to accompany dancing in the black juke joints. It is because of the dancing that rag’s origins include the complex rhythms which are characteristic of this music, but at first, though, rags were associated with the two-step rhythm of the cakewalk. The cakewalk was a plantation dance performed by slave couples in which a cake was awarded to the couple expressing themselves best while doing this dance.

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Because of ragtime’s popularity, America was turned on to cakewalk dancing. This syncopated dance became nationally and eventually, internationally known among whites and blacks at the end of the nineteenth century and was also adopted within “mainstream” classical music and marches.

Not only did ragtime contribute to the dance craze. It also contributed to the acceptance of African-Americans as “serious” composers which helped ease the stereotypical imaging of black Americans and had a direct influence on international music. While rag became more conventionally written, classical music composers such as Igor Stravinsky began to integrate this music genre into their own works.

Ragtime contributed to the beginning of the era of popular culture and popular music because of skyrocketing sheet music sales of Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag” and because of the proliferation and continuation of social and competitive gatherings such as cutting contests. A cutting contest was a creative way in which many African-American musicians earned immediate, additional income through musically competing with other musicians. These competitions would consist of many musicians/pianists taking turns performing virtuosic gymnastics on the piano (or other instrument) with the most skilled winning the contest much like the “playing the dozens” also known as signifying contest. The difference is that cutting contests involve instrumental playing while the African-American slave derived “dozens” contest involves a verbal duel of insults.

As reported by Eileen Southern,

The effect of slavery had been to create distinct and separate communities of blacks within the larger white communities of the nation, and the emancipation of the slaves did nothing to change this situation. Blacks lived, for the most part, in their own world and developed their own institutions and culture. Of particular relevance here is the fact that the black music maker developed a distinctive style of entertainment music, fitted to his own personal needs and expressive of his own individuality. It was not intended to be heard or understood by whites.
Rag music was one of the earliest manifestations of this distinctive music. The other was the blues.  

Blues

As with many African-American-related musical genres, the exact origins and dates of the blues are not known. Although the blues existed as an art form long before 1920 (the year the first blues was recorded), two blues songs – “The Baby Seals Blues” by African-American rag-pianist, Artie Matthews and “Dallas Blues” written by a white song writer, Hart A. Wand were published during the summer of 1912. Blues connoisseurs such as W.C. Handy and Ma Rainey were known to have stated that they had witnessed street blues performances as early as 1902 and 1903. Still others have said that the blues was always in existence. According to Eileen Southern, “Bunk Johnson, a pioneer bluesman, told an interviewer, ‘When I was a kid [i.e. in the 1880s] we used to play nothing but the blues.’”

Some consider this genre to be a type of “secular spiritual” reflecting the sorrow and negative aspects of black life in America much like many Negro Spirituals. As with the Negro Spirituals, the blues has its roots in African and African-American ancestry which were culturally preserved and continued via the negative oppressive circumstances surrounding the lives of black Americans. The blues served a cathartic purpose of helping the singer to better deal with his/her unbearable wretchedness. It imparted an affirmation of their existence as human beings in a society in which they felt disenfranchised. But unlike the Negro Spiritual, the blues was originally created as a private song which was performed by a soloist rather than a group in a private setting. It originated from the solemn work songs and the field hollers that were sung by black American unskilled laborers and slaves and in some cases were also influenced by

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56 Ibid., 339.
57 Ibid., 333.
blackface minstrelsy during the approximate time that blackface minstrelsy began to be performed by African-Americans.\(^{58}\) What is generally known is that like the spiritual, the blues “evolved” and is a reflection of negative sociological issues with which African-Americans dealt.

Blues exemplifies many similarities with other musical genres that are found and are associated with the African-American culture. As with ragtime music whose chief proponents were itinerant musicians who traveled far and wide to perform their music, many blues musicians were also nomadic. The latter also performed in “houses of ill-repute” such as saloons, brothels, and basically wherever they could find an audience. Because of the music they played, the sexual content in the lyrics, and the places in which they performed, blues performers were considered immoral by “decent” church-going, black people. Eileen Southern articulates, “From the time of its origin, however, the blues was generally associated with the lowly-received with warmth in the brothels and saloons of the sporting world, but rejected by respectable people.”\(^{59}\)

Peter Guralnick and others even contend that there has been a rivalry between the black church and the blues for some time. They state, “Historically, there’s a complex, even antagonistic, relationship between the blues—the devil’s music, Satan’s music—and the church in the black community. A lot of blues players, many of them women, left the church to pursue a career in the blues, and ended up going back at the end of their days.”\(^{60}\)

Because the blues was also believed to be associated with the supernatural and with the powers of the devil, respectable people who were also non-blues enthusiasts often referred to it as the devil’s music. Blues fans believed that instrumental playing abilities could be greatly improved upon if certain conjuring things were done. Many believed that the rattles of rattlesnakes placed in the guitar or some dirt taken from a

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\(^{58}\) At first blackface minstrelsy consisted of white performers who began this “genre” before the Civil War. After Emancipation and with the disinterest of whites, black performers began to participate.


graveyard would significantly enhance the musician’s playing ability.\textsuperscript{61} Blues guitarist and singer, Robert Johnson was one such person who was believed to have used supernatural powers gained from the Devil to improve his guitar-playing abilities.

At first a less-than-mediocre guitarist, Johnson was believed to have incurred the help of Satan in his goal of becoming a great blues guitarist with powers to entrance his audience.\textsuperscript{62} In a short time he more than accomplished this goal, which led many to believe that his immense improvement was due to his selling of his soul to the devil.\textsuperscript{63} Furthermore, one of his songs, “Me and the Devil Blues” reflects his interest in the occult, even though Johnson’s early life did include religious teachings and instructions against worldly activities.\textsuperscript{64}

As with many performing musicians, allegiance to this art form was divided. This is because many blues artists performed different (blues, folksongs, ragtime pieces, popular songs, etc.) types of music and because many of them had been reared in homes which catered to the Christian lifestyle. One such person was William Christopher Handy, otherwise known as the father of the blues. W.C. Handy’s father was a Methodist minister. For obvious reasons his parents, who were freed slaves, were opposed to his lifestyle choice to pursue blues performance because of its negative association with objectionable characters such as gamblers, pimps, bootleggers, prostitutes and unsavory associations. Fortunately for blues connoisseurs, Handy continued to pursue his love for blues despite parental objection.

Many other musicians were faced with the same lifestyle choice. While ex-blues performer, Thomas A. Dorsey, eventually chose a life of sacred music performance, others such as Robert Johnson continued to sing the blues. The lives (and deaths) of these “sinful” musicians as well as blues itself, were characterized as being unwholesome and “unheavenly.”

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., xvii.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 108-109.
Jazz

Not only were blues artists affiliated with unsavory characters and performance situations. This was also an important element in jazz music, even though jazz is now considered more honorable, as compared to its earlier beginnings. Jazz, like blues and ragtime, sprang from the saloons and brothels of the African-American community in the early twentieth-century where its players performed for and with each other. Jazz served as recreational music consigned to shoddy speakeasies, although some believe that the church also contributed to its birth. Because its audiences consisted of mainly black Americans, jazz was considered inferior.

Though there are many other theories as to its origination, the term, jazz is believed by some to have originated from the word jass which has sexual affiliations and connotations relating to houses of prostitution, yet it was also associated with gambling and bootlegging. Elijah Wald states, “The New Orleans jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton regularly boasted that music was just a sideline for him, that he made his real money as a gambler and a pimp. It was the gamblers and pimps, the bootleggers, tough guys, and gangsters who ruled the barrooms and juke joints, often hiring and firing musicians at their whim.”65

Jazz, as other African-American musical genres, was influenced by the sociopolitical aspects of the day. Even though the other genres were born as a result of slavery, discrimination, and basically, disenfranchisement, jazz is considered by some to be a review of the total cultural experience of African-Americans.66 Jazz’s later development was probably more affected by sociopolitical affairs because of migration/relocation and because of limited areas of practice.67 Jazz was born in New Orleans under the influence of African-American groups but was formally introduced to the public by white orchestras rather than black ones. It spread from the south to the north due to the African-American migration in which blacks relocated to northern towns

65 Elijah Wald, 268-269.
to secure work and to rid themselves of disenfranchisement, lynching, and racism. It was because of the migrations and the closing of legal prostitution districts that jazz spread to many northern and Midwestern cities.

Despite its “non-humble” beginnings, jazz is rooted in African and African-American musical genres such as spirituals, ragtime, and the blues, although it is a contemporary of ragtime and blues. It was also greatly influenced by the Negro brass bands of the late nineteenth-century which participated in local and regional competitions much like the cutting contests related to ragtime and the cakewalk dance.

The brass band cutting contests were very central to these musicians. It involved one or more bands competing against each other by playing louder or more melodiously with the losing band being forced to move out of the way. These contests were also known as bucking contests.

The influence of the oral tradition represents a characteristic which is predominant to this African-derived and influenced music. Jazz, like blues, is very vocally-oriented. Even though early jazz is mainly played instrumentally, the instruments mimic the voice and its nuances that have come to exemplify the blues and jazz genres. In the playing of this music, the performers typically improvise materials in such a way that the music often sounds different each time it is played. Another way in which the oral tradition manifested itself was the manner in which jazz pieces would be learned. Even though there were some jazz musicians who were musically literate, many could not read music. The music was typically learned orally through listening and through direct participation in which the performers would antiphonally answer each other in a call-and-response fashion. This communal manner of producing music is reminiscent of the musical dialogues which took place between the leader and the followers in other African- and African-American-derived musical genres.

Not only does jazz imitate blues in its oral tradition. Rhythmically, it embodies syncopated rhythms often found in blues and ragtime, two genres that utilize the less restrained and complex polyrhythmic structures which originated from the spiritual and
from earlier music transported from Africa. The usage of polyrhythms which are played by different instruments resulted in a polyphonic texture (though some would refer to it as heterophononic). Southern states, “The polyphonic texture of the music was a result of ‘collective improvisation,’ with each melody player improvising his part in such a way that the parts combined into a balanced, integrated whole. The sound of jazz was in the same tradition as the slaves’ singing of spirituals, which to contemporary listeners produced an effect, as we have seen, of ‘a marvellous complication and variety’ of sounds ‘sung in perfect time.’”

Gospel

Gospel music also consists of a variety of sounds. As with the spiritual, blues, ragtime, and jazz, the oral tradition in gospel music is also significant. It is through the blues that this tradition is manifested and imitated. Blues vocally “infiltrated” ragtime and jazz. According to Ellen Koskoff, “Blues also influenced gospel music through the increased use of blue notes and instrumentation, particularly the guitar. One of the leaders in introducing blues elements to gospel music was Thomas A. Dorsey in the 1930s, himself an ex-blues singer, pianist, and songwriter.”

Referred to as “Georgia Tom,” “whispering piano player,” and “Barrelhouse Tommy,” Thomas A. Dorsey was a bluesman and pianist who traveled with Ma Gertrude Rainey and other singers and musicians, such as Rainey’s Wild Cats Jazz Band and Rainey’s Rabbit Foot Minstrels. As her piano accompanist, he “wrote out all of her music for her” and is known to have written over three hundred blues and jazz songs (although even more songs are attributed to him).

Although influenced by C. A. Tindley, a gospel pioneer, Dorsey is credited as having “created gospel music—the African American religious music which married secular blues to a sacred text...He developed a sacred music based on the secular blues. It featured syncopated notes in an eight-bar blues structure; but instead of themes of defiance in the face of despair – the theme most common in the blues – this new music told stories of hope and affirmation, yet it appealed to those not subscribing to religion.”

Jazz fans were also attracted to and bought this music, but not for the purposes or affirming their faith. They related to the rhythms and the improvisation that were so reminiscent of their “own” music style. It is for this reason that some of this music’s audience consisted of those for whom gospel was not originally proposed.

Thomas A. Dorsey’s earlier commitment to gospel music quickly ended as a result of conflicts with church ministers who considered his gospel to be sinful. Boyer wrote, “Dorsey began developing a sacred music based on the secular blues...Less than a year later, however, Dorsey was back in the secular blues business full-time. His ‘gospel music’ met so much resistance from pastors who considered it ‘devil’s music,’ that he found it easier to play the blues straight.” Dorsey also faced difficulties within the churches. He stated, “I’ve been thrown out of some of the best churches in America.” This resistance led to the renouncement of his commitment to gospel music.

With the death of his wife and baby boy during childbirth, Dorsey responded by writing “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” (based on George Allen’s “Must Jesus bear the Cross Alone”) for which he is best known. With the success of this hymn, and his eventual teaming with Mahalia Jackson, they propelled a new gospel era which has become known as the “Golden Age of Gospel Music” and for which he eventually

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75 Ibid., http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/thomas_dorsey.html.
established himself as the “Father of Gospel” music. Additionally, after meeting with unsuccessful attempts to peddle his own song sheets and publish his gospel, and because he was disheartened by the music publishing industry and their attitude toward African-American composers, he established his own black gospel music publishing company called The Dorsey House of Music in 1932. Because of this, Dorsey “was the first one to make a market for gospel songs. He went to the churches and sang his songs at the end of the service to those who would let him.”

As gospel music became more integrated into American and African-American society, it also became more mainstream. Because it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to more thoroughly delve into the specifics, only a few promoters of gospel music who aided in mainstream integration and who culturally adhered to earlier standards of African-American music will be mentioned. Mahalia Jackson is among those whose singing skills catapulted her to stardom and did the same for gospel music itself.

Influenced by the music of her city of birth, New Orleans, Jackson, though musically illiterate, sang “the songs of Zion” with great emotion and without adhering to Western standards of music presentation. It was because of her emotion-filled performances that she was afforded the opportunity to perform outside of the realm of gospel music. Jackson stated, “I never did learn nothing about reading and writing music. All I ever learned was just to sing the way I feel.” This way included allowing the Lord to take control of her singing in the form of flexible rhythms and improvisation. As unconventional as this might seem, Jackson’s singing propelled her into other performance venues (radio and movies) and contributed to the proliferation of gospel music into mainstream American society. This mainstreaming was also made possible by the recording industry’s realization of the potential of money to be earned by the singing of gospel music. Mahalia Jackson, among others contributed to this realization.

76 Thomas Dorsey, interview. www.honkytonks.org/showpages/tadorsey.htm audio sound clip transcribed by this author.
With the infusion of secular genres and secular character traits with that of gospel, the controversy surrounding gospel music began and has continued despite the present prominence of contemporary gospel music. Because modern gospel includes the use of call-and-response, heavy repetition, syncopated and swinging rhythms, use of more musical instruments, namely percussive, and improvisation, many traditionalists consider this music to be too secularized. According to Edwin Hawkins, “There’s always been controversy around modern versus traditional Gospel. What is tradition anyway? Gospel music doesn’t have a particular style. Gospel’s got to progress.” Gospel music has continued to progress and change through the incorporation of rap music and the hip-hop culture.

Kirk Franklin, a native of Ft. Worth, Texas, exploded on the national gospel scene during the 1990s with his hip-hop-influenced gospel music and continues in the music tradition of Thomas A. Dorsey. Franklin also continues to preserve the controversy pitting traditional gospel against modern not only in music, but in lyrics, performance practice, contemporary beats, and even dress style. Frances Stallworth, Florida A&M University gospel choir adviser mentions that this choir performs all types of gospel music, but that she has a preference for traditional ones. She feels that they speak to the heart. Although the students enjoy the more contemporary songs, with hip-hop beats, she points out, “We older people have to tolerate it in order not to alienate the young people.”

Although this music crosses over to many religions and generations, urban, contemporary gospel music such as that of Franklin’s have been described by some as being very secularized. This is due to the lyrics which some believe have been whitewashed/toned down for mass appeal. Rev. Arthur T. Jones states that much of what he hears today doesn’t fit. Sometimes the songs don’t mention God, Jesus or

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Lord. There is no chorus about salvation or saving grace, only subtle inferences of goodness, morality, or the need for ‘someone’ who can turn hard times around. Jones points out, “If you have to wrestle with the lyrics of a song, if you have to tire yourself out trying to figure out who they’re talking about… it might be ‘religio-tainment,’ but it ain’t God.”80 J. Wendell Mapson also states, “More and more, music in the black church has become commercialized and packaged. Some of its lyrics represent poor theology, which has no place in black churches seeking to present the best of the faith heritage. As a result, the black church runs the risk of misusing this vital and necessary component of the faith.”81 These ideas of secularity and mass appeal were similar to those faced by Thomas A. Dorsey.

Even though the amalgamated musical genres making up gospel were diverse and the composers different, the reasons for the creation of gospel music remain unchanged—assisting in bearing the unbearable, triumphing over life’s adversities, and “understanding it better by and by” for the same reason most African-American-inspired music were born.

**Rhythm and Blues**

Also an expression of a collective predicament and diverse styles, rhythm and blues, arose as an African-American genre during the 1940s. At first being called “race” music and/or records, the genre title “rhythm and blues” was applied to African-American music produced at this time as a musical marketing term by Billboard Magazine’s Jerry Wexler.82 Some of the talented and significant artists whose works may be categorized in this genre include Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Ruth Brown, Louis Jordan, the Platters, the Shirelles, the Coasters, and many others. A few of these groups were also labeled as doo wop groups, a late 1950s/early 1960s subgenre of R & B and rock and roll, as well.

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80 Ibid., http://www.sptimes.com/w003/08/01/news_pf/Floridian/How_sweet_the_sound.shtml.
Rhythm and blues, also known as R & B, was born in the 1940s from blues, jazz, and gospel music which resulted from African-American migrations to northern cities. With the 1950s heyday of the gospel music quartets and their impact on other African-American genres, stylistic properties that characterized these gospel quartets were immediately and successfully adopted by rhythm and blues artists. Aside from the syncretizing of several styles, these properties included performances which were very “rhythmic, improvisatory, blues-like, repetitive (rhythmically, melodically, harmonically), responsorial, vocally interjective with the emphasizing of the primary chords, and like jazzmen, engaged in competitions much like the vocal cutting and carving contests that celebrated those most vocally abled.” R & B is also characterized by its use of electronic instruments and microphones.

Some African-Americans such as Alan Locke saw rhythm and blues (and other domains of popular music) as potentially being used to achieve visible gains for American blacks. Gains did indeed take place. Young black musicians were able to pursue their art full time, therefore, getting paid to do that which they enjoyed and gospel musicians were also able to earn a living through their art performance. Record companies, though, also made much money in this industry. Though some respected the black artist and his/her music, others cared more for their financial prosperity. This may be seen in the following scenario painted by Jerry Wexler, Billboard official who later co-operated Atlantic records, which catered to R & B artists:

First, he had the brass to imagine that he could do it, that he could find somebody who would spend a dollar, a good hard-earned American dollar, for his phonograph record. Then he had to find an artist, find a song, con the artist into coming into his studio, coax him into singing the song, pull the record out of him, press the record; then take that record and go to the disc jockeys and con

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83 Ibid., 174
them into putting it on the radio, then go to the distributors and beg them to take a box of twenty-five and try it out.\textsuperscript{84}

With the increased interest of young white listeners and the syncretizing of other certain blues types, jazz, and gospel, rhythm and blues became even more popular and widespread. As a result, rock ‘n’ roll was born. R & B also became more influential with American and English 1960s groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and eventually, other prominent rock ‘n’ roll groups and singers.

Rhythm and Blues adhered to the oral tradition, like its African-American predecessors, through rote rather than note music learning. This learning primarily took the traditional form of church choir participation, music apprenticeship, or active participation in performing groups. Rhythm and Blues also shared other commonalities with preceding black music genres which include underlying socio-political or cultural themes, such as promoting the realities of youth (interest in cars, relationships, and school). Esteeming the black race (“black is beautiful”) and protesting the disenfranchisement of black Americans eventually became important themes somewhat later as another new African-American music genre emerged. This genre was called soul music.

\section*{Soul}

The term, soul music began in the mid-twentieth century with Ray Charles, who developed and integrated R & B with gospel. “Peaking in the 1960s, it helped define the African-American experience in America with a passion, pride, and optimism rare in any art form.”\textsuperscript{85} It was during the time of soul music that blacks worked toward delineating their culture and sought self-acceptance. This was manifested in the referent terms used to address each other-- “brother” and “sister.”

By the 1960s, soul had “come into its own” subsequent to R & B becoming commercialized and urbanized. This African-American music genre was exemplified through the works of Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, including many other artists of Motown and Stax/Volt, and later Atlantic Records. These two record companies epitomized the diverse “soul” music qualities and types represented by the various sections of the United States.

Soul music counts among its characteristics: influence of gospel, R & B, and pop music; usage of call-and-response; flexible melodies; adherence to the three-part blues form (A-A-B), and continuance of the prominence of vocals. In distinguishing R & B from soul music, one must note the above-listed characteristics as well as remember two prominent facts. First, one must remember that soul music reflected the positive social changes and desire for change that were important to black Americans at this time. As stated by Robert Santelli, “To young black ears, soul sounded in sync with the times. People were moving forward in their thinking and actions, dreams suddenly seemed possible, the world could be changed, things could happen. For many young African-Americans, soul music reflected all of these feelings.”

Secondly, one should remember that “soul is the manifestation of the bittersweet Black experience and/or Black lifestyle. Accordingly, it emerged in the sixties not only as a concept of Black identity but also of Black musical expressiveness. Black music gives the Black artist the vehicle by which he can express that profound, quasi-religious feeling.”

“Soul diminished as a commercial presence in the mid-’70s, as funk and disco began to put more emphasis on danceable rhythms than songwriting and the singing….Soul is still very much alive, of course, in the harmonies and production that continue to inform contemporary African-American popular music, whether in funk, disco, dance-pop, or rap. The “classic” soul style lives on in different settings….”

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87 Tilford Brooks, America’s Black Musical Heritage, 151.
88 All Music Guide to Soul, 844.
Rap

Rap is a style of music which originated in the 1970s in New York City, which involves rhymed lyrics being spoken over accompanied pulsating beats. Obtaining its most characteristic elements from local DJs such as Jamaican immigrant, Kool Herc, who sampled funk and other music types, rap was the result of older styles being incorporated with the latest.

Being influenced by many early cultural genres and people (which will be discussed later in more detail in this dissertation), rap was introduced to the national scene with the success of the Sugar Hill Gang who recorded “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979. This well-received rap song was not the first rap recording. The Fatback Band recorded “King Tim III” a few months prior to “Rapper’s Delight but failed to generate as much notice as the latter. 89 Other artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Run D.M.C. followed suit with successful hits in 1982 and 1984 respectively, which made rap music more mainstream.

As with other genres discussed earlier, rap music also exemplifies cultural memory in the form of intertextualizing earlier music and incorporating it into more contemporary styles. This may be seen in “Rapper’s Delight” which uses sampling, a form of intertextualization, in the production of this rap song. The Sugar Hill Gang utilizes Chic’s song, “Good Times” as the basis for this groundbreaking rap song. 90

In the 1980s West Coast rappers became prominent with Ice T, N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude), and Dr. Dre leading the way. This music, which was called gangsta, exemplifies rap with more criminally-minded, and blatant sexual ideas and themes, and like the other music genres discussed earlier, exhibits a form of cultural memory.

Although gangsta rap exemplifies the same aspects of cultural memory as “general” rap music, the former also brings to mind another characteristic which is predominant in other African-American music genres—controversy. Gangsta rap

incites much controversy, but the one which relates most to this chapter is based largely on how it is defined and classified. As stated on the Bronze Bass website, “One of the problems with the grouping of music into genres is that it is a subjective process that has a lot to do with the individual’s personal understanding and way of listening to music. This is especially true in sub-genres.”

   Gangsta rap’s controversy pertains to its classification as either being limited to music created and performed by those of the West Coast, or being inclusive of East Coast rap, or being a defunct term no longer used in the classification of rap music. The same took place in jazz, blues, and soul music. In reference to jazz, Matthew Goodheart states,

   The fifties saw a multitude of new forms of jazz; modal, “cool,” hard bop, etc. There was also an attempt by Gunther Schuller and others at “Third-Stream,” a self-conscious fusion of jazz and classical. While these forms expanded and explored the language which had now been accepted as “jazz” in extremely inventive, artistic, and individualistic ways, nothing challenged the dominant paradigm so deeply as the music variously called “free-jazz,” “avant-garde jazz,” “the new thing,” or most tellingly “anti-jazz.” New harmonic and sonic materials invoked twentieth-century developments in “classical” music, but rather were incorporated according to a self-proclaimed “black” aesthetic. These musics cast doubt on the assumptions formulated in the fifties as to what jazz was.

A similar thing took place in soul music. There were many types of soul which were, for the most part, based on regions and their differences. The *All Music Guide to Soul* states of Northern Soul,

   Northern Soul, for many, is a meaningless term because it doesn't refer to any specific kind of music. For many others, it's a term that means everything.

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Where most soul genres are named for either the region that the music were the music was created, or for the sound of the music. Northern soul is named after where the music was played—in dance clubs in northern. There are other examples which will not be expanded upon due to dissertation limitations and future gangsta rap discussion in oncoming chapters.

Despite the lack of general consensus regarding the classification of gangsta rap, the definition which classifies gangsta rap as being rap music which caters to criminality, sexual proclivity, and excessive materialism irrespective of region will be utilized. This author recognizes that there are differing opinions from those stated in this dissertation, but for the sake of simplicity and comprehension, the above definition will be used.

Each of the African-American musical genres discussed involved the conscious and unconscious transmission of cultural information which resulted in the continuation and preservation of African and early African-American traditions. Whether this continuation pertains to music theoretical aspects such as utilizing call-and-response or using certain instruments or to the cultural aspects which include the continuation of controversies pertaining to elements such as the appropriateness, decency, and the negative influence of certain music genres, all are an important part of African-American music and cultural history and shows the unbroken lineage that connects both past and present.

CHAPTER THREE
CULTURAL MEMORY IN RAP MUSIC AND HIP-HOP CULTURE: SIGNIFYIN(G)

“In many ways, though, the Dozens is a mean game because what you try to do is totally destroy somebody else with words. It’s that whole competition thing again, fighting each other. There’d be sometimes 40 or 50 dudes standing around and the winner was determined by the way they responded to what was said. If you fell all over each other laughing, then you knew you’d scored. It was a bad scene for the dude that was getting humiliated. I seldom was….Signifying is more humane. Instead of coming down on somebody’s mother, you come down on them. But, before you can signify you got to be able to rap….Signifying allowed you a choice -- you could either make a cat feel good or bad. If you had just destroyed someone or if they were just down already, signifying could help them over. Signifying was also a way of expressing your own feelings.”

One manner in which cultural memory has formed the basis of a theoretical interpretation of African-American literature and music is the art of signifyin(g). Signifyin(g) denotes using seditious references, gestures, and dialogues to infer multiple meanings through association as a means of resistance. Signifyin(g) also refers to a spirited contesting and using of words as weapons in the undercutting of an opponent. This verbal competition, which was frequently used during slavery, takes place between two people and is otherwise known by various names such as woofin’, signifyin’, playing the dozens, trash talking, toasts, snaps, and beefs.

96 Signifyin(g) is the “black” version of the common English term, “signifying” or signification.” For the purposes of simplification, the two spellings, “-ing” and “-in(g),” will be used synonymously.
98 Beef 1, TV Broadcast, narrated by Ving Rhames, (2003,; BET, rebroadcast 2005).
Although Juan Latino, a sixteenth-century black neo-Latin poet, is noted as being the first person known to use signifyin(g) in his poetry, signifyin(g) “is not in any way the exclusive province of black people, although blacks named the term and invented its rituals.”

According to Roger D. Abrahams, “Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use if not in origin. It can mean any of a number of things; in the case of the toast about the signifyin(g) monkey, it certainly refers to the trickster’s ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. Thus it is signifyin(g) to stir up a fight between neighbors by telling stories; it is signifyin(g) to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back; it is signifyin(g) to ask for a piece of cake by saying, ‘my brother needs a piece of cake.’”

According to Henry Louis Gates, signifyin(g) is a metaphorical, rhetorical device used to imply, provoke, incite, through verbalizations and gesticulations. In essence, signifyin(g) means to manipulate language so as to vary or make its meaning ambiguous. This may be done through troping in the form of “marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one’s name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, etc.”

Signifyin(g) in the form of the verbal competitive game, “playing the dozens” is related to chattel slavery in which older slaves who were incapable of working were sold by the dozens; much like clearance items in a store, etc. Because slaves were unable to own themselves, any physical violence against each other was unlawful because they, the property of the owners, would lose their value and would face dire

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consequences as a result. Verbal sparring was used as a substitute for physical aggression. Although physical violence was sometimes incited by the verbal sparring, many conflicts were diffused.  

Upon close observation of the principles of signifyin(g) and its associative game, “playing the dozens,” one notices that verbal sparring is simply a more aggressive version of the call-and-response musical element that is so often associated with the music of Africa. This is because the verbal “dialogues” that take place in the dozens “game” entail, insults and humiliation which could lead to fights. H. Rap Brown states, "That's why they call me Rap, 'cause I could rap. (The name stuck because Ed would always say, "That my nigger Rap," "Rap my nigger.") But for dudes who couldn't, it was like they were humiliated because they were born Black and then they turned around and got humiliated by their own people, which was really all they had left. But that's the way it is. Those that feel most humiliated humiliate others. The real aim of the Dozens was to get a dude so mad that he'd cry or get mad enough to fight."

Signifyin(g) in music refers to the call and response-like interjections of musical embellishments such as calls, cries, whoops, and hollers, elisions, musical expressions, and many other musical elements. As with literary signifyin(g), the music form exhibits affirmative, searching, suggestive, and symbolic connotations. Additionally, music signifyin(g) is derivative of and related to the Signifying Monkey tales of African mythology which directly “connects its user with the roots of black culture” in the African oral expression. Music signifyin(g) also involves “criticism since it validates and invalidates musical narrative through respectful, ironic satirizing imitation and manipulation.”

In signifyin(g), the music of the African, and later, African-American traditions

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value how this music is performed over the European tradition of prizing what is performed. Samuel Floyd states, “African Americans have their favorite tunes, but it is what is done with and inside those tunes that the listeners look forward to, not the mere playing of them.”105 This ideology echoes that of Olly Wilson who states that, “The common core of this Africanness consists of the way of doing something, not simply something that is done.”106 Through the signifying elements which include call-and-response, double-talking, and sampling, early African-American music and culture are appropriated through the creation and performance of American rap music.

**Call-and-Response: Verbal Contests/Wars**

One type of signifyin(g) which adheres to affirmation and interjection is call-and-response. Call-and-response is an African-derived manner of performance which entails a leader singing the melody with a chorus or group responding to or echoing the leader. Call-and-response is also utilized in the African-American church practice.

This sermonic tradition which continues to be prevalent in contemporary black-American culture occurs in the form of expressive “dialogues” which take place between the black minister and his/her congregation during the sermon. In response to the minister’s spoken or sung words, the lively congregation “backs him/her up” with responses such as “Amen” or some other interjective phrase in a show of support of the manner in which the message is delivered as well as the message. The same signifying “dialogue” might also take place between the minister and the pianist or organist who musically “backs up” the former after he/she states a few concurring phrases.

“Dialoguing” also takes place in jazz music between the individual musicians of a band. According to Ralph Ellison, “True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and

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105 Ibid., 96.
against the group. Each true jazz moment . . . springs from a contest in which the artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the canvasses of a painter) a definition of his [sic] identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus because jazz finds its very life in improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazz man must lose his identity even as he finds it.”

**Competitive Rap Battling**

Signifyin(g) in its more aggressive form as used in rap music has been a source of contention within African-American culture because its serious verbal cutting contests have led to actual deaths among its feuding rap artists. A cutting contest of words, which involves call-and-response and which takes place between two people who display the virtuosic ability to undercut the opponent, is called a battle. There are two types of battles which differ in amounts of contest preparation: rap battling and freestyle battling.

Rap battling is more structured in that it involves pre-planning the insults and strategies before the competition actually transpires. This is done in front of a live audience (and in some cases, judges) whose emotional responses determine the winner. Freestyle battling, also known as cypher, is similar to rap battling except it differs only in performance strategy. It is more improvisational and may be likened to jazz improvisations which are done “off the top of the head.” Rather than being planned in advance, insults are spontaneously delivered, i.e., improvised. The winner

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108 A cutting contest is music contest in which musicians compete to determine the levels of virtuosity with the winner usually being determined by the audience’s applause. This contest was prominent during the early 1900s especially with ragtime musicians in the African-American community.


of both battling types must be prodigious and clever when retorting against the opponent. As with rap battling, freestyle battling also uses the audience’s response in determining the winner. Honor, respect, and money are awarded to those who demonstrate exceptional talent in “disrespecting” his opponent.¹¹²

Battles between rappers are not limited to stage performances in which the winner is determined by audience arousal, participation, and response. Internet battles of both types now take place.¹¹³ There are presently several websites which host these contests which consist of users logging in and either rapping along with pre-recorded beats or with the rappers’ own beats. After the contestant records his rap onto the website, the challenger has several days in which to compete against the contestant. The winner is determined by others who log in to vote on their favored and most skillful rapper. In some cases, judges also aid in determining the winner. In any event, constructive comments are also solicited from the audience/voters. These battles are held frequently and at specified times with contestants who challenge and with others who accept these challenges. Competition takes place at various ability levels and include newbie, normal, advanced, and professional.

**Hip-Hop Rivalries**

Other stage battles are incited by personality differences which often result in serious disputes. These rap battles or rivalries are very often expressed via media through radio/television interviews and shows, and newspapers and magazines. Some have even been sustained through the rapper-produced and answer songs which have an additional advantage—increasing CD sales. Though these songs and answer songs are prominent in rap music, they did not originate with rap artists. These call-and-

¹¹² *Urban Dictionary*, s.v. “Dissing.” Dissoning refers to disrespecting or showing no regard for one’s opponent. It also refers to embarrassing or criticizing another person. [http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dis](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dis): The gender reference—his—is used because, in most cases these competitions involved males rather than females.

response rivalries were merely a continuation of a tradition that had its non-aggressive beginnings in Africa and its aggressive beginnings in African-American slavery.

The call-and-response tradition in the form of answer songs were also important to African-American and general American popular songs.\(^{114}\) In fact, the 1960s represented a time when these songs were quite prominent. According to Patricia Jacobs, “The early to mid-1960s was probably the heyday of Answer or Response songs, those tunes that referred directly or indirectly to another song, or is meant as a reply to another song. The reason? I believe this was to try to "cash in" on a huge hit, ride the momentum, so to speak.”\(^{115}\) Not only did popular rap songs follow in this tradition by “cashing in” on its hits (as mentioned earlier), rap music took it one step further through the establishment of new careers. Additionally, many of these dialogue songs resulted in actual “conversations” through the creation of several songs resulting from the original. Some rap call-and-response songs even addressed acts of threatened violence which performers spoke about.

In the rap call-and-response songs one artist creates a work which disrespects another rapper or his/her ‘hood (neighborhood). In response to this, the disrespected person/’hood responds to the first work with his/her/their own impudent answer. In this manner the rappers compete for the audience’s approval and in the minds of the audience, there can be a winner and a loser, much like in a cutting contest. These dialogic feuds are called rap rivalries or beefs.\(^{116}\)

Feuds and rivalries have always existed in hip hop…. Originally, it came to block parties, where DJs would play records and isolate the percussion breaks for the dancing masses. Soon, MCs began speaking over the beats, usually simply exhorting the audience to continue dancing. Eventually, MCs began incorporating more varied and stylistic speech, and focused on introducing

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\(^{114}\) Answer song is a song which responds to or answers another song.


\(^{116}\) Beef is another name for rap battle or rivalry.
themselves, shouting out to friends in the audience, and boasting about their own skills, and criticizing their rivals’. While this is often done in good humor, it occasionally develops into offstage feuds that occasionally become violent. Many observers have claimed that the media feeds on rivalries for headlinings and escalates otherwise minor conflicts…

One person who was considered to be the winner in one of the first rap rivalries, whose career was established as a result of his rap answer record, was KRS-One, an acronym for “Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone” with his partner Scott La Rock. KRS-One and La Rock co-founded their rap group which they called Boogie Down Productions, also known as BDP.

KRS-One’s given name is Lawrence Parker, but he has used several other pseudonyms throughout his rap career, including “The Blastmaster,” “The Teacher,” and “Kris.” These nicknames reflect the development of his rap career which changed as his beliefs evolved from a more aggressive stance to that which is currently more socio-political. Parker obtained the name Kris as a result of his early relationship with the Hare Krishnas.

An example of musical signification which utilizes intertextuality, reinterpretation, and commenting, may be seen in the rap rivalry between two of New York’s finest MCs. In the 1980s, Bronx’s KRS-One became involved in a media call-and-response war with Queensbridge’s MC Shan, also known as Shawn Moltke, concerning the birthplace of rap music. “The Bridge” by MC Shan was the beginning of the rap rivalry between the two MCs and their factions.

Ladies and Gentlemen
We got MC Shan and Marley Marl in the house tonight
They just came from off tour and they wanna tell you a little story


\footnote{S. Craig Watkins, \textit{Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement}, (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2005), 239.}

About where they come from

Chorus: The Bridge, the bridge, the bridge--Queensbridge
You love to hear the story again and again
Of how it all got started way back when
The monument is right in your face
Sit and listen for a while to the name of the place...  

According to MC Shan, KRS-One mistook the information relayed in the former’s rap song, “The Bridge.” He states,

“Kris claimed that I said that hip-hop started in Queensbridge, which I didn’t. In the beginning of the song you hear Marley say, ‘Oh, they want to tell you a story of where they come from.’ That’s the key word, where they come from. Everybody knows hip-hop started in the Bronx, Kool Herc.”

Three answer songs were created by KRS-One and MC Shan in response to “The Bridge.” They include: “South Bronx,” “Kill That Noise,” and “The Bridge is Over.” These series of songs propelled KRS-One and Scott La Rock (BDP Productions) to the rap forefront, thereby, launching KRS-One’s rap career.

Although other rappers later became involved in this “beef,” these recordings which were created by KRS-One and MC Shan are notable for at least two reasons: they set the standard for later beefs; and they fostered a sense of pride, achievement, and esteem within and among the people of each New York City borough. KRS-One stated, “I found myself representing the Bronx, I mean like, representing. I didn’t realize how much a record did, you know, what a record did for pride; what a record did for esteem, The Bronx was alive.”

Setting the record straight, KRS-One answered “The Bridge” with his own rap, “South Bronx” which gave a historical account of Bronx, NY as being rap’s place of

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121 Beef 1, TV Broadcast, narrated by Ving Rhames, (2003; BET, rebroadcast 2005).
122 MC Shan is a part of the Juice Crew, a rap group that consists of Master Ace, Craig G, Big Daddy Kane, et al.
123 Beef 1, (2003; BET, rebroadcast 2005).
origin and “was similar in terms of content to” the Shan’s rap.\footnote{Wikipedia, s.v. “The Bridge Wars,” \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bridge_Wars}, Accessed 5/18/06.} Musical signifying may be seen in this answer rap which, in essence, reinterpreted and revised the previous text.

South Bronx, the south, south, Bronx ….
Party people in the place to be, KRS-One attacks
Ya got dropped off MCA cause the rhymes you wrote was wack
So you think that hip-hop had its start out in Queensbridge
If you popped that junk up in the Bronx you might not live….
Now way back in the days when hip-hop began
With CoQue, Larock, Kool Herc, and then Bam…
With Kool DJ, Red Alert, and Chuck Chillout on the mix
When Afrika Islam was rockin’ the jams…
As odd as it looked, as wild as it seemed
I didn’t hear a peep from a place called Queens…\footnote{BDP Productions, “South Bronx.” \url{http://www.lyrics.astraweb.com}.}
Later MC Shan sharply answers KRS-One’s claim by denying with his response in this rap, “Kill That Noise” which signifies melodically on KRS-One’s “South Bronx.” Furthermore, Shan also signifies by commenting on KRS-One’s performance of the former rap song.

…I don’t really mind bein’ criticized
But those who try to make fame on my name – die…
And if you knew what I knew, then you’d kill that noise…
(South Bronx) Kill that, kill that noise….
Yo Shan, “I didn’t hear you say hip hop started in the Bridge on your record?”
“I didn’t. They wanted to get on the bandwagon”….
Shoulda stayed in school, learned comprehension
Tryin’ to state facts that I did not mention
Sucker MC’s I hate the most
Next time I make a record you should listen close
Cause MC’s like me are the real McCoys
So you sucker MC’s better kill that noise…\textsuperscript{127}

KRS-One basically settles the feud with his rap answer, “The Bridge is Over” which allows him, the signifier, to achieve power through criticism. KRS-One “validates and invalidates music narrative through respectful (although not everything is respectful), ironic, satirizing imitation and manipulation…. Attention is now redirected to KRS-One, the signifier.”\textsuperscript{128}

I say, the bridge is over, the bridge is over, biddy-bye-bye!
…If you want to join the crew well you must see me
Ya can't sound like Shan or the one Marley….
Sayin’ that hip-hop started out in Queensbridge
Sayin’ lies like that, mon, you know dem can't live
…Tell them again, me come to te-ell them
Manhattan keeps on makin’ it, Brooklyn keeps on takin’ it
Bronx keeps creatin’ it, and Queens keeps on fakin’ it….
Cause Bronx created hip-hop, Queens will only get dropped\textsuperscript{129}
This widely-known rap feud ended with many rap fans declaring KRS-One as winner.\textsuperscript{130} Although other Bronx and Queensbridge rappers later became involved in this feud, each attempting to promote its own ‘hood, it eventually waned due to the

\textsuperscript{128} Floyd, The Power of Black Music, 96.
\textsuperscript{130} Beef 1, (2003; BET, rebroadcast 2005).
accidental death of Scott La Rock, KRS-One’s Boogie Down Production partner. Many other “beefs” later took its place.

Perhaps the most highly publicized and controversial rap rivalry was that which occurred between the East Coast and the West Coast rappers. This is due largely because of the resulting deaths of its participants. The Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) represented the East Coast rappers and Tupac Shakur represented the West Coast (even though he was born in the east). This feud essentially began in late 1994 with the New York shooting of Tupac Shakur. Tupac attributed Wallace and Sean Combs, founder and CEO of Bad Boy Records to the crime. A short time later Shakur was sentenced to prison for sexual assault for almost 5 years but was bailed out within a year by Suge Knight, CEO of Death Row Records. As a result of this “favor,” Shakur signed on with Death Row Records.

What was once a friendship between Tupac Shakur and the Notorious Christopher Wallace (Notorious B.I.G.) had now become open enmity, infighting between two former friends, and a rap rivalry which led to the release of Shakur’s single, “Hit ‘em Up.” Not only does Shakur use words as a weapon to undercut his former friend, he also speaks of his intention to use weapons in a threatening fashion.

I ain’t got no motherfuckin friends
That’s why I fucked yo’ bitch, you fat motherfucker….
So let the West side ride tonight, hahahah
Bad Boy murdered on wax, and killed….
Five shots couldn’t drop me, I took it, and smiled
Now I’m bout to set the record straight, with my AK.
I’m still the thug you love to hate….
Any of you niggaz from New York that wanna bring it, bring it,

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But we ain't singin, we bringin drama…. 
We gonna kill all you motherfuckers….

This rap song served as an answer song to Wallace’s and Jay Z’s “Who Shot Ya”/“Brooklyn’s Finest” rap. Although Wallace claimed that his rap was recorded prior to Shakur’s shooting incident, Shakur felt otherwise and this sentiment was expressed in his rap rivalry/diss-answer song.

…Who shot ya? Mob ties like Sinatra
Peruvians tried to do me in, I ain't paid them yet….
Chill homie, the bitch in the Shownies told me
Your holding more drugs than a pharmacy
You ain't harmin me, so pardon me
Pass the safe before I blaze the place and hit six shots just in case….
If Faith had twins, she’d probably have two Pac's
Get it, Tupac's….

Ya crazy, think a little-bit of rhymes can play me
I'm from Marcy, I'm varsity, chump, your JV.

In 1996 Shakur was fatally shot after attending a Mike Tyson fight in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Six months later, the same happened to Wallace in Los Angeles. The perpetrator(s) of both crimes have not been identified, nor apprehended.

The two companies and their CEOs were eventually plagued with lawsuits by embittered family members and/or other rappers who were allegedly financially cheated. These companies were also besieged by other complicated situations involving violence.

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and/or jail sentences by and to their founders. Neither company remained the success that it had been prior to the deaths of its primary rapper.

Bad Boy Records continues to operate despite Combs’ December 1999 arrest concerning bribery and gun possession related to a Manhattan night club shooting incident. Although the victims accused him of the shooting in which he fled, he was acquitted of all charges.\textsuperscript{137} Rappers, Lady of Rage and Nate Dogg have filed suits against Bad Boy with allegations of being cheated of funds owed.\textsuperscript{138} Shortly after the Wallace’s death, Combs and Faith Evans (Wallace’s former wife) released a record which they dedicated to Wallace and used as a tribute called “I’ll be Missing You.” Sean Combs has since embarked on a solo career (in addition to his Bad Boy Entertainment duties), and produced the TV series “Making the Band,” but also no longer has total control of Bad Boy Entertainment.\textsuperscript{139} In 2005, Combs agreed to sell 50 percent stake in Bad Boy Records to the Warner Music Group, but claimed he would get Bad Boy Entertainment back on track.\textsuperscript{140}

Violetta Wallace has since release a memoir in 2005 to her son and expresses anger with regard to Combs and Lil’ Kim (Wallace’s former girlfriend and female rapper). “In the book...published by Simon & Schuster’s Astria books,” according to Shady Soldiers.com, “Violetta Wallace accuses both Diddy and Kim of using Biggie’s name and image to further their respective careers.”\textsuperscript{141} Violetta Wallace has recently won a lawsuit in the amount of $1.1 million against the City of Los Angeles “for police negligence during the slain musician’s civil lawsuit trial.”\textsuperscript{142} This family lawsuit also


makes claims against a corrupt LAPD officer and Marion “Suge” Knight as being directly involved in Wallace’s death. 143

Death Row’s CEO, Suge Knight, “served five years, starting in 1996, for violating probation he received for assault and weapons convictions in 1992. While imprisoned, Knight was served with a $17 million civil lawsuit filed by Afeni Shakur, Tupac’s mother, in April 1997 alleging that the slain rapper was not paid royalties and advances for his “All Eyez on Me” double album. 144 Knight also violated parole in December 2002 for associating with a known gang member and other charges. 145 Knight was also jailed on June 27, 2003 for a parole violation which involved hitting a Hollywood nightclub parking valet. This, too, contributed to him serving prison time at a state prison where he remained for seven months. Knight is currently out of prison and is again working in the rap entertainment field. Death Row records has survived two name changes since its original inception: Death Row records, Tha Row, and currently, Death Row’s Back. After being shot in his right leg on August 28, 2006, Knight filed bankruptcy on April 4, 2006 “in a last-ditch bid to keep control of his Death Row Records label and duck a $107 million civil court judgment.” 146 His former Death Row artists, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Xzibit, and others have since left Knight’s company and Lisa (Left Eye) Lopes died in 2001. His association with music producer, Dr. Dre, ended in 1995 when Dre left to form his own label, Aftermath Records. 147

Neither Bad Boy Entertainment nor Death Row won the East Coast-West Coast rivalry because both suffered the loss of lives of friends and those who were influential to rap music. Furthermore, neither camp “kept it real” because neither realized that

there was enough money, success, and respect for all to positively coexist. It was not enough to limit the rap feud to recordings. Threats of violence and machismo bravado were replaced by fatal aggression.

When making reference to rappers Ja Rule and DMX and their beef, Lyor Cohen, the chief executive of Island Def Jam labels, “said that it is the companies’ responsibility to make sure beefs like theirs don’t go beyond words. “‘The moment you see it, you deal with it,’” he said. “‘They have a great opportunity to change the socioeconomic course of their families for generations to come, and we remind them of that.’”¹⁴⁸

While some rappers seem to allow their feuds to escalate to a level beyond words, others use these feuds and jabs to whip up fans, advance their careers, and increase finances. John Leland states, “Top rappers and executives, including Jay-Z, Nas, Snoop Doggy Dog, Eminem and Jermaine Dupri, have advanced their careers through battles of insult. Some of the talk is dazzlingly clever, much of it inflammatory, and all of it disseminated and promoted through the record companies. Much of the beef, or animosity, is purely promotional.”¹⁴⁹ Many feel that this is fine for business as long as it does not become aggressive.

Double-talking about violence as a way of life represents another area of contention within the African-American community. Double-talking is contentious and confusing to those who are unfamiliar with African-American culture because of its indirect rhetorical process of encouraging ambiguity and multiple meanings in language. Double-talking was highly incorporated into the African-American spiritual which was created to subtly communicate important messages to the various slaves. Double talking in rap music does not communicate subtle messages, but bold messages that many young aficionados see as being truthful and real but do not truly reflect the rappers’ lives for which are rapped. This ambiguity is the source of contention.

Contributing to this is the tendency among many double-talking rappers to

promote a life of gangsterism and criminality for which they do not, or have not actually subscribed. Because rap’s biggest adherents—young children--have been duly influenced by this negative lifestyle, this subject matter has become a source of contention within the black community. In reference to the estimated 80% of the retail funds provided by Caucasian teenage and young adult children who buy gangsta records, blogger, Eyecalone states, “many of them actually believe these songs are an accurate presentation of what Black and Brown poor and working class life is like. Meanwhile, back in the real world, an entire multi-billion dollar industry has been built around the imprisonment of Black and Brown men often attempting to live out toned down versions of the drug czar fantasies we often hear recited on wax…”

Double-talking through word play represents an element of signifying that is comparably as debatable as the serious verbal wars. In this form the rappers exaggerate, glorify, and pontificate on the positive aspects of the thug life even though this lifestyle may have never been experienced or is no longer subscribed to by the artist. Christopher Wallace (aka The Notorious B.I.G.), states in his song, “Ready to Die,”

My shit is deep, deeper than my grave G
I’m ready to die and nobody can save me
Fuck the world, fuck my moms and my girl
My life is played out like a jheri curl, I’m ready to die.

Yet, according to his VH1 interview, Behind the Music: The Notorious B.I.G., after receiving death threats via phone calls after the murder of Tupac Shakur, Wallace feared for his life. He mentions waking up in a state of paranoia and sacredness. He states, “I believe someone is trying to kill me. I be waking up paranoid and scared to death.”

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Snoop Doggy Dog, whose given name is Calvin Broadus, exhibits another example of double-talking and glorifying a life of criminality. In 1993, he was charged in the murder of Philip Watermarian who was chased down in a car and shot by his bodyguard. The former was later found not guilty. Broadus’ lawyer stated that this “fatality” was a matter of self-defense. Before this time, Snoop Doggy Dog also wrote music which dealt with guns, killing, and criminal activities. Strangely enough, this incident is mirrored on one song on his *Doggystyle* album which was produced before this incident occurred.\(^{153}\) His song, “Murder Was the Case” reads as such:

*gun shots*
Nigga man!
Get that nigga man!
Man get up fool man, get up man, don't be tryin' to run man
Get up on that fool man, I don't give a fuck
What set you got now? Fuck you nigga!
Yeah nigga, whassup?
Nigga?
Yeah motherfucker
Yeah nigga, one less nigga
Yeah nigga, youse a dead motherfucker now\(^ {154}\)

On Dr. Dre’s record, “187” Snoop Dog is featured.\(^ {155}\) They rap about the criminal lifestyle, having guns, shooting others, and the meaning behind the record label named Death Row.

Death Row come to show you all the game at,
And show you how my label got the name that...
Welcome back to Viet Nam, California.
Ain't a damn thing changed, so let me warn you.


Every motherfuckin minute you on the West Side,
The best side, 20 niggers that just died.
Walkin' down the streets of L.A.
Stay strapped cause niggas bust caps every day, yo
The 1-8-7 don't stop, on undercover cops,
So on this spot gettin' popped, shot.\(^{156}\)

But despite the lifestyle and machismo talk churned out by these rappers, when faced with difficult situations their response in many cases becomes less intense and less aggressive. Blogger, Eyecalone states, “I guess everybody wants to be a gangsta’, that is until those real life gangster charges start coming, then they ‘cry in their milk’ in interviews, on TV, on radio, and anywhere else that will listen, about the unfortunate prospect of their own imprisonment and how hard the legal troubles are for them and their families.”\(^{157}\) Because this case could have resulted in a 25 year jail sentence, Snoop Dog was shown praying at his seat during his murder trial instead of sporting the stolid, arm-folding, hard stance normally displayed by gangsta rappers.\(^{158}\)

According to Kevin Powell, Broadus (Snoop) also spoke about prayer during his proceedings. Broadus stated, “Everybody’s praying for me, and I want them to continue to pray for me.” Additionally, he said that God was placing obstacles in the way of everyone who is successful and that people who see him as a hero should “Keep God first.”\(^{159}\) Gangsta pride, exaltation, and aggression were replaced by unpretentious humility.

This is the picture not normally seen by young rap fans. Youthful fans do not typically see the negatives of the lifestyle which has come to reflect something positive in the minds of these listeners. This is one reason that controversy surrounding gangsta rap and its double-talking exist—the one-sided view that is promoted rather

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\(^{155}\) 187 is the police code for murder.
than a well-rounded picture. Many in the African-American community have come to believe that children are becoming overly influenced by these pictures and songs performed by artists. The problem lies in the fact that many of these rappers have never lived or truly do not want to live this lifestyle, but are remunerated greatly for lyrics which glorify it.

Within the last few years, the idea of realism has entered the rap battle arena. Some gangsta rappers have based their beefs/rivalries on living the gangsta life that one raps about, otherwise known as street credibility,\(^{160}\) Evan Serpick recalls a rap rivalry between gangsta rappers, Jay-Z and Nas. He states, “At first, it didn’t seem to be about anything, with the combatants trading more-bark-than-bite battle raps: Brooklyn’s Jay dropped “Takeover,” with blistering attacks on Queens rivals Nas and Mobb Deep, questioning their gangsta credibility, among other things:

‘You ain’t live it, you witnessed it from your folks’ pad/You scribbled in your notepad and created your life.’\(^{161}\) Most hip-hoppers would refer to this type of person as a wanksta as stated in 50 Cent’s (also known as Curtis Jackson) song of the same name.\(^ {162}\)

You said you a gangsta
But you neva pop nuttin
You said you a wanksta
And you need to stop frontin’

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\(^{160}\) Street credibility also means having the ability to use whatever it takes to survive.


\(^{162}\) A wanksta is a person who acts/looks like a gangster or thug, but has never done anything gangsterish or thug-like besides acting or looking like one. It can be directed toward any race or ethnicity. http://www.urbandictionary.com.
You go to the dealership
But you neva cop nuttin'
You been hustlin a long tyme
And you ain't got nuttin

According to Eyecalone, blogger, a couple of the rap double-talkers lacking street
credibility are: The Game (also known as Jayceon Taylor), who speaks/raps of hiss
hard life of thuggery; Ja-Rule (also known as Jeffrey Atkins); and many others.
Although “The Game” raps about his criminal activities, he appears to not be quite the
character that he makes himself to be. Sporting a “certain” kind of manufactured
piercing and tattoo, dyed hair, dating game show appearance, college attendee, and for
a good portion of his life, non-gang member, qualifies him as lacking street credibility.
Eyecalone goes on to say, “In watching his own account, and listening to and reading
his interviews, it becomes clear that Mr. Taylor is likely {sic} is hardly anything like the
angry, volatile, violent, and completely ignorant personality he publicly promotes.”

Jeffrey Atkins (also known as Ja-Rule), as said by blogger, Eyecalone, is
considered to be a wanksta because of his double-talking. His “beef” with 50 Cent
aided in the exposure of his former strict religious background. He, though, proudly
proclaimed that his lifestyle truthfully represented his label and its image—Murder Inc.
(presently called “The Inc.”).

Another important type of competition that exists in and is often overlooked as an
aspect of hip-hop culture and music is beatboxing. According to Josh Ralske, “beat
boxing is the art of producing musical sounds, particularly percussion, without the use of
instruments.” As stated by Grandmaster Flash in a collective interview with Nelson
George, “For some reason the world seems to think that beat box is something you do

164 Eyecalone, posting to Playahata Website. “Hip-Hop Smackdown: It’s All a Game,” April 2nd, 2005.
with your mouth. The beat box was an attempt to come up with something other than the techniques I created on the turntables to please the crowd.”

Flash continues, “There was this drummer who lived in the Jackson projects who had this manually operated drum box he used to practice his fingering. I begged him to sell it to me. Then I found a way to wire it into my system and called it the beat box. The drummer taught me how to use it. When my partner Disco Bee would shut the music off, I would segue into it, so you couldn’t tell where the music stopped and I started.”

Beatboxing eventually evolved from machine drum music used to accompany rapping into a vocal genre in which sounds are made mainly by the mouth. This occurred in the urban areas in which necessary machinery/instruments were unavailable. This resulted in vocal accompaniment which proved to be more affordable. Beatboxing, also known in hip-hop lingo as vocal percussion and multivocalism, was eventually introduced into hip-hop by proponents such as Darren “Buffy, the Human Beat Box” Robinson who created hip-hop rhythms using his mouth, Doug E. Fresh, Biz Markie, and others. Rahzel, a 1990s proponent who introduced the newer form of beatboxing which includes the use of polyrhythms and vocal scratching, to the hip-hop community acknowledges jazz singer, Al Jarreau and Bobby McFerrin, jazz vocalist, conductor, and famous “body” producer of music, among others as his influences.

While some hip-hoppers concede that the history of beatboxing is blurry, the method of making music using the body has been in existence for many years. Dale Olsen, ethnomusicologist, coined the term corpophone to describe sounds which are produced through the use of the body in the production of music in 1980. He

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168 Ibid., 49.  
includes not only vocal sounds, but other areas of the body which also produce sounds by using the hands to clap and to slap/hit various other body parts as well as, the feet for stomping. This term accurately describes the body music produced by those such as Al Jarreau and Bobby McFerrin, who may be considered early beatboxers.

Other types of vocal sound/music production may be seen in the South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the gospel quartets of the 1940s, Doo Wop groups of the 1950s, and in various Barbershop quartets of the nineteenth-century. When observing urban beatboxing, one might even see a strong resemblance to the scat singing of early jazz artists. This shows that beatboxing, is a continuation and integration of the past with the present.

Just as rap competitions occur, beatboxing competitions also exist. These competitions take place not only in annual events but also via the internet, nationally and internationally. As with rap which has expanded globally, beatboxing has done the same. Both have influenced cultures and music around the globe such as in Japan, the U.K., Holland, Australia, and other countries.

Sampling

Sampling represents another important characteristic of rap music. Sampling is the art of technologically integrating old or pre-existing music with new music to establish even newer forms. In this particular case, old music or musical concepts are fused with new and as a result, a hybrid is formed. Sampling is synonymous with intertextualizing. Andrew Bartlett states, “The art of digital sampling in (primarily) African American hip hop is intricately connected to an African American/African

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diasporic aesthetic which carefully selects available media, texts, and contexts for performative use.\textsuperscript{175}

Sampling/intertextuality is a practice that has existed for quite a while. Even Greek and Roman literature as well as genres of other eras drew from other sources. Joseph Farrell states, “The phenomenon of ‘intertextuality’ (or ‘allusion,’ ‘imitation,’ ‘reference,’ etc.) is present in all poetry and, to some extent, in all language. Some poets deliberately cultivate an allusive style, and thus encourage their readers’ expectation of seeing through one text to its source or model…. Archaic and classical Greek poets certainly alluded in various ways to one another and especially to Homer. Indeed, most surviving Greek poetry can hardly be read without calling to mind some passage or situation in Homer; and the great masters of Greek tragedy….So the tradition of allusive poetry is very old.”\textsuperscript{176}

Spirituals also used intertextuality—namely, sampling. African-American slaves constantly used or “recycled” older or other music to create new ones. Very often the music would stay the same and the words would change to reflect the particular functional purpose. This is an example of sampling. J. Wendell Mapson, Jr. states, “A genius of the slaves was their ability to create new songs from old melodies and to improvise upon various themes.”\textsuperscript{177} When addressing the importance of a song leader, Eileen Southern mentions, “…it was he who chose the song to be sung, who embellished the basic melody and improvised appropriate verses to fit the occasion, and who brought the performance to an end.”\textsuperscript{178} J. Jefferson Cleveland and William B. McClain assert that, “Even the words were often improvised to correspond with a certain event or situation.”\textsuperscript{179} John W. Work points out that “…the spiritual functioned in two

\textsuperscript{177} Mapson, The Ministry of Music in the Black Church, 14.
\textsuperscript{178} Southern, The Music of Black Americans, 18.
\textsuperscript{179} J. Jefferson Cleveland with William B. McClain, “The Historical Account of the Negro Spiritual,” in Songs of Zion (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 73B.
ways other than religious expression. It served as the work song and as the social
song.”

Sampling and intertextuality continued throughout the ages of African-American
music and non-music history. In classical and contemporary music, pianist/composer
Margaret Bonds’ concert piece, “Troubled Water” is based on the spiritual, “Wade in the
Water,” while 1980s R & B group, Tony Toni Tone also based their number 1 hit, “Hey
Little Walter” on the same. Blues and jazz were the genres on which William Grant
Still’s “Afro American Symphony” was based. All of the African-American musical
genres discussed utilized examples of sampling.

Hip-hop culture and rap music also make use of sampling. In fact, rap music has
become known for its widespread sampling. Nelson George mentions a radio show
situation on New York’s KISS-FM in which Mtume, producer-songwriter spoke of his
dislike for rap music’s strong reliance on sampling. George states that Mtume blasted
the, “hip hop record production for its slavish reliance on record sampling” and likened it
to “Memorex music.” According to George, Mtume had no qualms about sampling as
a technique, he opposed “the use of sampling as a substitute for musical composition.
It upset him that so many hip-hop producers had no understanding of theory, could play
no instruments, and viewed a large record collection as the only essential tool of record
making. He charged that this made for lazy musicians and listeners.” George points
out that even though the general public is mainly concerned about the obscenities found
in rap music, the musically astute has one additional serious concern—rampant
sampling.

184 Ibid., 90.
According to George, this situation was argued against by Stetsasonic, a rap
group, who defended sampling through their answer song, “Talkin’ All That Jazz.” In
this song they countered with the idea that rap was the reason many of the older songs
are still remembered. George mentions the continuing debate taking place between the
generations of African-Americans involving rap and sampling. He states, “What
continues to be debated is whether sampling is a tragic break with African-America’s
creative musical traditions or a radical, even transcendental, continuation of them.”
Many people believe that rap is indeed, a continuation of the tradition.

Andrew Bartlet states, “The art of digital sampling in (primarily) African American
hip hop is intricately connected to an African American/African diasporic aesthetic which
carefully selects available media, texts, and contexts for performative use.” Steven
Best and Douglas Kellner state,” rap groups "sample" previous music (also known as
"sonic shop-lifting"), sometimes respectfully in the manner of quotation, sometimes
ironically in the mode of juxtaposition, and sometimes satirically or critically by
counterpoising a romantic love song with misogynous lyrics or violent street sounds.
Rap groups regularly sample black classics like James Brown,..... but by now this is
accepted as normal.”

Sampling artists such as James Brown became so prevalent that he, alone, was
“sampled a reported 903 times! .... His song, “Funky Drummer,” was sampled 182
times by groups such as Public Enemy, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, LL Cool J,
and Run DMC....Rap is the most sampling genre...and Funk is the most sampled
genre...which makes sense cuz Rap came from Funk.” Despite the prevailing
sampling that almost seems to currently define rap music, other genres are also used
as the basis for much of this progressive music genre.

\[185\] Ibid., 90-91.
2, Spring 1999.
http://spaces.msn.com/members/funkrus/Blog/cns!lpZEm0p6Wa5oUo0U17N1LBwgI311.entry.
In 1993 jazz was fused with hip-hop to form intertextual works such as Digable Planets’ top twenty hit, “Rebirth of Slick” (“Cool Like Dat”) found on their CD, Reachin’ (A New Refutation of Time and Space). The songs on this album were sampled from the likes of Art Blakey, Sonny Rollins, and Curtis Mayfield.\(^\text{189}\) In 1993 Us3 produced a rap album called Hand of the Torch, which was also based on jazz. But even before these works began to incorporate jazz samples, rap’s first major record, “Rapper’s Delight,” not only samples Chic’s “Good Times,” but also scatting. Other examples of intertextuality in rap music exist. Another example of the sampling of an African-American genre in rap music is Eightball and MJG’s “Straight Cadillac Pimpin’,” which samples the moans and groans found in African-American prayers throughout the entire song. The song also quotes one line (If I should die before I wake) of the children’s prayer, “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep.”

Uncharacteristic samplings are also found in rap music. Kanye West and Coolio intertextualize portions of Psalm 23 from the Old Testament in their two works: “Jesus Walk” and “Gangsta’s Paradise.” While the Notorious B.I.G. samples the first line in “Ready to Die,” Snoop Doggy Dogg samples the entire prayer, “Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep” in his rap, “Murder Was the Case.” Nas samples Beethoven’s “Fur Elise” in his rap “I Can” whereas, according to the Answer Bag Blog, P. Diddy (Sean Combs) and Warren G. sample opera in their rap songs.\(^\text{190}\)

One example of sampling in which an African-American spiritual serves as the basis of an innovative rap may be seen in rapper, Kanye West’s song “Jesus Walk.”

Jesus Walk - God show me the way because the devil tryna break me down
Jesus Walk with Me – The only thing that I pray iz that my feet don’t fail me now
Jesus Walk – And I don’t think there’s nothing I could do now to right my wrongs
Jesus Walk with Me – I wanna talk to God but im afraid cuz we ain’t spoke in so


In this song, West utilizes intertextuality in his appropriation of the celebrated African spiritual, “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.”

All of the quoted songs serve to link the past with the present and the older generation with the younger. Through intertextuality/sampling, both songs (the old and the new) become more acceptable to generations of people. Cultural information and music history shared through songs such as the spiritual are transmitted from the older group to the younger, thus making this information better known, better established, and more appreciated.

Sampling, double-talking, and call-and-response are signifying elements that are predominant in rap music. Because of signifying, cultural memory continues a cultural music tradition which extends from before the onset of the African-American slave era through contemporary times.

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CHAPTER FOUR
SLAVE CULTURE AND CONTRADICTORY VIEWS OF THE PERCEPTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN RAP AND HIP-HOP CULTURE

There are contentious points of views within African-American culture concerning the portrayal of black men in rap and hip-hop culture. Diverse points of views pertaining to negative images and reuse of words/names that were once considered degrading to the black community have stirred up serious schools of thought. These and other contemporary “artistic” attributes of hip-hop and rap appear to be reminiscent of African-American slave and minstrelsy cultures.

African-American Stereotypical Identities and Images

While much hoopla is being made about the misogynistic images and disrespect shown to black women in rap music and videos, not much attention has been paid to the other group that is also affected by the constant bombardment of its images – African-American men. African-American men, through American mainstream rap music have become the “victims” of stereotypical images that some people (including other rappers) believe is a throwback to earlier eras of American history in which black men were not viewed in a positive manner.

African-American stereotypical images developed mainly during the slave era and were further perpetuated through minstrelsy. Minstrelsy, also called blackface minstrelsy, is an American musical theater genre which “officially” began in 1843 with its first full variety show, although individual blackface performers had been in existence for several years prior to this time. In the 1820s Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice, an individual blackface performer (also called Ethiopian Delineator) created and based the “Jim Crow” character on a crippled old slave who wore tattered clothing.\(^\text{192}\)

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Blackface minstrelsy, as did Ethiopian Delineators, featured “white actors who blackened their hands and faces and performed music and dance in what they claimed was the manner of plantation slaves.”\textsuperscript{193} The \textit{New York Tribune} supports the belief that the mannerisms portrayed by minstrels and delineators as being accurate. The article states,“

“Absurd as may seem negro minstrelsy to the refined musician, it is nevertheless beyond doubt that it expresses the peculiar characteristics of the negro as truly as the great masters of Italy represent their more spiritual and profound nationality.”\textsuperscript{194}

Blackface minstrelsy shows began featuring Jim Crow as a stock character “along with Jim Dandy and Zip Coon.”\textsuperscript{195} Of the three, the Jim Crow and Zip Coon characters “were probably the two most popular images to come out of blackface minstrelsy.”\textsuperscript{196} Jim Crow, a “swaggering braggart who believes he is smarter than his master is,” eventually evolved into Sambo and became associated with a number of legislations which were enacted for the purpose of limiting African-Americans’ newly-received rights during the Reconstruction period.\textsuperscript{197}

Zip Coon, also known as Dandy Jim, is another stereotype which was used to describe many variations or subgroups of this character and image. One version of the Zip Coon was the “citified” black man who was also known for his much bragging especially when it came to talking about his sexual prowess. Jonathan Stuckey states, “He wore ultramodish clothes, tightly fitting pantaloons, a lacy jabot, a silk hat, baubles

\textsuperscript{197} 1. Ibid., http://7cf.port5.com/minstrel.html. 2. According to \textit{The Slave Community} by John Blassingame, the Sambo stereotype is a combination of Uncle Remus, Jim Crow, and Uncle Tom charcters, 225.
dangling from his waistband, a lorgnon which he held up with an effeminate gesture, and occasionally a walking cane….But the dandy’s clothing, handsome good looks, and his way with the ladies, …are his most important characteristics.”198 “Jim Dandy seems to have gone on to become the prototype for the infamous pimps of urban areas, bedecked in fur coats and flashy jewelry.”199 These urban pimps are not only important to the 1970s blaxploitation era, but also during the gangsta rap era which began in the mid-1980s.200

Coons existed in dissimilar types. “There were the pure coon and two variants of his type: “the pickaninny and the uncle remus.”201 The pickaninny was the black child that was portrayed as partially-clad, dirty, little subhuman creatures with unkempt hair. The pickanninies, usually of the male gender, most often played a comedic/jester-like roles, and had unsophisticated names such as Buckwheat and Farina. These pickanninies were utilized in movie shorts such as the Our Gang series, for their comedic abilities which entailed widening their eyes to the larger than normal sizes, wearing long pigtails which stood upright whenever the child was frightened, and being master of double takes.202

The Uncle Remus was the older man known for storytelling, who evolved from being an Uncle Tom. Uncle remus was a harmless and congenial man who “distinguishes himself by his quaint, naïve, and comic philosophizing.”203 His jollity was one way which was used to indicate his satisfaction with slavery.

During the Reconstruction period another stereotypical image emerged to characterize the Southern freed African-American—the brute, also known as the savage. This image was born as a result of D.W. Griffith’s movie, Birth of a Nation. In

200 blaxploitation is a portmanteau word formed from “black” and “exploitation” which describes the 1970s American film genre which starred and catered to African-Americans.
201 Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2003), 7.
202 Shorts were movies that lasted 20 minutes or shorter.
203 Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks, 8.
this movie he portrays African-Americans as being savage, animalistic, violent, and aggressive. Donald Bogle states, “Just as the coon stereotype could be broken into subgroups, the brutal black buck type could likewise be divided into two categories: the black brutes and the black bucks. Differences between the two are minimal.”

The black brute was savage, uncivilized, “primitive,” and was in the habit of causing mayhem. He was physically violent, sexually repressed, and full of rage so much so that he was a threat to the white population. The black buck was so sexually high-powered that he could only be fulfilled in that manner by a white woman—“the ultimate in female desirability.” She represented “white pride, power, and beauty.”

Even though the Caucasian woman represented positive aspects of her race, the African-American man is associated mainly with negative ones.

Another version of the coon as described by Donald Bogle is the character which was in serious competition with the Uncle Tom—the Negro jester. The Negro jester, which was prominent during the movie era of the 1920s, replaced the black brute villains that Griffith introduced to the public. Bogle states, “They [Negro jesters] appeared in a series of black films presenting the Negro as amusement object and black buffoon. They lacked the single-mindedness of tom.” Bogle describes the black jester as, “high-stepping and high-falutin’ and crazy as all get-out.”

According to Tilford Brooks, “Minstrelsy perpetuated the image of the Black man as a shuffling, loud-laughing, dancing, continuously grinning buffoon.” The movies of the 1920 continued this perpetuation. According to Bogle, “…there were still few roles for blacks in movies, whenever they were used in this period, it was usually in this sort of demeaning manner. What degraded the black comic figures of the day even further

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206 Ibid., 13-14.
207 Ibid., 8
208 Ibid., 19.
and made them appear more grotesque and less individualized was that whites still played the Negro roles. The acting was always grossly overdone.”

This jester-like image appears to have been included in the perception of all of the stereotypical characters during the course of time. Bogle states, “…It was the 1930s. The toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks were no longer dressed as old-style jesters. Instead they had become respectable domestics.” Even when these domestics were assigned comedic stereotypical roles in film, Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin mention that these actors and actresses were able to turn their roles into memorable characters. Black actors, who later took on these buffoonic minstrelsy roles, later soared in the movie roles. One such person is Stepin Fetchit, who became noted for these jester-like roles which earned him much success. Just as these black-American actors performed and were perceived in various stereotypical ways, the same applies to contemporary black males.

African-American males in American mainstream rap music and videos are very often portrayed in three main ways: the hardy partier, the pimp/playa (player), and the gangster, all of which are evocative of the stereotypical images that originated either during the slave era or the Reconstruction period. The commercialized rap music portrayals listed above can not be solely and totally categorized in any one stereotypical image. There are variances within the rap music portrayals as well as in the stereotypical images that might not allow for a clear delineatory comparison. Nevertheless, there are indeed, some inherent similarities.

The hardy partier might be seen mainly in rap music of the crunk style. According to J. Freedom du Lac, Crunk is “a noun, but is also an adjective. And a verb!...Crunk: To get cranked-up, sans psychotropics; wild, crazy, off-the-hook

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210 Donald Bogle, Toms, 24.
211 Ibid., 35.
212 Harry A. Benshoff & Sean Griffin, America on Film (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 80-81.
213 Crunk is a subgenre of rap music born in the South and refers to and is formed from the words “crazy” and “drunk.”
goodness; hyper-aggressive rap that’s not unlike punk rock for the dance floor…Crunk is not the most thought-provoking rap idiom, but it’s got a funk beat and you can mosh to it.”

DJ Smurf, a crunk artist “feels that a real crunk track has two things: Lots of chants, and less emphasis on rapping – the primal, no-nonsense approach…That was the whole point of crunk. To just cut out everything but the beat and the chants, to cut through all the (bull) and just give the people what gets them going.”

Crunk was first popularized and defined (according to longtime friend, David Banner) by its leader, Lil Jon, whose given name is Jonathan Smith. Smith is a former record executive who currently sports dreadlocks and metal teeth and whose trademark shouts include “YEAH!!!”, “OOOO-KAAAAAY!!” and “WHAAAAATTTTT??!??!!.” Lil Jon “personified it [crunk] with his court jester image and antics….Add the gold-and-diamond studded pimp cup he uses to imbibe onstage (and off, for that matter), and you’ve got yourself a character – and a caricature.”

Cultural memory exists in the form of this partying crunk character who shares similar characteristics to that of Negro jester, coon stereotype. As with the jester who is known for his high stepping excessive movements and craziness, crunk artist, Lil Jon is also known for the same. As expressed by crunk innovator, Lil Jon, “crunk music, it makes you just wanna lose your mind – just be free and wild out.”

Zip Coon is characterized in the pimp/player (pimp/playa) who considers himself to be urban, intelligent, sophisticated, and a ladies man who dresses the part. Those who consider themselves to be playas are following in the coon tradition. One such person who exemplifies some of the coon characteristics is Snoop Dogg. Bogle states

that the coon butchers the English language.\textsuperscript{219} Snoop Dogg, in his rap song, “Don’t Fight The Feelin’,” creates his own new words:

Yeah that’s my baby, ya know she don’t plizzay
Come on Lady May, say, say what you sizzay.\textsuperscript{220}

Snoop Dogg brags about his sexual exploits and his love-them-leave-them attitude in his song “Gin and Juice.”

But it ain’t no stoppin, I’m still poppin
Dre got some bitches from the city of Compton
To serve me, not with a cherry on top
Cause when I bust my nut, I’m raisin up off the cot
Don’t get upset girl, that's just how it goes
I don't love you hoes, I'm out the do’\textsuperscript{221}

Snoop Dogg’s dress pattern is similar to that of the urban coon as well as the blaxploitation movie heroes of the 1970s. He often wears fur coats, hats, and frequently dresses in an ultramodern style with his “pimp cane” (walking cane) which contemporary people most associate with modern-day pimps, but which is reminiscent of the coon.

Additionally, the mainstream commercial rapper also places much emphasis on material possessions such as expensive cars and most especially, the bling-bling in an attempt to feel better about him-/herself.\textsuperscript{222} Rapper Ludacris states,

It’s a fact. The gold back then, and the diamonds now…we wear that to get women. That’s all guys do is buy stuff for women to see and notice and hopefully admire….We all love something beautiful and rare. And jewelry suddenly changes your image and gives you power….And that’s exactly why bling is so crucial to hip hop. Because for us, it is all about making that impression, getting

\textsuperscript{219} Donald Bogle, \textit{Toms}, 8.
\textsuperscript{222} Bling-bling refers to jewelry, expensive merchandise, and even money.
that shine, showing off success...even before you have any. When you sign that first deal or record that first, record, you get that first bling. This means, I'm successful, I've made it. This is me saying I've worked hard to get what I have what I have around my neck, so recognize it! Now of course, I could have congratulated myself by buying some stocks and bonds, but it wouldn't be bling.²²³

The rap gangsta image is evocative of both types of the brutal black bucks that D.W. Griffith created in his movie, *Birth of a Nation*. Gangsta rappers very often flex their muscles by rapping about violence toward their enemies while some have often physically acted on vengeance against their enemies; boasting about sexual prowess and adventures, sexually exploiting women as well as focusing on their own phallus area. They proudly posture themselves and lionize the gangsta lifestyle which signifies the black man as being angry, aggressive, brutal, and sexual. These negative cultural representations are reflected in their music and videos.

Interestingly enough, many gangsta rappers such as Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent very often wear religious bling-bling such as crosses, Saints' pendants and other things. Perhaps Reverend Run of Run D.M.C. explains this contradiction best. He states,

I believe these rappers love God, and they have love in their hearts for Jesus. It makes them feel secure and safe when the put a cross on. They really, underneath it all, love God. I believe that we all love God, but we are trying to figure out what is acceptable to do. We all make mistakes. If your message is one thing and you love God still, that's fine......I think we should choose to put Saints on our necks. I think it represents a lot of love. I think it’s great. I think it’s wonderful [to wear religious crosses]. It just shows that rappers are trying to find their way. Everybody sins and everybody does wrong, but we all just want love.²²⁴

Controversies and Contradictions in Gangsta Rap Images and Lifestyles

The glorification of the gangster lifestyle represents one prominent controversy taking place in commercialized rap music. Many feel that commercialized rap has evolved into a genre which no longer “captures the same frustration as some Negro Spirituals.” Because of this, its own innovators have complained of the new gangster direction it has taken. “I stopped listening to hip-hop 10 years ago,” says Darryl McDaniels, the D.M.C. in Run D.M.C. He points out “We weren’t choirboys, but we had multiple points of view. This past decade it seems like hip-hop has mostly been about parties and guns and women…the music had nothing to say to me. So I listened to classic rock.”

Although rappers have severely limited their music, they have been met by extreme financial and commercial success as a result of catering to the unsavory aspects of ghetto life. John McWhorter, gangster rap theme opponent, states “Of course, not all hip-hop is belligerent or profane – entire CDs of gang-bangin’, police-baiting, woman-bashing invective would get old fast to most listeners. But it’s the nastiest rap that sells best, and the nastiest cuts that make a career….Keeping the thug front and center has become the quickest and most likely way to become a star.” Opponents of gangster rap themes feel this to be a negative thing because many aficionados literally try to follow in the footsteps of these rappers by themselves, adopting this potentially harmful way of life. Opponents are also concerned because mainstream rappers are selling their souls for a price which underestimates their own value.

Will Smith wants rappers to see their importance and influences on the global community. He sees the necessity of hip-hop artists changing directions from thuggish

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themes to those that are more positive. He declared, “The kids that are making these trends, making these songs, don’t understand the level of effect that black Americans have around the world….It’s real important to have balance of the imagery. Yes, there are people who fire guns in the street, but there’s also doctors who go to work in those areas to feed their children.”

Because the gangster lifestyle is related to strength, Smith continues, “That’s the image of survivors. The dude that sells the drugs or has the guns or is most willing to kill somebody is the dude that has the greatest potential for survival, or at least that’s the perception. So that’s what people strive for.”

In these songs, male (and a female) rappers proudly tell of their thuggish achievements (stealing, involving oneself in prostitution, the selling of drugs, and firearms) and decry those who do not concur to this lifestyle. Any person not subscribing to this lifestyle is described as being a “wankster,” i.e. a fake gangster who only purports to be one but whose life does not truly reflect this lifestyle. This is exemplified in 50 Cent’s “Wanksta.”

You said you a gangsta
But you neva pop nuttin’
You said you a wanksta
And you need to stop frontin’
You go to the dealership
But you neva cop nuttin’
You been hustlin’ a long tyme
And you ain’t got nuttin’
I’m gangsta

Proponents of gangsta rap disagree about many aspects of this genre and its place in African-American culture because of several reasons. First, in relation to the

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pimp and gangster mentality that pervades this music genre, it is argued that rap artists did not invent this mind-set. Rappers, themselves, were very much influenced and are the byproducts of other American and non-American cultural icons. These include: martial arts, the mafia, blaxploitation films of the 1970s, early black comedians, and many other images represented in and out of American culture. Many were influenced by martial arts and its various related forms. One such example is the Wu Tang Klan whose debut album, *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* revolves around martial arts ideologies.\(^{231}\) Another example may be seen in Jackie Chan’s 1979 and 1994 movies entitled, *Drunken Master* and *Legend of Drunken Master*, whose title was adopted by a rapper who now shares the same name.

### Blaxploitation Controversies and Influences on Gangsta Rap

The gangster “way of life” which rappers so proudly espouse through dress, mannerisms, and themes, was adopted from the pimp mentality flaunted in the 1970s American blaxploitation movies. Movies such as *The Mack*, *Superfly*, *Sweet Sweetback’s Badassss Song*, and many others deal with the same illicit themes which are currently the source of controversy in gangsta rap—namely, pimping, selling drugs, and committing murder. Ironically enough, these blaxploitation themes were also the source of controversy in the African-American community during their heyday. Opponents such as the Coalition Against Blaxploitation, which consisted of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Urban League, along with a few African-American film professionals felt that these movies bolstered and sustained stereotypical beliefs.\(^{232}\) Many of these movies starred the brutal black buck with unwarranted and

\(^{231}\) Unknown Author, “Wu-Tang History,” *Fortune City Website.*
http://www.fortuneity.com/tinpan/stonetemple/72/facts2.htm#.

extensive amounts of sex and violence, which many black middle-class members criticized as being negative images.\textsuperscript{233}

Another controversial issue pertained to the fact that most of these movies were written and directed by whites who were the main bankrollers of the movies. The bulk of the money was going out of the black community and into the hands of white corporate America. The Coalition Against Blaxploitation was met with resistance from black filmmakers who recognized and expressed the fact that despite the financial benefits gained by white corporatists, there were limited work opportunities which were accorded to African-Americans prior to this time. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin state,

Blaxploitation filmmaking also provided new and greater opportunities for African American artists in Hollywood. While the majority of these films were still written and directed by white men, many black actors, writers, musicians, and directors did find work making these pictures….When opposition was felt from African American filmmakers who were finding much-needed work within these films, the Committee soon disbanded.\textsuperscript{234}

Despite the financial benefits earned by white corporatists as well as the black entertainers, blaxploitation movies were frugally made and were promoted primarily to middle- and lower-class African-Americans. Yet, according to John Belton, “White audiences, raised on a steady diet of sex and violence found in gangster films…were drawn in considerable numbers to black crime pictures….Though blaxploitation films were often merely the reworking and recasting of traditionally white stories, plot situations, and character types for black audiences with black actors, many of them nonetheless addressed the concerns of the black community [drugs, sex, violence] in ways which were unprecedented on the American screen.”\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{233} Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, \textit{American on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies}, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 204), 86-87.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 86.
One well-known blaxploitation film which was financed by its black filmmaker, Melvin Van Peebles, and introduced the new version of the black buck male protagonist was *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadassss Song*. This movie was a source of controversy because of its sexual and violent themes, but also because older black intellectual members felt that it gave no political and social direction to the black community.

The film though, in other aspects, was a success. While Van Peebles’ film budget consisted of $50,000, he grossed $10 million. The film was also successful because of its appeal to those militants in the black community who rejected black bourgeoisie and their attempts to culturally assimilate with the white America. Bogle states,

During that time…the new militant separatist black classes sometimes came to identify blackness with the trappings of the ghetto: the tenements as well as the talk, the mannerisms, and the sophistication of the streets—all of which appeared to mark a life lived to one’s black roots. Ghetto residents seemed to have a greater ethnic identity. Eventually, poverty and ghetto life (sometimes the very degrading constraints imposed on Black America by White America) were frequently idealized and glamorized…With the glamorization of the ghetto, however, came also the elevation of the pimp/outlaw/rebel as folk hero.\(^\text{236}\)

Van Peebles’ film was the first to glorify pimpdom while failing to explore as well as explain the context surrounding this lifestyle. Black women were sullied while being depicted as whores. His film is most noted and remembered as “a striking social document on the nature and certain attitudes of the new era.”\(^\text{237}\)

Blaxploitation criminal themes and the aggressive “nature” of African-American males which were adopted and utilized in gangsta rap were not only prevalent during the 1970s, but even earlier. Perhaps the gangsta image and rebellious nature is inherently “remembered” from the Nat Turner image and rebel who rivaled Sambo.

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\(^{236}\) Donald Bogle, *Toms*, 236.

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 236.
Blassingame states, “Revengeful, bloodthirsty, cunning, treacherous, and savage, Nat was the incorrigible runaway...who defied all the rules of plantation society. Subdued and punished only when overcome by superior numbers or firepower, Nat retaliated when attacked by whites, led guerrilla activities of maroons against isolated plantations, killed overseers and planters, or burned plantation buildings when he was abused.”

The Controversies, Effects, and Influences of Gangsta Rap

This aggressive criminal “gangsta” theme also existed during and after the minstrelsy era. James H. Dormon makes an especially salient point about how [Edward] Harrigan used the Zip Coon figure, with his "dandy" clothing and razor [this author’s italics], to represent the threat of blacks:

. . . in the Harrigan version, the blacks of lower Manhattan were not only comical in their pretensions, but also assertive, even aggressive, and in their proclivity for violence, potentially dangerous. . . . in no important way did the Harrigan caricature of American blacks differ from that of the stereotyped 'coons' of the 1890s, as they appeared in a seemingly endless succession of Tin Pan Alley hits.

Mark Freeman mentions the gangsta rapper’s image as being the updated version of the coon image. He states,

In case anyone thought coon songs died out with the demise of Amos 'N Andy (whites in blackface) on television in 1953, check out .... nearly the entire lyrical opus known as Gangsta Rap. What is the O.G. if not the razor-totin' coon image updated, armed with semi-automatics and a '90s bad attitude, and selling the bulk of its product to white teenagers?

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239 Edward “Ned” Harrigan was an Irish comic minstrel singer born in 1844.
Criminal themes were also common with African-American musicians of other music genres. As stated earlier, jazz pianist, Jelly Roll Morton considered himself to be more a pimp rather than a musician. Other ragtime, jazz, and blues musicians were involved in these “unwholesome”-related activities either by providing the accompanying music or by directly partaking in them.

The idea of gangster is also nothing new. Rappers were enamored with real Mafia characters and movies such as The Godfather. The word “mafia” has even been incorporated into group names such as the Junior M.A.F.I.A. and Three 6 Mafia, a Memphis rap group; an internet site, rapmafia.net, and even a specific member of the mafia man has been mentioned in a song, “Gangsta,” by A-Wax.

Black chucks, red laces
Bad luck but I duck fed cases
Who don't wanna help a gangsta ball?
Line 'em up and tell 'em face the wall
I'm gangsta
Like Al Capone
On my way to call the palace home

The second reason as to why proponents of gangsta rap disagree with opponents is because of the environment which spawned this music. Many advocates believe that it is not necessary to probe this subject area but that focused emphasis should be placed on the reason gangsta rap even exists. Michael Eric Dyson believes that many critics have unfairly placed blame on rappers for problems that existed long before they gained importance. He states, “First, we should understand what forces drove the emergence of rap. Second, we should place the debate about gangsta rap in the context of a much older debate about “negative” and “positive” black images. Finally, we should acknowledge that gangsta rap crudely exposes harmful beliefs and

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242 Chucks refer to high-top canvas basketball shoes with the Chuck Taylor signature.  
practices that are often maintained with deceptive civility in much of mainstream society, including many black communities.”

Russell Simmons, rap mogul, states,

...People always use the term ‘rap violence’ whenever there’s an incident at a rap show. But I’m sure they had ‘blues violence’ and ‘jazz violence,’ and we know they had ‘rock violence’.... People like to blame the music for kids’ problems when it’s the kids with problems who create the music and, unfortunately, create the violence as well. Whether a gangster or just a kid with a thug mentality beat someone at a concert or out in the street, it has nothing to do with the music. The violence was a result of the larger environment. Rap is part of that culture---it didn’t create it.

The opposing camps differ in their beliefs about the extent of the influence of this music and lyrics on rap enthusiasts, who are in many cases, very impressionable young children. MMB Music Inc., music therapist, Susan Weber says, “If someone is rapping over and over again about killing cops, someone is more likely to kill cops because people are susceptible to suggestions.”

Philadelphia Elementary and middle school inner city principal, Salome Thomas El concurs with Webber. He states, “A lot of young people listen to their [rappers’] lyrics and take their word as law. Children ‘live what they learn and learn what they live’ and many of these children coming from broken homes look up to the rapper. A lot of times he [the rapper] becomes the teacher. He becomes the role model to these young people.” Additionally, at a Black History Month event at the University of Florida, film director, Spike Lee, spoke of the effects of negative images. He states, “We are bombarded by these (‘gangsta’) images again and again

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247 Ibid., http://newsnet.byu.edu/print/story.cfm/55516.
and again and again…They do make a difference on human behavior. No one gets upset that pimpdom gets elevated on a pedestal.  

Murray Forman, Northeastern University professor, contends that he is skeptical of reports that say rap and hip-hop are negative. He said there are other factors that play a role as well, such as a broken home, psychological problems or economic depression. However, Ralph DiClemente and his colleagues at Emory University in Atlanta note that there is a strong association between rap videos and high-risk “unhealthy” behavior even though this might not mean that rap videos cause such behavior.

Opponents also disagree about rappers being or not being role models. Although upon observing the limitations of rap music themes and its negative portrayal of black men and women and the possible influences on young aficionados, rapper, while Will Smith asked that rappers be accountable as positive role models, the late Eazy-E, former N.W.A. member once stated, “I’m not a role model or a Dr. Seuss/Yo I’m a gangsta.” E’s point of view by and large, according to Rafer Guzman, reflects that of rappers who typically do not claim to be good examples for children.

At a National Hip-Hop Political Convention’s Youth Summit in June 2004, the same contradictory opinions were voiced by the rappers/panelists when questioned about rappers being role models. While rapper, MC Lyte felt that artists have a huge responsibility toward their fans, her male counterpart, as well as rapper, Doug E. Fresh both debated her argument. Both stated that rappers are not role models. Her counterpart stated “every artist isn’t ready to be a role model. He added in many instances rappers ‘get rich by accident’ and don’t necessarily understand the

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250 Ibid., http://newsnet.byu.edu/print/story.cfm/55516.
responsibility of being a public figure.” These are examples of diverging, contradictory viewpoints borne as a result of the new direction taken by commercially-commodified rappers and their promoters.

**Controversial Issues Relating to the Usage of the N-Word**

Inclusive in this new direction of rap is the controversial issue of the adoption and signification of the word, “nigger/nigga,” when referencing African-American men. According to the African American Registry, the word “nigger,” is believed to have derived from the Latin word “niger,” which means black. The prevalent usage during the slave era aided in the eventual transformation of this word from a positive to its negative connotation. It is probable that nigger is a phonetic spelling of the white Southern mispronunciation of Negro.

Historically spelled in several ways: nigger, niggah, nigguh, these volatile words meant the same, an African-American person of black heritage who was considered innately inferior, lazy, and generally intellectually substandard. At first this word was used to reference the African-American slave. Later, to show conformity to established anti-black rules, this word became a title which was expressed by blacks toward themselves and other blacks, as well. According to Wikipedia, “Slaves often pandered to racist assumptions about blacks by using the term to their advantage as a self-deprecatory artifice of Tomming. Implicit in so doing was the unspoken reminder that a presumed inherently morally or intellectually inferior person or subhuman -- in essence, a "nigger" -- could not reasonably be held responsible for work performed incorrectly, an "accidental" fire in the kitchen, or any other similar offense. It was a means of deflecting responsibility in the hope of escaping the wrath of an overseer or master. Its use as a self-referential term was also a way to avoid suspicion and put whites at ease.

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254 Phil Middleton & David Pilgrim, “Nigger (the word), a Brief History!,” *The African American Registry*, [Http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/2420/Nigger_the_word_a_brief_his...](Http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/2420/Nigger_the_word_a_brief_his...)
A slave who referred to himself or another black as a "nigger" presumably accepted the subordinate role that was his unfortunate lot and, therefore, posed no threat to white authority.  

The revival of this word which had diminished in usage after the Civil Rights Era was spurred with the creation or performance of artistic works by those such as writer/activist Dick Gregory, and musician, Curtis Mayfield. While Gregory used the N-Word as the title of his autobiography in 1964, Curtis Mayfield employed the word and referred to women as bitches in his *Superfly* blaxploitation film song “Pusherman.”

I'm your mamma, I'm your daddy  
I'm that nigga in the alley  
want some coke, have some weed  
I'm your doctor, when in need  
you know me, I'm your friend  
your main boy, thick and thin  
I'm your pusherman  
I'm your pusherman  
Haha. 
Super cool, super mean  
feelin' good, for the man  
ain't I clean, bad machine  
secret stash, heavy bread  
Superfly, here I stand  
baddest bitches, in the bed

Richard Pryor used the N-Word in his comedic acts even though he later recanted and apologized for his usage of this word. Pryor, as with comedian Dick Gregory, mentioned that this use of the N-Word was sprung from his desire to take out some of

the pain. According to Deborah Mathis, “he (Pryor) hoped to wear it out, to remove its stinger.” When visiting Africa in 1979, Pryor came to the realization that the N-Word was degrading to black people and as a result, became a changed man. He stated, “When I was in Africa, this voice came to me and said, ‘Richard, what do you see?’ I said, I see all types of people.’ The voice said, ‘But do you see any niggers?’ I said, ‘No.’ It said, ‘Do you know why?’ ‘Cause there aren’t any.’” Deborah Mathis stated that Pryor realized “the word was not our word and that adopting it would not legitimize it. Pryor stopped using the word in his public performances. Repeating it would not make it better, he said.”

Dick Gregory, the first African-American to publicly reclaim the “N-word for later generations of black musicians and performers,” now “isn’t enamored of everyone who followed his lead in this regard, and especially loathes gangsta rap which, he argues, demeans black women.” He, too, no longer uses it publicly.

Spurred and influenced by the use of “nigger” by these artist-icons, gangsta rappers of the mid-1980s breathed new life into this word and co-opted a phonetic spelling and new definition. This was an attempt to reclaim and rename a word that was historically-, and violently-charged.

The usage of the word, “nigger/nigga” in Gangsta rap has resulted in three differing sets of opinions in reference to the proper usage of this historically-charged word. Because this racial slur was used by slaveowners in the denouncement of black Americans during their time of enslavement, one group which includes entertainers, athletes, and intellectuals such as Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, John Salley (4-time NBA Champion), and John McWhorter, believes that this word should not be used at any time. Deborah Mathis, “Commentary: Richard Pryor’s Gift to Blacks? Making Us Laugh to Keep From Crying,” BlackAmericaWeb.com. December 11, 2005. http://www.blackamericaweb.com/site.aspx/bawnews/mathis121205.


time. They believe that even in the 21st Century “nigger” continues to be a principal symbol of racism. John Salley states, “I learned a long time ago that that word didn’t give me any strength. It didn’t. They can say the word is a term of endearment, but I’m not endeared by the word. Call me brother. If you don’t want to call me brother, call me John. If you don’t want to call me John, call me mister.”

Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley believes that this ‘endearment’ pretext is an excuse to use the word. Kelley states, “What we’re witnessing is not a transformation into something positive but a defense of the term when they’re now up against the fence/wall. When rappers are being criticized for using the term, they are coming up with some kinds of explanations or excuses to explain how it has this other meaning and they’re also in a strange situation where they’re trying to defend young white kids, you know, who are insisting on the right to use the term.”

There are many others who also hold this belief about the lack of transformation and negative connotation. Chuck D says that, “It’s crazy to think that a word that has had a negative connotation for three hundred to four hundred hears can be turned around in fifteen years….Black people didn’t invent ‘nigger’. That was thrown at us and then all of a sudden us accepting it is like somebody just catching garbage and loving it.” His controversial rap group, Public Enemy, also expresses the same conviction in their song, “I Don’t Wanna Be Called Yo Nigga.”

Yo! ho! yo nigga! yo nigga! no nigga!  
Check it out  
How can you say to me yo my nigga  
Cursin’ up a storm with your finger on a trigger  
Feelin’ all the girls like a big gold digger  
Take a small problem

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261 *The N Word: Divided We Stand*, DVD, directed by Todd Larkins (2004; Post Consumer Media Production, 2006).
Make a small problem bigger
Yo I ain't poor I got dough
Don't consider me your brother no more
Goddamn kilogram, how do you figure
I don't want to be called yo nigga…
Break it down
N.I.G.G.E.R.
Nigga
Everybody sayin' it
Everybody playin' it rolling on the scales
'Cause everybody's weighin' it

Another group led by university law professor, Randall Kennedy, believes that through unlimited and continued usage of this word it will become dis-empowered. Kennedy states in his book, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*,

….there is much to be gained by allowing people of all backgrounds to yank *nigger* away from white supremacists, to subvert its ugliest denotation, and to convert the N-word from a negative into a positive appellation. This process is already well under way, led in the main by African American innovators who are taming, civilizing, and transmuting ‘the filthiest, dirtiest, nastiest word in the English language.’

As stated earlier, comedians, Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor attempted to destabilize the N-word through unlimited usage. These attempts were unsuccessful. Quincy Jones mentioned that others had endeavored even earlier to do the same, but those attempts were also ineffective. He said,

It’s [the N-word] a very dangerous animal. A lot of people have tried to flatten it since I can remember in show business. Moms Mabley, Pigmeat Markham,

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Slappy White, Redd Foxx,…they’ve all tried to flatten it so it wouldn’t have the meaning, but it does have the meaning. It has—it is designed to be derogatory, and it is an expression of hate, and, uh, as I said, with a significant tone, it has the ability inside the family, I think, to be the most affectionate and loving or the most hostile.266

A third group, which includes rapper Ice Cube; filmographer, Spike Lee; actress, Nia Long; and rap group, A Tribe Called Quest; believes that the word should be used only among African-Americans since it serves as a term of endearment or insider camaraderie. Long states, “It’s a word that should be used in the appropriate place and at the appropriate time.” 267 This insider camaraderie idea is expressed in A Tribe Called Quest’s rap song, “Sucka Nigga.”

See, nigga first was used back in the Deep South
Fallin out between the dome of the white man's mouth
It means that we will never grow, you know the word dummy
Other niggas in the community think it's crummy
But I don't, neither does the youth cause we
em-brace adversity it goes right with the race
And being that we use it as a term of endearment
Niggas start to bug to the dome is where the fear went
Now the little shorties say it all of the time268
And a whole bunch of niggas throw the word in they rhyme
Yo I start to flinch, as I try not to say it269

True to this position about the usage of the N-word, is the Jennifer Lopez song, “I’m Real,” which has been a source of contention because of her usage of the N-word.

267 *The N Word: Divided We Stand*, DVD, directed by Todd Larkins (2004; Post Consumer Media Production, 2006).
268 Shortie: an attractive girl.
A local NY deejay and his cohost (Star and Buckwild) felt that because she is not African-American she has no right to sing, “I tell those n--s mind their business, but they don't hear me, though?.” Others disagree. Minister Muhammad Abdullah Muhammad feels differently. He feels that since Lopez is a Puerto Rican who is of African ancestry, she has every right to this word as anyone else. After all, Puerto Rican rappers Fat Joe and Big Pun also used the word. He stated, “If Jennifer Lopez is to be attacked, why not Fat Joe, and the late Big Pun who are Afro-Puerto Rican? They all have used the “N” word. A few shades of lighter skin do not make her less Afro-Puerto Rican, in culture and ethnicity.”

Even though controversies about the N-word continue as opposing sides remain steadfast in their beliefs and positions to use or not to use this antithetical word, one African-American intellectual has had a change of heart. University of Pennsylvania professor, Michael Eric Dyson who once defended his usage of the N-word as a term of endearment, has decided to no longer use the word. He states,

I have decided to retire the use of the “N” word in public. Why? Not because I believe that it has lost its power as a term of endearment among black folk who use it with love and affection. Not because its meaning has become so bastardized that one may not recover its redemptive use by black folk who intend it to signify profound love and respect. I have decided to stop using it for two reasons: many black folk who otherwise supported my work and agreed with my perspectives were thrown off by my public identification with the downtrodden and the debased of our race through use of the term. Despite all the good they thought I did, they believed that the use of the word made it difficult for them to fully embrace me…Finally, Rev. Jesse Jackson, after we both attended Johnnie Cochran’s funeral, and after we engaged in a healthy political discussion with Stevie Wonder, asked me to refrain from publicly using the “N” word because it obscured what he termed the effectiveness of my intellectual witness…So, I have

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270 Muhammad Abdullah Muhammad, “The "N" Word and Jennifer Lopez,” BlackElectorate, September 7,
decided to refrain from public use of the “N” word where I cannot explain the context of the word and its association with traditions of racial response to degradation. When I can explain it, I will feel free to engage in its use, although I realize those opportunities may be rarer than I’d like. In the end, the folk who know how I feel about the black oppressed, and all those who suffer regardless of race, creed, class, color or nationality, understand that I’m still riding for those whose backs are against the wall. But if those who otherwise feel me are offended by my use of the term, it makes little sense to continue its use. I have no problem with its use by hip-hoppers who continue to use it with verve, color, imagination, love and affection.\textsuperscript{271}

This word has brought to the forefront; the many viewpoints related to its usage and have established the significant need to address issues such as these through intelligent discourse within the African-American community. Although many people will undoubtedly continue to hold fast to their beliefs, historical debates will continue to shed light and encourage everyone’s right to hold disagreeing opinions. But according to University of Florida sociology professor, Terry L. Mills, “…for many, the word is not a term of endearment. “Despite the use of this word in popular media and the youth culture of today, many individuals with a sense of history, justice and equality [will] still find the n-word, and all other symbols of hatred, to be distasteful and insulting.”\textsuperscript{272}

There are some that cater to the rap music industry that have conflicting opinions as to its public usage. Damon Dash, co-CEO of Roc-A-Fella Records, admits to his personal conflicts concerning the word even though it is used in all of his recordings. He states, “Yes, I’m personally conflicted, definitely. But you know, everything I make isn’t for kids. Do you know what I’m saying? So in that respect its about the parents explaining it to the kids, if they’re going to let their kids listen to certain things. You


know what I’m saying? And make sure it’s used in the proper text; even though there isn’t a proper text for the word ‘nigger’. You know what I’m saying?”

Despite Dash’s protégée, Kanye West’s dislike for the word and attempts to not use it, the N-word is used multiple numbers of times in his music. West states, “Take the word nigga, I don’t like the word and I made an attempt to change it on this new song “Crack Music”-an indictment of drug abuse. I tried saying, ‘This is crack music, homey,’ but it just didn’t have the same impact….” According to Josh Tyrangiel, “The word nigga appears multiple times on the album.”

Others such as gangsta rappers will continue to use it as long as they continue to be paid as may be seen in N.W.A.’s (Niggaz With Attitudes’) rap song excerpt below, “Niggaz 4 Life.”

Why do I call myself a nigger, you ask me?
Because my mouth is so mother fuckin’ nasty
Bitch this, bitch that
Nigger this, nigger that
In the mean while my pockets are gettin’ fat
Gettin’ paid to say this shit here
Makin’ more in a week than a doctor makes in a year
So, why not call myself a nigger?
It’s better than pulling the trigger and goin’ up the river
And don’t I get called a nigger anyway?
Booked as a motherfucker and locked away
So... so, cut out all that bull shit
Yo! I guess I'll be a nigga for life.

273 *The N Word: Divided We Stand*, DVD, directed by Todd Larkins (2004; Post Consumer Media Production, 2006).
275 Ibid., 54-61.
Cultural memory is alive and well in the stereotypes and controversies which surround elements of rap music. Stereotypes such as the coon variants and the black brute may be seen in contemporary rap performers and characters. Other controversies stem from diverse viewpoints concerning the usage of the N-word. Unfortunately, these two elements of cultural memory will continue to proliferate because of the financial benefits gained by those who continue and will continue to adhere, assent, and remain naive to the dehumanization resulting from stereotypes and N-Word usage. Regrettably in this case, all African-Americans will be affected. Yet, others feel that the opposite has taken place. Guthrie Ramsey states, “If one of the legacies of nineteenth-century minstrelsy involved the public degradation of the black body in the American entertainment sphere, then one hundred years after minstrelsy’s emergence, African Americans used this same signifier to upset a racist social order and to affirm in the public entertainment and the private spheres their culture and humanity.”

In conclusion, it is obvious that there are problems concerning stereotypical portrayals and negative views and names “assigned” to African-American men. These stereotypes were formulated during the slave/minstrelsy eras and continue to live through contemporary black-American culture mainly because these images and names have been internalized and are now also perpetuated in the black community itself. This “black-on-black” perpetuation has become a source of contention because while some African-Americans (the perpetuators) are accommodating and even embracing, others strive for positive redefinition of the image of the black male which would lead to more self-acceptance and esteem. Oppositions and controversy will remain unless an general consensus is reached between opposing parties, otherwise the black community will forever be plagued with an internal war which affects the entire black community.

277 Ramsey, Race Music, 51.
There are other unexplored issues which directly relate to negative images such as the extent in which stereotypical images have contributed to the decline of the black family and the weakening of the black male/female relationship. These debates, though beyond the scope of this dissertation, exemplify the conflicts which have taken place between black men and women concerning determining the most dispossessed black gender, the “attitude” that many black men believe typifies the black woman, and the black man’s inability to see himself as an oppressor of the black woman. He, instead, sees himself as a victim of white racism. According to Elonda R. Wilder-Hamilton, “The issue of who has it easier or tougher has now become a point of contention between Black men and Black women.”

This contention continues to contribute to the love-hate conflictual relationship that black men have for black women and which has manifested itself in the misogynistic treatment expressed toward African-American women. This expression has become especially prominent in rap music and hip-hop culture, which itself has become yet another contentious, hot-button topic which has not only divided genders, but generations of African-Americans throughout the community. The proliferation of negative images and stereotypes, as well as degrading names, contributes to more self-hatred and contempt that affects not only black males, but also black females.

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“Drama”
But let’s get it straight, when I say the word bitch
I don’t mean all women
Cause hookers come a dime a dozen if you thought they wasn’t
You can hit this hoe today, and tomorrow you can hit her cousin
Or her mama, you gots to have drama.
Nigga flash some currency and go up in her auntie!
I’m talking bout the skinless type loc
You know the type that seem to like the taste of swipe…

“For My Sistas”
Now I didn’t use the word bitch a few times in a rhyme but…
This goes out to the young black queens
On the neighborhood scene
Who haven’t lost their dream…
She’s the kinda woman ya take home to momma
The only kind you ever let get past the drama
Coolio know that you ain’t no ho
And it’s time to put you up on a pedestal seat
Queen of the entire universe
And you know how I know that you were put here first
An’ to every nigga that dissed ya an’ every nigga that hit ya
Accept my apologies for my brothaz…

The song lyrics above (“Drama” and “For My Sistas”) which were written by rapper, Coolio, represent two opposing points of view; one that is supportive of and the other that is callous toward African-American women. Coolio’s inconsistency regarding black American women is consistent with that of the general black American public. What many perceive to be as negative renderings in rap music and its accompanying visual depictions of African-American women have become stereotypical portrayals of hypersexuality and devaluement. This has fostered divisive dialogues in the black community because of the reverberated use of degrading, animalistic, names such as “bitch,” “whore/ho,” “hoodrat,” and “chickenhead,” etc. when referring to African-American women. Due to gender and generational variances which work against cultural harmony, identity, and mutual respect, this source of contention has worsened in the African-American community.

Misogynistic lyrics in gangsta rap had expressed such hatred toward women that some females have become acclimated to and more accepting of negative names and derogatory roles assigned to women. Misogynistic meanings in rap music served to disempower women by inferences and blatant lyrical messages that considered women only for the visual and physical pleasure of the man, to include the implantation of future generations who are in many cases, the sole responsibility of the implanted. Furthermore, gangsta rap proudly declares that African-American men are and should be misogynists since African-American women are unworthy of marriage.

Survey of the History of Sexual Objectification in Black Women

Although pervasive in gangsta rap, these unflattering perspectives of African-American women did not originate with rap music and hip-hop culture. Considered as being animalistic, “less than human,” unworthy of permanent spousal commitment, yet suitable for the purposes for procreating and pleasing, the black women’s plight began during America’s enslavement process. Black women were not viewed as being tender and graceful. Neither were they adored as mothers-- ideals which were
characteristically assigned to those espousing the ideal of the cult of the true woman, i.e., the white woman. African-American women were perceived as being monstrous, oversexed, breeding creatures quite incapable of formulating ties with their offspring. This viewpoint perpetuated itself through the constant rape by white slaveowners and re-supplying and acquisition of human commodities (slave children) for the continuance of slavery. Additionally, slaveowners attributed the continual breeding to the unyielding immorality demonstrated by the lustful African-American female whose Jezebel image originates from this period.

The oversexed Jezebel is a stereotypical representation that continues to haunt African-American women throughout American history. Picking up the reins of the cult of true womanhood in and during the post-reconstructive south, many whites feared miscegenation between black men and white women. As a result, “Lynchings were used as a major form of racial control and the requisite punishment for Black men who allegedly raped white women because of their supposed out-of-control sexual impulses.”

“The stereotypical image of the black woman was adopted into media in the 1920s beginning with the King Vidor movie, Hallelujah. This 1929 movie set the standard for the portrayal of African-Americans as having the stereotypical attributes of being either sentimental idealists or highly emotional animals.” The young African-American woman is depicted as being either the “Cindy Lou Who” back-home girl or the unscrupulous woman who lures and/or manipulates men. This vamp (the unscrupulous woman) is very often represented by a light complexioned black woman – the tragic mulatto. These depictions were further perpetuated through continuous negative portrayals in African-American-oriented movies that followed, but the character that had the most influence was that played by Nina Mae McKinney.

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282 Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks, 31.
Executing sensuous bumps and grinds in the famous cabaret scene in *Hallelujah*, Nina Mae McKinney was the movies’ first black whore. Almost every black leading lady in motion pictures, from Lena Horne in *Cabin in the Sky* to Lonette McKee in *Sparkle* in 1976, owes a debt to the playfully sexy moves and maneuvers of McKinney’s character Chick…In McKinney’s hands and hips, Chick represented the black woman as an exotic sex object, half woman, half child. She was the black woman out of control of her emotions, split in two by her loyalties and her own vulnerabilities…Chick was always referred to as ‘that cinnamon-colored gal’ or ‘high yeller.’ The white half of her represented the spiritual; the black half, the animalistic.

McKinney’s vamp-like stance (hands on hips and others and harsh-sounding voice) was adopted by later leading ladies including Dorothy Dandridge’s “Carmen Jones” character.

The renaming of the African-American woman as “whores” and “bitches” was further embraced in popular culture not only through movies, but also by prominent comedians. In Richard Pryor’s early career, he in his profane manner also referenced black women as whores/hoes and bitches. Being reared in a brothel, it became commonplace for Pryor to refer to past childhood experiences and people as whores, pimps, and drug addicts in his comedic acts. It is because of this that many feel that he partially bears the responsibility of black culture becoming more debased. As stated in one blog shortly after Pryor’s 2005 death,

With the possible exception of the founder of BET, no one black man is more responsible for the whore house culture black culture has turned into than Richard Pryor. Pryor was the point man for the black criminal underclass. He used his genius to replace mainstream black culture with their whorehouse

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283 Ibid., 31-33.
culture. Rudy Ray Moore tried to do the same thing, but wasn’t as brilliant as Pryor. Nor was Red Fox. Then came Eddie Murphy who drove the nail further in our coffin. Then came the vile, ghetto criminals and addicts who gave us Hip Hop and Def Jam.  

Helena Echegoyen, *The N Word* filmmaker, states, 

After his [Pryor’s] first trip to Africa, he realized that he had been doing his culture an enormous disservice by using the word by and to describe African Americans. However, once he let the genie out of the bottle, you couldn’t really take it back. Once you put a word into the lexicon, there’s no way for you to somehow change your mind about it. It’s a very beautiful personal journey, but, frankly, the freedom that he used in using the word gave generations to come, not only of comedians, but also of rappers, to use the word the way I don’t think he would have imagined.  

Although Pryor later recanted his use of the word “nigger,” his degrading names for black women remained the same in his comedy routines. The Critic states, 

If there’s a weakness to all of this, it’s that while Pryor may have overcome the nigger-mind feelings, he remained trapped in the male versus female bitch-mind, even women he admires such as Natalie Cole being described as bitches. After his revelations in Africa, you’d have thought the power of words in general, not merely specific, would have opened up to him. It’s a disappointment that it didn’t.

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Diverging Points of Views/Like Views: Degrading Names and Images in Lyrics and Music Videos

With the general acceptance of words such as “nigga,” among gangsta rappers, it also became trite for derogatory words such as “bitch,” “whore/ho,” “chickenhead,” and “hoodrat” to be used to describe women. Although the word “bitch” is occasionally used to define a man who answers to the beck-in-call of a woman, it and the other disparaging words are used to define women as being imbecilic; excessively sexually promiscuous; single parent to many children fathered by different men; participant in fellatio activities; lazy woman who is sexually promiscuous and exhibits poor hygiene; a whining woman with a bad attitude. Generally, these non-complimentary words define all black women, as explained in NWA’s song, “A Bitch is a Bitch.”

Let’s describe a certain female. A female with the disease of character and attitude. If you will a snob. However in a view of NWA...

A bitch is a bitch (bitch)...
Now the title bitch don’t apply to all women
But all women have a little bitch in ’em (yeah)
It’s like a disease that’s plagues their character
Takin’ the women of America (yeah)
And it starts with a letter B. ..
There you have it. The description of a bitch. Now ask yourself, are they talking about you? Are you that funky, dirty, money-hungry, scandalous, stuck-up, hair piece contact wearing bitch? Yep, you probably are.
Bitch! 289

The word “whore”/“ho” is referenced synonymously many times with the word “bitch,” but may also refer to women of any ethnic background whose primary job is that of fulfilling the sexual pleasure of the black man. In Kurupt’s rap, a dogg (man) can be a best friend. Women, though, continue to be referred to as bitches that are unworthy of true, committed, romantic, permanent, marital relationships as seen in the rap song below, (“Ho’s a Housewife”). This rap, written by Kurupt, also defines women (bitches) as inhuman female persons with whining attitudes.

this, this, is, one of them occasions
Where the homey’s not doing it right
I mean he found him a hoe that he like
But you can’t make a hoe a housewife
And when it all boils down you go find in the end
A bitch is a bitch, but a dogg is a man’s best friend
So what you found a hoe that you like
But you can’t make a hoe a housewife

Now there’s bitches of all kinds, races and creeds
Bitches ain’t shit, bitches eat dick
Take a second look, I can't stand a hoe that can't cook”
…I mean, man, I found so many hoes, you know
I ran across so many hoes you know
I said ‘Yo, baby’ ‘Yo, my lady’ ‘Yo, my bitch’…
…You wanna act like a bitch, bitch!(bitch)
Lil' bitch! (Lil' bitch!)
Yo, if you goin' be a bitch, be a bitch
Be a bitch (dont’ be no bitch) Be a bitch, bitch!
Lil bitch, I’ve met so many hoes, so many bitches
What's wrong with these hoes? What's wrong with these bitches?
(I met a skank-ass, skallywag, trick, tramp, hussy, heffer)

I’m a feena let my homeboy Joe Montana speak to the hoes,

Speak to the hoes man²⁹⁰

Because many hip-hoppers disavow the influence that this music has on the lives of its listeners, many also underestimate the effects that these words and images that bombard the media airways might have on the viewing audience. Editorial writer for the Palm Beach Post, Elisa Cramer writes, “Even as fellow members of the 18- to 35-year-old so-called “hip-hop generation” claim that the message isn’t as important as the music, hip-hop has played an undeniably significant role in molding our generation’s view of marriage, sex, love, dating and friendship. Our conversational language and song lyrics—with common references to women as “hoes,” “chickenheads,” “pigeons” and “hoodrats”—reflect a destructive resentment and disregard.”²⁹¹

This resentment and disregard for African-American women, as represented in rap music and videos and as stated by some, reflect the realities that exist within the black community. When a few rappers were questioned by Rev. Al Sharpton with regards to the use of profanity and misogyny in their music, one of them replied, “Rev, we’re like a mirror to society. We are merely reflecting what we see.”²⁹²  Sharpton mentions that while attending a New York hip-hop conference, “one of the main topics of discussion was a fight for the right to use bitch and ho in lyrics. They wanted the right to call a woman – something the slave master called black women with impunity.” He continues, “With all the stuff going on in this world, all they’re worried about is being able to call a woman out of her name?! That’s their cause? First of all, it’s wrong. But second, it is insulting. These rappers and ‘hip-hop impresarios’ weren’t worried about unemployment or the financial conditions of those who support their

²⁹⁰ Kurupt, “Ho’s a Housewife.” http://www.lyrics.astraweb.com. ². pigeons are black women who date under false pretenses.
records and made them stars. They weren’t worried about the education system that keeps too many of their fans and families in poverty. They weren’t worried about voting rights. They didn’t have any conferences on any of that. There wasn’t one seminar entitled ‘Economic Empowerment’ or ‘Jobs for the 21st Century.’ No, they want the right to call somebody a ho or a bitch – somebody who brought them into this world. As far as I’m concerned, they are low-down devious things who aren’t worth the millions of dollars young people spend to make them stars.”

Activist and author, Kevin Powell, compares the plight and image of contemporary black women to that of slave women, except he feels that this new mindset has no boundaries. He also feels that the harmful lyrics coupled with negative film images that are constantly reiterated on daily medium serve to reinforce a blatant disdain for African-American women. He voices this concern in this question asked during his speaking engagements, “What other men on the planet are allowed, or even encouraged—for the sake of keeping it real or making a profit for their record labels and themselves—to refer to the females in their lives as bitches, hos, chickenheads, skeezers, sluts or what have you; have it put on CD; have it depicted in their music videos in the most pornographic ways possible; and have all those horrific sentiments shipped all over the globe? No one but us.”

Moya Bailey, Spelman College graduate and former campus activist, states that the hypersexualized images of black women are exacerbated through lyrics, but especially videos since many countries see only this character type. She states, “I know people who’ve been on exchange programs to another country, say South Africa or Brazil, and they’ve had experiences in which people have approached them, thinking that they were prostitutes or that they were sexually open just because of the images of us because videos are really what go out to the rest of the world. There aren’t really

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pictures of us in school textbooks or things that counter the images that are seen in music videos.”

Karrine Steffans, former music video dancer and author of *Confessions of a Video Vixen*, thinks that there are other options besides music video dancing. She states that, “The top reason a woman finds herself in a rap video, sprawled undressed over a luxury car while a rapper is saying lewd things about her, is a lack of self-esteem. I know it sounds like a cliché, but no one who values, loves, or knows herself would allow herself to be placed in such a degrading position. Finding myself and learning to value who I am was one of the biggest hurdles I had to overcome.”

Steffans also feels that dishonorable treatment from others toward some women is a result of negative portrayals—that one’s conduct determines others’ actions. She mentions, “It’s your fault when you’re treated poorly because you project a poor image of yourself. They’ve been video girls and so you’re not going to be taken seriously. If you want to be taken seriously, get an education and get a job that utilizes your brain and not your body.”

Interestingly enough, though, according to reporter Jason Carroll, Steffans was in the process of doing a racy magazine modeling shoot as she warned about the perils of what she did and was doing—“selling her sexuality.”

Moreover, Steffans mentions that video performance later led to and influenced her own promiscuous behaviors.

On the other hand, many others seem to be more accepting of names and music video images. Rap video dancer, Melyssa Ford, disagrees with Steffans. She says, “She’s [Karrine Steffans’] one individual who made her own choices.” She feels that video dancers are not what they represent in media. This is just a persona that does not accurately portray the “real” people, much as actors and actresses are not truly the characters they depict. She states, “The majority of girls that you see are not portraying

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298 Ibid., November 05, 2005.
the image of who they really are. They’re being sexy for the camera, but they go home and they’re regular people.”

Ford and other video performers believe that video performing can be a means to an end thereby, leading to the establishment of a career in entertainment. Ford used her video performances to launch her career in broadcasting. Many others who have already attained higher level education or are in the process of completing a college degree also accept the same as being true. Celestina Henry, a Temple University student and ballet dance teacher, reveals, “I never had any aspirations to be in a video. I had aspirations to be a dancer. I had aspirations to be an actress and I thought about different ways of getting exposure.”

Another problem that seems to be reminiscent of slave culture and to have taken hold of the rap video culture is the idea of colorism (also known as color consciousness). Reminiscent of colorism is racial prejudice via color discrimination within the African-American culture. This type of discrimination highly privileges the lighter complexioned/more European-like black person over the darker-hued/more negroid-like one. This appears to be prevalent in music video productions in which preference is given to the lighter hued person, especially with the dancers. According to Sean Cummings, editorial director of Smooth magazine, “There is definitely, from what I see in the industry, a disparity between hiring dark-skinned models and hiring lighter-skinned models.” Video dancers/models, Roxanne and Abeba, attest to this fact. Abeba states, “There is. You can see it out there in the videos where there is Latinas and white girls and there is one chocolate head popped up out of nowhere and you’re like, okay--. That’s all they can find. It’s like affirmative action, basically.” Cummings utters, “For years even within our own culture, it’s always been good to have the good hair; to have the lighter shade skin.”

300 Ibid., November 05, 2005.
301 Celestina Henry, interview by Jason Carroll, Cable Network News, November 05, 2005.
302 Sean Cummings, interview, Video Honeys, MTV 2, March 05, 2006.
303 Abeba, interview, Video Honeys, March 05, 2006.
304 Cummings, MTV 2, March 05, 2006.
Abeba pronounces, “It’s been a limit a lot of times for work because they’re like, oh, she’s too urban or I’m not black enough. Huh! It’s always something.” Roxanne answers, “They figure that because they have all of the money, their status, they feel as though, okay now, that’s all I want in my videos. Yeah! I can’t get y’all before, but now I can get you now.” Abeba counters, “Why, I’m not going to pick Shaniqua to be my girl when I had her back in the hood and I used her and did whatever I want and I can have a little dime (urban for attractive girl with a 10 out of 10 rating) piece fly with blond hair, strawberry blond, blue eyes in my video and just so people won’t say anything, let’s put a chocolate girl in there. Let’s put a BooKesha up in there.” She then resumes, “When you put too many black girls in a video, mainstream calls it urban.”305 Cummings ends with, “We owe it to ourselves to paint a more accurate picture of what a beautiful woman is.”306

While the devaluation of black women began during the slave era, it has only been recently that divisiveness concerning its negative influences within the African-American community been seriously questioned and polarization induced. In reference to film and stereotypes in black women, Norma Manatu states, “The stereotype’s shift from print to film also worked to decontextualize black women’s “other” status, removing it from its historical roots and placing it in the here and now. This transference process has gone unquestioned by the general populace for generations, circulating throughout the culture, first orally, then through literature, and finally through film [also through music and media]. But collective oblivion combined with the reality that the medium’s images are far more extreme than in real life, have called into question how audiences might receive such images. Indeed, where it concerns audience response, the transference process gives rise to one of many inherent contradictions.”307

Two diametrically opposed groups differ in their views in that one group readily

305 Roxanne and Abeba, interview, Video Honeys, MTV 2, March 05, 2006.
306 Cummings, MTV 2, March 05, 2006.
assents to rap and its accompanying images while the other challenges the status quo of rap music and its relationship to African-American women in its lyrics and music videos. These groups do seem to not be limited by generations as, the young and the older of both groups share similar opinions for and against these stereotypical images.

During a Boston Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women’s community forum in April 1995, a heated question and answer period took place between several older women and a late teenaged girl. The women were “up in arms” about the male rappers’ use of the word “nigga,” “bitch,” and other derogatory terms used to address young black men and women. The teenaged girl stated, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. Some women act like that and deserve to be checked. I know I’m not a bitch or a ho, so I don’t care ‘cause I know they ain’t talking to me.”

The above situation is one of many examples of the generational divide that is prevalent in contemporary African-American culture.

In 1998, author, Nelson George tells of his early experience at a conference at Spelman College in which a group of young women lambasted his remarks of misogyny pointed at 2 Live Crew’s Luther Campbell. George states, “Again I tried to understand how people could defend Campbell’s diatribes. If you called Luther Campbell a cultural drug dealer who sold quick hits of danceable misogyny, his young defenders would counter that Luther Campbell was just trying to get paid—which meant that getting paid justified everything. On some level they were arguing that his music’s content had no meaning outside of whether it made money.”

Others too have expressed concerns for the manner in which women are portrayed in rap-related media. Holly Bass, writer and theater dance performer, recalls spending a year in Italy in which negative media images were prevalent. She states, “I spent a year in Italy, and most of the images they see of blacks, especially black women, are on music videos. I remember thinking, ‘Wow, if I didn’t know any black

people, I’d think all black women just walked around half-naked and wanted to shake their behinds all day long.’” In reference to her brother, Bass states, “I’ll hear him use the word bitch in reference to a woman, and I’ll stop him and say, ‘Do you mean women or are you talking about one woman who is acting a certain way? In the real world, bitch does not equal woman, but it often does in videos and in some song lyrics.’”

One important issue which characterizes Bass’ statement regarding half-naked women shaking their behinds was the issue which arose with rapper, Nelly. The popular rapper was scheduled to visit Spelman for the purposes of raising funds, bone marrow, and enlightening others about leukemia, a disease which had stricken his sister. The young Spelman women (accompanied with many Morehouse men) felt the need to conduct a dialogue regarding young black women’s inhumane and devalued treatment in this popular music genre, but more specifically, his song, “Tip Drill,” and its accompanying video. The accompanying video to “Tip Drill” displays the usual underclothed video honeys with one additional “bonus”-- the crack of a video honey’s butt cheeks is used as a device for swiping a credit card. Nelly refused to attend this “pre-fundraising” event and instead, chose to cancel, thus avoiding any dialogue concerning the matter.

After speaking about the lack of artistic respect shown to rappers by the general public, Nelly stated,

I accept my role and my freedom as an artist. I respect women and I’m not a misogynist. I’m an artist. Hip-hop videos are art and entertainment. Videos tell stories; some are violent, some are sexy, some are fun, some are serious. As for how women are shown in the videos, I don’t have a problem with it because it is entertainment, whether it’s “Dilemma” or “Tip Drill,” Mos Def or Terror Squad. Women are in the videos by choice. No one knows what a particular woman’s situation is, what her goals are. Being in that video may help her further those goals. Several women who have been in my videos have gone on to do TV

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310 Dana Williams, “Misogyny in Music: Have Videos Gone Wild?” Tolerance.org, December 16, 2003,
appearances and movies. No one can dictate other people's choices and situations.\textsuperscript{311}

In the 1990s, C. Delores Tucker, civil rights activist and others actively undertook a mission of speaking out against gangsta rap's misogynistic and violent lyrics. She stated, "The whole gangsta rap industry, I have long said, is drug-driven, race-driven, and greed-driven. And I'm asking now, all of our people, every group of people wherever offensive words are said in any context, we should demand that it be stopped because we don't want negative images, stereotypical images being placed in the minds and hearts of our children. That makes them feel they cannot achieve, that they are hopeless when they're not."\textsuperscript{312} Her stance opposing this subgenre of hip-hop caused Tucker to be at odds with the likes of Tupac Shakur and others who proclaimed rap music as one form of entertainment in which of freedom of speech is displayed, and they in turn, felt that she had ulterior motives of greed. In one of his songs, "Wonder Why They Call U Bitch," Shakur addresses and characterizes the black woman, and even more specifically, C. Delores Tucker, civil rights activist, as bitches in retaliation for her gangsta activism.

You wonda why they call u bitch
Look here miss thang
Hate to salt your game
But you's a money hungry woman
And you need to change…
Dear Ms. Deloris Tucker
Keep stressen me
Fuckin' with a muthafucking mind
I figured you wanted to know

You know
Why we call them hos bitches
And maybe this might help you understand
It ain't personal
Strictly business baby
Strictly business
So if you wonder why we call u bitch….

**Efforts to Counter Stereotypical Images**

Many individuals and organizations are endeavoring to counteract negative and conventional images which pervade gangsta rap. Washington, D.C. community activist and hip-hop media watchdog, Lisa Fager, is advocating the change of radio play time for “lyrically-challenged” rap music through her new generation think tank. She declares her mission to be that which exposes truths and upholds integrity in media. Although she feels that gangsta rap is inappropriate for the average radio listening audience (under-aged children), she feels that the blame is misplaced. Since rappers do not own radio stations they should not be held solely responsible for the music and the times in which this music is played. She proclaims, “I don’t blame any of the artists. They have no power to distribute their own records. I don’t say they shouldn’t make these records. I am hip-hop. I do not disassociate myself from the music. I love the music. Some of the music hits you in the head and some hits you in the body. The only thing we’re getting from the radio right now are body blows. I don’t want to come off as the angry black woman. I just want people to know you don’t have to be complacent and say, ‘There is nothing that we can do.’ I think its time to man up. It’s time to put our voices together and make a difference. Don’t confuse freedom of speech with the absence of responsibility and accountability…”

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played on black radio is selected and programmed by white men and women who generally “force-feed musical porn to young listeners.” In fact, most of the black radio stations are white-owned and subscribe to payola, a pay-for-play manner in which money is exchanged for the playing of certain music usually “suggested” by independent promoters who represent particular record companies and artists.

Recently, this has been a major concern of the all-female college who some years earlier lambasted Nelson George because of his early concern for the black women’s negative presumptions inherent in gangsta rap. Spelman College has become a leading women’s institution in the fight against the lack of respect being shown to black women in gangsta rap lyrics and videos and has teamed up with Essence magazine in its campaign against stereotypical African-American women’s sexual pandering.

The Essence “Take Back the Music Campaign” began in 2003 in an effort to counter the negative, stereotypical images portrayed in the media. Its mission statement declares:

We at Essence have become increasingly concerned about the degrading ways in which Black women are portrayed and spoken about in popular media, particularly in popular urban music and music videos. Aware that these images may be having a negative impact on our children, we realized that, as Black women, it was up to us to take a stand... But respond we must.

The “Take Back the Music Campaign” holds annual conferences and aims to help provide a more balanced depiction of the sexuality and character of African-American women and men in media; foster dialogue and debate of the current status of black women in popular media; explore the effects of this music on young children.

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especially young black girls; endorse those rappers who promote positive messages; encourage the African-American community to ponder their own stance concerning the music, lyrics, and images; and lastly, to make commonsensical suggestions as to how the community can effectively fight the stereotypes and negative effects relating to this music.

Forming a coalition with the campaign spearheaders such as Moya Bailey, former Spelman student and former rapper, MC Lyte, is concerned not for the women who might succumb to a lifestyle equal to the characters in which they play. She is concerned about the images that the young audiences have come to believe is truly a part of the hip-hop culture. Lyte states, “Hip-hop has always come from a place of being based in reality and what happens is when they hire people for jobs like this or when they portray these certain characters, the youth believes it. Therefore, you have young children wanting to be exactly what they see in these videos. And I’m not anti-hip-hop or anti-any particular artist. I’m pro-self-respect. I’m pro-awareness of what’s going on around you and not succumbing to what we see in these videos.”

William Jelani Cobb, Spelman history professor asserts, “Some do not understand the power of these images that are being globally disseminated….This might not be who you really are but this is certainly who the world believes us to be. And so, when we send students abroad, and we have them going to different places all over the world, and people think that it’s appropriate to respond to you or to interact with using the 5-letter “B” word or the “N” word and they don’t know that these are offensive terms. Then whose responsibility is it? Who’s willing to take the blame for it?” He continues, “These are adult images and we want this to be dealt with responsibly, but certainly there’s a problem with the image in and of itself. In the very least, we don’t want this music at 3 p.m. when young children are hearing it, transmitting these ideas of

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the music videos, in the very least; maybe we can look at a more diverse spectrum of who we are as a community.”

Likewise, this concern for the negative images extends to other groups such as Motivational Educational Entertainment (MEE) which are providing important statistical information for the purposes of educating young, urban, hip-hoppers about the perils of some aspects of this culture. Its website states that “it is your primary source of information about the many facets of urban culture and society. MEE is nationally recognized for its communication strategies to reach and influence urban populations.” MEE’s vice-president of communications, Pamela Weddington likens strip club action to some rap music videos which are typically played on BET UnCut. She deems that teen girls are now exposed to things such as ultra-racy, “exotic dancing” that are displayed on the dance floor of junior high school dances. During pre-gangsta rap times, these moves would have been unfamiliar to these girls. She alleges, “Now it’s something that they aspire to. Even if they are not staying up until three in the morning to watch BET UnCut, everyone can set up a VCR.” While she feels that it is inevitable that young black boys will engage in sexual objectification because of early exposure to rap videos, Weddington states, “My sense is that over time young Black girls are beginning to internalize what they see in the media, and we see it in their behavior.” In a MEE survey of young African-American people residing in the metropolitan areas of the U.S. concerning sex, sexuality and the media, particularly music videos, Weddington concludes, “The message young women are getting is that if they can’t get something they want through their talent or ability, then they have something else that they can use, and that’s their bodies. They are learning that what’s important about a woman is her body, not her mind. So that means, ‘I am a commodity, therefore I’m going to use that commodity to get what I want.”

Female Rappers

Much of the misogynistic contradictions encircling gangsta rap entail male rappers with offensive lyrics and females who engage in ultra-sexy music video performances. However, this hot-button topic is not limited to the above-mentioned groups of people. Female rappers are very often ignored in the misogyny/devaluation dialogues. They, like other individuals, organizations, and institutions have diverse opinions concerning this topic. While some female rappers such as Remy Ma, embrace these images, others such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Lauren Hill are either speaking out against, rapping about, or doing constructive things which allow for more positive and balanced representations. While Remy Ma feels no responsibility as a role model for young black girls, Queen Latifah continues to exemplify less-than-stereotypical “black” behaviors as seen in her rap lyrics, “U.N.I.T.Y.”:

Uh, u.n.i.t.y., u.n.i.t.y. that's a unity
U.n.i.t.y., love a black man from infinity to infinity
(who you calling a bitch?)
U.n.i.t.y., u.n.i.t.y. that's a unity (you gotta let him know)
(you go, come on here we go)
U.n.i.t.y., love a black woman from (you got to let him know)
Infinity to infinity (you ain't a bitch or a ho)
U.n.i.t.y., u.n.i.t.y. that's a unity (you gotta let him know)
(you go, come on here we go)
U.n.i.t.y., love a black man from (you got to let him know)
Infinity to infinity (you ain't a bitch or a ho)

Instinct leads me to another flow
Everytime i hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho
Trying to make a sister feel low
You know all of that gots to go
Now everybody knows there's exceptions to this rule
Now don't be getting mad, when we playing, it's cool
But don't you be calling out my name
I bring wrath to those who disrespect me like a dame\textsuperscript{324}

Born as Dana Owens in New Jersey in 1970, Queen Latifah, through her book, interviews, and lyrics, happily exemplifies positive behavior. “I really hope that people can gain something from me,” says Queen Latifah. "The catch is that people expect some sort of perfection. But you know what? I'm human. I feel comfortable with who I am and how I got here. Bumps and bruises included."\textsuperscript{325}

Owens had not always felt comfortable about herself. Sporting an ample body, she stated that she had considered dieting and trying to conform to the body types of many entertainers. She has since accepted her body type as being different and as a result, has become a role model for plus-sized women and young girls. This sentiment is expressed in her rap, “Nuff’ of the Ruff’ Stuff’.”

Everybody know latifah love positivity
Now positivity erase negativity
Mi comin inna di dance ???
Me rollin with the flavor unit posse
As a black woman mi want equality
Equality, and di freedom to be me\textsuperscript{326}

Lauren Hill represents another who exhibits a positive image and pride in being a young black woman. She warns women through her rap song, “Doo Wop” aka “That

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“Doo Wop” aka “That Thing.”

EURWeb, “RAPTRESS TRINA--A GOOD ROLE MODEL? She’s trying to be positive for the youth,”
No time for the little dicks
You see the bigger the dick
The bigger the bank, the bigger the Benz
The better the chance to get close to his rich friends…
Like lightning I wanna nigga with a wedding ring
Bank accounts in the Philippines
Blank note to take everything…
I'm da baddest bitch what…
Who's bad? Who's, who's bad? (2x)
(Shit I'm the baddest bitch) 329
Despite a jail sentence of approximately one year, rapper, Lil Kim feels that she
continues to be a role model to her young fans. She states, "Yes. I mean, I would like
to think it won't make a difference. I can't speak for everyone. There's no way everyone
in the world is going to love you. You're not going to please everybody. I'm sure to my
millions and millions of fans, more than half of them think that I am." 330

After being approached by a fan and being told that she was an inspiration, Lil
Kim stated, "You know, in the beginning I didn't even want to be a role model to anyone
because I didn't want to make any mistakes. I didn't want to be the one that people
would point their fingers at if I messed up in front of them. But I understand now how
important a responsibility it is. It took a while, but I understand now." 331 Kim states that
she has changed a few things about herself, namely her seductive dress style and her
demeanor is less gangsta and more classy. This young rapper embraces the images
that many consider to be offensive. Her lyrics below to her rap, "Queen Bitch,”
exemplify this embracement.

330 Unknown Author, “Lil’ Kim Cannot Please,” Linkz to USA: One Company, One Link.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_11_29/ai_57590232.
I am a diamond cluster hustler
Queen bitch, supreme bitch
Kill a nigga for my nigga by any means bitch
Murder scene bitch
Clean bitch, disease free bitch
Check it, i write a rhyme, melt in your mouth like m&m's
Roll with the m.a.f.i.a. remember them?
Tell em when i used to mess with gentlemen
Straight up apostles, now strictly niggaz that jostle
Kill a nigga for the figure, how you figure?
Your cheddar would be better, beretta inside of beretta
Nobody do it better.

Kim states that she has changed a few things about herself, namely her seductive dress style and her demeanor is less gangsta and more classy.

Even though C. Delores Tucker and other anti-gangsta activists faced much condemnation regarding their desire to rid gangsta rap lyrics of misogynous and stereotypical attitudes, it has now become politically correct to address related issues. Many have become involved in the dialogues and debates regarding this highly-charged topic. The aspect of most importance is that more people are becoming aware of the need for change. A change can emerge if the initial problem can be identified and discussed between genders, generations, performers, and active listeners. But first there needs to be a general consensus about the existence of a problem. The following excerpt from a poem titled “Musical Revolution” by Jane Musoke-Nteyafas, clearly addresses the need for change that must be addressed by all.

We refuse to take off our clothes/we refuse to be ho's
We refuse to play these games/we refused to be called names
just to sell/just to tell

our souls to the public/our stories to the public/our music to the public….
We are beautiful even with our clothes on,….
We’ve got brains that can turn you on.
We refuse to show you our breasts just to boost our record sales. Isn’t it enough that we tell tales?
We refuse to jiggle in thongs just to sell our songs.
We refuse to wiggle what our mamas gave us
instead we choose to juggle with the gray matter that our creator gave us….

The issue of the objectification of women is highly controversial. This controversy extends to and includes genders and generations who differ in their opinions about treatment of black women. While some young men and women of the hip-hop generation see women as being hypersexual opportunists who are unworthy of respect, others especially women, are starting to debunk these “myths” through education and through active political and social participation. Generally, there are more variances of opinions between older and younger women who in some cases, do not feel that misogynistic lyrics and animalistic names such as “bitch,” “whore/ho,” “hoodrat,”, and “chickenhead,” are applicable to all women. They feel that degrading lyrics and names only apply to a specific kind of woman. Older women feel that some young women have become too acclimated and too accepting of disparagement.

In the process of becoming acclimated, many women also disagree on the career opportunities that may be afforded as a result being a video dancer. While some young women feel and try to use video dancing as a stepping stone to better media exposure and the launching of careers, others see this mode of entertainment as the perpetuation of a stereotypical image that many others have fought and are fighting to end. The latter feel that these stereotypical images have run their course for too long a time and in the meanwhile, people with little contact with African-American women will continue to hold these untruthful stereotypical views.

Misogyny toward black women was not created during the hip-hop era, but during African-American enslavement. It is for this reason that many women are trying to counter this devalued treatment and disrespect—its transpired for too long. When naïveté is countered with education, misogyny can become a “problem” of the past.
CHAPTER 6
INTELLECTUALISM AND/OR ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Intellectualism: Historically and Currently Defined

“We went and got some "pluck" (wine) and I told him I was in college. He asked what I wanted to be. I told him rich. He looked up at the ceiling and paused for a minute before he said, ‘You know, I’ve never given any thought to what I want to become.’ I told him he should think about it, but I knew I was shuckin’ and jivin’. Hell, hardly any of us had ever thought about what we wanted to become. What was the future? That was something white folks had. We just lived from day to day, expecting whatever life put on us and dealing with it the best way we knew how when it came. I had accepted the big lie of a Black man succeeding.”

“Without education, there is no hope for our people and without hope our future is lost.”

It is commonly conceded by many people to include, Living Colour musician, Vernon Reid, that a lack of critical thinking and a spirit of nescience permeate commercial American rap and hip-hop culture because some American mainstream rap music generally discourages fans from pursuing intellectual goals. This is due to the preponderant emphasis of street culture and excessive materialism in rap music lyrics and videos, as well as in the actual lifestyles of the rappers. These same skeptics feel that educational and intellectual endeavors are not emphasized, but instead, are devalued when materialism is promoted.

Harvard research professor, Martin Kilson declares,

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The ‘hip-hop worldview’ is far from being a viable post-civil rights era message to African-American children and youth. It is seldom...a message of discipline of one’s emotions, discipline towards education.... The cruelty of the irony is compounded because many hip-hop entertainers come from working-class backgrounds, and yet lack awareness of the injury done to the life chances of themselves and their peers by the warped values that are the hallmark of hip-hop. This is truly sad indeed.

In addressing a group in Toronto, Director Spike Lee said, “...enough is enough with the ‘pimp/ho’ arm of hip hop’s effect on black students, which glorifies bling and a piece of *ss over education.” Philadelphia-based writer, Akweli Parker, notes that commercialized rappers are “modern-day minstrels who are having the same effect as Pied Pipers, leading our children – particularly at-risk black kids – further into ignorance, poverty and self-destructive behavior.” Parker also points out that, “Our tastes have devolved into a bacchanal of pure indulgence and entertainment. So perhaps the public is also a bit to blame for its apparent suspension of common sense in wolfing down such aural junk food.”

As expected, there are some who refute this idea of intellectualism being lost in hip-hop culture and its commercialized music. This is due to higher education courses now being offered on rap and hip-hop-related topics and because some rappers have engaged in a life of avid reading and/or bookstore ownership in urban areas. These two opposite points of views contribute to the dissension concerning intellectualism and anti-intellectualism that are so prevalent in this music and its associative culture.

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Anti-intellectualism is an obscure term which is not easily defined. Richard Hofstadter defines it as being “a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life.” With the anti-intellectualist, academic and intellectual pursuits are minimized and commercial pursuits almost seem to take higher priority since “ordinary” people must live and work in society. An anti-intellectualist is not necessarily a person of limited knowledge or education. He/she may be one who is very erudite, articulate, and astute in his/her career endeavors and may even esteem prominent intellectuals of the past. As stated by Hofstadter, “anti-intellectualism is usually the incidental consequence of some other intention, often some justifiable intention.”

The labeling of a group of people or a culture as being intellectualistic or anti-intellectualistic is not new to hip-hop culture, nor to the general American (USA) culture. In fact, American culture and its people were characterized as being anti-intellectualistic early in its history. Hofstadter stated, “Our anti-intellectualism is, in fact, older than our national identity, and has a long historical background.” American anti-intellectualism stems from the fact that the people of the United States were more concerned with the colonization and the physical development of this new world, i.e., practical application of manual labor to real living situations. Rustic living allowed only for a little book learning, not for the pursuance of an extensive formal education. Hofstadter notes,

> With their minds fixed on the future, Americans found themselves surrounded with ample land and resources and beset by a shortage of labor and skills. They set a premium upon technical knowledge and inventiveness which would unlock the riches of the country and open the door to the opulent future. Technology, skill—everything that is suggested by the significant Americanism, “know-how”—was in demand.

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342 Ibid., 6.
343 Ibid., 238.

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Early American anti-intellectualism stemmed from many sources, including religion, politics, populism, and business. Early Christian Americans believed in the inerrancy of the Bible and believed that there should be no substitutes for God in one’s life. This meant that one should not only be educated in the “book” sense, but also in the spiritual sense. Book learning without spiritual learning does not make for a good Christian servant, or American citizen. William Jennings Bryan stated, ‘Christianity is intended for all, not for the so-called ‘thinkers’ only.’ Mind, being mechanical, needs the heart to direct it. Mind can plan the commission of crimes as well as deeds for the benefit of society. ‘Mind worship is the great sin in the intellectual world today.’ Only the heart—which is the province of religion—can bring discipline to the things of the mind so that they work for good. Bryan felt that sound education and orthodox faith did not contradict each other and that “an educated man without religion is a ship without a pilot.” He also felt that if a choice had to be made between religion and education, education should be given up.

Politics also influenced anti-intellectualism. Intellectuals were generally disliked by political leaders because of their tendency to engage in free thinking and inquiring. It was believed that independent thinking could lead to the decadence of a nation. Hofstadter writes that some early educationists argued that an especially praiseworthy feature of American education had been the attempt to avoid a highly rigid system of education. To do so does not mean that academic competence is not regarded as highly important to any society, but it does recognize that historically, education systems which stress absorption of accumulated knowledge [informing the mind and developing the intelligence] for its own sake have tended to produce decadence. Those who would “fix” the

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344 Ibid., 127-128.
345 Ibid., 129.
curriculum and freeze educational purpose misunderstand the unique function of education in American democracy.\textsuperscript{346}

Another source from which anti-intellectualism stems is populism, also known as anti-elitism. In this philosophical movement, the “common” people were distrustful of those who believed in higher education and academic pursuits. It was believed that “intellectuals” were engaged in disloyal dealings and were disloyal to this nation.

Business ethos, too, forms the basis of anti-intellectualism. This element is underscored in Hofstadter’s statement that, “…business is the most powerful and pervasive interest in American life. This is true both in the sense that the claims of practicality have been an overweening force in American life and in the sense that, since the mid-nineteenth century, businessmen have brought to anti-intellectual movements more strength than any other force in society.”\textsuperscript{347} Mainstream belief was such that the old traditions of intellectual acumen should remain in the past and should be replaced by that which was pragmatic and applicable to contemporary times. This especially meant using business skills and know-how to better one’s materialistic life. Mainstream strove to attain the American dream—acquiring more finances and material possessions. Inquiring was a useless activity that could result in an insurrection or even worse, prove to be fatal to the nation. “As business became the dominant motif in American life and as a vast material empire rose in the New World, business increasingly looked for legitimation in a purely material and internal criterion—the wealth it produced.”\textsuperscript{348}

Anti-intellectualism as defined above did not always exist in the African-American community. Black slaves originated from Africa’s pre-literate society which emphasized oral history and traditions rather than Western society’s literacy ideology. Through the oral traditions, culture remained intact for generations, yet some tribes supplemented

\textsuperscript{347} Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism, 237.
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., 251.
orality with literacy. According to Joseph E. Holloway, “In West Africa, south of the Sahara, there was no “history” or tradition of writing in an indigenously invented script until the Vai developed writing in the eighteenth century. This oral history tradition is characteristic of pre-literate societies that included black Americans during the slavery period.”\(^349\)

During the course of slavery, slaves recognized the value of education and sought to learn to read by any means necessary despite the laws that had been passed and enforced prohibiting them from learning to read and write. An example of this may be seen in Frederick Douglass’ account of his slave experience. Upon moving to his second plantation, Frederick Douglass was given reading lessons by his new mistress. Her husband, Mr. Auld, forbade her to stop; mentioning the unlawfulness and unsafe conditions this could incite. Douglass’ master stated, “A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master and to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave.”\(^350\)

For Douglass, his master’s words were words of revelation and served to inspire him even more in his pursuit of an education. Douglass revealed,

> Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read….the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn.\(^351\)

Douglass was not the only slave who desired an education and understood importance. There were many others who showed interest and actively pursued it after


\(^{351}\) Ibid., 20.
slavery’s end. Michael L. Cooper, in addressing the American Missionary Association’s founding of dozens of schools for freedmen during the Reconstruction Period, reports, “There was at that time no state supported education in the South, and many people believed these schools were essential to making freedmen self reliant citizens. Black people, both the young and the old, were eager to learn. Booker T. Washington, who graduated from one of the new institutions, in Hampton, Virginia, remembered how important the schools were for freedmen. ‘Few people who were not right in the midst of the scene can form an exact idea of the intense desire which the people of my race showed for an education….It was a whole race trying to go to school.’

Throughout the Reconstruction and other eras in America, African-Americans continued to pursue an education. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s brought about African-American intellectuals, progressive artistic endeavors (through the assistance of white patrons), and the “New Negro.” The Civil Rights era also promoted education through the passing of Brown v. Board of Education which allowed for public school racial desegregation. The post Civil-Rights era black families continued to encourage their children to succeed educationally. Spike Lee, film director, who grew up in the 1970s says, “Back then, we were not called sellouts for using our brains. And being intelligent was not frowned upon.”

Despite the educational and political strides that were made in favor of African-American education, anti-intellectualism, which is a source of debate in the African-American community, is believed to have existed for decades. In 1945 black novelist, Ralph Ellison, discerned and wrote about a trend of anti-intellectualism which he observed in the African-American community. He saw anti-intellectualism in the act in

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352 Cooper, Slave Spirituals and the Jubilee Singers, 40-41.
353 “New Negro”—a progressive Harlem Renaissance movement based on Alain Locke’s book of the same name. The “New Negro” sought to transform black self-identity through artistic creations and bring to the forefront, the cultural contributions of American blacks.
which black parents discouraged their young children’s proclivity for intellectual inquisitiveness and educational experience for the sake of protecting the child from unreceptive whites who might otherwise think negatively of the children. Very often this discouragement would take the form of severe beating.\textsuperscript{355}

Anti-intellectualism might also be seen in the attitudes of some late 1960s Black Panther Party civil rights activists such as H. Rap Brown, also known as, Jamil Abdullah al-Amin. Brown prioritizes street knowledge over formal education. He states,

\begin{quote}
I had to be out there where the action was. She thought I should be in the house reading books like Ed so I could make my way in negro america, but I wasn’t hearing that. I never was one for too much reading anyway. Too, how was I supposed to stay on top of what was going down if I was sitting up in the house with a book. If you were going to stay in control, you had to be in the street. The street is where young bloods get their education. I learned how to talk in the street, not from reading about Dick and Jane going to the zoo and all that simple shit. The teacher would test our vocabulary each week, but we knew the vocabulary we needed. They’d give us arithmetic to exercise our minds. Hell, we exercised our minds by playing the Dozens….And the teacher expected me to sit up in class and study poetry after I could run down shit like that. If anybody needed to study poetry, she needed to study mine. We played the Dozens for recreation, like white folks play Scrabble.\textsuperscript{356}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Opposing Views of Rap Music and Intellectualism}

Many different explanations concerning the anti-intellectualism problem within the black community have been put forth by prominent African-American scholars and concerned citizens. These include socio-economic issues, excessive valuing and

prizing of athletic abilities rather than intellectual prowess, the equating of educational scholarship to being white, victimology, and even rap music.

Stanford Psychology professor, Claude Steele, reports in his “stereotype threat” theory that people’s performances are based on how they (his/her race, culture, or gender) are perceived by others. Because African-Americans have been stereotypically perceived by others as being intellectually inferior, the former’s performances, in many cases, match this established stereotypical perception. “Even though the students may be highly prepared, the anxiety they could experience from worrying whether their peers and teachers believe the stereotypes is distressful enough to lower performance.”

Author and University of Maryland professor, Signithia Fordham, mentions that despite the inferior stigma that has been placed on black youths, many succeed through concerted effort. Yet others “avoid school success because they feel school will not make a difference in their lives.”

Triton College history professor, Brian Clardy, observes that in addition to the degradation that African-American culture experienced as a result of the drug, prostitution, and gang cultures felt through the blaxploitation movies, dwindling economic resources, and the “racist and flawed politics of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, this communal self-destruction had gone full circle…. The psychological and historical effects of slavery, lynching, and discrimination began to take hold as many young Blacks began to see academic underachievement as an honor and failure as a rite of passage.”

Tony Brown suggests that the defeatists in the midst of African-American culture believe that to be educated is to be white, contributes to anti-intellectualism and the

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corruption of the culture. In looking at the superior performance of Africans in the U.K., Brown states, “Hip-hopping, jive-assing, excuse-making, Jew-hating, crabs-in-the-barreling, joke-telling, play-acting, rhyme-making, and culture-killing—these are not the true traits of a proud people. Blacks have learned to feel inferior from the low expectations that others have of them.”

Harvard Medical School psychiatrist, Dr. Alvin Poussaint, agrees with the acting-white stance. He confirms,

“…a lot of black youth now are anti-education and anti-intellectualism, who feel that getting an education is being white, is acting white. We never had that in previous generations, this is something new. I think this is very, very disconcerting that black youth are culturally adapting such postures when the high school dropout rate is so high, when they’re going to jail at increasing rates, it’s in fact really very high, and in jail about 70 percent of inmates have not graduated from high school.”

The Late anthropologist, Charles Ogbu added another element to the anti-intellectual problem--parents. Ogbu

“found part of the problem to be the parents. He observed two parts to the problem, ‘society and schools on one hand and the black community on the other. What amazed me is that these kids who come from homes of doctors and lawyers are not thinking like their parents. They don’t know how their parents made it. They are looking at rappers in ghettos as their role models, they are looking at entertainers. The parents work two jobs, three jobs, to give their

children everything but they are not guiding their children.'”

Rap music, according to Ronald Ferguson of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, is responsible for the climate of anti-intellectualism in the African-American community. He equates the weakening in testing scores for black children to the iconic escalation of rap music. Ferguson asserts, “There was a tremendous progress in the 1980s in reading and math scores for black youth. Sometime between 1988 and 1990 the progress stops. I see a shift in time-use patterns among black youth [related] to this new music produced by hip-hop culture.”

Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture as Encouraging Anti-Intellectualism

Although many people proclaim gangsta rap as characterizing anti-intellectualism, it is necessary to delineate its characteristics, especially since it has not been defined with clarity.

Vernon Reid, guitarist and founder of the ‘80s band, Living Colour, says, “There’s a vicious amount of anti-intellectualism in our recorded arts. Black music was the music everybody came to for emotional truth. That’s what soul was.”

Old-school rapper, Chuck D. states, “There is a pirating of our culture. Record companies are saying, ‘We can’t sell songs that don’t play into the role of gangsters.’ Intelligence is being downplayed.”

He also stated that today’s parents have got to have an awareness of what their kids are listening to…”Don’t Believe the Hype…[but get out there and question it]…We’ve got to fight for better education and teach respect for fellow human beings and your planet.” Michael Roberts writes in his rap article,

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364 Gangsta rap is a subgenre of rap which began in the 1980s and which presently features criminal images, words, and activities.
366 Old School rap is the first kind of rap music which took place before the era of gangsta rap and whose theme focuses on partying and the plight of those living in the ghetto.
“Rap Gets Puffy,” “N.W.A.’s (Niggaz With Attitude’s) Straight Outta Compton CD birthed gangsta, a genre that went from a politically crucial declaration of independence to an exercise in anti-intellectualism in a few short years.”  

Bakari Kitwana, states, “For all its cultural acclaim, rap music has foisted negative stereotypes on a generation of black youths, who are inundated with glorifications of anti-intellectualism, ignorance, irresponsible parenthood and criminal lifestyles.”

Others also believe that although rap music and hip-hop culture encourage anti-intellectualism, rap should be used for teaching and role modeling purposes. In stressing the rappers’ effect on the world and their need to model that which promotes academics rather than the gangster mentality, Will Smith states, “What I’m trying to present and what a lot of other artists are presenting is a different approach to survival and a more sound approach to survival. It’s a more long-term approach based on intellect and skills that can’t be taken away from you: The smartest dude survives the best.”  

Rapper, Talib Kweli believes that rap should serve an expressive purpose of being the vehicle which will allow for the release of anger. He pronounces, “I give them the truth so they approach the situation with ammunition. Teach them the game so they know their position, so they can grow and make their decisions that change the world and great traditions….We gave the youth all the anger but yet we ain’t taught them how to express it. And so it’s dangerous.”

Old-school rap which originally expressed social interaction through partying and later more conscious themes, also advised against the criminal lifestyle, or expressed more intellectualistic themes making mention of school or academic accomplishments.

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through braggadocio rap lyrics. These intellectualistic, pro-positive lifestyle songs include such as Slick Rick’s (Ricky Walters’), “Hey Young World,” Kriss Kross’ “I Missed the Bus,” and Run DMC’s “Sucker MC.”

Slick Rick’s “Hey Young World” addresses doing those things which would make parents proud: dressing as young ladies and gentlemen; not disrespecting parents; only befriending those who have and are positively influenced; getting an education; doing your chores; refraining from fighting, stealing, taking drugs, but instead, getting a job; and lastly, being mature and acting/living one’s age. Although Rick received many accolades as a result of this song, he also wrote raps that stereotyped black women in much the same manner as other rappers. Unfortunately, a few years later, Rick served time in prison for attempted murder.

Times have changed... and it's cool to look bummy
And be a dumb dummy and disrespect your mummy....
You're ruining yourself... and your mommy can't cope
Hey, little kids don't follow these dopes
Here's a rule for the non cool... your life, don't drool
Don't be a fool like those that don't go to school
Get ahead... and accomplish things
You'll see the wonder and the joy life brings
Don't admire thieves... hey they don't admire you
Their time's limited, hardrocks too

Although Kriss Kross' “I Missed the Bus” offered no advice as to how to get along in school, it presented a school-related situation and a moral lesson.

But I ran down hill and I RUSHED, RUSHED
I ran down the hill TRYIN TO CATCH THE BUS

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372 Braggadocio rap lyrics are rap lyrics in which the artist brags about fame, riches, and rapping skills.
Now I’m hopin’ to myself everything is cool
Standin’ on my block like a fool
But (1) I’m all alone and (2) the bus is gone
(3) if I miss school this weekend I’ll be at home
Can somebody come real fast to my rescue
I’m stuck at the crib and I don’t know what to do
I missed the bus [ohh] (2x)
And that is somethin’ I will never ever, ever do again…

Run-D.M.C.’s “Sucker M.C.’s” is a simple old-school rap which exhibits much boasting. Included in the last verse of this boasting is a bit about D.M.C.’s educational status, literary/rhyming, and musical knowledge and skill.

You don’t even know your english, your verb or noun
You’re just a sucker MC you sad face clown…
I’m D.M.C. in the place to be
I go to St. John’s University
And since kinde-garten I acquired the knowledge
And after 12th grade I went straight to college…
The rhymes have to make (a lot of sense)
You got to know where to start (when the beats come in...)\(^{376}\)

In observing some of the words to old-school rapper Kool Moe Dee’s “Knowledge is King,” one is able to further identify anti-intellectual characteristics that prevail in gangsta rap and hip-hop culture.

Knowledge is infinite
Suckers ain’t into it
Ignorance is bliss
And they’re kin to it

The premise of this rap is that acquiring knowledge is important. Kool Moe Dee states that to possess knowledge is to possess power and that acquired knowledge results from the pursuance or the engagement of academic and intellectual undertakings rather than commercial and social endeavors. He also defines these philistines (the anti-intellectuals) as lacking the wisdom to do independent thinking because the media determines how and what they think and feel. He states that because of lack of knowledge, those lacking will not ever come to know themselves, nor their history. This will, in turn, result in the repeating of historical mistakes that could otherwise be avoided. He proclaims that because one does not take the time to think for oneself, one is liable to engage in war without truly knowing the underlying principles involved. The brains of anti-intellectualists are so preoccupied with material worth that they are used only to establish and continue meaningless traditions such as the glorification of the bourgeois lifestyle.

Various people have stated that gangsta rap is anti-intellectualistic. A few old-school rappers such as Chuck D. and KRS-One even venture to say that some that participate either directly or indirectly in this music also exhibit or contribute to anti-intellectualism or a kind of it.\footnote{Kool Moe Dee, “Knowledge is King.” http://www.lyrics.astraweb.com.} \footnote{Hayli Fellwock, “Chuck D Speak at Western Kentucky University,” \textit{Bowling Green Daily News}, February 26, 2004. http://www.publicenem.com/index.php?page=page2&item=76.} \footnote{Asondra Hunter, “The Blastmaster’s Back,” \textit{Yahoo Music}, http://launch.yahoo.com/read/interview/12027650.} This anti-intellectualism may be in the form of simply
being unaware of the possible dangerous influence that this music can have on unprotected and immature ears. Carolyn West, a University of Washington professor points out, “Many adults are quite ignorant about what’s out there. We can’t afford to pretend it doesn’t exist.”

Rapper, Kanye West takes a different approach in his raps which blatantly stress education as being unnecessary for financial success. West, whose parents hold higher education degrees, writes that those with college degrees are the ones who have no money. They spend money securing an education whereas the uneducated use their money for other “more meaningful” purposes. His first two CDs, College Dropout and Late Registration refer to higher education. “School Spirit Skit 2” (below) is found on his College Dropout CD.

You keep it going man; you keep those books rolling,
You pick up those books you’re going to read
And not remember and you roll man.
You get that a ‘sociate degree, okay,
Then you get your bachelors, then you get your masters
Then you get your master’s masters,
Then you get your doctron,
You go man, then when everybody says quit
You show them those degrees man, when
Everybody says hey, you’re not working,
You’re not making in money,
You say look at my degrees and you look at my life,
Yeah I’m 52, so what, hate all you want,
But I’m smart, I’m so smart, and I’m in school,
And these guys are out here making
Money all these ways, and I’m spended mine to be smart.

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You know why?
Because when I die, buddy, you know
What’s going to keep me warm, that’s right, those degrees\textsuperscript{381}

\textbf{Rap Music’s and Hip-Hop Culture’s Intellectual Savior and Intelligentsia}

Although there are many other examples of American mainstream rap lyrics that place maximum emphasis and value on non-educational enterprises, in all fairness, there are a few that speak positively about the need for educational pursuance. Nelly’s “Utha Side” is one such rap. The lyrics end with Nelly telling a boy to go to school, not to bother with drugs and gangs, and make something of himself so that he can become successful. The boy could still aspire to have and wear the “finer things in life” but he must always remember to “keep it real” and remember from whence he came.\textsuperscript{382}

\begin{verbatim}
Little man how old are you (you can tell me)  And what you doing skipping school
I see you running with your lil' crew  Y'all be fighting over red and blue
So now you wanna claim gangs  Even heard you bought a (?) that ain't it
You started out with chronic on the grain  Now you're smoking other fettamain
I ain't trying to sway your dreams  Just trying to show you, that's it's other ways to make cream
(Take it from me)  Just go to school and make something of
Your young life and watch it blow up  You ain't gotta stop being cool
\end{verbatim}

Don't even gotta stop flosin' fancy jewels (and fast cars)
Just keep it real with your game son
And don't forget where you came from
I'm trying to tell ya  

Just as there are a few mainstream American raps that talk about educational advancement, there are also those who feel that mainstream rap is also intellectualistic. A parallel opinion is that certain artists are the intellectual saviors of commercialized rap music. In his argument about rap’s anti-intellectualism, Michael Eric Dyson, in his description of Tupac and his legacy, states, “Tupac’s profound literacy rebutted the belief that hip-hop is an intellectual wasteland….Tupac helped to combat the anti-intellectualism in rap, a force, to be sure, that pervades the entire culture.”  

Tupac Shakur was an avid reader who read everything from poetry to spiritual literature to feminist works. He inspired other rappers to pursue a life of reading for the first time. Rapper Big Syke stated, “I feel what Pac gave to me and gave to a lot of these cats is that you can be street, but you can be smart, too….He had the words, and he was articulate. That's what made me start reading books. I wasn't reading no books, but the more I started dissecting him, the more I started seeing what all his game was coming from.”  

Two socio-political conscious rappers, Talib Kweli and Mos Def, saw such an importance in the role of reading that they decided to save an urban bookstore which was headed for financial ruin and closure. “Talib Kweli was destined to be an eloquent and thought-provoking emcee: He began writing plays, poetry and short stories while still in elementary school in Brooklyn. In 1998 Kweli teamed up with friend Mos Def (whose real name is Dante Beze) to purchase Brooklyn’s oldest Black-owned

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384 Dyson, Holler, 99.
385 Ibid., 99.
386 Ibid., 99-100.
387 Conscious rap is rap whose focus and themes relate to political and social awareness and issues. This type is not considered to be mainstream. This is also sometimes referred to as Underground rap.
bookstore, which was facing financial ruin, and converted it into the Nkiru Center for Education and Culture, a nonprofit organization promoting literacy and multicultural awareness.  

Talib Kweli, the eldest son of two college professors, had an interest in literature. This interest is reflected in his names which are Arabic and Ghanian and mean “the seeker or student” and “of truth or knowledge” respectively. Mos Def, established actor in his own right, started rhyming at the age of nine, but had interests that were varied and went well beyond that of black art to include other music genres and artistic spectrums such as jazz, rock, blues, and drama. He stated, “‘I’m not just inspired by black art, but good art, representations of art that are sincere and genuine.’”

S. Craig Watkins states, “Over the course of its career, hip hop has produced an impressive array of thinkers—writers, performance artists, poets, and scholars—who have come to embody its complex ideological makeup. Though the hip-hop intelligentsia is one of the rarely discussed aspects of the movement it is, without question, one of the its greatest achievements” and consists of a vast array of thinkers with diverse ideologies and academic backgrounds. According to Watkins, these thinkers include such as novelists, Sista Souljah, Vickie Stringer, and Erica Kennedy, and street philosopher and old-school rapper, KRS-One.

Hip-hop rap music, serving as inspiration for intellectual pursuits such as reading, has also stirred up controversy in the black community. As a result of rap music, some feel that “hip-hop intelligentsia” have in turn, birthed a new genre which will seriously affect on-coming generations in what opponents view as positive and negative ways. This new genre is hip-hop literature.

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391 Ibid., 235, 236, 238, and 239.
Hip-hop lit is known by various names which include: street, ghetto, and urban fiction; and crosses many different literary styles such as romance, thriller, and crime. The contentious issue surrounding this new artistic genre revolves around similar aspects as that of rap music: the negative and positive aspects of these works. Because the storylines of this literature are somewhat like that of rap music: street wiseness, crime, drugs, ghetto life, etc., critics of this genre believe that these themes propagate the stereotypes that many are fighting against. There can also be another negative impact. James Fugate, African-American bookstore owner, states, “The books are usually self-published and suffer from poor writing, grammatical and spelling errors, and lack any redeeming values.” These can cause the readers to misunderstand or misinterpret the written and spoken language and its rules of establishment.

Proponents differ in their view of these new “inspirational” works. Boston bookseller Hart believes people as young as thirteen have been drawn to hip-hop fiction. ‘Though I’m not necessarily crazy about many of these books, I’m an advocate of book reading,’ says Hart. ‘So any genre that attracts young black readers is a move in the right direction.’

Just as hip-hop literature is being embraced, this culture is also beginning to embrace those they consider to be intellectuals in their own right. These intellectuals are perceived by many as lighting and carrying the torch into the future by underscoring the importance of achieving knowledge. Yet, hip-hop intellectuals demonstrating formal schooling are not totally valued. This is because many hip-hoppers believe that many of the formally educated are really out of touch with the street culture. Therefore, these formally-schooled intellectuals can not truthfully address that which they have no common knowledge, nor experience. Thus, the self-styled hip-hop “intellectuals” who

392 Ibid., 235.
393 Watkins, Hip Hop Matters, 238.
394 Ibid., 237.
have suffered and experienced ghetto life or otherwise have “furrowed in the gullies” are seemingly more respected than those formally-educated intellectuals.\footnote{Watkins, \textit{Hip Hop Matters}, 246.}

While formally-schooled intellectuals are inclined to be concerned more with the history and preservation of the culture, informally-schooled intellectuals have become concerned with the image that current rappers portray and how this portrayal will affect the future writing of the history of rap music. This group of intelligentsia which includes KRS-One is more socially conscious and are attempting to save rap from corporate takeovers and “from itself,” and to preserve its “edutainment” value.\footnote{Watkins, \textit{Hip Hop Matters}, 244.}

Many are regarding rap music and hip-hop culture as being more intellectual simply because of the onslaught of college courses and books and dissertations that have entered academe within the last 15 years. Berklee School of Music is one such school which has incorporated rap music into music curricula.\footnote{Liz Linder, “Once Again, Berklee College Of Music Turns Tables On Music Education,” Berklee College of Music, February 17, 2004. http://www.berklee.edu/opi/2004/0217.html.} Also, because there are now over 100 rap-related courses being offered in liberal arts colleges, and over 80 rap dissertations have been written as of 2004, many feel this new direction will in turn, affect rap music and its stance in American culture.\footnote{Ernest Hooper, \textit{St. Petersburg Times Columnist}, “Author Gives Hip-Hop a Bad Rap.” March 7, 2005. http://www.sptimes.com/2005/03/07/Columns/Author_gives_hip_hop_.shtml.} The detractors feel differently.

Despite the mainstream acceptance of rap music and hip-hop culture, there are critics who differ in their “appreciation” of this music genre and cultural movement as intellectualistic endeavors. Unlike a few other African-American intellectuals, college professor and author, John McWhorter, feels that there is a lack of social value in this music and states, “The point is that there are a lot of people out there now who think hip-hop ... is politics,” McWhorter explained. “That this music promises some sort of second civil rights revolution. They have a serious problem.”\footnote{1. Ibid., 241. 2. Edutainment is a term believed to have been coined by KRS-One and means that rap can serve an educational and an entertainment purpose at the same time.}
Perhaps the most contentious and central element of the intellectualism/anti-intellectualism rap debate is the pervasive belief that young rap fans are limited in career choices outside of athletic and entertainment genres. Therefore, time that could be spent pursuing educational endeavors is otherwise spent learning “street credible” elements which are simply not useful to living a full, productive, successful and legal life in this Western society.

McWhorter states,

But we’re sorely lacking in imagination if in 2003 – long after the civil rights revolution proved a success, at a time of vaulting opportunity for African Americans, when blacks find themselves at the top reaches of society and politics – we think that it signals progress when black kids rattle of violent, sexist, nihilistic, lyrics, like Russians reciting Pushkin. How is it progressive to describe life as nothing but “bitches and money”? Or to tell impressionable black kids, who’d find every door open to them if they just worked hard and learned, that blowing a rival’s head off is “real”? How helpful is rap’s sexism in a community plagued by rampant illegitimacy and an excruciatingly low marriage rate? The idea that rap is an authentic cry against oppression is all the sillier when you recall that black Americans had lots more to be frustrated about in the past but never produced or enjoyed music as nihilistic as 50 Cent or N.W.A. On the contrary, black popular music was almost always affirmative and hopeful.\footnote{John McWhorter, “Rap Only Ruins,” \textit{New York Post}, August 10, 2003. \texttt{http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/\_nypost-rap\_only\_ruins.htm.}}

On the other hand, rap mogul, Russell Simmons proclaims,

When I was sixteen, I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but selling weed was one of the few options open to me. Today, however, young people are inspired to have higher aspirations because of hip-hop. Young people now have all these people visible who make the choice to be entrepreneurs and inspire them to do the same. It’s now a cultural thing in our community. Being a teacher maybe, or a
doctor, these used to be the hopes and aspirations of our community. But now hip-hop is all they talk about. Lower-middle-class blacks in New York City were the absolute dumbest young kids you could find anywhere, same as you would in the projects down the block. Well, it’s the same dumb people who broke the mold, because they were so hip-hop and so angry and so … this, I’m going to make it on my own. It’s like, own a company.\footnote{Henry Louis Gates, \textit{America Behind the Color Line} (New York: Time Warner, 2004), 52.}

The thoughts of African-American singer and bassist, Meshell Ndegeocello, on this subject are more similar to that of McWhorter. She states, “It’s all about making more, and then if you critique it, you’re seen as a playa-hater. What about educating people of color and giving other alternatives?”\footnote{Moon, “Nervous Music Industry,” \url{http://www.guerrillafunk.com/thoughts/doc4939a.html}.} Akweli Parker, in his warning against the perils of gangsta rap, mentions a similar idea of being considered a snitch because he goes “against the gangsta grain.” He warns black Americans to wake up because, “We’re raising a generation of clueless kids who think Thug Life and fortuitous superstardom, not intellect, \textit{legal} entrepreneurship and academic achievement, will lead them to success.”\footnote{Parker, “Black Hip Hop History,” \url{http://www.blackcommentator.com/170.170_guest_parker_hip_hop_pf.html}.}

Young fans have also come to believe that learning and doing well academically are associated with white culture, not black culture. Though this author believes this ideology originates not with rap music, but was in existence long before the naissance of this genre, this belief does, though, appear to be overtly and covertly disseminated by rappers and their accompanying culture. Waynes Au quotes several studies which state, “Rappers’ experiences with Eurocentric curricula have also led many of them to actively identify the system of education with Whiteness and teaching White identity to students of color (Davis, 1993; Dixon, 1992; Gavin & Alford, 2000; Parker, 1989, 1990c; Tyler, 1992). For instance, in his song “Why is That?” (Parker, 1989), rapper KRS One
specifically critiques schools for teaching Black kids to be White, and relates that process to teaching a dog to be a cat.\footnote{Wayne Au, “Fresh Out of School: Rap Music’s Discursive Battle With Education.” \textit{Journal of Negro Education}, Summer 2005. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qu3626/is_200507/ai_n15743675/\footnote{KRS-One, “Why is That.” http://www.lyrics.astraweb.com.\footnote{This is the author’s family’s experience.}}

Why is it young black kids taught \{flashin’\}?
They’re only taught how to read, write, and act
It’s like teachin a dog to be a cat
You don’t teach white kids to be black
Why is that? Is it because we’re the minority?
Well black kids follow me
The age of the ignorant rapper is done
Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone
The stereotype must be lost
That love and peace and knowledge is soft
Do away with that and understand one fact
For love, peace must attack\footnote{This is the author’s family’s experience.}

Black culture in the minds of young aficionados, is believed to be modes of expression which are un-academic, stylistic, and social and are demonstrated by means of the proper physical stance which includes acting, speaking, and dressing in a certain manner. It is this manner which they consider as distinguishing African-Americans from other races. Many African-American children have come to see this “black” style as being the only acceptable manner of garb and are non-accepting of others not adhering to this “established” canon. Many African-American parents have experienced this dilemma when their own children are questioned by other black children who are educationally astute in rap music, “Why do you act white?” “Why do you speak like white people?” “Why don’t you want to act ghetto?”

Culture limitations such as those listed above demonstrate anti-intellectualism
because misinformed collective thinking is encouraged, and independent thinking is dejected. If education is expressed as “thinking against the grain” and being about “questioning yourself”\(^{407}\) as stated by university professor, Cornel West, then anti-intellectualism exists not only in African-American culture, but also in rap and hip-hop culture. Chuck D appears to share the same belief as that stated by West. Chuck D said in reference to challenging information and remaining an independent thinker in college, “That’s actually getting your education. Leave with your own mind. That is very important.”\(^{408}\)

An important intellectualistic element characteristic of commercialized rap music which many see as being anti-intellectualistic may be observed in the amount of time invested in preparation for a rap career. While some hip-hoppers realize the value of formal schooling in preparation for a music career, others feel differently. When asking about courses necessary to take in college that would help him with rap music, several responders answered this blogger’s question by either talking about things such as which schools had the finest “chicks” or best homecomings; laughing about the idea of courses in rap, and asking about the blogger’s surname. Others though, addressed the issue with uplifting, encouraging “words of wisdom” about taking other courses such as economics, psychology, criminal justice, and even a rap course in which KRS-One taught which better prepared rappers for understanding the business as well as the artistic aspects of a career in rap music.\(^{409}\)

Upon observing the responses above, it appears that some hip-hoppers are unaware of the many rap music history and other courses that are currently being offered at music schools around the country, and in many cases, being taught by hip-

\(^{407}\) Cornel West, “Black History” (speech, Florida Agricultural Mechanical University, Tallahassee, FL, February 1, 2006).


No one mentioned learning to play a music instrument, learning about the theoretical aspects of music, or learning about using the latest in music technology. Some commercial rappers seem to feel that these are not necessary. Puff Daddy (Sean Combs) states about sampling: “I’m not afraid of using samples. That’s how I started producing. I never played no instruments. I never programmed no drum machines. So if I was at a party and heard a record that I loved, I would figure out a way to bring that record to life. Make it like it was some brand new shit.” Rapper, Warren G, when asked how many instruments he played stated, “Shit I can play the keyboards….I ain’t a super duper keyboard player, like Chuckey Booker, but the keyboard, I play the trumpet a little bit…But my instruments is the turntables and the drum machine. They’re my serious instruments.”

According to Berklee College of Music, turntablism has become a serious art form, turntables are now considered to be instruments, and the art of playing one has become accepted among musicians and non-musicians. This art form is now being taught and has been incorporated into the music curriculum at this school by Professor Stephen Webber. Webber, a veteran of the more “traditional” styles of music, has authored the first instructional method book to teach turntable titled, Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ (Berklee Press, 2000). He points out, “Turntablists are musicians. Many of them, like DJ QBert, are virtuoso musicians, who practice hours a day and constantly strive to push their art further.”

Minimal preparation by some commercial rappers coupled with the marginalization of the music in the form of lack of creativity, hinders the creation and development of quality rap music. Tom Moon states,


http://www.dubcnn.com/interviews/warreng/.


410 Ibid.,

411 “Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs History,” Diddy-Bad Boy Online: Un-Official Fan Site,


The demand for hits is as old as the Victrola. But increasingly, that pressure has caused African-American artists aligned with any sort of fringe — musical, social, whatever — to be marginalized by the big labels.” He continues, “As urban music has assumed a place of commercial preeminence, its artistic horizons have been steadily narrowed by a wicked cocktail of assembly-line production aesthetics, fearful executives and audiences that demand gratification within a song’s first 30 seconds….Musicians who may need years to refine their sound, or whose ideas are already ahead of prevailing trends, don’t have much chance.414

Cultural Memory: Corporate Conspiracy

Anti-intellectualism runs rampant in commercialized, “corporate” rap. It is in the form of easily expendable rappers who are commodified through their placement in cookie-cutter situations with immediate expected results and high monetary returns for the corporations which are owned by white businessmen.415 The emphasis in these situations is low overhead and high yields using a particular formula. Nelson George confirms, “During this same period [during the spread of Underground rap], breakthrough black superstars made more money than ever in history-most of it helping to subsidize multinational corporations that reconfigure black artistry into reproducible formulas.”416

This formula appears to be: find an uneducated (or undereducated) African-American young man (or woman); have him/her refer to others of his/her race using “endearing” terms; rap about the objectification, exploitation, and abuse of women; add to this, glorifying the gangster lifestyle; and finally, use an ear-catching, powerful, and head-bopping beat as accompaniment to the words. The rappers are the overhead and the high yields are the money the corporation makes after the hit record and before the

rapper goes to jail. They are then dispensed and the corporate big wheels (the cutters) find another rap “cookie” to cut.

Anti-intellectualism also exists in the form of rappers allowing themselves to be used when catering to individualistic, materialistic desires, rather than and at the expense of the African-American collective community. Many feel that this is about business only and as a result engage in philanthropic endeavors to “give back to the community.” In many cases, the performer is able to establish him-/herself as a pillar of the community and this aids in the prevention of possible backlashes much in the same way “urban gang members buy some goodwill” from its community.\textsuperscript{417} The Alienist writes, “Reducing people to animals intellectually and morally, while appearing to give them what they want, is an easy way to dominate them...”\textsuperscript{418} Criminal culture, though not originating from gangsta rap, has been accentuated since becoming corporative. This has thus facilitated stereotypical images that have continually haunted the African-American culture for years. Davey D states, “Many of us rappers are trapped within the stereotypes and images projected and sensationalized by the media. We find ourselves trying to live these wild-cowboy ideas.” Our concept of manhood is taught on a street level.\textsuperscript{419} Rapper M1 says “rappers have to work harder to change the demands of the music industry....And yes, that means rap stars remaining true to their communities.”\textsuperscript{420}

Rapper, Chuck D., in addressing the loss of control of hip-hop music, states, “In the early nineties...what occurred during that period was a visual explosion of Black celebrities. Music videos became more pervasive and entertaining, Black movies made a strong return, and simultaneously the NBA and NFL combined with major corporations to magnify and emphasize the individual. To the point whereby in 1995 and 1996 there was a subliminal message that stated, “if you’re not a ballplayer, or entertainer, and

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
you’re not living a lavish lifestyle then you ain’t shit.”  

Reynard Blake writes, “This analysis [Chuck D’s] is very important in that it speaks to the co-optation of hip-hop and black cultures by white corporations. Moreover, it speaks to larger more demeaning trends—the devaluation of black life (black people being portrayed as only valuing entertainment careers instead of academic achievement, science, or service to humanity), anti-intellectualism, and over-consumption.”

According to “About Entertainment Rap-Hip/Hop Newsletter” writer, Ife Oshun, in her article about “Why Rap Radio Sucks,” states, “Some [people] think there’s too many lyrics that speak of drugs, hoes, money and not enough that deal with spirituality, love, or knowledge. There are many people who have the misconception that all rap music is violent, misogynist or just plain ignorant. Many people feel there is a “corporate conspiracy” designed to keep rap music and fans ignorant. There are many opinions and points of view, but eventually they all come to the same conclusion: too many people feel rap radio is not on point.”

“Conspiracy theories may well be most prevalent in black America. A columnist calls these ‘the life blood of the African-American community,’ and a clinical psychologist notes that there is "probably no conspiracy involving African-Americans that was too far-fetched, too fantastic, or too convoluted." She finds four recurring themes, all centered on the U.S. government: it uses blacks as guinea pigs, imposes bad habits on them, targets their leaders, and decimates their population,” according to Daniel Pipes.

Decimating the population is what many hip-hop elitists allege. This, they believe, took (and is now taking) place as a result of two major conspiracies. First,

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159
many believe that there was a conspiracy by the CIA and other governmental authorities, to rid the U.S. of the black population. This “hidden agenda” was enacted through the introduction of drugs (and diseases such as aids) into the urban areas which were highly populated by poor African-Americans. The introduction of toxins into the urban black communities coupled with laws which directly affected the employment status of black city-dwellers led to the downfall of African-American neighborhoods. According to Randall Kennedy, “To them [many blacks], concentrations of drug abuse and criminal violence are not impersonal incidents of socioeconomic dynamics but rather the consequences of purposeful designs to deprive blacks of legal protections and the benefits that flow from them.”\(^{425}\) This view seems to be shared by many African-Americans within the general public, but also to include a few such as Minister Louis Farrakhan, who are in the limelight. Farrakhan proclaims, “The epidemic of drugs and violence in the black community stems from a calculated attempt by whites to foster black self-destruction.”\(^{426}\)

Reverend Paul Scott, an ordained Baptist minister and founder of the Durham-based New Righteous Movement, also feels that there is a conspiracy to destroy elements and people of the African-American culture. This, he suspects, is related to the spread of rap music. Scott claims that a “hip-hop conspiracy” is brewing in and is destroying the black community. In a recent news release, Scott calls for a hip-hop “fast.” He suggests that people abstain from listening to, or watching anything that portrays the black community in a bad light. Some people feel that Scott is fully unaware of the importance and the potential of hip-hop when it is properly enacted within the African-American community. Many feel that the hip-hop culture can be “engineered by its participants in such a way that cultural empowerment will be able to take place.”\(^{427}\)

\(^{426}\) Ibid., 71.
As believed by Rev. Scott, many hip-hop elitists deem that huge corporations (and governmental agencies) have deemed hip-hop as a passing fad in which diluted messages are conveyed via “used”/”scapegoat” artists for the purposes of making money and keeping control of the mass minority population through radio play and other media outlets. When strides had begun to be made by eminent rap groups and their followers who used rap as a means of positive expression and roadmap to success, hip-hop culture began to be molested. According to Latino rapper, Imagiin 360, “Later, more individuals such as: KRS-One, Nas, The Roots, and Onyx (along with other groups) devised the so-called “road to success” that we were bound to take if we would just hold on a little longer (or so we were told). This was the beginning of the “rape” of our culture.”

These elitists believe that a higher governmental power is in fear of the newfound freedom of expression created and co-opted by the mass minorities and seeks to blind these masses by shutting them up through their hidden agenda. This hidden agenda involves controlling the music not only for the purposes of making music, but to perpetuate the stereotypes of ignorance so that these masses will achieve nothing. This hidden agenda, many accept as true, is being ably used on those who created this music genre—blacks and Hispanics.

Regarding conspiracy in gangsta rap music, one internet blogger writes, “I know people throw the word 'conspiracy' around a lot, but think of this in context of the Willie Lynch letter on a global letter, i.e. "pit them against each other". The record companies and tv and movie studios control the images, so as long as they are sending negative images of Black Americans around the world this is the logical result. We’ve all had discussions about how when people from the Carribean or Africa come here they mistrust us or look down on us, well why do you think that is?”

This ideology is also expressed in rap music such as that by the rapper duo team and old school rap graduates, Gang Starr in their song, “Conspiracy.”

The s.a.t. is not geared for the lower class
So why waste time even trying to pass
The educational system presumes you to fail
The next place is the corner then after that jail....
Even in this rap game all that glitters ain't gold
Now that rap is big business the snakes got bold
They give you wack contracts and try to make you go pop
Cuz they have no regard for real hip-hop....
So you say: 'i ain't doing that corny stuff'
But they tell ya that your chart positions will go up
Sometimes they front big time and make you many promises....
We all have a job to combat the conspiracy\textsuperscript{430}

Though many conspiracy theories exist in the African-American community, the two which many hip-hoppers are frequently forced to grapple are those which revolve around the deaths of Shakur and Biggie Smalls. “And the ultimate conspiracy theory holds that the record executives conspired to have these artists killed because dead rappers—particularly rappers with legal problems that cost their companies money—are more profitable than live rappers.”\textsuperscript{431}

Another theory is that Tupac’s ties to the Black Panthers organization through his mother was cause for his death. This was based on COINTELPRO which enacted investigations and annihilations of groups thought to be dissident toward the USA during the ‘60s and ‘70s. Ozell Daniel states, “What does this have to do with Tupac’s death? Well, the FBI made it a point in particular to go after Black Nationalists organizations and any celebrity that might be linked to such groups or causes in the 1960’s and 70’s in

hopes of preventing the rise of a "BLACK MESSIAH". This is no conspiracy theory, it's the truth."

Some such as Tony Brown believe that "there is ample historical background for suspicion, and a certain healthy paranoia, among Blacks even today." Although he also states, "This is not to say that every Black, whether a gang member or a public official, who is investigated and charged with a crime is the victim of a conspiracy to undermine all Blacks. Indeed, the ones quickest to play the race card tend to be the guiltiest."  

Though these and other conspiracies are believed to exist, at least one opponent doubts their truthfulness. Randall Kennedy states, "Much of this conspiracy-minded rhetoric is inflated by paranoia. No one has brought forth any substantial proof evidencing "a deliberate" governmental effort currently to harm black people, and the plausibility of such a scheme is nil. At the same time, there does exist a kernel of truth in the general complaint that, in all too many instances, networks of decision makers—journalists, police, prosecutors, legislators, voters, etc.—respond differently—more attentively—when whites rather than blacks are victimized by crime or other injurious activity." Instead, the critics of the rap conspiracies believe that rap music and the corporate takeover of this genre are due to money acquired and business only. 

Others believe that gangsta rap music is all about money, not conspiracies. According to Norman Kelley, in 1997 a New York Times insider talked about the status of contemporary music and spoke about the leveling off of alternative rock but the sales growth of hip-hop music. This insider stated, “The whole music business is built on rock and roll, but what’s selling is urban music (meaning hip hop). This is troubling because

433 Brown, Black Lies, White Lies, 102.
we're supposed to be making money.”  Kenny Love claims, “greed … purveys at the corporate level within our industry.”

The problem concerning money and commercialized rap is that very often, most rapper do not receive most of the money earned from their work. Corporations do. Rappers are generally not seen as long term artists and are given contracts that reflect this idea which are usually not in their best interest. Because this music is seen as trendy, it tends to have a short shelf life which results in less chances of reaping financial benefits years later. Kelley states,

This obfuscates the fact that the music industry makes short work of artists who don’t perform quick enough to keep the industry’s profits "healthy." Contracts are structured in such a way that the odds are against musical neophytes remaining in the business for very long. They see the likes of Michael Jackson, Prince, Tupac, Snoop Doggy Dogg or Quincy Jones, dazzled by the big money makers but don’t understand how the music industry depends on a fresh crop of naive, young and talented artists - black, white, and Latino - to grease the industry’s wheels. Most of those who sign contracts will not enjoy long careers and the industry has ways to recoup the money that it spends on producing and promoting what they call "talent," but viewed as either disposable or exploitable.

Interestingly enough, these artists are exploited not only by white corporate executives, but also by black ones. Kelley confirms, “There is a fair amount of collusion between whites and blacks in exploiting black artists, especially those who are unaware about the business aspects of music: contracts, copyright, and music publishing.”

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With this in mind, it is safe to say that American mainstream rap music is operated in the green (for the money) at the expense of its cultural “commodity”—the performers. This same situation also existed with musicians of earlier eras. Many recorded and/or established themselves in the music profession only to die as paupers because of lack of business savvy. Such was the case with Blues (Robert Johnson), Rhythm and Blues (Jackie Wilson), and Soul (“The Supremes” founder and singer, Florence Ballard) musicians who were either taken advantaged of or who lacked the necessary skills to maintain a successful career during and beyond their career life. The same happened to Tupac whose recording sales totaled millions but died with slightly over $100,000 in the bank.

The mentality of gaining financial rewards for its corporate affiliates as a result of the nescience of the rappers is similar to the mentality that slaveowners exhibited—earn as much money by “using/exploiting” others for as long as possible. The slaves, though, being physically constrained, had no options but were prevented from pursuing knowledge and education. Contemporary “usees/exploitees” have more information at their disposal and are not physically controlled nor prevented from acquiring knowledge to aid in music career success. It truly is “All About the Benjamins” for the music corporations when anti-intellectualism prevails within its performer ranks. 439

Although some people would readily admit that anti-intellectualism exists in the general American public, there are many contradictory views relating to the existence of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism in African-American culture and most especially, hip-hop culture and rap music. While some believe that anti-intellectualism is prevalent in contemporary society, others believe that hip-hop has encouraged in the development of formal and non-formal types of learning. Other controversial viewpoints stem from the diverse reasons concerning the problem of anti-intellectualism in the African-American community. The varying reasons range from the discouragement of

439 1. “It’s All About the Benjamins” is a rap song by Puff Daddy (Sean Combs). 2. “Benjamins” refer to one-hundred dollar bills.
learning by African-American parents in the 1940s for the purposes of protecting their children to rap music, itself, and the prioritizing of street credibility over formal learning. One thing that is known for sure is that if anti-intellectualism does and continues to pervade contemporary culture, its promoters will become disempowered.
CHAPTER 7
EMPOWERMENT AND/OR ENSLAVEMENT

Empowerment and Enslavement Defined

Adverse points of view concerning commercially-commodified rap music continue to pervade the African-American community. Issues relating to the promotion of the criminal lifestyle, degradation of black women, excessive materialism, anti-intellectualism, and the corporate takeover and managing of African-American images which bear little resemblance to the general, collective community continue to foster divisions which have caused many to question the viability of rap music and its relationship to the community. Opposing individuals and groups have formed contradictory perspectives which portray rap music and its related culture as being something which either promotes empowerment or enslavement of those who champion it.

Before venturing into the important aspects and characteristics as to why rap music and hip-hop culture are sources of empowerment or enslavement, it is necessary to first define the two terms. Authors, Baruch Bush and Joseph Folger define empowerment as “the restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life’s problems.” Empowerment is defined differently by Maire A. Dugan, who characterizes it as “processes through which disenfranchised social groups work to change their social surroundings, change detrimental policies and structures, and work to fulfill their needs.” These definitions differ mainly because Bush and Folgers’ interpretation focuses on restoration. In most cases, the disenfranchised lack a sense of their own value and strength. It is hard to restore something that may have never existed. Bush and Folger’s definition also infers

that an additional entity or party does the actual “bestowing” of power. Dugan believes that “empowerment” is a combination of the two definitions—personal, social, economic, and political power and transformations obtained by the dispossessed through self-effort. Power is not given or received, but obtained in and through an effort which requires the increased and progressive management of one’s life. Empowerment might be summed up by the words of Nanette Page and Cheryl E. Czuba as being, “a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important.”

Dugan lists three approaches for aiding in the empowerment of the disenfranchised and oppressed: education, organization, and networking which she bases on Paulo Freire’s book entitled, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Education involves encouraging members to become more self-motivated through learning with reference to communal and societal responsibilities, learning from self-reflexive tendencies by challenging false assumptions gained from earlier non-validated sources, and learning to use this gathered information as a motivation for change, which is an arduous task.

Organization entails formulating a group of people who sees, understands, and agrees with the same or similar issues of concern that are in need of being addressed. This group of people is first established on a small scale and centers its attention on issues that can be met with relatively little success. Success will, in turn, encourage and spur the group on to other projects which will require more effort, but remain within the range of success.

Networking involves group and individual meeting and sharing with the purpose of communal learning. Through the gathering of these people, opportunities, experiences, and resources are available to all interested parties and support is exchanged. This allows for shared power among all.

Enslavement is defined as the total enforced and legal subjugation of one human being by another for diverse purposes, but most importantly, to the economic benefit of

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the dominant person. Slavery in the United States of America is described in the following South Carolinian slave code written in 1712.

Whereas, the plantations and estates of this province cannot be well and sufficiently managed and brought into use, without the labor and service of negroes and other slaves; and forasmuch as the said negroes and other slaves brought into the people of this Province for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province; but that it is absolutely necessary, that such other constitutions, laws, and orders, should in this Province be made and enacted, for the good regulating and ordering of them, as may restrain the disorders, rapines and inhumanity, to which they are naturally prone and inclined, and may also tend to the safety and security of the people of this Province and their estates; to which purpose, be it therefore enacted…that all negroes, mulattoes, mestizoes [mixed white and Indian], or Indians, which at any time heretofore have been sold, or now are held or taken to be, or hereafter shall be bought and sold for slaves, are hereby declared slaves; and they, and their children, are hereby made and declared slaves, to all intents and purposes.  

It is common knowledge that slavery as mentioned above no longer exists in the United States. There are no longer physical shackles and whippings, enforced illiteracy, forced rape and breeding of women for financial purposes, mental subjugation and inferiority complexes, enforced separation of families, and many of the gruesome elements that contributed to the enslavement of African-Americans. References to enslavement as related to rap music and hip-hop culture pertain not to physical shackles, but to mental and psychological restraints that hinder creators and fans from utilizing potentials and capabilities to the fullest extent.


Though many differ in their definitions of contemporary enslavement as it relates to African-Americans, Na’im Akbar, states,

As cruel and painful chattel slavery was, it could be exceeded only by a worse form of slavery….The slavery that captures the mind and incarcerates the motivation, perception, aspiration, and identity in a web of anti-self images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction, is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles. The slavery that feeds on the psychology, invading the soul of man, destroying his loyalties to himself and establishing allegiance to forces which destroy him, is an even worse form of capture. The influences that permit an illusion of freedom, liberation, and self-determination, while tenaciously holding one’s mind in subjugation, is the folly of only the sadistic.\(^444\)

Akbar also believes that there is a relationship between slavery of the past and psycho-social elements of contemporary African-American culture.\(^445\) This relationship may be observed in current black-American culture in the areas of work, property, leadership, negative images, negative self-esteem, communal division, family, and colorism.

Akbar believes that the African-American’s attitude toward work is a direct reflection of that which began during slavery. African-Americans equate work with enslavement because they are often underpaid. The slaves were not motivated to work harder because they were unable to reap the benefits of their work even when additional and harder work produced more. They worked for the financial increase of their owner, so there was no need to take pride in work accomplishments, nor strive to profit from labor. It was all in vain. As a result, Akbar feels that avoidance of work gave the slaves a sense of freedom from unending toiling which when not executed and completed, would lead to punishment and/or death. Furthermore, he also deduces that


\(^445\) Ibid., 7.
get-rich-quick schemes and reliance on gambling are related to work avoidance and are directly tied to the “badge of disparagement” and stigma experienced by slaves and as a result, have been “inherited” by contemporary American blacks.\footnote{Ibid., 10.}

Because slaves owned nothing and material things were highly valued, possessions were associated with freedom, prestige, and power—that of the owner and that which belonged to others. This, in turn, fostered envy and resentment on the part of the slaves because material possessions represented freedom and the ability to control one’s individual, familial, and communal situations.\footnote{Akbar, \textit{Chains}, 12.} This enviousness and resentment led to judging others based on outward appearances, having the inclination to vandalize property belonging to others, and acquiring material possessions that are associated with clout, rather than overall net worth. Akbar also states, “It is not unusual for concerted efforts to obtain “real” political and economic power to be prematurely aborted by a strategic dispensation of tokens. Realistically assertive efforts to alter social structures to equitably accommodate America’s former slaves, have frequently been terminated by offering limited material goods to the major strategists and the movement dies.”\footnote{Ibid., 14.} Additionally, he cautions that this ideology is only a part of that which determines behavior. Vandalism is also promoted through contemporary society’s inclination toward violence. Akbar states, “The destructiveness and violence in the society’s present mentality fosters vandalism. The materialism which has overrun the Western mind, certainly has had its effect on the African-American mind.”\footnote{Ibid., 14.}

Another aspect which is related to slavery is the distrust of natural African-American leadership. This distrust is based on the fact that natural leaders were “made examples of” in the community through physical atrocities for the purposes of controlling

\footnote{Ibid., 10.\footnote{Akbar, \textit{Chains}, 12.\footnote{Ibid., 14.\footnote{Ibid., 14.}}}
the other slaves. Owner “selected” black leaders instead, were put in place to snitch and otherwise present any planned insurrections.\textsuperscript{450} Even though these “selected” leaders were not totally trusted, those leaders who slaves felt had “divine” ties and flashy material possessions were trusted more as leaders in the black communities. Perhaps this was due to the pervasion of religion throughout the daily lives of the slaves’ and their African ancestors’ lives. These “divine” leaders, otherwise known as conjurers, rootworking doctors, or voodoo priests and priestesses claimed “the ability to make masters kind, to harm enemies, to insure love, and to heal the sick.”\textsuperscript{451} Even whites respected this religious tradition and its proponents. Blassingame states, “Because of the tales they [the planters’ children] heard from their [black] nurses and black childhood playmates, many antebellum whites were convinced of the conjurer’s power….Even some of the most refined white ladies visited Dinkie’s [the slave conjurer’s] cabin to have their fortunes told or to obtain love potions.”\textsuperscript{452} Jessie Ruth Gaston also states, “…whites in high places were their [voodoo conjurers] clients with whom they had a habit of making deals.”\textsuperscript{453} Contemporary “divine” leaders continue to follow this African and African-American [voodooism and conjuring] slave tradition.

A different tradition which also continues to exist in contemporary culture is the art of buffoonery. Buffoonery represents a cultural characteristic which Akbar feels stems from slave culture. Because clowning allowed for more clemency as well as allowed slaves to enjoy a few finer things in life, this became one way of manipulating the slaveowner. Buffoonery also allowed the slaves to hide their true feelings so as not to be suspect. Frederick Douglass stated, “Unusual sobriety, apparent abstraction, sullenness, and indifference—indeed, any mood out of the common way afforded ground for suspicion and inquiry.”\textsuperscript{454}

\textsuperscript{450} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{451} Blassingame, \textit{The Slave Community}, 41.
\textsuperscript{452} Ibid., 113.
“To protect themselves African-Americans took to wearing a mask captured nicely in poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s "We Wear the Mask"

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, --
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Since public life was inhumane by definition – being a unit of labor – should it surprise us that African Americans learned to use masks and tricks to "manage" whites? Using "diplomacy, flattery, subservience, or buffoonery" could blacks in frequent contact with whites soften their lives? One can not but think of the "trickster" in African folklore.\(^{455}\)

Buffoonery also became the standard for comedy through the ages in such a way that entertainment and athleticism are celebrated more than intellectualism. Akbar says,

Consequently, the slave images of power persist. African-American children, as a consequence, strive to throw balls or croon on microphones, rather than seeking to explore the universe, discover cures for infectious diseases, or discover ways to feed the starving masses in Africa or India. Such a preoccupation with impotent images was a device to keep the slaves’ aspirations in check. The persistence of such models to the exclusion of others, perpetuates the conditions of slavery.\(^{456}\)

Perhaps the most caustic remnant from slavery is the inferiority complex which seems to have permeated African-American culture. The inferiority complex was “forced” on the slaves by convincing them that Africa was backward, primitive, and uncivilized; the slaves’ names were changed, languages were changed (slaves were

\(^{456}\) Akbar, Chains and Images and Psychological Slavery, 19.
forced to speak the language of the slaveowners), customs and religions were also changed (even though parts of the religions were preserved through commonalities with Western religions). The slaves were meant to feel that they had no identity and were inferior to other races—especially since they came from the “dark” planet. Their culture was destroyed such that the slaves felt no other recourse but to accept their “new” culture.  

African-Americans were “initiated’ into enslavement through a process which included dehumanization and fear in much the same way a horse would be “broken.” Willie Lynch states,

I will use the same basic principle that we use in breaking a horse, combined with some more sustaining factors….For, if we are to sustain our basic economy we must break and tie both of the beasts together, the nigger and the horse….Both the horse and the nigger must be broken that is break them from one form of mental life to another—keep the body and take the mind. In other words, break the will to resist.

Through “breaking” the natural state of the slaves, owners were able to maintain control. As stated in the Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a Slave,

Let us make a slave a slave….When we do it with horses we break them from one form of life to another; that is, we reduce them from their natural state in nature; whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take of their needs and the needs of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence from them and thereby create a dependency state so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure.

Violence against African-Americans served as a motivating factor in their “embracement” of the Western culture. Through a dehumanizing process which

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459 Ibid., 12.
included brutal, physical punishment, humiliation through public nakedness, inability to attend to personal hygiene, verbal insults, etc., Africans were made to believe that they were unworthy of humane treatment and respect. They were treated as animals. Lynch states,

When it comes to breaking the uncivilized nigger, use the same process, but vary the degree and step up the pressure so as to do a complete reversal of the mind. Take the meanest and most restless nigger, strip him of his clothes in front of the remaining male niggers, the female, and the nigger infant, tar and feather him, tie each leg to a different horse in opposite directions, set him a fire and beat both horses to pull him apart in front of the remaining niggers. The next step is to take a bullwhip and beat the remaining nigger male to the point of death in front of the female and the infant. Don’t kill him, but put the fear of God in him, for he can be useful for future breeding.  

John W. Blassingame states,

A number of the slaves were so oppressed that they accepted their master’s claims about the rightness, the power, and the sanctity of whiteness and the degradation, the powerlessness, and the shame of blackness. As a result, some blacks wished passionately that they were white. James Watkins was treated so cruelly by his master that eventually, he declared: “I felt as though I had been unfortunate in being born black, and wished that I could by any means change my skin into a white one, feeling certain that I should then be free.”

Because of the violence perpetuated by the slaveowners, many black-Americans believe that this inferiority complex and had been so engrained in the African-American psyche that it continues to exist within contemporary African-American society and manifests itself in many ways. These ways include: the non-acceptance of any negroid attributes/bodily features as being attractive; the lack of respect for the African-American -

\[\text{460} \text{ Ibid., 15.} \]
\[\text{461} \text{ Blassingame, The Slave Community, 303.}\]
American expert; the continual bombardment of negative images of African-Americans in the media; and most importantly, the lack of respect for human life as manifested in the high percentage of homicides committed within the community.\textsuperscript{462} \textsuperscript{463} As Akbar states, “It is a simple fact that people who love themselves seek to preserve their lives—not destroy them.”\textsuperscript{464}

Division within the contemporary African-American community is a direct result of a division among the slave population. One method used to “make a slave” was to foster suspicion among them by pitting one against the other, i.e., the “divide and conquer” adage. Willie Lynch, proclaimed,

I have a foolproof method for controlling your Black slaves. I guarantee every one of you that if installed correctly, it will control the slaves for at least 300 years. My method is simple….I have outlined a number of differences among the slaves, and I take these differences and make them bigger. I use fear, distrust, and envy for control purposes….On top of my list is age….color or shade,.. intelligence, size, sex,…have fine hair, course hair, or is tall or short…The Black slave after receiving this indoctrination shall carry on and will become self refueling and self generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands.\textsuperscript{465} Don’t forget you must pitch the OLD BLACK vs. THE YOUNG BLACK and the YOUNG BLACK MALE against the OLD BLACK MALE. You must use the Dark Skin Slaves vs. the Light Skin Slaves and the Light Skin Slaves vs. the Dark Skin Slaves. You must use the Female vs. the Male, and the Male vs. the Female. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, but it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect

\textsuperscript{462} Carter G. Woodson, \textit{The Mis-Education of the Negro}, (Chicago: African American Images, 2000), 203.
\textsuperscript{463} Akbar, \textit{Chains and Images and Psychological Slavery}, 22.
\textsuperscript{464} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{465} Indoctrination refers to the brainwashing of African-Americans for the purposes of controlling and enslavement.
and trust only us….If used intensively for one year, the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful. 466

This division that was so carefully mastered by the slaveowners exists today within the African-American community but the exact cause of division has changed. Although the divisions are different, the results are the same. Separation within the black American community has become so “well-established” that it almost seems to appear as a natural occurrence. At first the slaveowners separated the Africans into groups of varying languages and tribes so as to discourage uprisings. Causes now vary with everything from church and religious differences to colleges. Wyatt Tee Walker states, “Considerable care was taken to keep sizable numbers of Africans with a common tongue separate. The obvious purpose was to minimize the chance of rebellion or escape.” 467

Another type of division was based on where the slaves worked. Slaves worked mainly in the house or the field. Most of the plantation slaves worked in and were associated with the field. The domestic workers were part of the elite slave population. The job of the house slave was considered to be the most prized job because “They usually ate better food and wore better clothes than the field slaves because they received leftovers from the planter’s larder and hand-me-downs from his wardrobe.” 468 In some cases, lighter complexioned slaves were assigned the domestic/elite jobs while the darker ones labored in the fields.

Benefiting from “better” jobs or being considered “more superior” than the average slave because of complexion represents another divisive technique used against African-Americans. This principle is called color consciousness, also known as colorism. This ideology contributed to the inferiority complex many slaves experienced and continues to be a problem within the African-American population. Akbar states, “Contrary to popular belief, these attitudes have not changed substantially among

467 Walker, Somebody’s Calling My Name, 29.
468 Blassingame, The Slave Community, 251-252.
African-American youth who have grown up since the “Black Power” movement of the
1960’s.”\(^{469}\) Colorism and its accompanying caste system were not the only elements
that caused divisiveness resulting from “assigned” status. Church membership within
certain African-American churches was another.

Becoming affiliated with a church represented another way which caused the
slaves to be divided. Although many slaves became a part of the churches in which
their owners were members, many became affiliated with other churches. According to
John W. Blassingame, “Blacks also chose denominations on the basis of the degree of
autonomy they could exercise and the amount of discrimination they encountered from
their white co-religionists and tutors.”\(^{470}\) Generally the slaves worshipped at the church
that would allow them to more freely worship in their own expressive manner. Portia K.
Maultsby states, “The black folk church is distinguished from black denominational
churches by the structure and nature of its service, religious practices, and philosophical
concepts and the socioeconomic background of its members.”\(^{471}\) Thus, the African-
American religious community and church membership were divided into two main
categories that were based on worship style and music: Afro-American and Euro-
American.\(^{472}\) The type of music utilized within the service determined the amount of
Africanisms that were retained. The black folk church was considered a “mass” church
because it catered to people considered low-income and low-status (by Western
standards). This church retained more African rootage because the congregation had
an appetite for rhythmic and emotion inducing music. They embraced the African
manner of expression and song. The “class” church typically consisted of people of
higher income and status (by Western standards). This church rejected the African
expressionism and much of the “black” music types and embraced Western worship
styles. As expected, these different manners of worship resulted in religious separation

\(^{469}\) Na‘im Akbar, *Chains and Images and Psychological Slavery*, 32.
\(^{470}\) Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 91.
\(^{471}\) Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music,” in *Africanisms in American Culture*
\(^{472}\) Walker, *Somebody’s Calling My Name*, 23.
of African-American worshippers. This separation is still in existence, even though many of the churches have managed to compromise on their worship services by mixing the two entities.\textsuperscript{473}

“One of the first great issues… [of separation] was the impact of the forcible separation of mates upon a slave union.” When a slave’s mate was sold and the spouse that remained remarried, this resulted in “double marriages” among the slaves.\textsuperscript{474} Although many of the slaves bemoaned this fact, “the most brutal aspect of slavery was the separation of families.” This occurred most often because of debts that the owners owed or death.\textsuperscript{475} This separation of the family continues to haunt present-day black families whose family unit has suffered from breakdown.

The African-American community has also suffered a serious breakdown. Breakdowns occurring with these two important institutions are interrelated. Akbar states, “The family is the very foundation of healthy, constructive personal and community life. Without a strong family, individual life and community life are likely to become very unstable. The destruction or damage to the African-American was accomplished by destroying marriage, fatherhood and motherhood.”\textsuperscript{476}

Willie Lynch wrote that in the process of breaking the black male slave and the female slave, their roles will be reversed and as a result, the slave woman would become more independent and the man would become mentally weak and dependent, but physically strong. As a result, all children would be raised according to their reversed gender roles and perpetuation for generations would continue. He states, “Continually, through the breaking of uncivilized savage niggers, by throwing the nigger female savage into a frozen psychological state of independency, by killing of the protective male image by creating a submissive dependent mind of the nigger male

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 23-25.
\textsuperscript{474} Blassingame, \textit{The Slave Community}, 170.
\textsuperscript{475} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{476} Na’im Akbar, \textit{Chains and Images and Psychological Slavery}, 27.
savage, we have created an orbiting cycle that turns in its own axis forever, unless a phenomenon occurs and reshifts the positions of the female savages."  \(^{477}\)

African-American women became known for their breeding and concubinage abilities while African-American men became known for impregnating and abilities of sheer strength. Akbar believes that the pimping, stud, and “love them, leave them” qualities of some contemporary black American males are remnants left from slave culture. \(^{478}\) He believes that same is applicable for the American black woman who additionally, fosters dependence in her male children when rearing her children alone in an attempt to protect the male child from the world. \(^{479}\)

The last destructive element and remnant of slave culture is color consciousness, also known as colorism. As discussed earlier, colorism is the positive or negative prioritizing of attributes based on the color/complexion of the skin; the lighter the skin color, the more positive the prioritizing. Colorism is subtle, yet definitive discrimination which fosters division in the African-American race.

Since enslavement with Caucasians and Native Americans failed and enslavement with Africans succeeded because of their inability to hide amongst “regular” people, white enslavers believed that Africans were cursed to be slaves. These same enslavers also felt that Africans were the direct descendants of Ham, Noah’s son, and that Ham’s descendents were cursed to be slaves. Although this theory has since been proven to be false, dark skin color became (and in some cases, still is) synonymous with slavery and subhuman qualities. \(^{480}\)

### The Effects of Slavery versus Slavery as an Excuse

Although the “Ham Theory” is now known to be false, there seems to be diverse numbers of opinions questioning the validity of other theories concerning the effects of


slavery on contemporary African-American culture. Some African-Americans believe that there is a continued influence of slave traits that persist within black contemporary communities. Others believe that slave traits do not exist but that their labeling is merely an excuse for failure within the Black community. Still, other African-Americans believe that there is a continuation of these same traits, that they are due to rap music and hip-hop culture, and that they have caused a type of neoslavery to exist in black-American contemporary culture.

Three people who believe that slave traits still exist in the black community are: Sekou Mims, Omar Reid, and Larry Higginbottom—two social workers and a psychologist who “discovered” Post-traumatic Slavery Disorder. Post-Traumatic Slavery Disorder is defined by its “discoverers” as being “a derivative of post-traumatic stress disorder which manifests itself drug abuse, broken families, crime, and low educational attainment in segments of the black community which can be directly linked to the trauma of slavery, and that “black people as a whole are suffering from PTSD.”

Marcella Bombardieri says, “These Boston clinicians were not the first to note the lingering psychological effects of slavery. Harvard University psychiatrist Alvin F. Poussaint wrote in 2000 about ‘posttraumatic slavery syndrome,’ calling it ‘a physiological risk for black people that is virtually unknown to white Americans.” Poussaint wrote in his co-authored book, Lay My Burden Down, that “A culture of oppression, the by-product of this nation’s development, has taken a tremendous toll on the minds and bodies of black people.”

Dr. Poussaint, though, notes that there is a difference between his “syndrome” diagnosis and the clinicians’ disorder diagnosis. He suggests that the trauma of slavery operates in the background of the lives of black people much like background noises, except it affects their daily functioning. He points out, “Slavery was profoundly traumatic for black people and we’re not over it yet.”

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Not everyone believes that African-American people are still seriously influenced by American slavery. One such person is Jawanza Kunjufu, educational consultant. Kunjufu feels that the black population is afflicted by the fatherless epidemic, not slavery. He contends, “I don’t believe our major problem is racism.” He said, “The greatest demon in black America is fatherlessness. The common variable for the (African-American) dropout rate, the incarceration rate, and drug use, is the daddy didn’t stay.” Kunjufu also adds, “Slavery did not destroy the black family.”

Thomas Sowell, author of *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* concurs with Kunjufu on the issue of the influence of slavery as being non-existent, or not a factor in contemporary African-American society. He believes that race and racism are also not factors in the performance of young black-Americans and claims that culture is the most influencing factor in contemporary society. He feels that the culture that currently inhabits the African-American community is based on “redneck” culture that existed in England and found its way across the Atlantic in centuries past. He asserts that “redneck” culture

was a culture that produced far lower levels of intellectual and economic achievement, as well as far higher levels of violence and sexual promiscuity. That culture had its own way of talking, not only in the pronunciation of particular words but also in a loud, dramatic style of oratory with vivid imagery, repetitive phrases and repetitive cadences.

Sowell claims that because 90% of American blacks resided in the South among the 33% of whites who catered to this culture, blacks mainly continued to perpetuate this culture while it eroded in the white communities. Because the Northern ghettos are inhabited by Southern blacks who immigrated to the North, this culture also immigrated and has proven to become a serious and damaging hindrance to both whites and blacks.

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who continue to subscribe to it. He emphasizes, “The counterproductive and self-destructive culture of black rednecks in today’s ghettos is regarded by many as the only “authentic” black culture--and, for that reason, something not to be tampered with. Their talk, their attitudes, and their behavior are regarded as sacrosanct.

Economic Freedom versus New Slavery

Even though Kunjufu and Sowell disagree with the slavery theory, others are beginning to believe that rap and hip-hop culture are contributing factors to a neo-slave atmosphere that is currently pervading the African-American culture. These neo-slave believers are similar to the slavery theorists except the former believe that slavery exists in a new form and that rappers themselves are the enslaved and their corporate sponsors are the enslavers. These neo-slave theorists also believe that early African-American slavery as it existed in its previous form is no longer the most influential in black-American culture.

Civil rights leader, Al Sharpton, labeled gangsta rappers “well-paid slaves” during the hosting of a summit about social responsibility in the hip-hop industry. He stated, “Don’t let some record executive tell you that cursing out your mama is in style. Anytime you perpetuate a slave mentality that desecrates women and that desecrates our race in the name of a record…I consider you a well-paid slave.”

In the article, “Culture: Rhyme and Resist,” which addresses the raising of social consciousness, it states “Public Enemy inspired a generation to exchange huge gold rope chains, which the group likened to slave shackles, for Malcolm X medallions.”

Southern rappers, Eightball and MJG in 1999 produced the video “We Started This,” which depicts in a slave metaphor the exploitation of hip hop artists by rich record labels.

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executives. The video shows black males being trapped, shackled, and then forced to rap into microphones hanging from a factory ceiling. The suit-clad executives appear throughout the video laughing and throwing hands full of money at the artists under their control.\textsuperscript{488}

Although the hip-hop influence has now become global, many are wondering if its artists are financially better off than before and if they are truly reaping the benefits of that which they have sown. Rapper, M.C. Hammer after making millions, went bankrupt.\textsuperscript{489} Tupac Shakur whose albums grossed millions of dollars died with slightly more than $100,000 in the bank and two used cars.\textsuperscript{490} Shakur’s mother’s civil suit lawyer, Richard Fisherbein, stated, “He had no houses, no real estate, he had nothing.”\textsuperscript{491} Rapper M.C. Shyne, was recently sentenced to ten years in prison for a 1999 shooting incident. His assets, valued at $500,000 from a CD advance from Def Jam Records, were frozen pending a lawsuit concerning the crime for which he is being punished. His family wants access to the much-needed money. These situations as well as many others have many people questioning whether these artists are truly empowered or whether they are the “victims” of a form of neo-slavery that does not physically shackle, but shackle in a mental and financial manner. In this case, the corporate industry is considered to be the slaveowners. Old school rapper, Chuck D. mentions media information control and manipulation for the purposes of swaying people in specific directions and the lack of black people who are at the “packaging table” where determinations are made. He compares this complicated situation to slavery. He states,

To the naysayers, when you lay out the facts in front of them and then they say ‘that’s the way business is in America baby, so you gotta roll with it’. I say then, what difference is that then with slavery? So then you are gonna say that because slavery is a business then it is legitimate? It is just a whole different type of slavery today. Just because there is a paycheck that is being given to Black people, a 6 or 7 figure salary to Black faces to a select few of them mean that it’s legitimate so that you have to claw for survival, for information? You mean that you are thrown a bone, a biscuit in the form of a platinum chain, some rims and maybe a house out in Concord [California]… Ya know what? You guys have made it, you have achieved the American dream? [Chuck says sarcastically]  

Chuck D. also believes that because many African-Americans are busy watching BET comedy shows or listening to music/rap radio all day that many are missing out on opportunities to become enlightened and are continuously manipulated to the point of not challenging the information they are taking in. They are more aware of the criminal activities of the entertainers rather than the activities of those who actually help the community. He considers that many people should be called SHEEPLE, his word for black people who follow false shepherds much as children followed the Pied Piper out of town. And likens entertainers making 8 – 9 figures to house N***as working for the benefit of plantation owners.  

In Bell Hooks’ article entitled “Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap?: Misogny, gangsta rap, and The Piano,” she states, “Gangsta rap is part of the anti-feminist backlash that is the rage right now. When young black males labor in the plantations [italics placed by this author] of misogyny and sexism to produce gangsta rap, their right to speak this violence and be materially rewarded is extended to them by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Far from being an expression of their  

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“manhood,” it is an expression of their own subjugation and humiliation by more powerful, less visible forces of patriarchal gangsterism.\(^{494}\)

Hooks believes that although the rappers should be held responsible for their misogyny, people must also realize that not only African-American males are responsible for these injustices against black women, nor are they the originators and perpetrators of systematic power that has been held over women. White male (mainly) patriarchal society is responsible for the context in which this manner of thinking was created and it is this institution which is mirrored in the music and culture of young, black rappers (though in a cruder manner). She states,

One cannot answer them [questions about misogyny] honestly without placing accountability on larger structures of domination and the individuals (often white, usually male but not always) who are hierarchically placed to maintain and perpetuate the values that uphold these exploitative and oppressive systems. That means taking a critical looking at the politics of hedonistic consumerism, the values of the men and women who produce gangsta rap. It would mean considering the seduction of young black males who find that they can make more money producing lyrics that promote violence, sexism, and misogyny than with any other content.\(^{495}\)

Through rap music and other contemporary institutions, the white patriarchal system, which was also prevalent during the American slave era, continues to thrive. The difference is that young African-American males (and some females) are the conveyors who are the current focus of national backlash.

Conscious rapper, Mikkey released an album entitled, “Nat Turner’s Revenge” in Fall 2005.\(^{496}\) In his response as to why it was given this title, he stated,

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\(^{495}\) Ibid., http://eserver.org/race/misogyn.html.

It's just the whole mind frame that I am in. Nat Turner was a slave that ran away and led a revolt in Virginia. And basically, I feel like the industry has always had these master and slave relationships. But I'm finally breaking free of that relationship I had with Cash Money/Universal. Now I feel like I am leading a rebellion of all of these ex-slaves that were tied down in situations where people were not benefiting them. It's also paying homage to a great Black hero, by saying every time that a Black man becomes successful, or makes something of themselves, it's like Nat Turner is having his revenge. Nat Turner was hanged, murdered, and skinned alive, so it's like he's getting his revenge silently, even though he is dead. How many disenfranchised black males would not surrender to expressing virulent forms of sexism, if they knew the rewards would be unprecedented material power and fame?497

Though many feel that rappers and their fans are not empowered by the music, many also feel that either the responsibility does not rest solely on the corporations, but on those who lack knowledge (anti-intellectualism), i.e., parents of young fans and those rappers who refuse to learn more about their trade. One internet blogger states,

“Secret no it is not right to put the total responsibility on the gangsta rap industry but it is not empowering our young people to do better. It is teaching kids in a tacit way that materialism is everything. That's why I don't listen to most of it because I don't like the message. But let's look at the larger issue here, some of these kids are vitually raising themselves.”498

In the internet article, “Dollars and Non-Cents,” Pathrhino states that

“Rappers either are content to, or are grossly unaware of, how they are leading their own fans down a path of self-destruction. Financial devastation is a subtle form of violence but just as deadly. As long as we're buying nobody seems to care who's dying. The average rap fan seems to have diamonds in their eyes

even if they can’t afford to drape their fingers, necks and ears with them. Nowadays, Ice Ice Baby has a whole new meaning, and it’s our youth that is fiending.”

Not everyone believes that rap music and hip-hop culture are forces of enslavement. Because of the rapper’s freedom of choice to pursue his/her profession, Tricia Rose, author of *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* states that, “it’s utterly fundamental to distinguish slavery from contemporary circumstances, and many people use it easily in a way that diminishes the utter brutality as well as the total domination of people when they are physically enslaved.”

Michael Eric Dyson, university professor, believes that despite certain elements of hip-hop that may have negative consequences, he believes that there is a sense of empowerment that also permeates this culture. He says that hip-hop culture “has accentuated the profound reality of Black culture and has given hundreds and thousands of young people a viable means of making a living and furthermore encourages millions of people around the globe to examine their own lives.”

Rap mogul Russell Simmons believes that hip-hop culture has spawned a new entrepreneurial spirit among hip-hoppers. He says,

> When I was sixteen, I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but selling weed was one of the few options open to me. Today, however, young people are inspired to have higher aspirations because of hip-hop. Young people now have all these people visible who make the choice to be entrepreneurs and inspire them to do the same. It’s now a cultural thing in our community. Being a teacher maybe, or a doctor, these used to be the hopes and aspirations of our community. But now hip-hop is all they talk about. Lower-middle-class blacks in New York City were the absolute dumbest young kids you could find anywhere, same as you would in

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the projects down the block. Well, it’s the same dumb people who broke the mold, because they were so hip-hop and so angry and so … this, I’m going to make it on my own. It’s like, own a company.\textsuperscript{502}

Rappers are also becoming involved in other financial business dealings with lucrative results. Kimberly L. Allers, staff writer at Fortune magazine mentions that rappers are getting paid through the sales of rap CDs, DVDs, porn, ring tones, and product placement. She also states, “It’s hard to hate on the get-rich part of this game. That rappers are becoming more astute businessmen, branching out into multiple industries, is a good thing.”\textsuperscript{503} She quotes Bryan Leach, vice-president of Integrated Marketing of A & R at TVT Records as saying, “Rap music was making a lot of money for the corporate world, and artists realized that they’d rather pimp themselves than be pimped.”\textsuperscript{504}

There are some who agree with Simmons and Allers—that the hustler’s mentality has fostered a sense of entrepreneurialism in hip-hoppers that may not have existed prior to this time. Since many hip-hoppers want to “keep it real,” they feel that they should not have to change their manner of speaking, fashion sense, and deportment to accommodate corporate society. But most importantly, they want to answer to no one but themselves. Although speculative, Hashim Warren relates the "hustler's spirit" of the Hip-Hop Generation to a research study finding that "Blacks and Hispanics with some graduate level education are the most likely groups to start a new business."\textsuperscript{505}

Rappers such as Notorious B.I.G. and 50 Cent believe(d) that rap music was their financial savior in that without it, their life would continue to cater to the drug industry. Notorious B.I.G. states the following in his rap, “Things Done Change,”

If I wasn't in the rap game

\textsuperscript{501} Ibid., http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/slave_routes/7_rap.htm.
\textsuperscript{502} Gates, America Behind the Color Line, 52.
\textsuperscript{504} Ibid., http://www.essence.com/essence/takebackthemusic/whattheyresaying.html.
I'd probably have a key knee deep in the crack game
Because the streets is a short stop
Either you're slingin crack rock or you got a wicked jumpshot
Shit, it's hard being young from the slums
eatin five cent gums not knowin where your meals comin from

When interviewed about the preview of his movie, Get Rich or Die Trying," 50 Cent said that if it was not for rap music, either he would be selling drugs, be incarcerated, or be dead.

Pro-Establishment versus Anti-Establishment

As of recently, rap music fans have become more involved with the political process despite the anti-establishment attitude that currently exists. This is due to changes in civil rights such as the decline in Affirmative Action and welfare reform along with racial profiling and police brutality. They felt the need to express their opinions through the voting and other processes. The 2004 presidential election brought forth the “Rock the Vote” campaign by the likes of Russell Simmons and Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs and others who encouraged 1.4 million hip-hoppers to register and vote.

Foundations started by Wyclef Jean, Ludacris, and other rappers have been giving monetary funds to financially deprived individuals and communities in the U.S. and other countries. Internet blogger, LaShanda Henry explains that the Hip Hop Summit is a newly established institution created by Russell Simmons to mobilize hip-hop artists with leaders such as Jesse Jackson. Its chief aim is to educate urban youth.

In spite of these wonderful inspiring endeavors, many people have become

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507 Bakari Kitwana, The Hip Hop Generation, 147 & 175.
angry at the “Stop the Snitching” campaign and its efforts to de-establish desired changes in the black and other communities. The slogan appeared in Baltimore about two years ago with the title of an underground DVD featuring gun-wielding drug dealers who threaten to harm/kill those who “blow the whistle on” criminals. The black community is divided. Many of the hip-hoppers support this slogan and its ideology because of the disproportionate amount of African-Americans who have been incarcerated. Others do not. Old school rapper Chuck D disagrees with the campaign and feels that wanna-be gangsters and thugs are beginning to set the standard for the culture. He feels this to be wrong. He states, “I support snitches. If a person is cancerous to society, then a snitch sometimes is the best solution, with an army behind him.” Gangsta rapper 50 Cent agrees with the campaign and proclaims, “A snitch would be the worst thing that you could be in the neighborhood. If you tell on them, they don’t want you around.”

According to rapper, Lil’ Cease, “If you’re from the streets, one of the most honored codes is that you don’t tell, especially not on your friends.” Unlike his peers, Lil’ Cease snitched on his ex-friend, Lil’ Kim. Lil’ Kim, remaining true to her snitching philosophy, is spending time in jail for perjury and covering up crimes. Additionally, this honored code is expressed in songs produced by rappers such as Dead Prez, Lil’ Kim, Shyne, and Jay-Z.

The “snitching” campaign is just one de-establishment theme has served to polarize the rappers themselves as well as music proponents and critics. Other themes of equal adversarial influence on the general public revolve around previously discussed

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510 Ibid.
topics such as: venerating stealing (50 Cent’s “Wanksta”), being proud of being a pimp (Dru Down’s “Pimp of the Year”), teaching the essentials of drug dealing (Notorious B.I.G.’s “Ten Crack Commandments), killing (Gangsta Boo’s “Kill, Kill, Kill, Murder, Murder, Murder”), etc. and are incorporated in the music lyrics and videos. These reflect anti-establishment views because they exalt a lifestyle that goes against pre-established societal and institutional rules. These views which are reflected in gangsta rap attempt to tear down “the establishment,” rather than reveal and call for a social change. This manner of thinking has caused disputant reactions within the black community.

American mainstream rap music and hip-hop culture set the stage for dialogue in the African-American community because proponents and critics have differing opinions as to their influential powers. Ever since its initial appearance in the 1980s, it has been the subject of conflictual interest in the American black community and continues to wield a powerful influence on the public because of its adversarial themes and its resulting stances. Whether commercialized rap music is misogynistic, intellectualistic or anti-intellectualistic, serves to empower or enslave, there are differing opinions because these opinions are numerous and diverse. Additionally, there are varying attitudes and opinions within each polarized side of the different conflicts. This shows the influential power of this contemporary music and its culture.

Like rap’s music predecessors (spirituals, ragtime, jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, and soul), there were varying opinions for and against the music and the culture that nurtured them. As these music genres began to more widely spread, they became more readily accepted. The same is currently taking place with rap music and its accompanying culture. It is steadily gaining more widespread acceptance; even global recognition. Also accompanying this widespread recognition are diverse points of views shared by the global community participating in the sharing of this music.

Even though there are many who concur or disagree with one of the two sides of the enslavement/empowerment issue, hardly anyone disputes the fact that rap music
and hip-hop culture could be a force needed for self-reflection, something that is necessary for collective self-improvement. One can also not ignore the fact that rap /hip-hop culture, though divisive in nature, is merely an orally-transmitted, contemporary continuation and extension of African-American music and culture and all that it represents, or as some would argue, misrepresents.
CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

There is a historical lineage between Rap and African-American music genres of earlier styles. Aside from the similar music theoretical aspects that all of the genres share and inherited from Africa, all African-American music genres also communicate certain cultural similarities that have been preserved through collective memory and oral traditions, otherwise known as cultural memory.

Cultural memory in African-American music exists in the form of intertextuality in which earlier music is alluded to, imitated, referenced and co-opted into a more contemporary hybrid form. In this technique, both, the older and the newer forms of music are remembered and retained. In other words, bonds between the older and the newer are continued with the past shaping the present.

Commercialized, mainstream rap music exhibits many points of contact with the music of the past that contributes to the continuation of African-American culture. They are: the preference for orality in which singing and/or rapping is used for communicative purposes; call and response (which takes place theoretically and culturally); emphasis on complex rhythms; the creation of music by the disenfranchised who reside in an oppressive environment; the music is considered indecent or is met with opposition from certain factions within the race or culture before becoming more “accepted” in mainstream society; the music frequently involves a contest or some sort of competition; the music almost always involves improvisation; the music involves much repetition; indistinct singing which pertains to utilizing words which have double meanings with two different purposes (overt and covert or sacred and secular); and finally, the music almost always involves some sort of controversy relating to influences, decency, performers, or performance practices.

Among the various forms of cultural memories, one of the most relevant and prevalent to rap music and hip-hop culture is the art of signifyin(g). Signifyin(g) is
defined as the art or technique of inferring multiple meanings through subversive language. In Signification, a word (or even a phrase or song) might have a double function as well as a double meaning. It might be overt or covert or sacred or secular. It might also refer to rapping about one thing while in actuality it is something else.

Signification might also refer to verbal competition known by names such as playing the dozens or beefin', etc.. Signifyin(g) survived from the African-American slave era in which slaves used it as a form of resistance, but has now developed into a form of competition between rappers in which they brag about verbal skills, compete in contests, or even settle disputes via the media. Whenever media or stage performance competitions take place, these contests are sometimes called settling a beef.

These beefs have recently escalated to the point in which rap musicians have been harmed or killed. This has been a source of concern as well as a source of controversy in the black community because gangsta rappers have not always truly rapped about their lives as they truly exist. Critics object to the personas that young fans seemingly believe to be the truth when in essence, they are not. This and other controversies related to rap music represent another cultural memory type that appears to be rooted in most African-American music traditions.

Rap music appears to be rooted in the slave and minstrelsy traditions. Of the elements that are rooted in the customs of slavery and minstrelsy, stereotyping and reclaiming the N-word for the proposed purpose of redefinition are perhaps the two most significant. During slavery stereotyping in the form of institutional roles were defined and slave adherence was expected. As a result, the slaves' actual behaviors were many times truly different from the "perceived" behaviors, but because of expectations, the slaves "became" or acted as those expected images.

Even though there are varying opinions as to the number, accuracy, and type of stereotypes, but it is known that there were a few male "standards" with which most people agree: Coon, Sambo (combination of Uncle Remus, Jim Crow, and Uncle Tom), and the Black Brute. Variations of the Coon and the Black Brute stereotypical images
continue to exist in rap music and hip-hop culture. The Negro Jester Coon exists in the form of Crunk musicians who smile consistently, excessively move, and party hardy. The Zip Coon exists in the pimp/playa (player) who brags about his sexual conquests and adventures and wears ultra-modern fashion. The Black Brute exists in the form of the gangsta rapper. He also brags about his sexuality, but he is also rebellious and is seemingly similar to the slave, Nat Turner, who defied plantation society.

The other tradition that has ancestral connections to the slave era and the age of minstrelsy is the usage of the N-word. During slavery this word was used in a derogatory manner to refer to African-Americans. During this contemporary period in which commercialized rap music has become so prevalent, this word continues to be used for the purposes of referencing African-American males. The difference and the accompanying controversy stems from the three main different viewpoints relating to this emotionally-charged word. These viewpoints consist of those in agreement with using this word unlimitedly; those who feel the need to limit its usage to and among limitedly African-Americans only for endearment purposes; and those who feel that it should be not be used at all. One person, Minister Muhammad Abdullah Muhammad believes the word should be “completely expunged from out vocabulary, dictionaries and writing” because of its destructive power.\(^{514}\)

In response to Michael Eric Dyson’s early defense of limited, camaraderie usage of the N-word, Ron Scott wrote in the *Amsterdam News* (9 August 2001):

Well, if you really want to keep it real, try reading *100 Years of Lynchings* by Ralph Ginzburg and *Without Sanctuary, Lynching Photography in America*, by James Allen and Hilton Als, which graphically depict the hideous lynchings of African-Americans in America. The latter has some photographs that show the N word, which was carved on their chests.” As for the supposed distinction

between the term of affection and the slur in ending the word with an “-er” rather than an “-a,” this is, as Scott observed, a distinction without a difference: “Remember, many white people weren’t that educated,…so in many cases, it was spelled the latter.\textsuperscript{515}

Despite the extensive controversies, rappers are continuing to use it while engaging in “beefs” with other celebrities, i.e., the Oprah Winfrey-Ludacris beef concerning their opposite stances on the usage of the word; and comedian/actor, Damon Wayans has been putting forth great unsuccessful efforts in seeking to trademark this word for usage in a clothing line.\textsuperscript{516}

Because many African-Americans do not want to be referenced using the N-word even by those of the same ethnicity, and because there is continual controversy concerning “others” who use or might use the word, perhaps it is best that the word is retired from regular usage to avoid continual offensiveness.

Recently, there has been a group of people who have actively pursued the eradication of this word. Through educating the public about its history and its usage during the past through via handout cards, t-shirts, and contracts which are used to help spread the word to those who are unaware of or may have forgotten the history of this word. This group, otherwise known by its website as “Abolish the N-Word.com,” states on its website,

The “N” word is not a term of endearment. It cannot be reappropriated. We cannot redefine the “N” word or re-spell it to make it positive. Racism is so subtle, we now think that we can embrace the “N” word and take away its power. However, not enough time has passed for this concept to be effective. The word is viewed as a racial slur at large, it will continue to be so until it is put away for a generation, and then maybe it can be embraced at such time in a historical


context. Until the pain of this word no longer lingers in society for any of us, we cannot continue to use the “N” word. Every time we use the “N” word it is a slap in the face of our elders and a blatant disrespect to our ancestors. We have not only lost our minds, but we’ve lost consciousness. The dependency of this word as a greeting, to complete sentences and start conversations is a total disregard for every movement that gave us the many freedoms we enjoy today. This site is our answer to a call to duty. We now challenge you to make a personal commitment and join us in the movement to abolish the “N” word.\(^\text{517}\)

Another offensive word which has caused a generational and even an intra-generational problem among females is “bitch.” While some young females are accepting of this word, others of the younger and older generations refuse to tolerate it. The usage of this and other degrading words when addressing females, along with objectifying these women have also become a source of serious debate in the African-American culture. As a result of this, many women are beginning to fight back through education and through the formation of groups to bring about awareness of the seriousness and influence this practice has on future generations of African-American girls and women. Unfortunately, women are not only the victims in this situation. Some other women contribute by perpetuating and encouraging debased naming and objectification through gangsta rapping and underclothed video dancing. Their participation is seemingly due to desire for exposure and fame, money, but possibly also because of under-education or even anti-intellectualism.

Anti-Intellectualism as stated by Richard Hofstadter, is an obscure term used to describe a general resentment, suspicion of, or the lack of pursuance of formal learning. Although existent in the American culture for many years, many people such as Ronald Ferguson, John McWhorter, and even other rappers believe it pervades gangsta rap music, hip-hop culture, and even the general African-American culture. But there are also those persons who refute this and believe that intellectualism does exist in this

\(^{517}\) \textit{Abolish the “N” Word, “About Us,” http://abolishthenword.com/homepage.htm.}
music and culture and in a few rappers who are (were) known to be avid readers. A third opinion that is shared by University professors, Lynda Dee Dixon Bowling and Patricia A. Washington, is that gangsta rappers are organic intellectuals.\textsuperscript{518} Organic intellectuals as defined by Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci are individuals who create ideologies that mould societies while creating a counter hegemony. These intellectuals are not necessarily formally trained but are revolutionaries that act on behalf of the working class.\textsuperscript{519} Gangsta rappers claim to speak for the proletariat, about their oppression, and about the circumstances surrounding their communities. For this reason, some see them as leaders. One difference, though, is that the organic intellectual’s purpose and goal is to aid the collective community rather than the individual. Gangsta rappers, though claiming philanthropy through foundations and donations, also proudly boast about individuality rather than collectivity.

Whether collective empowerment and/or enslavement currently exist(s) in the black community represent(s) another area of controversy within black-American culture. Although there are many opinions as to what constitutes empowerment and enslavement, the ones most appropriate to African-Americans and their culture are: positive and collective changes taking place within the disenfranchised population as a result of self effort; and the imposed suppression of a group of people by a dominant group for economic purposes. While many people believe that enslavement currently exists in the form of neo-slavery within the rap music industry, others believe that rap music has empowered people to become more independent and self-sufficient.

A different controversy stems from the fact that there are also varying opinions as to whether African-American slavery has lingering effects on the black community. Psychologist, Na’im Akbar, believes it does, while Jawanza Kunjufu and Thomas Sowell believe otherwise. Rap mogul Russell Simmons believes that rap is not a source of


enslavement, but of empowerment because of the many young hip-hoppers aspiring and beginning their own entrepreneurial enterprises.

W.E.B. DuBois affirmed that worrying over the African-American past is a waste of time and energy and that blacks and whites should share reciprocal cause and effect in the status and relationship of blacks and whites which will allow for empowerment. He stated,

I insist that the question of the future is how best to keep these millions from brooding over the wrongs of the past and the difficulties of the present, so that all their energies may be bent toward a cheerful striving and cooperation with their white neighbors toward a larger, juster, and fuller future.... It is not enough for the Negroes to declare that color-prejudice is the sole cause of their social condition, nor for the white South to reply that their social condition is the main cause of prejudice. They both act as reciprocal cause and effect, and a change in neither alone will bring the desired effect. Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent. The Negro cannot stand the present reactionary tendencies and unreasoning drawing of the color-line indefinitely without discouragement and retrogression. And the condition of the Negro is ever the excuse for further discrimination. Only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line in this critical period of the Republic shall justice and right triumph.520

One other controversy exists concerning empowerment and enslavement. This ongoing debate concerns whether rappers and other hip-hoppers are evolving into citizens who are pro- or anti-establishment. Because of more involvement in the political aspects of American society, many see this hip-hop generation as moving toward empowerment. But despite added involvement in political affairs, there is also a hip-hop faction that “encourages” crime witnesses to keep quiet. Because of the “Snitch” campaign, many neighborhood “watchdogs” have not conveyed information to

the local police with reference to community crimes either because they disagree with the disproportionate amount of African-American males who are currently incarcerated or because of loyalty to “their gangsta friends.” And finally, one last group of people is afraid for their lives.

Cultural memory continues to predominate in African-American music and rap music in the tradition of exposing (and even inciting) controversial and related subject matters. Cultural memory also exists in the form of signification. Both forms are directly related to the oral culture with which rap music is based. This, in some ways, presents a problem because despite the extensive usage of the oral tradition, rappers live in a Western society that is predominantly gauged by the written word and judged by those standards. Perhaps the biggest controversy/problem or even tragedy lies in the fact that rappers want to continue to value the oral culture over the written in a society that lends itself to different traditions. Valuing and continuing aspects of oral culture in terms of creativity is advantageous because in remembering the past, one begins to have a sense of well-being, self esteem and identity, and sense of belonging.

Embracing aspects of a written society will allow a disenfranchised people to become enfranchised thereby gaining self-empowerment. Perchance there should be more compromising or negotiating between the two worlds/cultures.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

As generally known, research concerning rap and hip-hop culture is expanding. But despite this expansion there is a need for more investigation on determining the cultural lineage between African society and hip-hop and rap music. Establishing the interconnection will aid the general population in understanding that the black race is not one of inferiority, but one whose criteria and customs were and are different in many ways.

Not only would it be interesting to delve into the African connection, but it would also be beneficial to see the extent of rap’s global influence especially since rap music has become a prominent musical genre among popular cultures of other countries. Of
note, would be the extent to which local musical influences have syncretized with those of America; the type of lyrical themes used in the music and videos; and lastly, whether black folk culture serves as the compelling force in the creation and performance of this music.

There is also a need to explore the effects of rap music and hip-hop culture on young fans of other ethnicities. If these fans are able to indulge in this music without experiencing the same harmful effects as experienced by young African-Americans and Latinos, then it would be necessary to explore this issue. In finding the answer, these two affected groups might be able to adopt this ideology of other ethnicities which will allow them to both appreciate the music, but adhere to a healthier mental perception and positive self esteem.

Finally, it would be advantageous to explore the effects of hip-hop culture and rap music on race and cultural relationships. It would be interesting to learn if and to what extent hip-hop and rap music have improved or worsened relationships between the races. In essence, it would be valuable to examine exactly how rap and hip-hop culture has affected the general American and international society.
GLOSSARY

Answer song: a song which responds to or answers another song. (65)

Anti-intellectualism: a dislike for intellectual pursuits usually resulting from the pursuance of unrelated endeavors. (163)

Battle: a dialogic verbal contest involving two people who display the virtuosic ability to undercut the opponent. Battles occur in two forms: rap battling and freestyle battling. (63)

Beat boxing: the art of producing musical sounds, particularly percussion, without the use of instruments. Beatboxing is also known in hip-hop lingo as vocal percussion and multivocalism (84)

Beef: a rivalry or dispute between two rappers (or any two people). (66)

Benjamins: urban slang for one hundred dollar bills. (205)

Blaxploitation: an American film genre of the 1970s movies which catered to African-Americans and which featured pimps, prostitutes, and criminal types. (95)

Bling-bling: gold (and diamond) jewelry worn by rappers and other hip-hoppers. Bling-bling also refers to expensive materialistic things and even money. (101)

Braggadocio rap lyrics: rap lyrics in which the artist brags about fame, riches, and rapping skills. (175)

Cakewalk: a plantation dance performed by slave couples in which a cake was awarded to the couple expressing themselves best. (38)

Call-and-response: an African-derived manner of performance which entails a leader singing the melody with a chorus or group responding to or echoing the leader. (62)

Chickenhead: a woman who engages in oral fellatio activities. (129)

Colorism: racial prejudice via color discrimination within the African-American culture which highly privileges the lighter complexioned/more European-like black person over the darker-hued/more negroid-like black person. (141)

Conscious rap: rap whose focus and themes relate to political and social awareness and issues. This type is not considered to be mainstream. (183)
Corpophone: sounds which are produced through the use of the body whether vocal or bodily, in the production of music. (86)

Crunk: to get cranked-up, wild, crazy. Crunk is also hyper-aggressive subgenre of (hip-hop) rap music born in the South and that is not unlike punk rock for the dance floor. The word “crunk” is a portmanteau of the words “crazy” and “drunk.” (99)

Cultural memory: the ability to access and relay previous communal information with or without the benefit of formal training. (22)

Cutting contest: a competition of virtuosic display between musicians performing on the piano (or other instrument) which featured the winner as being the most skilled. (39)

Dissing: to disrespect or show no regard for one’s opponent. It also refers to embarrassing or criticizing another person. (64)

Double-talking: an indirect, rhetorical way of talking in which the speaker speaks in an ambiguous fashion. Normally, there are overt and covert meanings. This was especially prevalent in African-American spirituals. (77)

Dozens (a.k.a. “playing the dozens”): African-American slave derived contest involving a verbal duel of insults. (39)

Edutainment: a term believed to be coined by KRS-One which means that rap can serve an educational and an entertainment purpose at the same time. (186)

Gangsta: urban slang for gangster. (81)

Ham Theory: The belief that Africans were cursed to be slaves because of many enslavers’ belief that Africans were the direct descendants of Ham (Biblical Noah’s son). (223)

Ho’: Urban slang for “whore.” (5)

Hood: is the slang name for neighborhood and/or ghetto. (72)

Hoodrat: a woman of ill-repute. (129)

Jheri curl: an African-American hairstyle prevalent in the 1980s. (79)
Minstrelsy: an American musical theater genre which “officially” began in 1843 and was also called blackface minstrelsy. Its actors appeared in blackface. (93)

New Negro: a progressive Harlem Renaissance movement based on Alain Locke’s book of the same name. The “New Negro” sought to transform black self-identity through artistic creations and the bringing to the forefront the cultural contributions of American blacks. (168)

Nigga: Urban slang for “nigger.” (5)

N-Word: a more politically correct manner of saying “nigger.” (15)

O.G.: abbreviation of the words “original gangsta.” (110)

187: the police code for murder. (80)

Old-School Rap: the first kind of rap music which began in the 1970s in New York and took place before the era of gangsta rap. Old-school rap’s theme focuses on partying. (174)

Organic intellectuals: individuals, according to Antonio Gramsci, who establish ideas that mould humanity while creating opposition to society’s dominant rule. These intellectuals are not necessarily formally trained but are revolutionaries that act on behalf of the subalterns. (245)

Payola: a pay-for-play manner in which money is exchanged for the playing of certain music usually “suggested” by independent promoters who represent particular record companies and artists. (149)

Pigeon: women who date under false pretenses with the expectation of being financially remunerated for dinner. (137)

Post-Traumatic Slavery Disorder: a derivative of post-traumatic stress disorder which its discoverers believe manifests itself in drug abuse, broken families, crime, and low educational attainment in segments of the black community. It is deemed to be directly linked to the trauma of slavery, and affects the general black population whose ancestors were enslaved. (224)

Sampling: the art of technologically integrating old or pre-existing music with new music to establish newer hybrid forms. (86)

Shortie: an attractive girl. (122)
**Shorts**: movies that last 20 minutes or shorter. (96)

**Skeezer**: a woman with loose morals. (139)

**Signifying(signifyin’, also signifyin(g))**: 1. an African-derived tradition refers to the fluid use of language in a subversive manner as a means of resistance through the conveyance of double meanings. 2. a competitive spirit of jesting and undercutting between two people. Also known by various names such as woofin’, signifyin’, playing the dozens, trash talking, toasts, snaps, and beefs. (3)

**Street credibility**: to have the ability to use whatever it takes to survive. This also means to live the gangsta life that one raps about. (82)

**Turntable**: Machine which has a revolving center for the purpose of playing, scratching or mixing vinyl records and music. (193)

**Wanksta**: a person who acts/looks like a gangster or thug, but has never done anything gangsterish or thug-like besides acting or looking like one. It can be directed toward any race or ethnicity. (83)
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Discography


Videographic and Broadcast Television Specials


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Levern G. Rollins-Haynes was born in Charleston, but was reared in Goose Creek, SC. After graduating from Charleston Southern University with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Therapy and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, she attended the University of South Carolina in Columbia where she earned a Master of Music in Piano Pedagogy.

Following graduation, she began several years of work as a music therapist specializing in children and adults with special needs, as well as older adults. During this time she also served as a church pianist, private and adjunct music instructor, and freelance pianist and singer, while later teaching music to pre-K through Eighth graders.

Her deep interest in music allowed her to publish two children’s recordings (Music for Me, Pts. 1 & 2), participate in the recordings of choral works with the Choraliers Music Club of Charleston and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, and perform in the Charleston Symphony Orchestra’s production of Porgy and Bess. As may be seen, her interest in music and levels of participation are many and varied.

Her non-musical interests include reading, crocheting, sewing, and collecting early African-American movies.