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A Historical Analysis: The Evolution of Commercial Rap Music

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: THE EVOLUTION OF COMMERCIAL RAP MUSIC

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I dedicated this to the collective loving memory of Marlena Curry-Gatewood,
Dr. Milton Howard Johnson and Rashad Kendrick Williams.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
METHODS	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
LIMITATIONS	14
THE EARLY ERA	19
THE GOLDEN ERA	32
THE RISE OF GANGSTA RAP	53
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996	74
POST TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT (1998-PRESENT)	95
DISCUSSION	141
FINAL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION	146
REFERENCES	150
DISCOGRAPHY	155
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	158

ABSTRACT

Detractors of the current lyrical content of Hip Hop music claim it has devolved to the proliferation of the gangsta image as the defacto voice of contemporary Hip Hop culture. However, the factors that influenced the evolution of rap music have gone unexamined. The current research is a historical analysis that attempts to document the origins of commercial rap music and the factors and events that drastically affected its development as an art form. These factors include but are not limited to the discovery of white suburban males as the primary consumers of gangsta rap, which led to the genre garnering the most mainstream and commercial appeal, and the research examines how the deregulatory statutes of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 created an unnatural progression of the music that has resulted in the stifling of socially conscious artists and the promotion of hardcore rap music into a commercially lucrative global commodity.

Results of the analysis show that the early commercial rap lyrical content began as a cultural response to the socioeconomic oppression of inner-city African-Americans, and lyrics were geared towards a party atmosphere in the late 1970s and early 1980s before progressing to the addressing of social issues plaguing the black community. The analysis also suggests that because of the differences in which gang culture developed in New York City and Los Angeles, respectively, two very distinct and separate cradles of Hip Hop civilization were formed. The New York artists were geared towards socially conscious ideals while West Coast artists took a much more confrontational approach and created what is now referred to as gangsta rap. The consequences of white consumption of black popular culture are discussed and are key to

understanding the development of the Hip Hop music industry; the extreme, still- prevalent effects of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 are also examined, as well as the resulting trends in lyrical content.

INTRODUCTION

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated radio station ownership, lifting a regulation that limited ownership media channels to owning no more than 40 stations. Soon after the lifting of this regulation, companies such as Clear Channel and Cumulus bought the majority of local radio stations. After a period of media consolidation and a series of corporate mergers, radio station playlists were nationalized, a maneuver which has stifled the voice of socially conscious musicians and promoted certain genres of music, specifically gangsta rap. This paper illustrates how commercial rap music became a global commodity, how the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has caused a change in the tapestry of Hip Hop music, and points to specific examples of musical styles that have been marginalized. These changes have ensured that the commercialization of Hip Hop culture, and rap music specifically, has led to the music art forms that present a warped representation of the black community as a global commodity.

The current paper's objective is to analyze the history of commercial rap music in a historical context. The analysis of commercial rap music begins with the *Sugarhill Gang's* "Rapper's Delight" in 1979. After their initial success with the first commercial rap single, rap lyrics began to evolve as artists such as *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five* addressed social issues affecting the inner city and *Afrika Bambaataa's* experimentation with the electro-funk musical movement took Hip Hop to a global audience. Lyrical content became more geared towards street consciousness with the arrival of the now defunct Profile Records and Rush Management's *Run-DMC*. Led by Russell Simmons, Def Jam Records was the first major Hip Hop label and Run-DMC were the first Hip Hop artists to attain a crossover white audience during the mid-1980s. Hip Hop's global influence continued to grow with their numerous video appearances on MTV and the production of motion pictures depicting elements of Hip Hop culture. During the 1980s, it was discovered that Hip Hop music was not just limited to black neighborhoods and was being consumed in white suburbia. The music industry then focused its efforts on marketing select music styles to white suburban audiences, thereby shifting music industry practices towards promoting the newly founded gangsta rap genre. This resulted in the superstardom of NWA in the late 1980s, and later, the artists on gangsta rap label Death Row Records beginning in the early 1990s.

Another objective of this study is to give an accurate account of how the lyrical content of commercial rap music developed to its current position and an analysis of the several factors that dictated this development. While the current detractors of Hip Hop culture claim that rap lyrics have supported violence, misogyny, the usage and distribution of narcotics, and sexual conduct, this study supports that these images are strategically projected to the mainstream because of a combination of verbal artistry, socioeconomic oppression, racial conflict, globalism, public policy, and technological advancement that has resulted in being deemed profitable by corporate America. The evolution of party-oriented lyrics at the genesis of commercial rap music to socially conscious messaging will be discussed. The era of socially conscious music and the exploitation of the profitable criminalized black male image helped produce the West Coast gangsta rap genre, which initially was a confrontational cultural response to previously the crack-cocaine epidemic, gang culture, and police brutality. My research also shows the importance of the invention of Soundscan in the early 1990s, and how it was used as a tool by white music executives who had discovered that young suburban white males were the primary consumers of an art form that had been dismissed as a fad, later, labeled a menace to society, before finally becoming a billion dollar global industry.

This research will be potentially contribute to recent discussions regarding artist responsibility, how legislation and socioeconomic factors drastically affect the content within rap lyrics, and how the white consumption of popular culture is the driving force behind the stereotypical images that are presented to a worldwide audience. Rap music, which began as a voice of the oppressed, and an artistic response to the urban decay that plagued New York City and Los Angeles, has now become a global commodity, and its organic roots become less and less prevalent as socially conscious artists are given no mainstream access due to the consolidation of radio and record labels choosing only to promote prominent gangsta rap artists. The historical analysis concludes with a discussion regarding a rap artist's street credibility versus entertainment value. The dominance of the gangsta rap genre in the early to mid-1990s had caused a shift in label marketing practices, as common practices included highlighting an artist's criminal history in an attempt to bolster street credibility, which would boost record sales. During the current cocaine era of rap music (2004-present), these practices have become obsolete, as artists whose individual criminal histories have not been validated, or have even been fabricated, continue to prosper while posturing themselves in the image of the criminalized

Black male. This image continues to drive record sales, which are still primarily being supplied by the white suburban audience.

In 1991, the advent of Soundscan, a revolutionary over-the-counter sales-reporting method, continued to support the fact that white suburban males were the primary purchasing audience of hardcore rap music and gangsta rap artists were heavily promoted. Roots of gangsta rap began with Philadelphia's Schoolly D's "P.S.K.," but eventually it became a West Coast- dominated art form, and the heavy promotion and astronomical record sales caused a rift between East Coast socially conscious rappers and West Coast gangsta rappers. This ultimately was a factor in the negative atmosphere surrounding the still unsolved murders of Hip Hop Culture's two most prominent artists, Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace aka The Notorious B.I.G.. The white consumption of black popular culture eventually led to the genesis of white Hip Hop artists trying to gain recognition in a Black-dominated art form. After many failures, success was finally found with the ascension of a credible white rapper to superstardom, Eminem. Questions that deal with acceptance, authenticity, racism, and cultural theft are explored and issues regarding whether or not his success can be attributed to his skin color, or to his skill and talent as a lyricist. Ironically, the answer is yes, to both questions.

Furthermore, the deaths of Shakur and Wallace and the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 all took place within a year and these events played a pivotal role in the evolution of Hip Hop music. Their deaths also created a national diaspora in which several regions of the United States, specifically the South, were able to develop their own distinct Hip Hop cultures. Gangsta rap eventually evolved to the current prevalent genre of cocaine rap, and the criminalized image of the young Black male continues to be not only the defacto representation of Hip Hop music, but also the most heavily promoted image by the multinational corporations that came about after the "mergermania" caused by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Other effects of the Telecom Act included the consolidation of musical outlets (radio stations and record labels) and the successful commodification of the art form as a product. This commodification resulted in the birth of several gangsta rap subgenres including Mafioso rap, and the current era of cocaine rap.

METHODS

The development of theory is a central activity in organizational research and traditionally, authors have developed theory by combining observations from previous literature, common sense, and experience (Eisenhardt, 1989) Thus, the methodology of the analysis began by reading literature based upon the development of Hip Hop culture, which began in the early 1970s. However, my research was then narrowed to the analysis of commercial rap music, which began with the release of the *Sugarhill Gang's* "Rappers' Delight" in 1979. Common sense would dictate that if one is truly an observer of Hip Hop culture, then they have witnessed the evolution of the lyrical content of rap music. As a child of two U.S. Army veterans, I have experienced these significant changes in subject matter from several regional and national viewpoints.

Kathleen M. Eisenhardt's article, titled *Building Theories from Case Study Research*, contains a table regarding the steps utilized in the process of building theory from case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989). An initial definition of a research question is of vast importance. By defining a research question, it focuses efforts. In this case, the question was how the lyrical content of rap music evolved through its periodic icons. The numerous factors surrounding its evolution up until the Telecommunications Act of 1996 were also analyzed. To do so, I had to thoroughly research the development of commercial rap music up to the Act, and after it's signing. Robert E. Stake offers:

"We expect an inquiry to be carried out so that certain audiences will benefit- not just to swell the archives, but to help persons towards understandings" (Stake, 1978).

Selection of cases (literary works) is an important aspect of building theory from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). While selecting cases, efforts were focused on using theoretically useful cases which replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories. To accomplish this, I selected literature pertaining to Hip Hop culture by several renowned scholars, as well as selected articles from periodicals as my secondary sources. The article subject matter included commentary on trends in Hip Hop music and the analysis of the effects of the Telecommunications Act. The scholarly works presented several historical perspectives of the

evolution of Hip Hop culture, broadly, and rap music more specifically. To show the evolution of lyrical subject matter, the actual lyrics of the icons of each periodic era of rap music were specifically chosen primary sources. This diverse combination of perspectives strengthened my grounding of theory and allowed me to be flexible regarding data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989); Flexibility enabled me to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features, especially the socioeconomic factors that contributes to the criminal/gangsta themes in rap music.

Each literal work that was referenced gives evidence that commercial rap singles proved to be a commodity valued enough by the music industry for entire albums to be released, beginning with *Run-DMC* in the mid-1980s. A historical analysis of the shifts in the music industry, as indicated by the literature, coincided with the evolution of rap music, and was conducted to verify the underlying causes of the changes in lyrical subject matter. These causes included the globalization of rap music, the crack-cocaine epidemic of the 1980s, and the increased role of technology and media to further the development of Hip Hop culture.

A functional knowledge of early Hip Hop artists and their lyrics, and of the socioeconomic conditions affecting inner-city African-American populations are needed to understand the foundation of the socially conscious artistry of the former, and the gangsta rap genre of the latter. An examination of the statutes within the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was undertaken to show its dramatic effects on commercial rap music after its signing. An examination of literature and legislation produced a clear conclusion that the mass consolidation of radio stations and record labels, the discovery of white suburban males as the primary consumers of rap music and their preference of the gangsta rap genre, produced industry marketing practices and initiatives which not only promoted the gangsta image, but stifled the mainstream social commentary in rap music that had been present since its inception. Further research supported the conclusion that the shift caused by legislation has undoubtedly resulted in the emergence of the Mafioso rap era, followed by an age of materialistic lyrical content (the Bling Bling Era), and concluding with the current cocaine era of rap music.

An analysis of recent magazine and online articles, editorials, and the literary contributions of renowned Hip Hop cultural scholars shows that the lyrical content of the cocaine rap era is primarily fixated on entertainment, the quest for high record sales, and the satisfaction of the aforementioned suburban white male demographic. These scholars have offered their views

primarily to summate the political and cultural influences of Hip Hop culture and their projections of its future based on history. The analysis also reveals that rap artists' street credibility, which had previously had been used as an important marketing factor for gangsta rap artists during the 1990s, has dwindled in influence and importance because of a growing white youth demographic, unfamiliar with the accurate representations of inner city African American communities, that favors fabricated movie-like storylines and caricatures as opposed to the truthful experiences of artists.

The reading of literary works based on the history of Hip Hop culture by the following authors will allow for a functional knowledge of the genesis of Hip Hop culture and its historical development: *Can't Stop Won't Stop* by Jeff Chang, *Hip Hop America* by Nelson George, *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, edited by Alan Light, and *Somebody Scream* by Marcus Reeves, which specifically discusses the development of rap music by the musical icons of each era. Using these sources, it chronologically showed how these musical icons rose to prominence due to several factors that specifically contributed to their success. Further commentary of the socioeconomic factors and historical events that shaped the birth and development of Hip Hop culture can be found in *The Hip Hop Generation* by Bakari Kitwana, *Black Noise* by Tricia Rose, and *Hip Hop Revolution* by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar. These sources provide a voice for the environment that birthed Hip Hop culture, and eventually helped nurture three separate cradles of cultural expression and their individual lyrical content. As previously stated, knowledge of earlier artists and specifically, their lyrics, is integral to the understanding of their change in prevalent subject matter. A combined analysis of the lyrics and the factors that influenced them will enable a full understanding of the development of rap music up until the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

An analysis of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 showed that its statutes lifted the caps of radio ownership, which allowed conglomerates such as Cumulus and Clear Channel to purchase hundreds of local radio stations nationwide; the previous cap on ownership by a single entity had

been 40 stations. The inevitable conclusion was nationalized playlists and the mass mergers of major and independent record labels to satisfy the demands of competition. Further analysis of the after effects of the Act shows that not only was the voice of local artistry stifled from mainstream exposure, but because of the discovery of suburban white males' affinity for the gangsta rap genre, the gangsta image would be heavily promoted, and the socially conscious artists' voice would be silenced. These conclusions are based upon observations of Tricia Rose's *Hip Hop Wars*, S. Craig Watkins' *Hip Hop Matters*, and M.K. Asante Jr.'s *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop*. Each work presents similar theories regarding the proliferation of the gangsta image to the mainstream and the Telecommunications Act's undeniable influence of rap music since 1996. Those theories were combined to postulate that the Act was just one of several contributing factors to the development of rap music.

Periodical sources such as *The Source*, *Vibe*, and *XXL* also offer more personalized sources of information and analysis, as an artist's words in interviews can sometimes give a more accurate depiction of the time period in which the issue was published. For example, I used *Vibe: Tupac Shakur*, a compilation of every article, editorial and interview conducted with Tupac, one of the all-time best-selling musical artists. From 1991 to his untimely demise in 1996, he offers a personal, poignant insight on issues such as politics, the music industry, racism, and crime, each playing a prevalent role in the development of Hip Hop culture, and rap music in general. Furthermore, Shakur was specifically chosen as an example of a person who was affected by many of the factors discussed in the current research because he is one of the best-selling commercial rap artists of all time and an example of emceeing in Hip Hop Culture.

After analyzing all the data compiled (lyrics and events), familiarity was gained with the information was able to be viewed beyond initial impressions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Trends and

connections between rap music and socioeconomic conditions of inner-city Black neighborhoods in New York City and Los Angeles were evident. According to Eisenhardt, analyzing data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process (Eisenhardt, 1989). As Miles and Huberman wrote:

“One cannot ordinarily follow how a researcher got from 3600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions, sprinkled with vivid quotes though they may be” (Eisenhardt, 1989)

Emergent concepts included how MCs (rappers) were portrayed in terms of their success, as opposed to how they were a product of unseen factors, initially socioeconomic factors, technological advances, and later, the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Eisenhardt says a key to this process of enfolding is to consider a broad range of literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). Literature discussing similar findings is important as well because it ties together underlying similarities in phenomena normally not associated with each other (Eisenhardt, 1989). Each work of literature referenced either addressed Hip Hop culture from a historical perspective, or from the view of a participant in the culture, as opposed to that of a detractor. However, works by Rose, Kitwana, and Asante Jr. often hurl blame at the corporate structure that governs commercial rap music. The research takes this stance a step further by suggesting that not only is the corporate structure to blame, but has been specifically responsible for the process beginning with the discovery of the suburban white male demographic, the advent of Soundscan, the mainstreaming of the criminalized black male image, and the heavy promotion of gangsta rap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hip Hop is a relatively new musical genre, with rap music emerging towards the late 1970s. The culture surrounding Hip Hop is being studied within academia, but few academic papers have been published that critically examine the cultural norms of Hip Hop, let alone the narrower topic of rap music. Derek Evans, of the University of Missouri-Columbia, titled his 2008 Masters' Thesis "*It's Bigger Than Hip Hop*": *Popular Rap Music and the Politics of the Hip Hop Generation*. His research discusses how authors and supporters of Hip Hop Culture have suggested that rap music has the potential to serve as a vehicle for the next stage of the Civil Rights Movement, and specifically, which political issues are most important to the Hip Hop Generation and what popular rap songs have addressed those issues. Ironically, M. K. Asante Jr.'s uses Hip Hop as a springboard for a larger discussion about the social and political issues affecting this generation, and how the music reflects those issues in his work entitled *It's Bigger than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip Hop Generation*. My view is the lyrical content in rap music ultimately shifts with the global and domestic circumstances during a particular era, as rap music has always been a reflection of American society and its effect on African-Americans in urban communities. After the acceptance of gangsta rap as the most authentic representation of those communities, the revelation of prominent white consumerism caused the music industry to shift towards only promoting artists with violent and misogynistic lyrical content.

In his book, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*, Bakari Kitwana established the birth years 1965-1984 as the age group for this generation. Author Jeff Chang alludes to this age demographic in his groundbreaking work, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*. The Civil Rights Movement was most prominent during the 1960s and included the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy

in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965, and Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. The late 1960s also birthed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, whose militancy, combined with their strained relationship with law enforcement, influenced the youth that would go on to initiate the genesis of Hip Hop culture in the 1970s, thus creating the aforementioned bridge between the Civil Rights Movement and the Post-Black power Generation (Hip Hop Generation). In the 1980s, rap music began to deal with the social issues affecting black Americans that had previously been addressed in the 1960s, thus becoming a legitimate genre of music, as opposed to a passing fad.

Marcus Reeves, author of *Somebody Scream*, details rap music's rise to prominence in the aftershock of the Black Power movement. He describes the evolution of the role of the MC (rapper) from Nuevo entertainer to cultural/racial spokesperson and socio-political lightning rod for black America after the demise of the Black Power movement. The MC's role has been complicated by numerous factors. These include socio-economic oppression, the complicated relationship between black Americans and law enforcement, past and present, the rise of street gang activity and the desperation of the 1980s crack-cocaine epidemic, globalization and technological advancement, and the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Reeves work was referenced within my analysis to further the discussion of the prominent practitioners of the emceeing (rapping) element of Hip Hop Culture, and how the characterizations of these practitioners have been altered due to rap's increasing financial worth. The timing of the aforementioned piece of public policy correlated with events that have continued to impact the evolution of rap music.

According to Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, in his book, *Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture of Politics and Rap*, 1996 was the first year that Hip Hop albums achieved a billion dollars in sales.

Numerous album releases of Hip Hop icons such as *Tupac Shakur (All Eyez On Me)*, Jay-Z (*Reasonable Doubt*), *Outkast (ATLiens)*, and *Nas (It Was Written)* shaped the lyrical content of Hip Hop artists for years to come. This was an exceptionally pivotal time period for Hip Hop music because the image of success had begun to be defined in such a powerful manner. Because these albums were released in 1996, future artists, then, would come to model themselves after such artists due to their financial success, a trend that was heavily promoted by the signing of the Telecommunications Act that same year.

In Reeves' work, he charts rap music's evolution through its periodic icons. For example, the eighth chapter is titled "The myth of Thug Power," and is organized around the experiences of *Tupac Shakur*; the ninth chapter, "Ghetto Fab Rising," is dedicated to the *Notorious B.I.G.* and Sean "Puffy" Combs; and the tenth chapter, titled "The Ice Age," refers to the age of materialistic lyrical content that accompanied the rise of *Jay-Z* to stardom, following the still-unsolved murders of Shakur in September 1996, and B.I.G. in March 1997. Reeves also notes that by 1999, 75% of all rap music was being purchased by white consumers, and that "black thugness" had become rap's biggest appeal to a pop (i.e. white) audience.

This trend of white consumerism began in the late 1980s and early 1990s following the high record sales of *NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes)* albums *Straight Outta Compton* and *Efil4zaggin (Niggaz4Life spelled backwards)* and commodification of Black popular culture.

Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop* offers a historical account of the socioeconomic conditions in New York City and Los Angeles that preceded the genesis of their two separate and very distinct forms of Hip Hop music. One (New York) shifted towards a Black Nationalist and socially conscious themed-type of rap music, while the other (Los Angeles) shifted towards gang culture

and a new subgenre called gangsta rap. These two movements conflicted with one another, with gangsta rap ultimately influencing New York's offshoot, Mafioso rap, and became the primary representation of Hip Hop music. These separate cradles of rap music expanded to include the development of a third cradle of cultural expression in the Southern United States.

In Tricia Rose's *Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why It Matters*, she discusses the prevalence of the gangsta/pimp/ho trinity as the images that the commercial rap music industry has chosen to project in the interests of selling records to the detriment of the black community. The trinity is not discussed in this analysis, but rather, how the projection of these images came about, and why. Despite the mainstreaming of rap music, and its thug fascination, according to Reeves, the music is still the unmitigated voice of young black and brown Americans, as he traces the MC's ascent out of rap music's first commercialization to become the prototypical man/woman of the people.

Other works referenced to explain the role of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 in the evolution of the lyrical content of rap music include S. Craig Watkins' *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* and *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture*, a collection of narratives edited by Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle. Specific artists and their lyrical subject matter are referenced in the context of development from Michael Eric Dyson's *Born To Use Mics*, which focuses on Queens, NY rapper Nas, *From Pieces To Weight*, which is the autobiography of fellow Queens rapper 50 Cent, and *Vibe: Tupac Shakur*, which is a collection of articles written about the fallen rap star, who was gunned down, ironically, in 1996.

My research initially showed that Hip Hop Culture evolved in the aftermath of the Civil Right Movement. It then produced the art of emceeing (rapping) as one of its primary elements, and eventually evolved from an art form into a global commodity. The literary sources support rap music's evolution from party music, to addressing social issues, to the conflicting views of Afrocentricity and gangsta rap. The recognition of the suburban white male demographic as the primary consumers of rap is also a prevalent theme within the literature of these scholars. Furthermore, their consumption of black popular culture shaped the lyrical content of commercial rap music immediately preceding the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which caused an unnatural progression of rap lyrics, and served as precursors to the lyrical content of rap music today.

LIMITATIONS

The position I have taken is that of a participant and scholar of the culture, and researcher of the culture in a historical context. My ethnicity correlates with rap music being a black-dominated art form and my status as the child of U.S. Army veterans enables me to have a diverse understanding of rap music and its effects on the population from a multiregional, and even multinational perspective. I have resided in the Midwest, The Northeast, and Southern regions of the United States, as well as Europe and Central America. This is extremely important when analyzing Hip Hop culture and its influence in a global context, which is discussed in Dalton Higgins' *Hip Hop World* and *The Vinyl Ain't Final*, edited by Dipsannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle.

The limitations of this thesis are primarily confined to the perspective in which the information analyzed is portrayed. These limitations are affected by the ethnic background and personal value system of the researcher and the validated opinions of Hip Hop cultural scholars. Also, the broad definition of commercial rap music is subject to interpretation, as even though the gangsta rap genre is the most prevalent form of rap music promoted in the mainstream, some socially conscious artists manage to garner more mainstream appeal than their lyrical peers. Mainly, limitations of the interpretation of the information presented is due to a focus on commercial rap music according to its capitalist connotations.

The conspiracy theory of the generational devolution of rap music has been thoroughly discussed in Hip Hop circles. The combination of the socioeconomic factors resulting in its birth and development, caused by governmental powers, and public policy and local, state, and federal legislation has often been labeled as a contrived effort to control the minds of inner city youth

based on the influence of rap music. That particular perspective was not discussed within this analysis. Rather, the state of the music has been analyzed as opposed to the state of the population that it catered to at its inception.

Hip Hop culture, and rap music in general, has sometimes been identified as a continuation of the Civil Rights/Black Power movement, and is briefly expounded upon in Marcus Reeves' *Somebody Scream*. Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop* also addresses the racial tensions that fuel the subject matter in rap lyrics. This is specifically personified in the Afrocentricity of *Public Enemy* lyrics and the anti-establishment lyrics of *NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes)*. This theory was not analyzed in detail in interests of focusing on the specific continuity of commercial rap music's evolution as a global commodity.

While this thesis was written from a communications perspective, as evidenced by the emphasis on the impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, rap music can be analyzed in a sociological context just as easily. While the Act's influence is clearly referenced, the socioeconomic factors including race, crime, and poverty that birthed Hip Hop culture and continue to influence it to this day can also be recognized. In the interests of maintaining focus from a communicative perspective, this limitation was exhibited.

Commercial rap music was analyzed, as opposed to the full spectrum of artists including socially conscious and alternative artists who have not made much of a financial contribution to the culture, but have made an artistic contribution. An example would be the lyrics of rappers *Mos Def* and *Talib Kweli*, known collectively as *Black Star*. While they are not mentioned in this analysis, that does not undermine their lyrical superiority to other rap artists nor does it accurately display their contributions to the culture musically in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The female MC and her role was also not researched in an effort to maintain focus. The early female artists such as *Roxanne Shante* and *MC Lyte* made valuable contributions to the culture in a typically male-dominated art form. The socio-political lyrical content of *Salt N Pepa*, which dealt with issues of misogyny and sex, cannot be forgotten as well. The lyrical prowess of Fugees' *Lauryn Hill* is a clear contrast from the sex-fueled and materialistic lyrical escapades of *Lil' Kim* and *Foxy Brown*. While the contribution of female rap artists is of equal importance, it was considered overwhelming to extend the current analysis beyond the most influential male artists. Clearly, the role of women in the development of Hip Hop Culture is an important topic, one that is deserving of a thorough examination.

The researcher's personal value system, ethnic background, and knowledge of the banditry of black cultural artistry may be also viewed as a limitation. One who has respect for the culture and its divine genesis obviously has views which are contradictory to those with no organic connection to the culture. For example, the commodification of culture and art is standard in today's business and industry practices, as Hip Hop's status as a global commodity far outweighs its value as a cultural response to oppression, an afterthought in today's global, capitalist economic system.

Last but not least, an identifiable limitation can be seen in the ongoing emergence of new trends within the music industry. Piracy, the advent of MP3 files, and the continuing influence and usage of the internet are very important factors that were not discussed in the interests of maintaining focus of rap music being analyzed from the researcher's perspective. Furthermore, artists whom were prevalent in the gangsta, Mafioso, and cocaine rap genres have shifted to party-oriented and socially conscious themes in their music. Two examples are *Nas* and *Jay-Z*. *Nas'* second album, *It Was Written*, is considered instrumental in initiating the Mafioso rap

genre, whereas his last three releases, *Hip Hop is Dead*, his controversial *Untitled* album (*Nigger*), and *Distant Relatives*, a collaboration with *Damian Marley*, deal with primarily social issues. *Jay-Z's Reasonable Doubt*, also a catalyst of the Mafioso rap era, and his subsequent signings of cocaine rap artists during his reign as President of Def Jam Records, references the socioeconomic factors surrounding the subject matter of his earlier releases, bringing his music to a full circle. As head of his new label, Roc Nation, he has signed artists *J. Cole*, and *Jay Electronica*, who have been characterized as socially aware MCs.

Because Hip Hop Culture, broadly, and rap music, in general, is a relatively new field of study, limited secondary sources was also a limitation. To assist in counteracting this limitation, rap lyrics were used as primary sources and were transcribed from memory.

THE HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL RAP MUSIC

The analysis of the history of commercial rap music will begin with the first rap single in 1979, “Rapper’s Delight,” by the *Sugarhill Gang*. The single was chosen as a starting point because it was the first time an element of Hip Hop culture (MCing) was seen as profitable, and the first time this musical genre was recognized as more than an urban fad. For instance, after the success of “Rapper’s Delight,” numerous singles with party-oriented lyrics were produced by both independent and major labels. During the years immediately following “Rapper’s Delight,” the lyrics and the beats intensified the connection between Hip Hop and rock music. For example, *Afrika Bambaataa* utilized this connection with the release of “Planet Rock” in 1982.

The first song to address social issues was “The Message” by *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*, also released in 1982. This signaled the first shift in subject matter in rap lyrics and continued to evolve into the street-oriented lyrical content of *Run-DMC*. The success of *Run-DMC* was due in part to the globalization of Hip Hop culture in the mid 1980’s. During this time period, numerous motion pictures depicting Hip Hop culture were produced. Run-DMC also successfully crossed over to a white audience because of increased exposure on MTV, which began to play their videos based on their rock-influenced singles. These factors catapulted Hip Hop culture, and rap music specifically, to a global commodity.

THE EARLY ERA

Rapper's Delight

“The modern history of rap probably begins in 1979 with the rap song “Rapper’s Delight,” by the *Sugarhill Gang*. Although there were other (mostly underground) examples of rap, this record is regarded as the signal barrier breaker, birthing Hip-Hop and consolidating the infant art form’s popularity.” (Forman & Neal et al., 2004)

Shortly after its release, it sold fifty thousand copies a day, eventually reaching double platinum. Tom Silverman, who three years later would back Afrika Bambaataa’s *Planet Rock*, was a DJ and journalist covering the dance music scene at the time, and had never seen anything like it.

“I was there in Brooklyn on Fulton Street when they brought ‘Rappers Delight’ in stores, in ’79 right around Christmas-time,” he recalls. “Ten boxes came out of the truck, they went onto the floor and they opened the cardboard boxes and literally handed two copies to everybody in the store who went right to the cash register. They must’ve moved two million records in a month on twelve-inch vinyl just in New York. I said, ‘I gotta be in this business. This is great!’” (Chang, 2005, p.131)

Although the *Fat back Band* released “King Tim III (Personality Jock)” two months prior to the October 1979 release of “Rapper’s Delight,” Fatback’s label, Spring Records, didn’t want to take the risk of being the first label to push rap. (Reeves, 2008, p.21-22) Sylvia Robinson had heard all about the rap phenomenon and was scouring all the clubs in the Bronx and Harlem, trying to figure out if rap could be financially viable. (Chang, 2005, p.129) According to Jeff Chang (2005):

“In retrospect, it makes perfect sense that a no-name group using partly stolen rhymes-the very definition of a crew with no style-would have been the first to tap Hip Hop’s platinum potential. When three anonymous

rappers stepped into Black indie label owner Sylvia Robinson's studios to cut 'Rapper's Delight,' they had no local expectations to fulfill, no street reputations to keep, no regular audience to please, and absolutely no consequences if they failed." (p.129)

The *Sugarhill Gang*'s version of rap successfully captured the feel of Hip Hop music into a fifteen-minute record, telling stories, providing humor, and most importantly, they spoke with slang terminology. Examples of the slang used include "getting some spank" (sex) and "driving off in a def OJay" (a nice Cadillac). Dipannita Basu (2006) notes:

"In the first rap song to hit the Top 40 in the U.S., the *Sugarhill Gang* name-checked the Lincoln Continental and the Sunroof Cadillac in 'Rapper's Delight.' Ever since, rappers have playfully converted shout-outs to profitable endorsements that can deliver companies with the audience demographics that will sell their products." (p.28)

The song's live sampling of Chic's "Good Times" was the *Sugarhill Gang* staying within Hip-Hop music's practice of reconfiguring recorded music and a wise pop move; it's original composition was a major dance hit, selling nine million copies. (Reeves, 2008, p.25) "Rapper's Delight was a hit for two immediate reasons, according to S. Craig Watkins (2005).

"First, there was the timely use of Chic's classic disco recording, "Good Times," which was one of the year's most popular recordings. But rather than use an electronic sample of the song, Sugarhill Records' house band played their own version with Sylvia Robinson providing the bass line herself. Second, the art of talking rhythmically or rapping exclusively over a danceable track offered something quite rare in the world of pop culture, an original idea." (p.15)

Despite their success, the *Sugarhill Gang* weren't embraced by those who considered themselves the true guardians of Hip Hop. (Watkins, 2005, p.18) They were dismissed as a knockoff and considered outsiders exploiting the culture. This was a historic precursor to the street credibility factor, later exhibited in the gangsta rap genre. Even in today's times, protecting the integrity and borders of Hip Hop has been a constant source of conflict. Their triumph produced a paradox; while commercial success established Hip Hop as a legitimate cultural force, it also made it much more difficult to control who participated in the movement. (Watkins, 2005, p.19) Sylvia Robinson herself had no organic connection or entitlement to Hip Hop, or a long term presence in the movement. She, like virtually every record executive that came after her, saw Hip Hop as an opportunity to make money. Consequently, Sugarhill's reign as the premier recording label of Hip Hop ended as abruptly as it began because they never understood the need to develop a connection to the roots of the culture. (Watkins, 2005) Between 1979 and 1983, Sugarhill Records was able to outmaneuver rival labels in the budding rap music industry. However, by 1983, a combination of factors including the rise of hungrier labels with closer ties to Hip Hop's pulse (the streets), squabbles with artists over royalties, lawsuits, and slowly budding competition from major labels turned rap music into an intensely competitive industry that eventually upended Sugarhill's status as the top label in rap music. (Watkins, 2005, p.19)

One of the charges made against Sugarhill Records is that "Rapper's Delight" diluted the raw rhymes and street cadences that captured so much of Hip Hop's vitality. I feel this was a precursor to the conflict between later "pop" rap artists and gangsta rap artists of the 1990s. Sylvia Robinson has been both reviled and revered for her role in establishing rap music's commercial identity. Even though she established "pop" rap as a commercially viable genre, she played a pivotal role in making the recording that established rap music's legacy as a politically viable form of music. (Watkins, 2005, p.20)

The overnight success of the *Sugarhill Gang* transformed the music industry as both artists and labels scrambled to cash in on the new phenomenon. Major labels such as Mercury Records, released "Christmas Rappin" by *Kurtis Blow*, just weeks after the debut of "Rapper's Delight" (Greenberg et al., 1999). It eventually sold over 600,000 copies. His next single, "The Breaks," was an instant commercial success, and the second rap single to certify gold. Blow was the first artist to sign with a major label and embark on a national tour (Reeves, 2008, p.26). Most

notably, he pushed rap further into the commercial realm by constructing his rhymes to the formula of popular music, as “The Breaks” was the first commercial rap single to have a chorus and a bridge. While “Rapper’s Delight” was merely three MCs rapping, “The Breaks” became the first rap song built around a concept or a hook (Reeves, 2008, p.26).

The club-going experience grew increasingly passive due to the swift replacement of the DJ as the primary representative of Hip Hop culture with the MC. The b-boys (break dancers) disappeared, and the attention of the masses was on the “man with the mike.” Charlie Ahearn says “Nobody was dancing. Period! Rap became the focal point. MCs were onstage and people were looking at them.” (Chang, 2005, p.132) The new independent rap industry, with its fear of music publishers, rendered the DJ obsolete, as they were no longer the center of the music. Originally, the lyrical content of the first rap songs referenced the DJ.

Planet Rock & The Message

The next big influence on rap music came in the form of *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*, who signed with Sugarhill Records to reach a wider radio audience after the success of their 1980 single, “Superrappin.” Their leader, *DJ Grandmaster Flash*, was a member of Hip Hop culture’s Holy Trinity (which also includes *DJ Kool Herc* and *Afrika Bambaataa*). The group’s next single, “Freedom,” displayed Flash’s DJing talents and the Furious Five’s mic skills, and was the first complete embodiment of the energy, creativity, and excitement of a Hip Hop jam that had ever been recorded (Reeves, 2008, p.29)

After cutting two singles with Paul Winley and being disappointed with the results, *Afrika Bambaataa* met Tom Silverman, a white music journalist who had started a record label for twelve-inch dance singles. (Chang, 2005) Under Silverman’s label, Tommy Boy Records, Bambaataa released “Jazzy Sensation” in November 1981. In 1982, Bambaataa, along with the Soulsonic Force, released the cosmic hit “Planet Rock” and kicked off the electro-funk revolution. Jeff Chang (2005) says:

“Planet Rock” was Hip Hop’s universal invitation, a hypnotic vision of one world under a groove, beyond race, poverty, sociology and geography. The Soulsonic Force shouted, ‘No work or play, our world is free. Be what you be, just be!’” (p.172)

According to Silverman, the song cost \$800 to make and sold 650,000 copies, but its importance would be felt far beyond the number of copies it sold. “‘Planet Rock’ had more impact than any record I’ve ever been involved in,” Silverman says (Chang, 2005, p.173).

“The only record I can think of in the Hip Hop movement that maybe had more of an impact was ‘Rappers Delight’ because that’s the first one that opened the door. But ‘Planet Rock’ took it in a whole ‘nother way. That was the record that initiated that it wasn’t just an urban thing; it was inclusive...That’s when they started pouring in from France and England to cover Hip Hop. That’s when Hip Hop became global.” (Chang, 2005, p.173)

With the heavily synthesized sound of Europe’s new wave rock influencing the electro-funk era, “Planet Rock” was the first rap record to bridge the gap between Hip Hop and rock music. Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force pushed Hip Hop culture and rap music into the collective consciousness of the post-Black Power generation, using the music as a tool for social change and mind expansion. (Reeves, 2008, p.34) They weren’t just pioneering rap’s commercial importance. They were expanding rap music’s artistic and intellectual importance (Reeves, 2008, p.35).

Most Hip Hop scholars acknowledge *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s* “The Message” as rap’s initial foray into social and political commentary. The song was a revealing window into the conditions of urban blight that were ravaging many of America’s major cities in the early 1980s (Watkins, 2005, p.20). Dyson (2004) offers the following:

“As it evolved, rap began to describe and analyze the social, economic, and political factors that led to its emergence and development: drug addiction, police brutality, teen pregnancy, and various forms of material deprivation. This new development was both expressed and precipitated by *Kurtis Blow’s* “The Breaks” and by the most influential and important rap song to emerge in rap’s early history, “The Message” by *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*. The picture this song painted of inner city life for black Americans—the hues of dark social misery and stains of profound urban

catastrophe-screached against the canvas of most suburban sensibilities.”
(p.61-62)

Dyson cites these lyrics as an example:

You'll grow up in the ghetto living second rate/ And your eyes will sing a
song of deep hate/ The places you play and where you stay/ Looks like one
great big alleyway/ You'll admire all the number book takers/ Thugs,
pimps, and pushers and the big money makers/ Drivin' big cars, spendin'
twenties and tens, and you want to grow up to be just like them... (p.62)

With MC *Melle Mel* taking the lyrical lead, “The Message” proved rap music could be more than just a novelty. (Greenberg, 1999) The desperation and rage felt in the black community was displayed in the hook “It’s like a jungle, sometimes, it makes me wonder, how I keep from going under.” Mentioning issues of debt, police harassment, and incarceration, MC’s could no longer ignore the idea of seriously dealing with issues facing their community. The opening lines, “Broken glass everywhere, people pissin’ on the stairs, you know they just don’t care,” resonated with inner city populations nationwide. Mark Anthony Neal (2004) states:

“Melle Mel’s narrative portrays the transformation of the individual spirit within a context that offers little or no choice or freedom for those within it...the fate of the individual spirit living within the parameters of the postindustrial urban landscape has been consigned at birth to live a short and miserable life...Hip Hop was the first popular form of black music that offered little or no hope to its audience. The fatalistic experience has become a standard trope of urban based Hip Hop...Melle Mel is cognizant of the “role model” void produced by middle-class flight and the lack of quality institutions to offset the influence of the illicit underground economy...he identifies the failure of inner-city schools to provide a necessary buffer against urban malaise” (Neal et al., 2004, p.372).

“The Message,” along with Flash’s “New York, New York,” pioneered the social awakening of rap into a form combining social protest, musical creation, and cultural expression (Dyson et al. 2004). Unlike its commercial rap predecessors, “The Message,” with its midtempo

synthesized beat, was a song to be *heard* more than one for dancing (Reeves, 2008, p.36). It emerged as one of the biggest Hip Hop hits of all time despite never making the pop Top 40; but it reached #4 on the R&B charts and was certified platinum. Besides its obvious financial viability, far reaching effects of its success included another boost for the MC over the DJ, and corporately, rap's realignment towards copyrights, trademarks, agents, lawyers, and an expanded global audience (Chang, 2005, p.178). Also, while "Rapper's Delight" proved that a pop song could sell, "The Message" proved that a place for socially conscious rap music also existed in the marketplace (Watkins, 2005, p.21).

With rap music, record executives realized there were potentially many more millions of fans, and the number of rap groups and crews significantly increased. This is when the marketing practices of commercial rap music began to take form. (Chang, 2005) In the next fifteen years, Hip Hop moved away from the parks and community centers and the clubs and into the studio (Chang, 2005, p.133). Independent labels invested in the research and development of Hip Hop, specifically rap music, to fit music industry standards, to rationalize and exploit the new product, and how to find, capture, package, and sell it. Efficiency and cost cutting measures resulted in six-man groups dropping to two, and fifteen-minute party raps evolved to three-minute radio singles. (Chang, 2005) As Jeff Chang states, "The tension between culture and commerce would become one of the main storylines of the Hip Hop generation" (Chang, 2005, p.134), referring to a construct that began in the 1980s and is still prevalent today.

Run-DMC

The reception given to "The Message" by rock media (*Rolling Stone* gave the song a five-star review) foreshadowed a longstanding kinship between Hip Hop and the teenage male rock audience. Nelson George says the chief exploiter of this relationship has been former Def Jam Records head Russell Simmons (George, 1999, p.65). Def Jam Records and Russell's now defunct Rush Management company have, at one time or another, been home base for many of the artistically and commercially important acts in Hip Hop history (George, 1999, p.82). *Run DMC*, a trio from Queens, was comprised of Joseph "Run" Simmons, Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, and Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell. They were managed by Russell, Run's older brother, and signed a single deal with Profile Records for \$2,000. The single, "It's Like That/Sucker MCs," sold 250,000 copies. (Light, 1997) With eight hundred dollars, Simmons

began Def Jam Records with NYU student Rick Rubin, a Hip Hop fan, and long-haired Jewish punk rocker from Long Island. The white hipsters who had been intrigued by Hip Hop in its earlier graffiti and break dancing forms had also become fans of the music, which influenced the coverage of early rap records in periodicals such as the *Village Voice*, *SoHo Weekly News*, and other Lower Manhattan journals. The early work of Simmons' Rush Management was behind *Kurtis Blow's* groundbreaking career; the push Russell gave *Run-DMC* wasn't propelled by his marketing savvy alone, but by the revolution taking place between both Black and American popular culture (Reeves, 2008, p.44).

“As its fortunes slowly grew, rap was still viewed by the music industry as an epiphenomenal cultural activity that would cease as black youth became bored and moved on to another diversion, as they did with break-dancing and graffiti art. But the successes of the rap group *Run-DMC* moved rap into a different sphere of artistic expression that signaled its increasing control of its own destiny. *Run-DMC* is widely recognized as the progenitor or modern rap's creative integration of social commentary, diverse musical elements, and uncompromised cultural identification, an integration that pushed the music into the mainstream and secured its future as an American musical genre with an identifiable tradition” (Dyson et al., 2004).

Where the Furious Five's “The Message” elevated MCs as poets who could report the grim realities of Black urban America, *Run-DMC* debuted as street-corner prophets addressing the world's problems (Reeves, 2008, p.39). The social commentary and musical elements Dyson referred to are evident on the B-side of “Sucker MCs,” their commercial offering for radio airplay. In “It's Like That,” lyrics such as “Wars goin' on across the sea!/ Street soldiers killing the elderly/What ever happened to unity?” and the extremely pared-down drum tracks they rhymed over set the trio apart from their predecessors. “Sucker MCs” utilized a sonically gigantic beat to usher in the new age (some would even say the new school) of hardcore rap, one drawing its style and focus from the merciless, competitive nature of the MC battle (Reeves, 2008, p.40).

Instead of showcasing a rap artist's ability to **move the crowd** (MC), this new brand of rap utilized in "Sucker MCs" concentrated on downing the competition, dazzling listeners by articulating how other MCs couldn't measure up to one's rhyme skills or ghetto brawn and street credibility (Reeves, 2008, p.40). This was the genesis of the boastful and braggadocio nature of the early gangsta rap era, and the current cocaine rap era. (Reeves, 2008) While the delusions of grandeur evident in "Rapper's Delight" were still present, as evidenced by Run rhyming "Champagne, caviar, and bubble bath, ya see, that's the life I lead," the group primarily focused on dissin' (disrespecting) their competitors, which accomplished two important things. First, the confrontational theme gave rap's growing core audience the honest, raw, and competitive energy of Hip Hop culture. And secondly, it established *Run-DMC* outside the ranks of rap's original rhymers and strengthened the relationship between the rapper and his/her audience. While rappers had normally created fictional tales within their lyrics, *Run-DMC* utilized the reality of their existence within their subject matter. Run referenced how his rap career began with the opening line "Two years ago, a friend of mine..." while DMC spoke of his educational background with "I'm DMC, in the place to be/ I go to St. Johns University" (Reeves, 2008, p.40-41). To me, this was the foundation of the personal/autobiographical narrative in rap lyrics.

Run-DMC's self-titled debut album, released in March 1984, became the first rap album to go gold, and *Village Voice* music critic Robert Christgau proclaimed the LP was "easily the canniest and most formally sustained rap album ever" (Reeves, 2008, p.45). The LP was Hip Hop's first attempt at a profoundly cohesive statement (until then, artists had only released singles), one reflecting the dual consciousness (self-assured and socially insightful) of its post-Black Power constituency (Reeves, 2008, p.46). their remake of *Kurtis Blow's* "Hard Times," more than a reflection on problems facing Black urban America (unemployment, sociopolitical obstacles, poverty), was a Hip Hop-style pep talk (Reeves, 2008 p.46-47).

"Hard times is spreading just like the flu/ Watch out homeboy, don't let it catch you/ (PaPaPa) Prices go up, don't let ya pocket go down/ When ya get short money you're stuck on the ground...Turn around" (Reeves, 2008, p.47).

Simultaneously, "Wake Up" borrowed thematically from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech:

“Everyone was treated on an equal basis/ No matter what colors, religions or races...There were no guns (no what!), no tanks (no what!), atomic bombs/ And to be frank, homeboy, there were no arms/ Just people working hand-in-hand/ There was a feeling of peace all across the land” (Reeves, 2008, p.47).

“Rock Box” was a melding of rap and hard guitar rock music. Consequently, over the course of three albums, *Run-DMC* released one guitar-driven single apiece; “Rock Box” in 1984, “King of Rock” in 1985, and “Walk This Way” in 1986 (George, 1999, p.99). As Russell Simmons saw it, “Rap is black outlaw music and rock is white outlaw music. Two opposites together as one” (Reeves, 2008, p.48). In 1983, Michael Jackson became the first black artist to get played on the racially exclusive network MTV, which ultimately resulted in “Rock Box” becoming the first rap video played on MTV in 1984. “A million people wouldn’t know who us if it weren’t for MTV,” DMC later reflected in an interview with *The Source* magazine (Reeves, 2008, p.48). The sociocultural power of Run-DMC persisted with the release of their sophomore LP, “King of Rock,” in 1985, and although they were now considered ambassadors of their post-Black Power constituency, they sought to build on the marketing momentum created by “Rock Box.”

Chuck D of *Public Enemy* offers this commentary:

“You know, if it hadn’t been for Run-DMC setting a precedent, there wouldn’t be no Public Enemy. Run-DMC is the phenomenon of the ‘80s. They were it. This was way before the Steve Tyler thing (i.e., Run-DMC’s collaboration with Aerosmith on “Walk This Way”), which was really kind of an aftermath. I’m talking about how they came into rap music with a different approach, one that magnified the power of the beat, the rhythm behind their rapping, whereas before the whole thing was just about rhymes. Run-DMC had the power and the yelling and the rage on top of it, riding it which made you just say, ‘Damn, this shit is controlling me!’ That just crossed over out of the black community. ‘Sucker MCs’ and ‘Rock Box’, even without the guitar, transcended, because the beat was strong and the rhythm was strong and the image they projected was hard and black: ‘This is what were about, we’re only into this, and we don’t give a fuck if

you into this or not because we're having a damn good time and we believe in what we're doing!' Their records made people look at rap and say, 'Well, that's some legit shit!'" (Furman & Neal et al., 2004, p.412)

The success of their second album *King of Rock* helped *Run-DMC* take rap music and Hip Hop culture to commercial spaces (and heights) it had never experienced or imagined. (Reeves, 2008, p.51) Besides performing on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* (the first rap act to do so), the duo also added to the growing arsenal of Hip Hop films with the release of their movie *Krush Groove*. Whereas previous Hip Hop films had been fixated on the culture as a whole, the semi-biographical film was the first built around the stardom of the MC. *Wildstyle* had featured graffiti artists and *Breakin'* was a representation of b-boys, while *Krush Groove* was a serious acknowledgement of the burgeoning force and financial might of rap artists and rap music (Reeves, 2008, p.52).

Krush Groove also launched *LL Cool J* on the hardcore rap scene. His brief role was that of a hungry, street hardened MC, dressed in the tough wardrobe of urban street corners and angrily rapping "I can't live without my radio!" (Reeves, 2008, p.52) "My story is rough/ My neighborhood is tough/ But I still sport gold, and I'm out to crush," he rapped on the single "I Can't Live Without My Radio." The emergence of *LL Cool J* was a sign that younger MCs were adopting (and adding to) the *Run-DMC* standard. With his youthful ego and role as the "Hip Hop gangster," *LL* approached hardcore rap with less social awareness, displaying more of a street-fortified attitude and focusing mostly on rugged hedonism and thuggish bravado (Reeves, 2008, p.52). This trend, along with *LL's* intricate and innovative lyricism, eventually became a staple in Hip Hop music. His debut album, *Radio*, went gold, and solidified Def Jam Records as a major institution nurturing the growth of a rap music industry (Reeves, 2008, p.52).

The unfortunate effect of the mid 1980s crack cocaine epidemic on Black youth culture, as Nelson George observed in "Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos," was it became "increasingly nihilistic and materialistic" (Reeves, 2008, p.55). This shift was evident in the evolving sound of hardcore rap, as rap artists now wore fashions of local drug kingpins, which escalated their display of attitude and ego and aggression. This street style was inspired by *Run-DMC*, and exponentially increased by *LL Cool J. Radio* singles "Dangerous" and "Rock the Bells" insulted not only sucker MCs, but androgynous black pop stars with lyrics like "So all you Jheri curl

suckers wearing high-heeled boots/ Like ballerinas what I mean is you're a fruit-loop troop” (Reeves, 2008, p.55). As Sia Michel cites:

“He’s never been the highest-selling or most-imitated MC, but he’s been the face of Hip Hop since he was 16 years old, the living, styling, eminently quotable personification of a new young black dream” (Light et al., 1999, p.83).

1985 was also the year *MC Ricky D* (later *Slick Rick*) introduced the storytelling aspect of rhyming on “The Show” and “La Di Da Di” with *Doug E. Fresh*. The creative pressure from rap’s new talented hardcore artists pushed *Run-DMC* to produce their magnum opus, *Raising Hell*, which displayed the undeniable artistic and cultural might of rap music and Hip Hop culture (Reeves, 2008, p.56). The album’s first single, “My Adidas,” paid homage to the crew’s favorite footwear and celebrated their trailblazing accomplishments using their sneakers as a metaphor for achievement (Reeves, 2008, p.56).

“My Adidas walked through concert doors/ And roamed all over coliseum floors/ I stepped onstage at Live Aid/ All the people gave and the poor got paid/ And out of speakers I did speak/ I wore my sneakers but I’m not a sneak/ My Adidas touched the sand of a foreign land/ With mic in hand I cold took command” (Reeves, 2008, p.56).

“My Adidas” was their first Top 10 R&B single (Light et al. 1999, p.65). *Raising Hell* ultimately established rap music as an honorable art form, becoming, as *Chuck D* later wrote in *Rolling Stone*, “the first true rap album, a complete work of art” (Reeves, 2008, p.56). Rick Rubin’s genius pairing of *Run-DMC* and Aerosmith for the remake of the band’s hit “Walk This Way” not only revived Aerosmith’s career, but also catapulted *Raising Hell* to rap’s first multiplatinum selling album (three million copies sold) in less than a year (Reeves, 2008, p.57). The album sales enabled the group to become the first Hip Hop artists to grace the cover of *Rolling Stone* and exposed Hip Hop’s growing flock (especially young whites) to the ego-heavy intricacies and streetcentric creativity of hardcore rap (Reeves, 2008, p.57). The group’s evolution was evident with the increased ruggedness of their content. Disses of sucker MCs turned to threats, as shown in “Is It Live,” “When I write I don’t bite, and I might check/ And if I find yo’ behind, I’ll break

your neck.” To their expanded record buying audience, especially those white kids whose parents heard their children listening to (and enraptured by) these black prophets of post-Black Power America, *Run-DMC*, according to Marcus Reeves, were the new “Bad Niggas of American music and culture” (p.58). *LL Cool J* even later released a single titled “I’m Bad.” As the face of Black urban music and youth culture, their position, along with their dress, language, and attitude, made them visible targets, easily used as scapegoats for the ill conditions and behavior of their young followers (p.59).

Run-DMC’s ultimate contribution to rap music was catapulting it into America’s mainstream, and inadvertently inventing what *Village Voice* writer Harry Allen calls “the modern Hip Hop music business,” emerging from Hip Hop’s struggle for respect as post-Black Power icons (Reeves, 2008, p.61). They gave rap music its first taste of real power by infusing commercial Hip Hop with the honest spirit and look of the streets and became a continuum of the historical Black folk hero, the “Bad Nigga Hero,” and successfully installed the character as *the* archetype for rap music (Reeves, 2008, p.61-62). As Lawrence Levine wrote in his book *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, the bad black bandit expressed a “profound anger festering and smoldering among the oppressed” who felt that “within the circumstances in which they operate, to assert any power at all is a triumph” (Reeves, 2008, p.62). According to Marcus Reeves, *Run-DMC* was the Bad Nigga myth brought to life through the séance of Hip Hop culture (Reeves, 2008).

What had begun as a cultural response to the socioeconomic conditions in the black community in the 1970s had evolved into a globally commodifiable art form by the mid-1980s. The lyrics developed into a more accurate reflection of these social conditions as opposed to the earlier lyrical content that was geared towards the satisfaction of crowds at parties. The record industry responded to rap music’s potential by producing singles, before Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin founded Def Jam Records and released actual rap albums by *Run-DMC* and *LL Cool J*. Run-DMC also established themselves as the first rap artists to garner a crossover white audience, due in part to their increased visibility and their rock-influenced singles. This early era of rap music lasted from 1979 to roughly 1986.

THE GOLDEN ERA

1986 was the beginning of what was to be known as the “Golden Era” of rap music. (Reeves, 2008) In response to the socioeconomic conditions of New York City during the mid-1980s, rap music took a shift towards social consciousness and addressing issues plaguing the ghettos. This shift began with “The Message” by *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five* and encompassed the theme of acquiring knowledge. During the golden era, MCs were elevating the art of rhyme, utilizing the layered intricacy of sampled rhythms to enhance the meter of their poetry, approaching the delivery of their rhymes like musicians and poets (Reeves, 2008, p.67). Accompanying this development in writing was a budding self-consciousness among rap artists; they not only had an awareness of rap’s potential impact as urban-style entertainment, but a consciousness-raising poetry for a generation (Reeves, 2008, p.67). On one end of the pendulum was the intensely popular Public Enemy, and on the other was NWA (*Niggaz With Attitude*). Both groups rebelled against the cultural and political status quo while simultaneously presenting themselves as models for a new, urban youthful representation of blackness (Ogbar, 2007, p.56). While *Public Enemy* represented the socially-conscious New York audience, Compton’s NWA would cater to black inner city youth nationwide, introducing a new subgenre called gangsta rap. This would cause friction between East Coast and West Coast rap artists, as the discovery of suburban white males as the primary consumers of rap music would initiate a shift in the marketing practices of record labels towards the promotion of solely gangsta rap artists.

The induction of white consumers, along with the invention of Soundscan, an over-the-counter sales tracking method, which would ultimately lead to gangsta rap artists becoming the defacto representation of Hip Hop culture- albeit an exaggerated, and sometimes corporately-manufactured representation. Gangsta rap artists would attain the most radio airplay as well as the bulk of exposure on video music networks such as MTV. Due to the marketing of their criminal histories, they achieved much media exposure, which catered to their street credibility and vastly increased their fame, record sales, and power within the industry.

New York's Social Consciousness

Lyricists such as *Rakim* (William Griffin) utilized theological teachings of the *Nation of Gods and Earths* within their lyrics (Chang, 2005). The *NGE*, also known as the “*Five Percenters*,” were founded in Harlem by a former member of the *Nation of Islam*, *Clarence 13X*, who is also known as “the Father.” Teachings included that the original *Asiatic Blackman* was God incarnated on Earth, eighty-five percent of the people of the world were uncivilized, mentally blind, deaf and dumb, ten percent had true knowledge and were slave makers of the majority, and the remaining five percent were the “poor, righteous teachers” (George, 1999, p.68). Concepts such as the Supreme Alphabet and Supreme Mathematics were prevalent themes within *Rakim's* lyrics, whose laid-back delivery laid to rest the high energy cadences that previous MCs had exemplified. On “Paid In Full,” he was the first MC to use an internal rhyme scheme:

“Thinkin’ of a master plan/ ‘Cause ain’t nothing but sweat inside my hand/
So I dig into my pockets, all my money is spent/ So I dig deeper, but still
coming up with the lint/ So I start my mission, leave my residence/
Thinkin’ how can I get some dead presidents/ I need money, I used to be a
stickup kid/ And I think of all the devious things I did/ I used to roll up,
‘This is a hold up, ain’t nothing funny/ Stop smilin’, be still, nothing move
but the money’/ But now I learned to earn ‘cause I’m righteous/ I feel great,
so maybe I might just/ Search for a nine-to-five/ If I strive, then maybe I’ll
stay alive”

Chang says, “Like *Bambaataa*, *Rakim* was on a lifetime mission to lift the word from the street to the spiritual” (Chang, 2005, p.259). “He rocked a weird mix of braggadocio and self-consciousness.” *Rakim* once told a journalist “You’re dealing with heaven while you’re walking through hell. When I say heaven, I don’t mean up in the clouds, because heaven is no higher than your head, and hell is no lower than your feet” (Chang, 2005, p.259). “No tricks in ’86, it’s time to build,” rapped *Rakim* on the Marley Marl-produced “Eric B. Is President” (Reeves, 2008, p.67). Other MCs such as Brooklyn’s *Big Daddy Kane*, and later, *Brand Nubian* and the

WuTang Clan would also contain *Five Percenter* theology within their lyrics (George, 1999, p.69).

Kane's *Juice Crew*, a collective that included *Biz Markie*, *Kool G Rap*, and *MC Shan*, lyrically sparred with South Bronx representatives *Boogie Down Productions*, comprised of *KRS-ONE* (an acronym for **K**nowledge **R**eigns **S**upreme **O**ver **N**early **E**veryone) and Scott LaRock during the infamous "Bridge Wars." The "Wars" was lyrical warfare between *Shan* and *KRS-ONE* that featured legendary songs "The Bridge," "South Bronx," "Kill That Noise," and the battle's coup de grace, the BDP's "The Bridge Is Over." The cover of *BDP*'s 1987 debut album, *Criminal Minded*, depicted a return of black radicalism, as LaRock and *KRS* posed with firearms, and was the "first album-length exploration of the crack-fueled criminality of Reagan's America" (George, 1999, p.45). On August 26, 1987, LaRock was shot to death while trying to squash a beef between a neighborhood drug dealer and *BDP* member *D-Nice*. *KRS*, also known as "The Teacha," saw LaRock's death as a manifestation of the violent imagery projected on their first album. Still, in a display of defiant black radicalism, he gripped an Uzi semiautomatic machine gun on the cover of *BDP*'s second offering, *By Any Means Necessary* in 1988. Not only was the album's title a reminder of Malcolm X's famous words, but *KRS*' position on the album cover, looking from behind a window curtain for enemies below, also echoed the self-defense sentiments of the slain civil rights leader. He later helped found the *Stop the Violence Movement* and released the LP titled *Spiritual Minded*.

Kool G Rap was one of the forefathers of the Mafioso Rap era that would come of age in the mid-1990s. His albums *Road to the Riches*, and *Wanted: Dead or Alive* heavily influenced later New York rappers *Nas*, *the Notorious B.I.G.*, and *Jay-Z*.

Although the metaphor and vocabulary driven forms had become commonplace, and the gangsta rap genre not yet explored, the storytelling aspect of rap music had earlier presented itself with *MC Ricky D*, later on named *Slick Rick*. Born in Wimbledon, England, Ricky Walters moved to the Bronx at the age of 14 (Light et.al, 1999, p.95). He met *Doug E. Fresh* at a rap contest around 1984 and afterwards, the two combined for hits such as "The Show" and "La Di Da Di." Ricky, with his distinct English accent, went solo in 1988 and recorded his classic debut album, *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* for Def Jam Records. Rick was "considered a lyrical

genius by many” and “maybe the finest pure writer in Hip Hop” (Light et al., 1999, p.95). The album spawned now-legendary stories such as *Mona Lisa* and *Children’s Story*. His smooth-narrative style was a predecessor of the smooth cadences of California rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg.

Undoubtedly, the revolutionary group *Public Enemy* had one of the more radical approaches to Hip Hop, using rap music as an intellectual voice of activism. (Reeves, 2008) The issues facing the black community in the 1980s fueled late night conversations between Chuck D and his friends Bill Stephney, Harry Allen, and Hank Shocklee. They wondered if rap could be used as a political tool to wake up the black community to these topics (Reeves, 2008, p.68). *Chuck D* originally claimed that his goal for *Public Enemy* was to create 5,000 new leaders for the black community (Light et al., 1999, p.166). After hearing a tape of the crew’s show, Def Jam’s Rick Rubin wanted to sign the group. Rick’s offer got Chuck thinking about forming a team that his group could lead, just the way Bambaataa had envisioned a revolutionary movement in rap music, a Black Panther-like revolution to inspire and maybe protect Hip Hop culture (Reeves, 2008, p.69). *Chuck D* would be “the messenger,” *Flavor Flav*, his comical sidekick, would be the unfocused energy of “niggas in the street,” Terminator X would DJ, and Hank, his brother Keith Shocklee, and his friend Eric Sadler would form the Bomb Squad, the crew’s production team. The need for a nationalist revival was invoked by *Public Enemy’s* logo, a b-boy’s silhouette with folded arms in the crosshairs of a rifle’s scope, signaling that black youth were in danger (but didn’t know it) and that *Public Enemy*, rap’s connection to the buried Black Nationalist thoughts and notions of yore, had arrived to awaken them (Reeves, 2008, p.71). Taking a cue from the Black Panthers, Professor Griff, a martial arts expert and member of the Nation of Islam, was named the group’s Minister of Information (Reeves, 2008).

What ultimately made people listen to *Public Enemy* was the release of the single “Rebel Without a Pause.” Its opening was the sampled voice of Jesse Jackson (who had unsuccessfully ran for president in 1984) saying “Brothers and Sisters, I don’t know what this world is coming to” (Reeves, 2008, p.71). *Chuck D’s* lyrics invoked black militancy with the line “Supporter of Chesimard!” The reference is to Assata Shakur (born Joanne Chesimard), a former Black Panther and member of the Black Liberation Army who was arrested in 1973 for charges of killing a New Jersey State trooper. Sentenced to life in prison in a weak case, she escaped in 1982 and

found exile in Cuba (Ogbar, 2007, p.147). Chuck refers to the Black Panthers with “I guess you know, you guess I’m just a radical/ Not on sabbatical, yes to make it critical/ The only part of your body should be parting to/ Panther power on the hour from the rebel to you” (Reeves, 2008, p.72) .

Equally powerful was P.E.’s follow-up song, “Bring the Noise,” a pro-black defense of rap music against a hostile mainstream media, this time beginning with the sampled voice of Malcolm X declaring, “Too black, too strong” (Reeves, 2008, p.72). Chuck fashioned himself as the crucified black messenger of rap, using his platform to galvanize the post-Black Power generation around unorthodox black leadership (namely Louis Farrakhan) and the new struggle to fight racial suppression. These lyrics from “Bring the Noise” are exemplary of Chuck’s mentality:

“Now they got me in a cell/ ‘Cause my records, they sell/ ‘Cause a brother like me said, ‘Well, Farrakhan’s a prophet, and I think you ought to listen to...What you ought to do/ Follow for now, power of the people, say, ‘Make a miracle, D, pump the lyrical, / Black is back, all in, we’re gonna win” (Reeves, 2008, p.72).

Their second LP, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, released in 1988, sounded the definitive change in guard from rap kingship to black leadership (Reeves, 2008, p.72). According to Alan Light, the album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* is “quite simply, the finest Hip Hop album ever made” (Light et al., 1999, p.168). The album provides references to several icons of black resistance who have been widely considered political prisoners, including Black Panthers Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver (Ogbar, 2007, p.147). *Nation of Millions* accompanied an electrifying renaissance in black consciousness and leadership, answering black folks’ need for some kind of response to the aftermath of the decade-long conservative backlash (Reeves, 2008, p.73). During the summer of 1988, socially conscious rap was officially “in”; Africa medallions replaced gold chains; the *Stop the Violence Movement* had been formed by several rappers (notably *KRS-ONE*), and black nationalism dominated radio waves. At the height of his *Fresh Prince* popularity, Will Smith said “What

Public Enemy are doing is trying to uplift the black youth. I agree with them and they need to be heard” (Reeves, 2008, p.80). *Village Voice* critic Greg Tate said:

“The thing about *Nation of Millions* was that it dramatized Black identity in a way that it hadn’t since the sixties. It almost seemed like there was a mythic inevitability to it” (Chang, 2005, p.272).

The album went platinum within two months of its release and they were dubbed the “Black Panthers of rap” (Reeves, 2008, p.80). Later, they recorded the theme song for Spike Lee’s feature film on racial tension, *Do The Right Thing*. The video featured the group performing on a red, black, and green stage framed by a large photo of Malcolm X during the “Young People’s March to End Racial Violence.” Jeff Chang says:

“The presentation was street demonstration, Black pride march and rap concert, as if the 1972 National Black Political Assembly had been transformed into a millennial Brooklyn block party” (Chang, 2005, p.279).

Later that year, comments labeled as anti-Semitic made by Professor Griff led to the unraveling of the group. On May 9, 1989, while Public Enemy was in Washington, D.C., Professor Griff was interviewed by David Mills, a reporter for the *Washington Times* (Chang, 2005) When pressed to explain why he didn’t wear gold because of Israel’s support of South Africa’s racist government, Griff said that since Jews help the apartheid regime (a place where the gold probably came from), Jews have a “tight grip” on Black South Africans (Reeves, 2008, p.81). The dialogue ended with Griff stating that Jews were responsible for “the majority of the wickedness that goes on across the globe” (Chang, 2005, p.285).

The comment went relatively unnoticed until a month later when it was reprinted in the *Village Voice*. Jewish groups such as the militant Jewish Defense Organization began protesting against *P.E.*. The mainstream media began to label the group anti-Semitic and strained Black-Jewish relations. Pressure from Def Jam and from within the group forced Chuck to address the matter without jeopardizing Public Enemy’s credibility (Reeves, 2008, p.81-82). Since Griff was the source of the controversy, without fully denouncing the infamous comment, Chuck apologized to the offended and reluctantly fired Griff (Reeves, 2008, p.82). For black fans of

Public Enemy, Chuck's apology and dismissal of Griff was a devastating blow of defeat; it served as further proof that whites, in this case, Jews, were still pulling the strings. But most importantly, despite all of its nationalistic rhetoric, *Public Enemy* seemed to be caving in to the pressure, selling out one of its own for speaking his mind (Reeves, 2008, p.82). This is indicative of the aforementioned struggle between art and commerce, and the still prevalent issue between black artists and white music executives.

After the racially volatile summer of 1989, Professor Griff was reinstated with the new title of Supreme Allied Chief of Community Relations. (In other words, he would act as community liaison but would give no more interviews) (Reeves, 2008, p.84). *Chuck D* addressed the controversy surrounding the group with *Fear of a Black Planet's* lead single, "Welcome to the Terrordome." The song's angry words towards his Jewish detractors ("Crucifixion ain't no fiction/ So called chosen, frozen/ Apologies made to whoever pleases/ Still they got me like Jesus") caused Jewish leaders to call for boycotts (Chang, 2005, p.295). *Fear of a Black Planet* was the first of the group's three albums to enter Billboard's Top 10, and went platinum. It was as much a musical assault on America's racism as it was a call to blacks to effectively react to it (Reeves, 2008, p.85). The album's title track explored the roots of white fear of people of African descent, and focused primarily on racist concerns over the effect growing miscegenation would have on the white gene pool ("White man, black woman, black baby, Black man, white woman, black baby") (Reeves, 2008, p.85). The music industry's exploitation of black recording artists is addressed on "Who Stole the Soul."

"Ain't no different than in South Africa/ Over here they'll go after ya to steal your soul/ Like over there they stole our gold" (Reeves, 2008, p.85).

In the end, *Public Enemy* accomplished Chuck's vision of evolving rap into a tool capable of awakening the social consciousness and racial awareness of its core black audience (Reeves, 2008, p.90). Their rise to prominence occurred within an era characterized by black nationalist affirmations of black authenticity as well as competing street-level gangsta tales (Ogbar, 2007, p.56).

NWA

If *Public Enemy* fought white fears and black stereotypes with black pride, *NWA*'s defense was to embrace the fears and myths, and transform them into a source of strength and power (Reeves, 2008, p.94). "Nigger" became "nigga," both a term of endearment and a moniker of the aforementioned "Bad Nigga Hero" instead of a racial slur used to dehumanize black people. They popularized a new genre of rap music (gangsta rap) and created a contradictory villainous/heroic archetype that penetrated American popular culture by embracing and enhancing America's myth of the black male as violent and criminal. This phenomenon was created by the desires of post-Black Power youth to have their urban, impoverished neighborhoods perspective represented and respected within the growing space of commercial rap music (Reeves, 2008, p.94). Their violent, nihilistic, misogynistic lyrics were not looked at as an evolution, but as an alternate method of speaking on social ills in the black community, and their impact continues to resonate as they spawned a revolution centered in First Amendment rights and censorship, racism and police brutality, and the manifestation of the "black criminal" as the primary representative of Hip Hop culture (Reeves, 2008). By exploiting the fear and freedom associated with the word (*nigga*), rappers *Eazy-E*, *Ice Cube*, *Dr. Dre*, *MC Ren* and *DJ Yella* realized they could capitalize on America's secret fascination with its own pathology (Coker et al., 1999, p.252). It was a fitting name for the self-proclaimed "world's most dangerous group." Their supporters said they pushed Hip Hop culture to new levels of artistic freedom while their critics denounced their records and actions as catalysts for real violence and death in the inner city. Two *NWA* artists, *Ice Cube* and *Dr. Dre*, eventually left the group and furthered the development of the gangsta rap genre into a commodifiable entity.

Eric Wright (*Eazy-E*) was a local street hustler in Compton (Los Angeles), California, while Andre Young (*Dr. Dre*) was one of the most influential DJs on the scene; he, along with Antoine Carraby (*DJ Yella*), were part of a group called the World Class Wreckin' Cru (Coker et al., 1999, p. 253). O'Shea Jackson (*Ice Cube*) lived a few doors down from Dre's mother's house in South Central Los Angeles, and Lorenzo Patterson (*MC Ren*) was a local kid whose older brother was friends with Eazy, and Eazy promised him a chance to record (George, 1999, p.134). As New York City rappers such as *KRS-ONE* and *Public Enemy* matured and became radicalized, *NWA* flew in the opposite direction as quickly as possible. "When Black Power and recognizing

one's African heritage were all the rage, *NWA* reveled in their ignorance, wearing Jheri curls when everyone else was rocking high-top fades, pointing guns at brothers while others were calling for an overthrow of the white system," writer Cheo Hodari Coker says (Light et al., 1999, p.258). *Dr. Dre* says:

"I wanted to make people go 'I can't believe he's saying that shit.' I wanted to go all the way left. Everybody trying to do this Black Power and shit, so I was like, let's give 'em an alternative, 'nigger nigger nigger nigger fuck this fuck that...all types of shit, you know what I'm saying?'" (p. 258)

MC Ren offers:

"When we did *NWA*...the main thing was New York had all the bomb groups. New York was on the map and all we was thinking, man...I think we all was thinking about making a name for Compton and L.A.. *KRS-ONE* had South Bronx, *Public Enemy* was talkin' bout Long Island, *Run-DMC* talkin' about Queens and *Ice-T* was talking about L.A. We was like 'Damn! Fuck it, we comin' from Compton!'" (George, 1999, p.135)

In 1986, *Ice Cube* wrote a song for *Eazy-E* titled "Boyz in the Hood," illustrating the violent environment in South Central Los Angeles. In the course of five minutes, *Eazy's* character does everything from cruising the street looking for girls, to shooting a crack addict, smacking a girlfriend and beating up her father, and witnessing a shootout in a courtroom. The song proved strong enough for *Eazy* to secure a distribution deal with Macola Records (Coker et al., 1999, p.257). *NWA* later signed with Priority Records and quickly sold over 300,000 copies of "Boyz in the Hood." (Chang, 2005, p.317). *Eazy's* debut, *Eazy Duz It* was written by *MC Ren*, *Ice Cube*, and Tracy "The DOC" Curry and went gold. Jeff Chang describes it as "equal parts urban threat, hypersexed Black male, and class clown" (Chang, 2005, p.318). Marcus Reeves (2008) offers the following analysis:

"The end result was the holistic realization of the character *Eazy-E*, rap's diminutive reincarnation of Stagger Lee (a Black folk hero): a violent, megasexual black urban menace with a sense of humor (and justice) that

was darker than several midnights. Alongside Hip Hop's other gangsta heroes, Eazy was the well-crafted extreme: extremely vicious, extremely callous, but extremely funny. Moreover, within Hip Hop's golden era of hardcore rap music, he became, for South Central (Los Angeles), an underground symbol of the growing nihilism and cynicism among young African-Americans" (p.101).

Reeves supports this notion with the fact *Eazy Duz It* went gold with little radio or video promotion and the resulting anticipation for the group's debut album, *Straight Outta Compton*. It was released January 25, 1989 (Reeves, 2008)

Nelson George says "My old-school New York, 'Public Enemy is God' ears couldn't really hear *NWA* yet. It was too obscene. Too radical. If that was Compton, then it was too Compton" (George, 1999, p.135). While East Coast rappers *Rakim* and *Chuck D* talked of discipline and control, excess was the essence of *NWA*'s appeal to the masses. *Rakim* and *Chuck D* also cultivated racial self-awareness and spirituality within rap music while *NWA* began refining a ghetto-real consciousness (a nigga power concept). (Reeves, 2008, p.101) Coker says "Nigger" was no longer an epithet when *NWA* was finished with it; it was a term of endearment. You wanted to be a nigger, because niggerdom held strength, power, community, and vengeance" (Coker et al., 1999, p.258). Stripped of the East Coast's "positive rhetoric," emboldened by *Ice-T*'s forays into gangster storytelling, and informed by the evil energy that crack cocaine sent coursing through Black L.A., *NWA* sent New York rap into a spasm of denial that lasted half a decade," says George (George, 1999, p.136). While *Public Enemy* had espoused nationalism and consciousness, *NWA* epitomized Malcolm X's philosophy "by any means necessary." As much as the group laughed off Black Power, it was *NWA*, not *Public Enemy*, who more closely epitomized the spirit of the Black Panthers (Coker et al., 1999, p.258). The word "nigga" became a source of power because they spoke to the conditions of the black urban masses from inside the harsh reality (poverty, crime, violence, drugs, poor education) that turned many black people into "niggas." As *NWA* understood, to survive the effects of oppression was to find strength within it (Reeves, 2008, p.101).

The opening of the album begins with *Dr. Dre* warning, “You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge” (Reeves, 2008, p.101). The realistic effect of the album was enhanced by the street authenticity of Ice Cube’s lyrics, beginning with his opening lines of the album’s title track:

“Straight outta Compton, a crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube/
From the gang called Niggaz With Attitude/
When I’m called off/ I got a sawed-off/
Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off” (p. 102).

While their antics and image were exaggerated for shock value and entertainment, *NWA* was an animated portrayal of the post-Black Power generation that had been cursed by 1980s racism and Reaganism, and were now the physical embodiment of an extreme “fuck the world” doctrine. The following lyrical excerpts are examples:

Ice Cube on “Gangsta, Gangsta”:

“Here’s a little something about a nigga like me/
Never should have been let out the penitentiary...
Takin’ a life or two/ That’s what the hell I do/
You don’t like how I’m livin’, well, fuck you!...
To a kid lookin’ up to me/
Life ain’t nothing but bitches and money” (p.102).

MC Ren on “Straight Outta Compton”:

“See, ‘cause I’m the motherfuckin’ villain/
The definition is clear, you’re the witness of a killin’
that’s taking place without a clue/
And once you’re on the scope, your ass is through” (p.103).

A misogynistic view of women was portrayed in the song “A Bitch Iz a Bitch.” However, a subtext of social commentary was evident in most songs, as displayed by Ice Cube’s lyrical performance on “Dopeman.” He speaks on the underground drug economy that faces black youth (“Young brutha gettin’ over by slingin’ ‘caine”), and the wealth that often accompanies the lifestyle (“Gold around his neck, a 14K habit”), while simultaneously exploring the destruction caused by crack cocaine (addiction, and women prostituting themselves for drugs) and

introducing the term “strawberry” (“Strawberry is a girl sellin’ pussy for crack”). Cube even goes as far as admonishing users of the drug as opposed to condemning the drug dealer (If you smoke ‘caine you a stupid motherfucker/ ‘Known around the hood as the schoolyard clucker/ Doin’ that crack with all the money you got/ On your hands and knees searching for a piece of rock”) (p.103). With virtually no radio airplay, the album went gold within six weeks.

Police brutality was the catalyst behind *NWA*’s “Fuck Tha Police.” Bakari Kitwana (2002) says “Police brutality is not unique to the Hip Hop generation; it has a long history in Black communities” (p.39). It helped summon the creation of the Black Panther Party. *NWA*, the musical symbolic representation of the post-Black Power generation, had long been vilified for its violent disposition towards racism and oppression through law enforcement. The video for *Straight Outta Compton*’s “Express Yourself” reflects the black nationalist consciousness that had come to dominate Hip Hop in the late 1980s (Ogbar, 2007, p.150). In one scene, the video depicts *NWA* members incarcerated while the images of a white police officer/slave overseer/minister (all played by the same actor) suggest a historic continuity with white supremacy. The video opens with a white overseer on horseback striking a whip at an enslaved black boy who stops picking cotton, defying the overseer. When the young boy attempts to throw a rock at the overseer, the black adults restrain him; in following scenes, that same white man is incarnated as a police officer on horseback raising his baton at black citizens. The subtext of this visual representation is a recognition of organic resistance to oppression on the part of the youth, while simultaneously criticizing the more cautious steps assumed by adults (Ogbar, 2007, p.150).

In another scene, *Dr. Dre* is represented as President of the United States with the tricolor flag of black nationalism in the White House (renamed the “Black House”); a picture of Malcolm X brandishing a rifle, and inscribed with “Free South Africa,” symbolizes radicalism, and is balanced out with a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. (Ogbar , 2007, p.150). The video concludes with *Dr. Dre* walking towards the electric chair with flashes of the same white man who was the slave overseer/minister/police officer before *Dre* is electrocuted. Even though the video for “Express Yourself” reflects the racial consciousness and resistive politics absent in rap videos, it fails to evoke optimism of a triumphant ending for the oppressed (Ogbar, 2007, p.150). The final image of *Dre* being killed by the state is a triumph for white supremacy. A much more optimistic

sense of resistance to racist law enforcement is displayed in the video for “Straight Outta Compton” and the song “Fuck Tha Police” (Ogbar, 2007, p.150).

In the “Straight Outta Compton” video, *NWA* members are walking the Compton streets when police arrive with sirens and lights; after being chased, they are all placed in a police van, except *Eazy-E*, who taunts police from a car moving alongside the van (Ogbar, 2007, p.150). Without explanation, the group is released from police custody and the video concludes with them dismissively gesturing at the police, symbolizing the constant police harassment that often ends with black youth being released upon the revelation of no criminal violations. “Fuck Tha Police” offers the most explicit and powerful expression of resistance to the justice system and police brutality (Ogbar, 2007, p.151). The power relationships are reversed on record when *NWA* puts the police department on trial and *Ice Cube* testifies against racial profiling and police brutality. *Cube*’s lyrics include:

“Fuck the police, coming straight from the underground/ A young nigga
got it bad ‘cause I’m brown/ And not the other color, so police think/ They
have the authority to kill a minority/ Fuck that shit, ‘cause I ain’t the one/
For a punk motherfucka’ with a badge and a gun/ To be beatin’ on, and
thrown in jail/ We can go toe-to-toe in the middle of a cell/ Fuckin’ with
me ‘cause I’m a teenager/ With a little bit of gold and a pager/ Searchin’
my car, lookin for the product/ Thinkin’ every nigga is selling narcotics/
You’d rather see me in the pen (penitentiary), then me and Lorenzo (MC
Ren) rolling in a Benzo/ Beat a police outta’ shape/ And when I finish,
bring the yellow tape/ To tape off the scene of the slaughter/ Still getting’
swoll of bread and water (prison meals)/ I don’t know if they fags or what/
Search a nigga down, and grabbin’ his nuts/ And on the other hand, without
a gun they can’t get none/ But don’t let it be a black and a white one/
‘Cause they’ll slam ya down to the street top/ Black police showing out for
the white cop/ Ice Cube will swarm/ on any motherfucker in a blue
uniform/ Just ‘cause I’m from the CPT (Compton)/ Punk police are afraid
of me/ A young nigga on a warpath/ And when I’m finished, it’s gonna be

a bloodbath/ Of cops dying in L.A./ Yo, Dre, I got something to say/ Fuck the police!” (Reeves, 2008, p.104)

In the finality, Dr. Dre, as the judge, declares the cop guilty (Ogbar, 2007, p.151). The dialogue is as follows:

Dre: The jury has found you guilty of being a redneck, white-bread, chickenshit motherfucker

Cop: But wait, that’s a lie! That’s a goddamn lie!

Dre: Get him out of here!

Cop: I want justice!

Dre: Get the fuck out my face!

Cop: I want justice!

Dre Out, right now!

Cop: Fuck you, you black motherfuckerrrs!

(Ogbar, 2007, p.151)

The demands for justice from, a racist police officer appear ironic, but ultimately liberating to the many listeners who are familiar with the pervasive nature of police brutality and a biased justice system (Ogbar, 2007, p.151). People who had never listened to rap music before began to take notice after the release of “Fuck tha Police.” On August 1, 1989, FBI assistant director of public affairs Milt Ahlerich sent a bulletin to police departments across the country and a letter to Priority Records. Excerpts from the letter include:

“A song by the rap group *NWA* encourages violence against and disrespect for the law enforcement officer...Law enforcement officers dedicate their lives to the protection of our citizens, and recordings such as the one from

NWA are both discouraging and degrading...Music plays a significant role in society, and I wanted you to be aware of the FBI's position relative to this song and its message" (Chang, 2005, p.325).

The letter was sent while *NWA* was on tour, and in protest, police groups refused to provide concert security in certain cities. In one of several incidents, federal agents in Cincinnati subjected the group to drug searches, asking them if they were "Los Angeles gang members using their tour as a front to expand their crack-selling operation" (Reeves, 2008, p.104). After the story broke through the *Village Voice* in New York, the organization *Music In Action* mobilized industry leaders and the ACLU to formally protest, and the FBI backed off. Congressman Don Edwards, head of the House's Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights said "The FBI should stay out of the business of censorship" (Reeves, 2008, p.105). MTV banned the video to "Straight Outta Compton" two months after its release, but Fab Five Freddy, host of Yo! MTV Raps, defied MTV executives and took cameras through Compton and devoted an entire show to *NWA*. This allowed millions of young viewers, especially suburban white kids, to see a visual depiction of the environment in which the lyrics of *NWA* were rooted. Bryan Turner of Priority Records told writer Jeff Chang:

"That's how we sold two million. White kids in the valley picked it up and they decided they wanted to live vicariously through this music. Kids were just waiting for it" (Reeves, 2008, p.105).

Boycotts against *NWA* also came from community radio DJs and Hip Hop writers who were publicly outraged at the crew's belligerent ignorance and arrogance. To Hip Hop progressives, *NWA* sounded militantly incoherent, as their music drew new lines over issues of misogyny, homophobia and violence. Chang says "When *Straight Outta Compton* crossed over to white audiences, things became very unpleasant" (Chang, 2005, p.327). Proving to be more than just "the new punk rock," *gangsta rap* became the symbol of suppression of youth culture. Cultural wars became catalysts of political wars. Rob Marriott, James Bernard, and Allen Gordon wrote for *The Source*:

“The saddest thing is that these attacks on rap have helped set the stage for the most oppressive and wrong-headed crime legislation. Three strikes you’re out? Mandatory sentences? More cops? More prisons? Utter bullshit” (Chang, 2005, p.328).

Ice-T adds “Rap is really funny man. But if you don’t see that it’s funny, it will scare the shit out of you” (Chang, 2005, p.331).

Compton had replaced New York City as the new symbol of urban decay and gangstafied rap became both a verbal response to horrible social conditions and an innovative way to sell records (Chang, 2005) *NWA* and the media officially titled the new Hip Hop subgenre “gangsta rap” (Reeves, 2008, p.107) and the target of the hardcore rapper shifted from sucker MCs (pioneered by *Run-DMC*) and racists (*Public Enemy*) to the citizens themselves, of post-Black Power America.

Hip Hop’s crossover to the mainstream white audience is an important issue in today’s rap music, and origins of the phenomenon began with *NWA* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the end of 1989, *Eazy Duz It* and *Straight Outta Compton* had sold a combined three million copies and the tour grossed \$650,000. *Ice Cube* asked manager Jerry Heller about his royalty share; he received \$23,000 for the tour and \$32,700 for the album, a total of just over \$55,000 and was told to leave it alone (Chang, 2005, p.331), even though he was the primary writer of both *NWA* releases. Heller, the manager of the group, had taken home \$150,000 himself (Reeves, 2008, p.107). Cube, feeling cheated, left the group and headed to New York to work with *Public Enemy*’s production unit, the Bomb Squad.

NWA, now a group of four after *Ice Cube*’s defection, released an EP in the fall of 1990 called *100 Miles and Runnin*, and dissed Cube in the title track. They would also insult Cube in a song titled “Real Niggaz” on their 1991 album *Efil4zaggin*, or *Niggaz4Life* spelled backwards. That same year, Michael Shalett and Michael Fine came up with a method of tracking over the counter sales for the music industry. They named their invention Soundscan (Kitwana, 2005, p.83).

Soundscan

Just two years previous, the music industry's most important trade publication, *Billboard* magazine, held a briefing devoted to improving the way it collected sales data. Shalett, whose primary areas of expertise included information technology, marketing, and market research, found *Billboard*'s methods both substandard and unreliable. (Watkins, 2005, p.33) He recruited Fine, president of George Fine Research, a company that had developed some of the most widely used market research methodologies in the world. Their innovation was to install a bar-code-reading, point-of-purchase system to tally actual sales. (Watkins, 2005) Before then, *Billboard*'s magazine charts were based on a network of retail reporters. "Nobody knew what criteria they used for their top twenty," says Tommy Boy Records owner Tom Silverman (Chang, 2005, p.416). "Someone sent them a check, free records or a refrigerator that week; you could've had a number one."

The "two Mikes," as music industry insiders would later call Shalett and Fine, began aggressively shopping their data intelligence to music retailers and record companies (Watkins, 2005). Soundscan's big break came when the editors at *Billboard* decided to begin using the service to compile its music charts (Watkins, 2005, p.36). When the first *Billboard* chart released on Soundscan was released on May 25, 1991, the results shocked the music industry; Both country singer Garth Brooks and metal band Skid Row had hit number one. *NWA*'s independently distributed *Efil4zaggin* debuted at number two (Chang, 2005, p.416). What the industry had previously assumed were niche markets (country, metal, and rap music) were in fact the best-selling albums. And while the country music market was firmly established and metal had reached its peak, the rap industry had remained underdeveloped due to major label prejudice. Before Soundscan data, rather than reflecting actual sales, the previous charts actually reflected the tastes, perceptions, and predispositions of store personnel that were unwilling, or perhaps, more likely, unable to comprehend the cultural changes that were transforming the very meaning of American pop music (Watkins, 2005, p.39). Jeff Chang (2005) says:

"Soundscan told the music industry what the kids had been trying to tell them for years. Broadcast culture was too limiting. They weren't interested in being "programmed" or hard-sold into the mainstream. They wanted

control over their pop choices; they wanted to define their own identities”
(p.416).

Brian Turner, president of Priority Records, also understood the significance of Soundscan. His label roster had included hard core rappers like *Eazy-E*, *NWA*, *Ice Cube*, and Houston’s *Geto Boys*. After *NWA* and *Ice Cube* reached the number one and number two positions, respectively, in 1991, Turner said the label “had those sales numbers before but never the chart position. We’ve probably had the sales for five or six top two albums before Soundscan” (Watkins, 2005, p.41).

“There are more young whites in the U.S. than Blacks,” Mike Shalett said in a 1994 interview with Bakari Kitwana. “And Sounddata’s monthly survey suggests overwhelming sales to white teens. Hence, it’s a fair assumption to say white teens are rap’s greatest buying audience” (Kitwana, 2005, p.85). According to the 1990 U.S. census, there were about 35 million white teens as opposed to only 7 million Black teens. In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose suggests that even though actual sales demographics for rap music weren’t available, increasing sales figures for rap musicians suggested that white teenage rap consumers has grown steadily since the emergence of *Public Enemy* in 1988, and that middle class white teenagers appear to be an increasingly significant audience (Rose, 1994, p.7). She adds, however:

“It is quite possible, that the percentage of white rap consumers in relation to overall sales is being disproportionately represented, because bootleg street sales, coupled with limited chain music store outlets in poor communities, makes it very difficult to assess the demographics for actual sales of rap music to urban Black and Hispanic consumers” (p.7).

In addition to inconsistent sales figures, Black teen rap consumers may also have a higher “pass-along rate”; the rate at which one purchased product is shared among consumers. According to Rose’s conversations with James Bernard, then editor of *The Source* (a major Hip Hop culture magazine with a predominantly Black teen readership), *The Source’s* pass-along rate is approximately 1 purchase for every 11-15 readers, three to four times higher than the average magazine’s pass-along rate. She says, therefore, it is conceivable that a similar pass

along rate exists amongst rap music consumption, especially among consumers with less disposable income (p.8). Regardless, Soundscan data and emerging trends took hold and new corporate strategies emerged pertaining to the promotion of gangsta rap. In Rose's *Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop, and Why it Matters*, veteran radio and music programmer Glen Ford commented on these new findings:

“By 1990, the major labels were preparing to swallow the independent labels that had birthed commercial Hip Hop, which had evolved into a wondrous mix of party, political, and “street”-aggressive subsets. One of the corporate labels (I can't remember which) conducted a study that shocked the industry: The most 'active' consumers of Hip Hop, they discovered, were 'tweens.' It didn't take a room full of PhDs in human development science to grasp the ramifications of the data. Early and pre-adolescents of both genders are sexual-socially underdeveloped, uncertain and afraid of the other gender. Tweens revel in honing their newfound skills in profanity; they love to curse. Males, especially, act out their anxieties about females through aggression and derision. This is the cohort for which the major labels would package their hip-hop products. Commercial Gangsta Rap was born, a sub-genre that would lock a whole generation in perpetual arrested social development” (Rose, 2008, p.16).

A few years after *NWA's* success, *Eazy-E* reflected on hardcore rap's mainstream breakthrough:

“When *NWA* was together, we were talking directly to our homies on the street, in our language, about what was happening to us; and they were buying it,” he said, referring to young whites. “But the big secret is before Soundscan, there were some white kids picking up the records too. Now everybody knows the secret” (Watkins, 2005, p.96).

William “Upski” Wimsatt, a long-time admirer of ghetto youth culture, believes white kids gravitate towards Hip Hop because it offers a way to vicariously experience the resilience of ghetto youth (Watkins, 2005, p.97). Whatever the reasons, white record executives didn't stop to

dissect *NWA*'s appeal among white consumers, they simply imitated the group's hard-core demeanor, profane lyrics, and woman-hating tendencies (p.97) and pursued similar gangsta rap acts, no matter how mediocre the lyrical content. In fact, *NWA*'s socially conscious voice disappeared with *Ice Cube* and amplified its violent outlook, and stayed within the lane of screwing women, abusing women, getting high, getting paid, and killin' niggas (Reeves, 2008, p.110). Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar says "*NWA* took realness to new heights" with *Efil4zaggin* (Ogbar, 2007, p.43). However, the March 3, 1991 beating of Rodney King by four Los Angeles Police officers made the group's earlier lyrics seem eerily prophetic. Marcus Reeves sums up *NWA*'s impact:

"The precedent for making rap represent "the hood" had been set by *NWA*, who pushed criminal-minded rap as the *real* black CNN, an unfiltered perspective of post-black power America. And, in the process, they stumbled upon hardcore rap's new pop fan base, suburban white kids enthralled by Hip Hop's beat and fascinated by the unvarnished view of black ghetto life. In *NWA*, they finally had something more than the aging sound of hard-rock music to scare the wits out of their parents. The widespread appeal of *NWA* to this audience showed that the angst Hip Hop music expressed reached beyond the borders of post-Black Power America...Eight years after *Run-DMC*, rap music was indeed becoming America's new rock n' roll" (p.113).

Cube meanwhile, released his solo debut, *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* in June 1990, and was one of the first important collaborations between West Coast and East Coast artists and producers. Philosophically and creatively, Cube felt he had taken the idea of Black teen rebellion to its logical end; ready to grow up, he found willing mentors in *Chuck D* and the *Public Enemy* faction. He shaved off the jheri curl and embraced teachings of the *Nation of Islam*. He discussed topics like black dependence on government assistance ("Once Upon a Time in the Projects"), and racial extinction ("Endangered Species [Tales from the Darkside]") (Reeves, 2008, p.110).

His second album, *Death Certificate*, came closest to a pro-black position that didn't denigrate women (Ogbar, 2007, p.116). It was the first rap CD to debut at #1 on Billboard's pop

chart, and was divided into the “Death Side” and the “Life Side.” The former was replete with violence, drug dealing, misogyny and other criminal and self-destructive behavior, while the latter was “where black people need to go” (p.116). *Death Certificate* not only continued to address social ills in the community, but Black-Korean relations specifically, in “Black Korea.” Vilified for its anti-Asian lyrics, and under protest, Cube eventually issued an apology to Korean and Japanese American communities and sponsored dialogue between local black and Asian communities following the ensuing 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion in the wake of the Rodney King verdicts (Ogbar, 2007, p.52). Also included on the album was “No Vaseline,” a vicious verbal assault on his former *NWA* comrades. Unfortunately, *Dr. Dre* too, would leave *NWA* after financial disputes with *Eazy-E* and Jerry Heller. As *Death Certificate* hit number one on Billboard charts, Dre, along with a 6’5, 330 pound former football star-turned artist manager, Marion “Suge” Knight, started Death Row Records.

THE RISE OF GANGSTA RAP

After *Dr. Dre's* defection from *NWA*, he pioneered West Coast Gangsta Rap to new heights with his "G-Funk" styled production. He, along with rap artist *Snoop Doggy Dogg*, acquired multi-platinum album sales. White males continued to serve as gangsta rap's most avid consumers. The ongoing shift from social consciousness to gangsta rap was evident in *Tupac Shakur's* shift in lyrical content. His short life encompassed the entire Hip Hop cultural era from the 1970s until his untimely demise in 1996, and his signing with Death Row Records resulted in more multi-platinum albums, and coincided with the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a piece of legislation that deregulated radio station ownership, resulting in mass radio consolidation and the stifling of the voice of socially conscious rap artists, and the proliferation of gangsta rap artists. Even New York Hip Hop artists, who had previously conflicted with California Hip Hop artists, shifted to a new version of gangsta rap, called Mafioso rap.

Death Row Records

Knight, along with David Kenner, a lawyer known for his Columbian and Mafia-linked clientele, secured distribution for Death Row with Interscope Records in 1992. Together, Death Row and Interscope would take the nihilistic celebration of the L.A. gang mentality that *Eazy-E* and *NWA* popularized and make it pure pop (George, 1999, p.140). *Dr. Dre* was still contractually obligated to *Eazy-E's* Ruthless Records, so Knight, and a group of men brandishing lead pipes and a piece of paper containing Eazy's mother's address cornered him in a studio, and persuaded Eazy to sign away Dre's rights to Knight. Suge's persona as a "gangster" was well deserved, as there were rumors of other executives and musicians forced to sign away their artists' rights and royalties, respectively. Knight who also had ties to the Bloods street gang, was later sued by Eazy.

Consequently, on April 29, 1992, a mostly white jury acquitted the four LAPD officers that had been caught on tape viciously assaulting Rodney King with their batons. While gangsta rap solidified hardcore rappers as black street prophets of America's ghettos, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 affirmed it (Reeves, 2008, p.137). By the end of the violence, more than fifty people were killed, at least two thousand were injured, more than one thousand buildings had been set

ablaze, there was between \$800 million and \$1 billion in damages. Instead of black political figures, journalists and news anchors looked to rap artists for answers. An L.A. Times headline read “Rappers documented the anger of the inner city before the riots” (p.138). MC Ren told Billboard magazine:

“The only way you can do it is through violence. You gotta do the same thing that they doin’ to you” (p.138).

I believe this moment was when the sentiment behind NWA’s “Fuck Tha Police” was finally understood.

Death Row Records’ first foray into the national Hip Hop scene was the title track of the 1992 motion picture *Deep Cover*, featuring *Dr. Dre* and a newcomer named *Snoop Doggy Dogg*. Marcus Reeves (2008) describes Snoop’s rhyming style:

“His ice-cold delivery, one part pimp, two parts cool thug, while maintaining a brash ruggedness (niggas still got shot) was the complete antithesis of the red eyed hostility of pre-Los Angeles riot gangsta rap...Snoop’s appetizing delivery of street life, disarming and charismatic, yet still shocking, pushed gangsta rap even further onto mainstream America” (p.139).

It featured a chorus saying “It’s 1-8-7 on an undercover cop,” the police numerical code for murder. The Dre-Snoop chemistry embodied on the track, which topped the rap charts, would signal the beginning of Death Row’s brief reign over Hip Hop (Light et al., 1999, p.321). The West Coast began to dismantle New York’s monopoly of Hip Hop and critiqued nation-conscious rap’s politically correct disciplining of black bodies (Forman & Neal et al., 2004, p.165).

In late 1992, Interscope and Death Row released their first album, *Dr. Dre’s The Chronic*. The album’s title was a reference to an especially potent blend of marijuana (Watkins, 2005, p.48). The production style Dre used was called *G-Funk*, and utilized samples of early funk pioneers *Bootsy Collins* and *George Clinton’s Parliament Funkadelic*. *The Chronic* created an

elaborate texture of sounds and images comprised of Blaxploitation and documentary films, seventies television sitcoms, local news, comedy skits, game shows, and the sometimes profound, sometimes profane world of ghetto street culture (p.48-49). If *Straight Outta Compton* expressed the rage and *Niggaz4life*, following the Rodney King episode, presented the reasons why, then *The Chronic* was the musical celebration of the aftermath (Reeves, 2008, p.142). “The Day the Niggaz Took Over” even references the looting, racial violence, and unity brought about by the Los Angeles revolt. Davarian L. Baldwin (2004) speaks of Dr. Dre’s lyrics in the song “Let Me Ride”:

“No medallions/ Dreadlocks/ Or Black fist, it’s just that gangsta glare/
With gangsta rap, that gangsta shit/ Brings a gang of snaps.” Instead of seeing this position as exemplifying a movement of anti-politics, I see it as a shift in which politics is articulated. In hindsight, it is an attempt to break the stranglehold of nation-conscious rap on Hip Hop expression. The political language of nation-conscious rap, in its most general sense, was traded in for the grammar of the hood and the particular day-to-day struggles of black people” (p.166).

The Chronic was double platinum nine months after its release and still remained in the Billboard Top Ten. Dre and Snoop’s videos, “Nuthin’ But a G Thing” and “Let Me Ride” pushed the album to triple platinum sales (Chang, 2005, p.419). The third single, “Dre Day,” was a vicious dis to *Eazy-E* and Miami rap artist Luther “*Luke*” Campbell. All three videos propelled the post-gangsta aesthetic into heavy rotation on MTV (p.420). While *NWA* had been shunned by radio and television, *The Chronic* was welcomed with open arms and continued the trending crossover to white youngsters. In the essay “We Use Words Like Mackadocious,” white graffiti writer/journalist William Upski Wimsatt said:

“Like it or not, whites seem to be buying rap in increasing numbers... This has advanced rap’s clout, capital, and potential to transform society. But the white audience doesn’t just consume rap, it shapes it. Rappers and labels aren’t stupid... Increasingly, rappers address their white audience, either directly, by accommodating our perceived tastes, targeting us for

education/insult, or indirectly, by shunning the white audience, retreating into blacker, realer, more hardcore stances” (Reeves, 2008, p.143).

With respect to *Dr. Dre’s* multimedia talents, Interscope president Jimmy Iovine boasted; “He can rap, he can produce...and he can direct a video with humor,” (Watkins, 2005, p.49) *The Chronic’s G-Funk* grooves, success with radio, and crossover appeal make it the most memorable recording from the tremendous output of gangsta inflected titles that, between 1988 and 1994, defined rap and a significant aspect of youth pop culture in America (Watkins, 2005, p.49). The album contained drugs, death, money, sex, misogyny, and commentary about racial abandonment and oppression, all important ingredients in the gangsta ethos. However, *The Chronic* sold gangsta life not as a violent reaction to a cruel world, but as a state of mind, posture, and attitude that anyone wishing to act or remotely look like they have street credibility could fit into (Reeves, 2008, p.142).

Snoop Doggy Dogg, amidst a pending first degree murder charge, followed suit with his debut, *Doggystyle*, selling over four million copies, including over 800,000 albums sold during the first week. (Reeves, 2008) Even before Snoop’s album was released in 1993, it was the most anticipated rap album in history (Reeves, 2008, p.147). The criminal and brutal reputation surrounding Death Row Records was intensified by the charges brought against Snoop, and simultaneously fueled nationwide interest in the camp. In fact, *Dre’s The Chronic* had been the first West Coast Hip Hop record to gain major spins on New York radio stations. I believe it can also be argued that Snoop’s *Slick Rick*-inspired flow was a throwback to Hip Hop’s earliest era, when rap music was utilized for “rockin’ the party.” After *The Chronic* and *Doggystyle*, the gangsta rap subgenre became the face of Hip Hop, and its emphasis on being “real” and genuinely street became an industry standard by which commercial rap music was sold to the public, especially to young white music buyers (p.148-149).

New York Hip Hop artists and intelligentsia, ever faithful to the purity of hard, non-melodic arrangement and complex, punchline-laden wordplay, had developed a level of snobbery towards West Coast Hip Hop (Light et al., 1999, p.329). Undoubtedly, the animosity stemmed from a lack of high record sales since the late 1980’s and the emergence of West Coast *gangsta rap*. From the ashes of *NWA’s* rebellious spirit spawned *Dr. Dre’s G-Funk* and Death Row continued

its dominance, releasing a multiplatinum album by *Tha Dogg Pound* before bringing socially conscious artist *Tupac Shakur* into the fold.

NWA had begun the subgenre, gangsta rap, and it was taken into a political direction by *Ice Cube*, while taken to an increasingly nihilistic, but pop-friendly direction with *Dr. Dre* and Death Row Records. The recognition of young white males as the primary consumers of gangsta rap led to high record sales and the promotion of the gangsta image in the rap music industry. The shift was so extreme, socially-conscious artist *Tupac Shakur* shifted his lyrical subject matter to that of gangsta rap, and as one of the most recognizable Hip Hop artists of the time, he signed with the most recognizable gangsta rap label, Death Row Records.

Tupac Shakur

A cultural icon, and recognized as perhaps the most influential MC in rap music history, the life and untimely death of *Tupac Shakur* spans the entire development of Hip Hop culture through the signing of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. His shift from a socially-conscious artist to gangsta rap was heavily influenced by the now heavily marketed subgenre, and his conflict with New York MC , *The Notorious B.I.G.*, helped escalate the already existing animosity between East Coast and West Coast Hip Hop artists. His run-ins with the law and subsequent conviction on sexual abuse charges in 1994 fuel his legend, and his still unsolved murder in Las Vegas in 1996 solidified his gangsta mantra, which influenced many lyricists that would follow the trend in the coming years following the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

Tupac was reading graduate school level books as a teen, including socialist and anarchist classic texts, philosophical treatises, poetry, and Shakespeare. He also wrote much poetry, dedicating one to Black Panther Huey P. Newton, and writing a song titled “Panther Power” (Potash, 2007). While honing his burgeoning musical skills, he was elected the youngest ever national chairman of the New Afrikan Panthers and stayed in that leadership position for almost two years (Potash, 2007, p.49).

Tupac left the New Afrikan Panthers to become a roadie and dancer for Bay Area group *Digital Underground*. The group’s leader, *Shock G*, allowed Tupac to record a verse for the song “Same Song,” and Tupac’s recording career officially began (Potash, 2007). His music was a

combination of criminality, black rage, and black nationalism. He turned “nigga” into an acronym (Never Ignorant about Getting Goals Accomplished) and street niggas into potential revolutionaries by challenging racial oppression through self-combustion, gun violence, and passionate disclosure of the inner-city blues (Reeves, 2008, p.159).

In 1991, Interscope Records released his debut album *2Pacalypse Now*, which was a return of Panther ideology to black popular culture (Reeves, 2008, p.159). Kevin Powell says Tupac’s music was “a cross between *Public Enemy* and *NWA*, between Black Power ideology and ‘Fuck tha Police’,” (Powell et al., 1997, p.29). Several days after his first video’s release, Oakland police stopped Tupac for jaywalking before beating him and choking him unconscious. He sued them for \$10 million and received a \$15,000 settlement years later (Potash, 2007, p.53). In 1992, Tupac began to emerge as a public figure, agitator and critic. He gave an interview to *Rolling Stone* magazine regarding the not-guilty verdict of the four police officers caught on video beating Rodney King, and the resulting riots:

“The difference between 1992 and the Watts riots twenty-seven years ago is AK-47s, crack, unemployment. Those people wanted to see tomorrow, now people don’t really care. It was like getting slashed with a knife. The Latasha Harlins decision (in which a Korean grocer got five years probation in the fatal shooting of a fifteen-year-old black girl) came, and we took that. When they gave a grocer probation and then sent a black man to jail for shooting a dog, we took that shit. When we went to the Rodney King trial every day and saw them call us gorillas, we took that. But this verdict was like Marie Antoinette saying ‘Let them eat cake.’ America’s got to feel what it is to live in the ghetto for three days. We get looted, we get beat down, we get grabbed out of trucks every day. It’s hypocritical to be sensitive to white victims but not to us. I feel for the Koreans who lost their businesses and for the people who got hurt, but I feel more for my people” (p.57).

These excerpts from Tupac’s lyrics exhibit the mentality of *2Pacalypse Now*:

“Violent”

“I told ‘em fight back, attack on society/ If this is violence, then violent’s what I gotta be/ If you investigate you’ll find out where it’s comin’ from/ Look throughout history, America’s the violent one” (Reeves, 2008, p.160).

A year before the L.A. riots, these lyrics from “Trapped” would become prophetic:

“One day I’m gonna bust, blow up on this society/ Why did ya lie to me/ I couldn’t find a trace of equality/ Work me like a slave while they lay back/ Homey don’t play that/ It’s time I let ‘em suffer the payback” (p.159).

Tupac even challenges America’s reliance on young, impoverished blacks to help fight in international conflicts on “I Don’t Give a Fuck”:

“Mama told me there’d be days like this/ But I’m pissed ‘cause it stays like this/ And now they tryin’ to ship me off to Kuwait/ Give me a break/ How much shit can a nigga take?” (Reeves, 2008, p.159)

Tupac also had the uncanny ability to not only rap about problems in the ghetto and condemn the socioeconomic conditions, but also the gift to bring his listeners into the lives and souls of people affected by the hazardous environment (Reeves, 2008, p.159). “Brenda’s Got a Baby” tells the story of a twelve-year-old girl impregnated by her older cousin, and after secretly having the baby, dumps the infant into a trash can. Afterwards, she turns to selling crack, and then prostitution before being found murdered. Tupac vividly explains her background:

“Now Brenda never really knew her moms/ And her dad was a junkie putting death into his arms/ It’s sad ‘cause I bet Brenda doesn’t even know/ Just ‘cause you’re in the ghetto doesn’t mean you can’t grow...Now Brenda’s belly’s getting’ bigger/ But no one seems to notice any change in her figure...News headline read ‘12-Year-Old Prostitute Slain’...and Brenda’s her name” (p.159).

In “Soulja’s Story,” he describes a teenaged black male choosing to act out against his entrapment in poverty and a virtual police state:

“Is it my fault just ‘cause I’m a young black male?/ Cops sweatin’ me as if
my destiny is making crack sales/ Only fifteen and got problems/ Cops on
my tail so I bail till I dodge ‘em/ They finally pull me over and I laugh/
‘Remember Rodney King’ and I blast on his punk ass...Crack done took a
part of my family tree/ My momma’s on the shit/ My daddy split/ And
momma’s steady blaming me” (p.160).

On August 22, 1992, Tupac was invited to the Marin Fest in Marin City, California as an honorary guest (Potash, 2007) During a confrontation, a group of men rushed at Tupac with no provocation, prompting Tupac and his bodyguards to retreat to their vehicle. A five-year-old boy was shot in the head during the ruckus that followed. As a mob followed the jeep to a police precinct a few blocks from the event, armed police present at the scene allowed the mob to surround Tupac and attack him, and try to overturn his jeep until he crawled underneath a police squad car for protection. That police at the event merely watched without intervening, suggests foreknowledge according to author John Potash (Potash, 2007, p.59). “Police standing around with shotguns when Maurice “Mopreme” Harding’s (Tupac’s bodyguard and stepbrother) jeep reached the precinct and failing to stop the attack suggests a stand down order. It appeared police only breached this order when Tupac got out of the jeep and crawled under the police car, risking damage to the vehicle by the mob” (p.59). Police proceeded only to arrest Tupac and Harding.

A month later, Vice President Dan Quayle condemned Tupac’s lyrics in a well-publicized speech. “This music has no place in our society,” said Quayle (Kitwana, 2005, p.20). His comments came on the heels of the murder of a Texas state trooper. Investigators claimed to have found a tape of Tupac’s *2Pacalypse Now* inside the accused shooter’s car. Ronald Ray Howard, 19, pulled over while driving a stolen car, shot Officer Bill Davidson in the neck, and later told authorities he was listening to “Soulja’s Story” as he loaded his weapon and prepared to kill the officer (Reeves, 2008, p.161). While a jury rejected his excuse (Howard was sentenced to death), Davidson’s widow didn’t, filing a multimillion dollar lawsuit against Tupac for influencing the young man to kill her husband (p.162). This further opened the national debate

over gangsta rap's violent lyrics, artistic expression, and free speech, while simultaneously heightening Tupac's celebrity profile. A *USA Today* headline about Tupac read, "Menace or Martyr?" (Reeves, 2008, p.162) *Billboard* magazine noted how in Quayle's speech, he used the same words that he used in a speech against rapper *Ice-T* three months earlier (Potash, 2007, p.65). Like Tupac, *Ice-T* proposed a violent response to the Rodney King police brutality incident, in his song "Cop Killer." Despite increased sales, Time-Warner dropped *Ice-T* within six months.

Quayle's denouncing of Tupac had political implications. His previous attacks on President George Bush on his debut album were to increase with his second release, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* His lyrics were clearly pointed at Republicans with "they've got money for war but can't feed the poor" (Potash, 2007, p.66) Other Republican politicians such as Bob Dole and William Bennett said that Time-Warner, who had increased ownership of Tupac's Interscope Records, needed to ban Tupac's recordings. Ironically, Interscope was also the parent label of gangsta rap label, Death Row Records. Time-Warner delayed Tupac's second album release for over a year, well after the election. On the album, Tupac intensified his gangsta-revolutionary response to conservative America and law enforcement:

"Holler If Ya Hear Me"

"In case ya can't see us while we burn the other week/ Now we got him in a smash, blast/ How long will it last: til the po' get mo cash/ Until then, raise up/ To my young black males, blaze up!" (Reeves, 2008, p.163)

Tupac sensed rap music's shift from black nationalism to gangsta rap, and decided to go along with it. Cheo Hodari Coker says:

"He progressively became more gangsta because he realized that even though his political records were critically acclaimed and got him a certain amount of respect, he wasn't reaching the audience he wanted to reach" (Reeves, 2008, p.163).

Tupac's new philosophy was called "T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E.," an acronym for "The Hate You Give Lil' Infants Fucks Everybody," and was famously tattooed across his stomach. His gangsta shift was evident on "The Streets R Deathrow":

"Those who test will find a bullet in they chest/ Put to rest by a brotha who was hopeless/ Grow up broke on the rope of insanity/ How many pistols smokin', coming from a broken family" (p.163).

Despite the violent rhetoric, he always held a heartfelt moment for women, and this was shown in "Keep Ya Head Up," a song of encouragement for black women.

"They say the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice/ I say the darker the flesh, and the deeper the roots/ I give a holler to my Sisters on welfare/ Tupac cares if don't nobody else care/ I know they like to beat you down a lot/ And when ya come around the block, brothers clown a lot...I wonder why we take from our women/ Why we rape our women/ Do we hate our women?...I know you're fed up, ladies/ But keep ya head up" (p. 165).

Tupac's reputation for blending art with reality as he referenced the Texas lawsuit on "Point the Finga":

"I thought I hit rock bottom, they ban my album...I guess nobody loves a real nigga-slash-rap singer/ I thought I'd bring a little truth to the young troops/ I brought proof that the niggaz need guns too"(p.165).

On October 31, 1993, Tupac was arrested for allegedly shooting two white, off-duty police officers in Atlanta, Georgia. Charged with two counts of aggravated assault and released on bail, Tupac and his attorneys maintained he and his associates present were acting in self-defense (Light et al., 1997, p.30). The investigating detective admitted that the officers' report stated that "niggers came by and did a drive-by shooting." Witnesses support that the cops shot at Tupac first. During the entire conflict, the officers never identified themselves as police (Potash, 2007, p.71). The officers also discredited themselves in saying they didn't have a gun on them that night. Most importantly, prosecution dropped their charges after the state prosecutor's witness

said that the gun one of the cops used on Tupac had been taken from the other cop's police evidence locker. Two weeks later, Tupac was charged with sexual assault in New York City. Of his legal incidents, Tupac says:

“I feel like somebody's setting me up because I'm *Tupac Shakur*. My mother was a Panther. It's based on what they did and what I'm doing” (Powell et al., 1997, p.31).

On November 29, 1994 a Manhattan jury convened to deliberate charges of sodomy, sexual abuse, and weapons possession against Tupac for the incident a year earlier (Johnson et al., 1997, p.41). After the first day of deliberations, he headed to Times Square's Quad Recording Studio. While entering the lobby elevator, Tupac and two comrades were forced at gunpoint to get on the floor. The robbers not only shot Tupac five times, but nabbed at least \$40,000 in jewelry from him as well. The first cops to show up included Officer Craig McKiernan, who had just testified at Tupac's trial, and had supervised two other officers present during Tupac's arrest the year previous. Tupac bled heavily all day and against doctors' wishes, checked himself out of Bellevue Hospital. Tupac later admitted:

“Until it happened, I really did believe that no black person would ever shoot me. I believed I didn't have to fear my own community...I was like, I represent them” (Reeves, 2008, p.168).

The next day, he was rolled into a Manhattan courtroom in a wheelchair for the jury's verdicts (Reeves, 2008) He was found innocent of sodomy and weapons charges, but guilty of “forcibly touching the buttocks,” or sexual abuse. Planning to appeal the sexual abuse conviction, sentencing was delayed due to Tupac's condition and he remained free on \$25,000 bond. On February 14, 1995, Tupac was sentenced from 18 months up to four-and-a-half years in prison and immediately began serving at Riker's Island penitentiary in New York (Reeves, 2008)

In April 1995, his fourth album, *Me Against the World*, was released and entered the charts at number one, the first time an incarcerated artist had done so (Reeves, 2008). I believe this is a prime example of the criminalized black male image being celebrated by white consumers. The

double-platinum selling LP was led by the Grammy-nominated single, “Dear Mama,” an account of his troubled relationship with his mother. He explains on the first verse:

“When I was young, me and my mama had beef/ Seventeen-years old,
kicked out on the streets/ Though back at the time, I never thought I’d see
her face/ Ain’t no woman alive that can take my mama’s place/Suspended
from school, was scared to go home/ I was a fool with the big boys
breakin’ all the rules/ Shed tears with my baby sister/ Over the years, we
was poorer than other lil’ kids/ And even thought we had different daddies,
the same drama/ When things went wrong, we blamed mama/ I reminisce
on the stress I caused, it was hell/ Huggin’ on my mama from a jail cell/
And me thinkin’ elementary, hey/ I’d see the penitentiary, one day/ And
runnin’ from the police, that’s right/ My mama catch me, put a whippin’ to
my backside/ And even as a crack fiend, mama/ You always was a black
queen, mama/ I finally understand, for a woman it ain’t easy/ Tryin’ to
raise a man/ You always was committed/ A poor, single mother on welfare,
tell me how you did it/ There’s no way I can pay you back/ But my plan is
to show you that I understand/ You are appreciated.”

As Marcus Reeves concluded, “For a rapper convicted (wrongfully, many thought) of molesting a woman, ‘Dear Mama’ seemed to appropriately counter the negative implications of his fall from grace” (Reeves, 2008, p.170) *Me Against the World* also featured a preoccupation and fascination with death, as expected with his near brush, and evidenced by his rhymes on “So Many Tears,” “If I Die 2Nite,” and “Lord Knows” respectively:

“And fuck the world ‘cause I’m cursed/ I’m having visions of leaving here
in a hearse.”

‘Don’t shed a tear for me, nigga/ I ain’t happy here/ I hope they bury me
and send me to my rest.”

“I wonder if the Lord will forgive me or bury me a G/ I couldn’t let my
adversaries worry me” (p.170)

During his incarceration, Suge Knight recognized the multimedia potential of Shakur (He had starred in three movies; *Juice*, *Poetic Justice* and *Above the Rim*) and posted his \$1.4 million bond to get him released from prison. (Reeves, 2008, p.172) Just a month earlier, at the second annual *Source Awards* in 1995, Suge Knight began what would be a two-year siege on the character and manhood of rival record mogul Sean “*Puff Daddy*” Combs. Derrick Parker called the *Source Awards* “Hip Hop’s Academy Awards,” to give an idea of the environment and significance of the event (Parker, 2006, p.114). After sending his regards to an imprisoned Tupac from the podium, Suge announced “If you don’t want your CEO dancing in all your videos, come on over to Death Row,” in a swipe clearly aimed at Combs and his label (Light et al., 199, p.323). Parker added:

“The East Coast-West Coast rivalry was what made the headlines, but the *1995 Source Awards* also featured some gangsta business, real street shit, that managed to elude the radar of law enforcement” (Parker, 2006, p.114).

Later in October 1995, Jake Robles, a friend of Knight’s, was shot to death at an Atlanta party, allegedly by Anthony “Wolf” Jones, Combs’ longtime bodyguard (Parker, 2006) Knight never forgave Combs for Robles’ death, and this would solidify the bloody divide between East and West Coast rap camps even further (p.116). A few weeks after Robles’ homicide, Suge Knight and attorney David Kenner went to visit Tupac, housed at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York. Knight posted Tupac’s bail and immediately signed him to Death Row Records. The union was not just musical, as Tupac’s disenchantment with the *Notorious B.I.G.*, the centerpiece of Combs’ Bad Boy Entertainment, coincided with Knight’s disdain for Combs. While incarcerated, Tupac had granted an interview to Vibe magazine’s Kevin Powell regarding his recent legal troubles and his robbery/shooting that occurred in November 1994. Interview excerpts include:

“When I got in here, all the prisoners were like ‘Fuck that gangsta rapper.’ I’m not a gangsta rapper. I rap about things that happen to me. I got shot five times, you know what I’m saying? People were trying to kill me. It was really real like that” (Light et al., 1997, p.45).

During the interview, Tupac gave his account of what happened following his shooting, and implicated the *Notorious B.I.G.* and Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs’ involvement, believing that they had prior knowledge of the robbery attempt.

“Puffy was there, Biggie (The Notorious B.I.G.)...Nobody approached me. I noticed that nobody would look at me...Puffy was standing back too. I knew Puffy. He knew how much stuff I had done for Biggie before he came out” (Light et al., 1997, p.47).

October 1995’s *Million Man March*, organized by *Nation of Islam* leader *Louis Farrakhan*, was supposed to be a symbol of unity between Black men, but the ongoing conflict between East Coast and West Coast Hip Hop artists was anything but. Also in October 1995, Death Row released *Dogg Food*, the debut album of *Tha Dogg Pound* (Reeves, 2008) It sold over two million copies. In December, as they filmed the video “New York, New York” in Brooklyn, New York, gunshots were fired at their trailer. In response to the “New York, New York” video, which featured Godzilla-sized members of *Tha Dogg Pound* crushing Manhattan, Queens rappers *Mobb Deep*, *Tragedy*, and *Capone & Noreaga* made “L.A. L.A.,” and a video featuring the New York artists kidnapping *Dogg Pound* look-alikes, torturing them, and throwing them off a bridge (Reeves, 2008, p.173). Marcus Reeves (2008) offers this analysis:

“Whereas legendary MC rivalries of the past (*Busy Bee vs Kool Moe Dee*, *KRS-ONE vs MC Shan*, *LL Cool J vs many adversaries*) remained on wax or cassette, outside of public scrutiny, the East/West conflict felt as if it reached beyond the airwaves. Then again, the stakes in the rap industry were higher now, with larger sums of money and celebrity and corporate interest at risk in a duel. And with a higher premium being placed on street credibility as a measure of Hip Hop realness, hardcore rap’s worshipful adoption of the gangsta played right into a skewed image of the music growing in popular culture and an escalating game of destructive one-upmanship. By the same token, the controversy, which attracted tons of free publicity, also helped sell a ton of records” (p.173).

Gwendolyn Pough, who makes an important point in recognizing the connection between Hip-Hop and the Black Power Movement/Black Panther Party by highlighting former Black Panther Afeni Shakur, and her son Tupac, in “That’s the Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader,” offers her opinion regarding speculation that the FBI orchestrated the conflict between East Coast and West Coast Hip Hop artists, just as they had with Black Panthers on the East and West Coasts just 25 years earlier:

“I think that it is particularly interesting to note that it has been contended that the FBI also had a hand in starting the East Coast/West Coast war in Hip Hop that eventually claimed the lives of *Biggie Smalls* and *Tupac Shakur*. It was a letter from the FBI denouncing rap group *NWA* that spirited them to success and thus brought about the rise of West Coast style “gangsta rap” and the death of the political rap that was popular on the East Coast at that time. Gangsta rap’s tremendous popularity and East Coast rappers’ failure to acknowledge the West Coast as a vital part of the Hip Hop community caused a great deal of friction on both coasts. However, when we look at the fact that one letter from the FBI stifled the rise of “political/message rap” and ensured an era of gangsta rap, it’s difficult not to also recall J. Edgar Hoover’s declaration that there will not be another Black messiah unless they (himself and the FBI) made one” (Forman & Neal et al., 2004, p.286-287).

Tupac Shakur, now signed to *Death Row Records*, immediately embraced the gangsta aesthetic, and the content of his fifth album, *All Eyez On Me*, reflected his shift from socially conscious to a more hardcore, street style of lyricism. Hip Hop’s first double album, it was released February 13, 1996, and went on to sell over seven million copies, and on February 20, Calvin Broadus, aka *Snoop Doggy Dogg*, was acquitted of murder charges that had been hanging over his head since 1993. Just a couple weeks earlier on February 8, President Bill Clinton signed the Telecommunications Act, the first major overhaul of telecommunications policy since 1934.

Tupac Shakur's first single off the *All Eyez on Me* album was "California Love," an ode to the state in which he grew into manhood, and it featured *Dr. Dre* and *Roger Troutman* of *Zapp*. The video, directed by Hype Williams, was filmed in December 1995 and enjoyed extensive airplay on MTV, even nominated for an *MTV Music Video Award* for Best Rap Video in 1996. Lyrics include:

"Out on bail, fresh outta jail, California dreamin' / Soon as I step on the scene, I'm hearin hoochies screamin' ... Only in Cali, where we riot, not rally, to live and die / In L.A. we wear Chucks not Ballys (Yeah, that's right) ... Say what you say, but give me that bomb beat from Dre / Let me serenade the streets of L.A" (Reeves, 2008, p.174).

During the shooting of the video, Tupac insinuated that he had been intimate with Biggie's wife, Faith Evans. This escalated the friction between not only both artists, but between the East and West Coasts. *Dr. Dre* told Vibe Magazine:

"If it keeps going this way, pretty soon niggas from the East Coast ain't gonna be able to come out here and be safe. And vice versa" (Light et al., 1997, p.77).

Although involved parties denied the bi-coastal beef in media interviews, numerous publications continued to perpetuate the conflict via questioning and front-page headlines. Tupac, himself says;

"It's not like I got a beef with New York or nothing, but I do have problems. And I'm representing the West Side now. There's people disrespecting the West Coast. 'It's only gangsta shit, it ain't creative enough, it's fucking up the art form,' even though we made more money for this art form than all those other motherfuckers. The artists who now selling records stole our style. Listen to 'em. Biggie is a Brooklyn nigga's dream of being West Coast" (p.79-80)

Lyrical excerpts from the album “All Eyez On Me” include:

“Ambitionz As a Ridah”

“So many battlefield scars while driven in plush cars
This life as a rap star is nothin’ without heart
Was born rough and rugged, addressin’ the mad public
My attitude was, "Fuck it," cause motherfuckers love it
To be a soldier, must maintain composure at ease
Though life is complicated, only what you make it to be...

My murderous lyrics equipped with spirits of the Thugs before me
Pay off the block evade the cops cause I know they comin for me
I been hesitant to reappear, been away for years
Now I'm back my adversaries been reduced to tears
Question my methods to switch up speeds, sure as some bitches bleeds
niggaz'll feel the fire of my mother's corrupted seed...”

“2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted”

“So now they got us laced
Two multimillionaire motherfuckers catchin’ cases (mmm)
Bitches get ready for the throw down, the shit's about to go down
Uhh, me and Snoop about to clown...

Now follow as we ride
Motherfuck the rest, two of the best from the West side
And I can make you famous
Niggaz been dyin’ for years, so how could they blame us?
I live in fear of a felony,
I never stop bailin’ these, motherfuckin’ G's

If ya got it better flaunt it, another warrant
2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted.”

Now give me fifty feet
Defeat is not my destiny, release me to the streets
And keep whatever's left of me
Jealousy is misery, suffering is grief
Better be prepared when you cowards fuck wit me...

They tell me not to roll with my glock
So now I got a throwaway
Floatin' in the black Benz, tryin to do a show a day
They wonder how I live, with five shots
Niggaz is hard to kill, on my block
Schemes for currency and dough related
Affiliated with the hustlers, and so we made it
No answers to questions, I'm tryin to get up on it
My nigga Dogg with me, eternally the most wanted”

“Only God Can Judge Me”

“Perhaps I was blind to the facts, stabbed in the back
I couldn't trust my own homies just a bunch a dirty rats
Will I, succeed, paranoid from the weed
And hocus pocus try to focus but I can't see
And in my mind I'm a blind man doin' time
Look to my future cause my past, is all behind me
Is it a crime, to fight, for what is mine?

Everybody's dyin' tell me what's the use of tryin
I've been trapped since birth, cautious, cause I'm cursed
And fantasies of my family, in a hearse
And they say it's the white man I should fear
But, it's my own kind doin' all the killin here
I can't lie, ain't no love for the other side
Jealousy inside, make 'em wish I died
Oh my Lord, tell me what I'm livin' for
Everybody's droppin' got me knockin' on heaven's door
And all my memories, of seein' brothers bleed
And everybody grieves, but still nobody sees
Recollect your thoughts don't get caught up in the mix
Cause the media is full of dirty tricks
Only God can judge me.”

At the March 1996 Soul Train Awards, Biggie and Tupac came face-to-face for the first time since the shooting at Quad Recording Studio in November 1994. While Biggie, Puffy, and Faith performed a medley of songs, Tupac stormed the aisle during the performance (Light et al., 1999, p.346). “That’s when I knew it was real to him,” Biggie said later. “That he believed all this shit. He was just convinced.” As Tupac and Suge hurled insults back and forth with Biggie’s faction, a firearm was brandished and bullets were shot into the air, and the crowd dispersed.

By the time the second single and video, “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted,” featuring *Snoop Doggy Dogg* in his first collaboration with Tupac, hit MTV, *Dr. Dre* was leaving Death Row Records to form his own label with Interscope, *Aftermath Entertainment*. Dre wanted to expand his creative wings by experimenting with various musical styles and genres, while Suge Knight insisted that the label maintain a strict focus on the ghetto-tough anthems that made it an instant hit factory (Watkins, 2005, p.103). The gangsta rap genre had taken the “keeping it real” mantra to the extreme, even resorting to marketing the criminal backgrounds of artists to ensure street

credibility. Dre, looking for a way out, phoned Interscope Records president Jimmy Iovine and told him ‘I’m ready to bounce. Make me a deal, and I’ll make you some hit records.’ (Watkins 104) Tupac had publicly vented his frustration about Dre’s lack of involvement (Reeves, 2008, p.175).

In June, Tupac released his third single, “How Do U Want It,” with a B-side titled *Hit Em Up*. It was put out in retaliation to Biggie’s “Who Shot Ya,” which had been previously released. Whereas, before, Tupac had only hinted at Faith’s infidelity, he now outright claimed he slept with her. The most scathing dis in Hip Hop history, he called Biggie a “fat muthafucka” and yelled “I fucked your wife!” (Light et al., 1999, p.347).

“First off, fuck yo’ bitch and the clique you claim/ Westside, when we ride,
comin’ quick with game/ You claim to be a player but I fucked your wife/
We bust on Bad Boys, niggas fucked for life/ Plus, Puffy tryin’ to see me,
weak hearts I rip/ Biggie Smalls and Junior Mafia some mark ass
bitches...Fuck peace!/ I let you niggas know it’s on for life/ Don’t let the
Westside ride tonight/ Bad Boy murdered on wax and killed/ Fuck with me
and get yo’ caps peeled/ Grab ya glocks when you see Tupac/ Call the cops
when you see Tupac/ They shot me but ya punks didn’t finish, now you
‘bout to feel the wrath of a menace/ Nigga, I hit ‘em up!”

Later that year, Death Row’s latest high profile artist, and cultural icon, *Tupac Shakur*, tragically solidified his legend and myth. On September 7, 1996, Tupac and Suge, after leaving the Mike Tyson/Bruce Seldon boxing match at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, drove towards Suge’s *Club 662*. Suge was driving and Tupac was in the passenger seat when a late-model white Cadillac pulled up along the passenger side at a red light (Light, 1997). One of its four passengers took out a high-caliber firearm and began to fire at Suge’s black BMW. Tupac was stretched out in the back seat, bleeding profusely as the cops arrived. He was taken to University Medical Center’s intensive care unit and his mother, aunt, and friends, including Mike Tyson, actress Jasmine Guy, and Jesse Jackson rushed to his side (Light et al., 1997, p.120). Six days later, at 4:03 p.m., he was pronounced dead. He was only 25 years old (Light, 1997) As much as

his murder had nothing to do with the East Coast/West Coast conflict (regardless of how television and print media attempted to portray it), the Hip Hop community began to reevaluate hardcore rap music's infatuation with violence (Reeves, 2008, p.175). Within a few months, Suge Knight would be sent to prison for a parole violation stemming from his involvement in a brawl that occurred the same night as Shakur's murder. On November 5, under the alias *Makaveli* (a reference to the last name of 15th century Italian philosopher/writer Niccolo Machiavelli), Death Row released the final album Tupac recorded while alive, titled *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*. (Reeves 2008) The album contained direct insults to the *Notorious B.I.G.*, *Nas*, and *Jay-Z*. It went on to sell over four million copies.

By 2006, ten years after his untimely demise, *Tupac Shakur* had released nearly twice as many albums dead (eight) than the five albums he released when he was alive, and is widely regarded as the most influential rapper ever, and one of the most important figures in music history (Dyson, 2001, p. xv). "I put Tupac beyond Shakespeare," says legendary rapper *Nas*. The analysis of Tupac Shakur's shift from social consciousness to gangsta rap is evidence of the continuing evolution in the subject matter of rap lyrics, and his stature as the prominent representative of Hip Hop culture had major implications for the future as he became the most emulated artist. However, as the consequences of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 will later show, his high record sales ensured that the music industry would continue to promote the gangsta image, and with the consolidation of radio airwaves, it would become the only image promoted.

At this juncture, the musical genre of West Coast gangsta rap had reached its pinnacle. Its influence had secured an evolution from social consciousness to gangsta by legendary artist Tupac Shakur. Simultaneously, other artists began to model themselves after his T.H.U.G L.I.F.E. philosophy, referencing their criminal exploits and confrontations with law enforcement. While this had always been characteristic of gangsta rap music, the multi-faceted influence of Tupac Shakur (music and motion pictures) combined with his Black Panther family history and his lyrics rooted in excess materialism and premonitions of death created a blueprint that would be emulated by future artists trying to attain the same success.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996

During the 1970s and 80s, technological advancements, court decisions, and changes in policy permitted competitive entry into some telecommunications and broadcast markets. With little attention from the public, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996 by huge bipartisan margins, a vote of ninety-one to five in the Senate, and four-hundred-fourteen to sixteen in the House of Representatives (Common Cause. (May 9, 2005). The Fallout from the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In Common Cause Education Fund. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from http://www.commoncause.org/atf/cf/%7B8A2D1D15-C65A-46D4-8CBB-2073440751B5%7D/FALLOUT_FROM_THE_TELECOMM_ACT_5-9-05). The bill, hailed as the most deregulatory telecommunications legislation in history, was nearly vetoed by President Bill Clinton in its earlier version. However, when signing the Act into law at the Library of Congress, Clinton predicted that “consumers will receive the benefits of lower prices, better quality and greater choices in their telephone and cable services, and they will continue to benefit from a diversity of voices and viewpoints in radio, television, and print media” (Common Cause. (May 9, 2005). The Fallout from the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In Common Cause Education Fund. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from http://www.commoncause.org/atf/cf/%7B8A2D1D15-C65A-46D4-8CBB-2073440751B5%7D/FALLOUT_FROM_THE_TELECOMM_ACT_5-9-05). Coming 12 years after the breakup of AT&T, the Act attempted to move all telecommunication markets towards competition, not just telephone services. (www.stern.nyu.edu/networks/telco96.html) Recognizing the telecommunications network as a network of interconnected networks, the Act envisioned competition in all markets, both in the markets for the various elements that comprised the telecommunications network, as well as for the final services the network creates.

Original goals of the Act included protecting consumers from monopolistic abuses in some markets as long as such abuses were feasible under the current market structure, and safeguarding against firms leveraging their monopoly power in other markets. (www.stern.nyu.edu/networks/telco96.html) However, the Act did not legislate any framework for the most revolutionary innovation in telecommunications, Internet telephony, or more specifically, Internet Protocol telephony. Cultural trends suggest that legislation regulating internet services will be attempted in the future.

Journalists that covered the signing of the Act didn't write about it in terms of impact on the public, but rather, as a business story instead of a public policy story. Media scholar Robert McChesney quoted one lobbyist as saying 'I have never seen anything like the Telecommunications Bill. The silence of public debate is deafening. A bill with such an astonishing impact on all of us is not even being discussed' (Common Cause. (May 9, 2005). The Fallout from the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In Common Cause Education Fund. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from http://www.commoncause.org/atf/cf/%7B8A2D1D15-C65A-46D4-8CBB-2073440751B5%7D/FALLOUT_FROM_THE_TELECOMM_ACT_5-9-05). A public largely uninformed about the legislation, combined with the intense lobbying of telecommunication interests both contributed to the fallout from the Act.

And while it had bipartisan support from Congress before it was signed into law, its final provisions reflected the shift in power in the 1994 when control of the House went to the Republicans from the Democrats. *Congressional Quarterly* noted shortly after the bill's passage, "There are numerous provisions that the Democratic-controlled 103rd Congress never would have countenanced, such as the ones lifting price controls on cable television systems and allowing radio broadcasters to own an unlimited number of radio stations across the country." (Healey, *CQ Weekly*) The latter, lifting the caps on radio ownership, had the most profound, devastating effect on Hip Hop culture, and rap music in general. Before, the cap was 40 radio stations. The Act enabled corporations such as Clear Channel to own over 1,200 stations, leading to a substantial drop in the number of minority station owners, the homogenization of playlists, and less local news. The consolidation of radio has made it more and more difficult for new artists to get airtime on commercial radio.

The Effects of the 1996 Telecommunications Act on Rap Music

In *The Vinyl Ain't Final*, Dipannita Basu (Basu & Lemelle, 2006) states:

"If we are to understand the scope of outside control and governance of Black culture and bodies in the new millennium, it is significant to note that the 'invisible hand' of the market works in the sphere, of music, crime, and punishment. Making Hip Hop music and warehousing the Hip Hop

generation into prison are, to differing degrees and outcomes, interrelated to elite bureaucratic, political, and economic interests in the face of the sweeping epochal changes in the 1970s. During that time, technological innovations allowed the free flow of money around the world in a matter of seconds. The subsequent impact of technological changes, global flows of capital and flighty investments, resulted in massive downsizing, deregulation of markets, disaggregated forms of production, concentrated forms of ownership (mergers), and de-industrialization. These shifts in society were due to technological changes and the ideological, political, and economic shifts from ‘public’ and state to ‘private’ and market as the basis of economic growth” (Basu & Lemelle, p.41).

The deregulation of the telecommunications industry essentially ‘freed’ corporations from state imposed rules, regulations, and regulatory bodies. The 1996 Telecommunications Act devolved the government’s role in regulating the digitalized public sphere and has had particularly adverse effects on Black and other minority owned radio stations. Clear Channel’s absorption and acquisitions included US Radio, the largest Black-owned broadcast company in America. 3.8% of commercial broadcast facilities were owned by minorities, despite constituting 29% of America’s populace (Basu & Lemelle, p.42). The political economy of the opportunity structure expresses itself culturally, so white-controlled capital impacts radio programming, streamlines output, and squeezes out diversity and local programming (Basu & Lemelle, 2006). By frequently replacing local programming with nationally syndicated programming, it compromises the democratic potential and artistic diversity of a traditional digitalized Black public sphere; Black radio. It can and has regulated terms and conditions of debates and political viewpoints.

Radio deregulation left the public airwaves dominated by less than a handful of companies; Clear Channel, Cumulus, Citadel, and Viacom. The mergers laid off hundreds, decimated community programming and standardized playlists. Clear Channel, the biggest beneficiary owned 1,240 stations by 2003 and its closest competitor Cumulus, owned 248 (Chang, 2005, p.441-442). As of February 17, 2011, Cumulus had purchased Citadel Broadcasting Corp. and its 223 radio stations for \$2.4 billion. ([Cumulus Media purchases Citadel Broadcasting Corp.](#)

(2011). Retrieved March 3, 2011, from

<http://www.goerie.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110217/NEWS02/302179845>)

Technology began to replace engineers, and also rendered DJs obsolete. Michael Martin, Clear Channel's regional vice president of programming, says that the national trend was headed towards fewer songs:

“When I first signed on at KYLD, I signed it on with eighty-six records. Around the country, the stations that play less have bigger ratings. Power 106 in LA, who has huge ratings, their most spun record in a day can go up sixteen times in a day. My most-played will hit eleven, maybe twelve, that's it. Because at the end of the day, the hits are the hits. And the audience comes to you for a reason, to hear the hits” (Chang, 2005, p.442-443).

One of its most cherished tenets was that all radio was local, but according to Jeff Chang, “Conglomerates had no commitment to the idea of the local.” The future was in global monopolies.

One of the biggest critics of the merger and acquisition frenzy that followed the Telecommunications Act was the Future of Music Coalition, an organization that seeks to educate the media and policy makers about music and technology issues (Watkins, 2005, p.137). In its assessment of the Act's aftershocks, it noted that ten companies controlled two-thirds of both radio listeners and revenue nationwide. Ownership consolidation led to format consolidation and shorter playlists, which “deprives citizens the opportunity to hear a wide range of music,” according to the Coalition. Speaking from the floor of the Senate in January 2003, Wisconsin senator Russ Feingold stated:

“People should have choices, listeners should have a diversity of options, and Americans should be able to hear new and different voices. Radio allows us to connect to our communities, to our culture, and to our democracy. It is one of the most vibrant mediums we have for the exchange of ideas, and for artistic expression” (Watkins, 2005, p.138).

Chuck D of Public Enemy made this assessment of the ongoing ‘mergermania.’

“You got five corporations that control retail. You got four who are the dominant record labels. Then you got three radio outlets who own all the stations. You got two television networks (BET, MTV) and you got one video outlet. I call it 5-4-3-2-1. Boom!” (Chang, 2005, p.443)

Akilah Folami, of the Hofstra University School of Law, says:

“Some scholars have argued then that with the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which “relaxed local ownership restrictions, it is difficult to explain why a single entity owning upwards of eight stations in the largest markets would reach out to the smallest groups (within a local community) without the government telling them to do so. For example, when media giants like Clear Channel, Cumulus, Citadel and Viacom were able to purchase multiple radio stations after the Act’s removal of ownership caps on stations, the media companies bought up all of the local stations and consolidated the stations in order to maximize profits. Although “local stations were supposed to be assets to local communities [and] the ownership rules were designed to keep ownership as diverse as possible . . . all that changed in the 1990’s (with the passage of the Telecommunications Act)” (Folami et al., 2007, p.296).

In an article titled “It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp,” clearly referencing Memphis rap group Three 6 Mafia’s 2006 Academy Award for Best Original Song, Folami says the Act not only strengthened corporate control of radio stations, but has allowed the successful commodification of Hip Hop music. By stifling the social commentary and diversity present in “old school’ rap, corporate control has encouraged the proliferation of *gangsta rap* and the gangsta image, becoming the de facto voice of contemporary Hip Hop culture. Radio airplay is no longer balanced, but instead heavily slanted towards the racialized and sexualized image of the Black man for the purpose of promoting consumption. In his documentary, *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, Byron Hurt says “Every Black Man who goes into a studio has always got two people in

his head: him, in terms of who he really is, and the thug that he feels he has to project, the performance thug.”

The July-August 2006 issue of *International Socialist Review* featured an interview with *Can't Stop Won't Stop* author Jeff Chang, in which he commented on the effects of the Act:

“In terms of Hip Hop, it removed the ownership caps on radio stations, which basically ushered in a massive consolidation of the radio industry. That in turn, led to a massive paradigm shift in the way regulatory agencies in Congress began to treat the entire entertainment industry. They were like ‘It’s OK, we can go ahead and let these guys consolidate themselves.’ The original charter of the FCC was to ensure the public interest, but by removing the ownership caps, they allowed companies to be able to take over the definition of the public interest, and to really turn them into a private interest. So now we have a situation where one company owns 1,200 stations (an obvious reference to Clear Channel) and what that has meant is a massive narrowing of content. The narrowing of content inevitably eliminates progressive voices, marginalized voices, women’s voices, and plays up stuff that is a lot more reactionary and conservative. That logic has permeated the entire entertainment industry. It has infected the magazines you read, the newspapers you read, the websites that you see. All of that. At the same time there’s been this shifting (of necessity) to more multi-hued faces that represent this narrowed content. So what’s happened in hip-hop is we’ve gone from having a broad spectrum of voices from the community—your *Queen Latifahs* and *MC Lytes*, to *NWAs*, *Compton’s Most Wanted*, *Geto Boys*—this massive spectrum of voices in the community has been narrowed. Now the women all have to dress a certain way, which is pretty much not to dress at all, and rappers are pretty much all in the “get rich or die trying” camp. It’s not that there are fewer female rappers these days, it’s not that there are fewer progressive rappers these days—there are a lot more than there were fifteen years ago—it’s that these folks have all been locked out of the master systems that have been set up to distribute content all over the world. Instead, you have a lot more money

based around a smaller number of artists. So this narrowing of content that's occurred, in a lot of respects we see it happening with hip-hop first—we're really on the front lines of this battle for media justice.”

(Interview with Jeff Chang. (Jul-Aug 2006). International Socialist Review.

Retrieved March 1, 2011, from

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/48/changinterview.shtml>)

Eric K. Arnold of the aforementioned Future of Music Coalition wrote on the effects of media consolidation on urban radio in a three part series. In Part 1, he defines urban radio as programming whose primary demographic targets people of color living in urban areas. This listenership is categorized by three somewhat overlapping market segments based on age. The “Hot Urban” is geared towards ages 12-24, “Rhythmic Adult Contemporary,” ages 18-34, and finally, “Urban Adult Contemporary” for ages 25-49. While Hot Urban stations tend to spin current rap and contemporary R&B, Urban AC stations rarely play rap, preferring a mix of vintage soul and R&B with more recent neo-soul and R%B. Rhythmic AC stations fall into the middle of these categories. Arnold says:

“Urban radio is a multibillion-dollar industry controlled by a handful of large media conglomerates which program the majority of the genre’s stations across the country. To a large extent, the industry’s current state is the result of media consolidation. Over the last twelve years, independently-owned commercial stations have become a rarity, while corporate radio has become the norm.” (The Effects of Media Consolidation on Urban Radio. (May 16, 2008). Future of Music Coalition.

Retrieved from <http://www.futureofmusic.org/issues/radio/full-power-fm>)

Bobbito Garcia, former co-host of The Stretch Armstrong Show, a New York college radio program known for featuring unsigned Hip Hop artists, says “It’s become national radio, not urban radio. The effect of consolidation is that artists started making music not for the audience, but for the radio.” Julio G., who pioneered West Coast Hip Hop radio 20 years ago, and is credited with originally breaking Eazy-E, says “Real Hip Hop sounds weird,” in comparison to

the increasingly formulaic sound that has taken over radio. “I started with a passion to find the best record. Why do I gotta be just another guy playing (chart-topping MC) Plies?”

Mafioso Rap and the Bling Bling Era

From the early 1990s through the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the New York Hip Hop scene experienced a period of relative inactivity in commercial rap music, during the rise of West Coast Gangsta Rap that had begun with *NWA* in the late 1980s, and continued through the era of Death Row Records through *Dr. Dre*, *Snoop Doggy Dogg*, and converted socially-conscious artist *Tupac Shakur*. However, a resurgence in New York occurred with the ascension of an offshoot of gangsta rap, called Mafioso rap, in which MCs/rappers would create alter egos on their albums that often depicted them as Mafia-styled dons and drug kingpins. This new version of gangsta rap was established with notable album releases by *Raekwon* of the *Wu-Tang Clan*, *Nas*, *The Notorious B.I.G.*, and *Jay-Z*. These albums were released from 1995 to 1997, the year immediately preceding the Telecommunications Act, the year of its signing into legislation, and the year following its inception.

The Mafioso theme, combined with the already prevalent voice of West Coast gangsta rap, kicked off an age of lyrical materialism and self-indulgence, complete with references to high-priced luxury vehicles, clothing, and the outlandish purchasing of diamond encrusted jewelry, leading to the period following 1996 to become known as the “Bling Bling Era,” (Reeves, 2008). Not only would this era shape the characterization of future rap artists, but it would stimulate a diaspora into the independent Midwest and Southern rap markets, and a resurgence of gangsta rap to combat the corporate rap that was being manufactured by major labels. This corporate rap established the need for bankable producers to craft radio-friendly hits to ensure high record sales for rap artists. The emergence of radio consolidation hastened the rise of corporate rap, formulaic music releases consisting of catchy hooks, hummable lyrics, and up-tempo R&B style arrangements (Watkins, 2005) It also ushered in a “producer era” in which celebrity producers such as Sean “*Puff Daddy*” Combs, the *Neptunes*, *Timbaland*, and even *Dr. Dre*, were needed to ensure high album sales and hit singles for pop and urban radio. Whereas saying and doing something original in rap was once a main goal, as it was in the late 1980s, the late 1990s can be characterized with the mimicking of already established styles and trends.

Prominent New York Rap Artists

Weaving ghetto narratives with kung-fu mysticism, *Nation of Gods and Earths (Five Percenters)* theological teachings previously immortalized by *Rakim*, and through ten distinct personalities, the *WuTang Clan's* cult-like influence on Hip Hop culture began in 1993 with the release *Enter the WuTang (36 Chambers)*, which is littered with references to Chinese hand combat arts (Higgins, 2009, p.36). They hailed from Staten Island, called “Shaolin,” and were either related or had grown up together. *RZA*, the producer, brokered an unprecedented deal with Loud Records that not only gained them complete creative control of their music, but the option for each group member to record solo albums with different labels (Light et al., 1999, p.333). Nelson George (1999) comments:

“In the ‘90s, the vogue for contemporary Hong Kong action movies that blend ‘70s martial arts with more elaborate special effects (as in the popular Chinese Ghost Story series) informs the rhymes, names, and cosmology of the *Wu-Tang Clan*. Though they in fact come from Staten Island, its nine members claim to belong to an ancient and secret sect searching for the thirty-sixth chamber of martial arts knowledge. While theirs is far from a coherent vision, the *Wu-Tang* have used their interest in Asian action movies to inject a sense off the mystical into Hip Hop” (p.106).

Their early classic solo efforts include *Method Man's* 1994 Def Jam debut, *Tical*, which produced the Grammy-winning single *All I Need* featuring Mary J. Blige, and went platinum; and *Raekwon's* album *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, which helped usher in the *Mafioso rap* genre, the East Coast's response, or rather, adherence to West Coast *gangsta rap* (Light et al., 1999) The group also released solo albums from each member, *Ghostface Killah*, *U-God*, *Inspectah Deck*, *Ol' Dirty Bastard*, *RZA*, *GZA (Genius)*, *Cappadonna*, and *Masta Killa*. They have released their own clothing line, Wu-Wear, and both *Method Man* and *RZA* have added Hollywood acting credits to their resumes.

Most hope for a New York resurrection was placed in an MC hailing from the five boroughs' Queensbridge housing project, the world's largest public housing development and site of the "Bridge Wars" of the late 1980's. Inspired by the devastation the drug trade and thug mentality was having on his friends and his community, Nasir "Nas" Jones unleashed deft storytelling and mind-blowing street poetry on 1994's *Illmatic* (Reeves, 2008, p.181). *Nas* debuted as a guest vocalist on *Main Source's Live at the BBQ*, a memorable performance that made him an instant New York cult figure (George, 1999, p.70). After signing with Columbia Records, he amassed a team of New York's best producers including *DJ Premier*, *Large Professor*, *Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest*, *Pete Rock*, and *L.E.S.* to craft his classic debut album, *Illmatic*. From eerie ghetto reportage on "New York State of Mind," to a disheartening letter to a friend in prison on "One Love," to an introspective look at project living through the eyes of its toughest MC on "The World Is Yours," *Nas* was considered, by East Coast standards, the obvious voice to bring New York rap back to prominence (Reeves, 2008, p.181). Lyrical excerpts follow:

"New York State of Mind"

"It drops deep, as it does in my breath. I never sleep, 'cause sleep is the cousin of death/Beyond the walls of intelligence, life is defined, I think of crime, when I'm in a New York state of mind" (*Illmatic*, 1994)

"One Love"

"What up kid? I know shit is rough, doing your bid./ When the cops came, you should slid to my crib./Fuck it, Black, no time for looking' back, it's done, plus, congratulations, you know you got a son./ I heard he looks like ya/ Why don't your lady write ya?/ Told her she should visit, that's when she got hyper...I was like 'yeah, shorty don't care', she a snake too/ Firkin' with them niggas from that fake crew that hate you./ But yo, guess who got shot in the dome piece (head), Jerome's niece, on her way home from Jones Beach" (*Climatic*, 1994)

"The World Is Yours"

“I sip the Dom P(region champagne), watching’ Gandhi, till I’m charged and writing in my book of rhymes, all the words past the margin...the thief’s theme, play me at night, they won’t act right, the fiend of Hip Hop has got me stuck like a crack pipe” (Climatic, 1994)

Containing only ten tracks, the album continues to be heralded for its production, lyricism, and brevity. *Nas*’ complex lyrics were poetic descriptions of his environment during childhood, and his extensive vocabulary and spiritual commentary raised the bar for subject matter and lyrical skill. However, it sold less than 200,000 copies its first year out, a commercial disappointment for perhaps the most gifted lyricist since *Rakim* in the late 1980’s. It would be seven years before the album would finally reach platinum. Author Matthew Gustier (2009) says:

“*Nas* was playing a role on *Climatic*, even if it was himself. By constructing this persona, *Nas* not only laid out his career for the next decade-plus, but the careers of dozens of other rappers who were able to use their considerable skills to develop similar personas. His brazen ambition has become a road map for every rapper who hopes to reach an artistic peak” (p.1).

Michael Eric Dyson (2010) casts the following analysis of the aforementioned “One Love”:

“Instead of writing (better yet, speaking) the letters as an inmate, he writes to imprisoned comrades, offering them not a way out but at least a view outside the prison walls that confine them...*Nas*’ narration casts a sharp eye and literate tongue on the streets from which his mates have been temporarily banned. “One Love” teems gritty details of unfaithful lovers, menacing rivals, criminal apprentices, unseen offspring, mourning mothers, troubled siblings, and a neighborhood fraught with murder and other moral mayhem...”One Love” is both reportage and pep talk, a morality tale of lost innocence and lost life in degrees and proportions...It captures poignant moments of black male intimacy and vulnerability forged in the crucible of urban desperation and poverty. In telling his friends’ stories,

Nas reflects on lives carved from suffering and struggle, interpreting their experience in a tale that marries vernacular and formal poetic devices” (p.133).

The Notorious B.I.G. and Jay-Z

Despite *Nas*' critical acclaim, the job of resuscitating New York's national acclaim arrived with the same trifecta that turned Death Row Records into a West Coast Hip Hop hit factory: an ingenious producer (Sean “Puffy” Combs), the formation of a mega-hardcore Hip Hop label (Bad Boy), and an incredibly gifted and charismatic MC (The *Notorious B.I.G. aka Biggie Smalls*) (Reeves, 2008, p.181). Just as *The Chronic* propelled Death Row to superiority, Biggie's debut *Ready to Die* ushered in Bad Boy as a commercial rap powerhouse. Puffy explained the motivation behind the album, which ironically, was inspired by the competition:

“We wanted to make a movie on wax. We were so impressed by the stories on *Ice Cube's America's Most Wanted*, *NWA's Niggaz4life*, *Dr. Dre's The Chronic*. I never heard a story told like that from a New York point of view. We wanted to tell a movie our way” (Reeves, 2008, p.181).

Born Christopher Wallace in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn to Jamaican parents, but raised solely by his mother, the *Notorious B.I.G.*, known affectionately as “Biggie,” was an ex-street hustler trying to make the transition to rapper. As many rappers had done in the 1990s, he scored a hit on a motion picture soundtrack. The movie was *Who's The Man*, and the song, “Party and Bullshit,” was successful enough to catapult him into numerous guest appearances. (Light, 1997) Signed to Uptown Records, Biggie sank into a deep depression when Combs was fired in July 1993. “I would rather have never come out if I'm never gonna come out,” he said (Light et al., 1999, p.342) He had already begun production on his debut album, and his girlfriend had just given birth to a daughter. Combs label *Bad Boy Entertainment* finally landed distribution with Clive Davis's Arista Records and in September 1994, the album *Ready To Die* was released.

The album is often noted for its dark, depressing nature, and its self-destructive emotional feel is evident in songs such as “Everyday Struggle” and “Suicidal Thoughts,” though songs such as

these vastly contrast the party-oriented singles. Much like *The Chronic*, the album's production was sample-based; the lead single "Juicy" was lifted from *Mtume's* "Juicy Fruit," and the smash single "Big Poppa" sampled the *Isley Brothers* "Between the Sheets." Biggie's storytelling style was reminiscent of *Slick Rick*, and his slick metaphorical content was akin to fellow Brooklyn MC *Big Daddy Kane*. In fact, Biggie had rapped over Kane's *Aint No Half Steppin* instrumental on his demo. Music journalist Dream Hampton wrote "New York's legacy of brilliant lyricists descended on Biggie as if he were a cultural apex. Their influences were immeasurable" (Reeves, 2008, p.189).

Marcus Reeves (2008) analyzes the album's intro:

"Clearly Big (in his calculated rhyme delivery) and Puffy (while supervising production) had Dre's formula for making albums in mind when sculpting the cohesive drama of *Ready to Die*. But instead of witnessing the birth of street knowledge, the album's intro treated listeners to the sounds of a hustler's birth: first as a baby, born to the grooves of Curtis Mayfield's Blaxploitation classic "Superfly." Then as a child of Hip Hop, the sounds of domestic violence intermingling with the intro to "Rapper's Delight." Then as a teenage stickup kid committing a holdup in a subway car to the beat of "Top Billin." And finally as a prison inmate about to be released to the rhythm of Snoop Dogg's "Tha Shiznit" (p.189).

"Things Done Changed" displayed the same nihilism that was evident in West Coast gangsta rap and served as a report on the crime infestation that crack cocaine introduced to his neighborhood, as well as the intergenerational conflict it caused between the youth and the elderly.

"Remember back in the days, when niggas had waves/ Gazelle shades and corn braids/ Pitchin' pennies, honeys had the high top jellies/ Shootin' skelly, motherfuckers was all friendly...turn your pages to 1993/ Niggas is getting' smoked, G, believe me...Back in the days, our parents used to take care of us/ Look at 'em now, they even fuckin' scared of us/ Callin the city

for help because they can't maintain/ Damn, shit done changed" (p.189-190).

"Everyday Struggle" lamented on his past selling crack and his relationship with his mother:

"She was forced to kick me out, no doubt/ Then I figured out things went for twenty down south...I'm seeing body after body and our Mayor Giuliani/ Ain't trying to see no black man turn into John Gotti...I remember I was just like you/ Smoking blunts with my crew/ Flippin' oldies 62s/ 'Cause G-E-D. wasn't B-I-G, I got P-A-I-D/ That's why my mom hates me" (p.191).

With "Rapper's Delight," commercial rap music began with MCs bragging about fictitious material wealth, but ironically, it was now attainable beyond the now-normalized practice of selling crack. The career of the *Notorious B.I.G.* was a combination of the image of the flashy, luxurious life of a drug dealer and the marketing practices of the music industry. This new era of "ghetto fabulousness," as it was called, helped transition New York Hip Hop into Mafioso rap, the East Coast derivative of West Coast gangsta rap in which mafia culture, instead of gang culture was glorified. Instead of speaking of crack sales on street corners, rappers now spoke of establishing drug connections with Columbia and other South American nations, and shipping in kilograms (or kis [pronounced keys]) of pure cocaine. The early origins of Mafioso rap began in the late 1980s with the Juice Crew's Kool G Rap, whose influence can be found in the lyrical styles of Nas, the Notorious B.I.G., and Jay-Z Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2007) comments on the trend:

"Rappers by the mid-1990s helped romanticize the organized crime "mafia style." Frequently dressing like classic Italian mobsters in their videos, these MCs often named themselves after famous Italian or Columbian mobsters and made earnest attempts to be down with La Cosa Nostra" (p.112).

Davarian L. Baldwin (Forman & Neal, 2004) mentions that Biggie even goes as far as to assume the role of a white movie figure, Frank White, from the film *King of New York*, and concluded many of his rhymes by exclaiming "Mafioso!" (Neal et al., 2004, p.170). Even his protégé group

was named *Junior M.A.F.I.A.*. The Hip Hop wardrobe, which normally consisted of baggy jeans, sneakers, Timberland construction boots, and hooded sweatshirts (hoodies) was being traded in for designer suits, bright-colored Coogi sweaters, slacks and Mauri alligator shoes. Designer name brands such as Gucci, Moschino and Versace became commonplace references, as did vehicles from Mercedes Benzes and BMWs to Rolls Royces and Bentley sedans. High priced champagnes such as Moet and Cristal also became staples within Hip Hop vernacular.

The good times displayed in Biggie's Hype Williams-directed videos contrasted the perils of his real life as his contemporary, rapper/MC *Tupac Shakur* was robbed and shot five times in the lobby of Quad Recording Studio on November 30, 1994 (Light et al., 1999, p.343) while Biggie was upstairs in a recording studio. Within two years, I feel the circumstances following the shooting and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 would forever change not only rap music, but Hip Hop culture, forever. While Tupac sat in prison after being convicted of sexual abuse charges, the *Notorious B.I.G.* and Sean "Puffy" Combs' Bad Boy Entertainment continued to thrive. Four videos; "Juicy," "Big Poppa," "One More Chance," and "Warning," enjoyed heavy rotation on MTV and the songs garnered major radio airplay across the nation. Bad Boy also released three R&B albums by *Total*, *112*, and Biggie's wife, Faith Evans. All sold well. Biggie's protégé group, *Junior M.A.F.I.A.*, released the LP titled *Conspiracy*, which yielded the singles "Players Anthem" and "Get Money."

After witnessing the multi-platinum sales of Biggie's *Ready To Die*, and the mediocre sales of his debut, *Climatic*, *Nas* boldly named his second album *It Was Written* (Light et al., 1999, p.331), and recruited the *Track masters*, the production team responsible for Biggie's hit "Juicy," to craft the type of radio songs that would boost his album sales. The result was a collaboration between him and *Fugees* singer/MC *Lauryin Hill* titled "If I Ruled The World (Imagine That)." The song's hook sampled *Kurtis Blow's* song of the same title and the beat came from *Whodini's* 1984 song "Friends." *The Eurythmics* "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" was remade into "Street Dreams." Of "If I Ruled The World," David Bry offers the following:

"It seemed like *Nas's* song was coming out of the speakers of every box on Broadway. MTV put the Hype Williams-directed video on heavy rotation, and soon the image of *Nas*, jiggy now in an Armani suit and silk scarf,

profiling on top of a limousine before Times Square's neon nightscape, could be seen by kids all across America. All of a sudden, it looked like *Nas* really did (rule the world)" (Light et al., 2004, p.334).

On the *Wu-Tang Clan's Raekwon's* album, *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, *Nas* first revealed his "Escobar" persona. He would further delve into his alter ego on *It Was Written*, with much more materialistic lyrical subject matter. Although Hip Hop purists accused *Nas* of selling out in order to obtain mainstream pop appeal, the results were not arguable. The album, released July 2, 1996 had gone double platinum by September. As Marcus Reeves (2008) observed:

"Judging from the fine cars and fly clothes he sported in the videos promoting the album, especially the one for "If I Ruled the World," *Nas* was clear proof that the ideals of ghetto fabulous were catching hold" (p.195).

Nas's second video, "Street Dreams," was modeled after the hit mafia movie *Casino* (p.195). He would later form the group *The Firm* with Brooklyn MCs *AZ* and *Foxy Brown*, a collaborative effort that furthered the Mafioso rap genre. However, it would be another Brooklyn MC that would take the subgenre to new heights. *Jay-Z*, who would be later featured on Biggie's second and final album, released his debut album, *Reasonable Doubt*, and firmly established himself in the "King of New York" debate along with the *Notorious B.I.G.* and *Nas*.

"*Jay-Z*, in his first solo LP, prided himself on his pimp/mafia/drug-lord style. The opening skit on *Reasonable Doubt* signifies the Hip Hop film of choice, *Scarface*, where a mobster arranges a purchase of two kilos of cocaine from Columbians. He later raps about a typical gangsta highlife, complete with expensive cars, hos, and clothes, sipping fine wine and rapping with "a godfather flow." Largely considered a classic, *Reasonable Doubt* inspired scores of imitators who similarly rapped about high-end cars, fashion, "moving product," and killing enemies in order to maintain power" (Ogbar, 2007, p.112).

For his persona, *Jay-Z* chose the nonchalant kingpin who possessed a poetic precision and a smirk that acknowledged the question coming off the tongues of the curious: Where in the hell did they get the money to do all of this? (Reeves, 2008, p.205) With no major-label backing, *Jay-Z* and his cohorts Damon Dash and Kareem “Biggs” Burke were able to produce videos of MTV quality complete with luxury cars and boats in the Caribbean, which seemed to replicate the extent of *Jay-Z’s* debut album exploits. On the song “Dead Presidents II,” he hinted with the lines “I dabbled in crazy weight/ Without rap, I was crazy straight/ Partner, I’m still spending money from ’88,” insinuating his profits from his previous life of drug dealing is what enabled them to do so. Perhaps *Jay-Z’s* most powerful tool was his ability to strategically balance his conscience with his moral shortcomings, and his love of the fast life combined with his fear of incarceration and/or death as a result of his lifestyle. This is evident in the song “Can I Live”:

“My pain, wish it was quick to see/ From sellin ‘caine till brains was fried
to a fricassee/ Can’t lie, at the time it never bothered me/ At the bar getting’
my thug on properly/ My squad and me, lack of respect for authority/
Laughin’ hard, happy to be escapin’ poverty/ However, brief, I know this
game got valleys and peaks/ Expectations for dips/ For precipitation, we
stack chips, hardly/ The youth I used to be, soon to see a million/ No more
Big Willie, my game is grown, prefer you call me William/ Illin’ for
revenues, Rayful Edmund-like, Channel seven news...Forgetting all I ever
knew, convenient amnesia/ I suggest you call my lawyer, I know the
procedure/ Lock my body, can’t trap my mind/ Easily, explain why we
adapt to crime/ I’d rather die enormous than live dormant, that’s how we on
it/ Live at the main event/ I bet a trip to Maui on it/ Presidential suites my
residential for the weekend/ Confidentially speakin’ in code since I sensed
you peekin’/ The INXS rental, don’t be fooled, my game is mental/ We
both out of town, dog, what you tryin’ to get into?! Viva, Las Vegas, see ya
later at the crap tables/ Meet me by the one that starts a G up/This way no
frog willies present gamblin’, they re-up/ And we can have a pleasant time
sippin’ margaritas/Y-y-yeah, Can I Live?” (Reasonable Doubt, 1996)

At first listen, it would seem as if he was gloating about his drug-dealing escapades, but listening deeper unveils his reluctance to sell drugs, or “hustle,” seeing it as the only way to escape his bleak existence. On “Can’t Knock the Hustle,” he rhymes:

“At my arraignment, screamin’/ All us blacks got is sports and
entertainment, until we even/ (I’m) thievin’/ As long as I’m breathin’/
Can’t knock the way a nigga’s eatin’/ Fuck you, even” (Reasonable Doubt,
1996)

In his lyrics, Jay’s motivation for his criminally enterprising ways was his disillusionment with the American economic system (p.206). This is expressed in “D’Evils,” which, purposefully, was spelled like “devils.”

“This shit is wicked on these mean streets/ None of my friends speak, we
all tryin’ to win/ But then again, maybe it’s for the best though/ ‘Cause if
they seein’ too much, you know they tryin’ to see you touched/ Whoever
said illegal was the easy way out couldn’t understand the mechanics/ And
the workings of the underworld, granted/ Nine to five is how you survive/ I
ain’t trying to survive/ I’m trying to live it to the limit and love it a lot/
Life’s ills poisoned my body/I used to say ‘Fuck mic skills,’ I never prayed
to God, I prayed to Gotti/That’s right it’s wicked, fast life, I lived it/Ain’t
asking for forgiveness of my sins/...it gets dangerous, money and power is
changing us/ And now we lethal, infected with d’evils (devils)”

In the second verse, he expounds upon the unfortunate destruction of a longtime friendship, using a series of double entendres and situational ironies in one of the most visually descriptive verses of the album.

“We used to fight for building blocks, now we fight for blocks with
buildings to make a killin’/ The closest of friends when we both started/
Grew apart as the money grew, and soon grew black-hearted/ Thinkin’
back to when we first learned to use rubbers (condoms)/ He never learned,
so, in turn, I’m kidnappin’ his baby’s mother/ My hand around her collar,

feedin' her cheese (money)/ She said the taste of dollars was shitty so I fed
her fifties/ About his whereabouts, I wasn't convinced/ I kept feedin' her
money till her shit started to make sense (cents)/ Who could ever foresee?/
We used to stay up all night at slumber parties, now I'm tryin' to rock this
bitch to sleep/ Over the years, we were real close/ Now I see his fears
through her tears, I know she wishin' we was still close/ Don't cry, it is to
be/ In time, I'll take away your miseries and make 'em mine, d'evils"

His collaboration with the *Notorious B.I.G.*, titled "Brooklyn's Finest," was seen not so much as a passing of the torch, but an acknowledgement of the newcomer's talents. Ironically, *Jay-Z* was nearly three years older than Biggie. The two would later work together on songs "I Love The Dough" and "Young Gs," but Biggie would not live to see either song released.

In February 1997, the *Notorious B.I.G.* traveled to California to promote his heavily anticipated second album, *Life After Death*, and to film a video for the lead single, "Hypnotize." On March 8, he presented an award at the Soul Train Music Awards in Los Angeles and attended an after party at the Petersen Automotive Museum. The party was closed down due to overcrowding, and shortly after midnight, Biggie and his entourage began to leave the venue. At the corner of Fairfax and Wilshire, a black Chevrolet Impala pulled up alongside the GMC Suburban in which Biggie was sitting in the passenger seat. The driver rolled down his window, drew a 9 mm pistol and began firing into the Suburban. Biggie was hit four times in the chest. At 1:15 a.m., he was pronounced dead at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. He was 24 years old. On March 25, his double album *Life After Death* was released. Continuing the *Mafioso rap* genre, he was the first artist to have two posthumous number one singles, "Hypnotize," and ironically, "Mo Money Mo Problems." The album sold 690,000 copies in its first week, and went on to sell over ten million copies (Reeves, 2008, p.197).

While *Ready to Die* had portrayed Biggie as a midlevel crack dealer, *Life After Death* had escalated him to a drug kingpin/mafia don. Rhymes about scrambling on Brooklyn corners were replaced with the experiences of a drug lord enjoying his wealth while defending himself against jealous enemies. Like *Tupac Shakur*, his last completed LP was a double album. The criminal universe that Biggie wrote about on *Life After Death* had become a metaphor for the criminal-

driven celebrity within hardcore rap (p.197). He referenced both *Raekwon* and *Ghostface Killah* of the *Wu-Tang Clan* (on “Kick In The Door” and “What’s Beef,” respectively), who had accused him of plagiarism, biting (copying) and stealing slang terminology on the skit “Shark Niggas” and the song “Ice Water” on *Raekwon’s Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*. *Raekwon* rhymed “That’s life/To top it all off, beef with White (a reference to Biggie’s Frank White-alter ego)/ Pullin’ bleach out, trying to throw it in my eyesight,” to which Biggie responded:

“This goes out to those who choose to use/ Disrespectful views on the King of NY/ Fuck that, why try?/ Throw bleach in your eye, now you’re Brailin’ (Braille-blind) it/ Fuck that soft shit, I’m scalin’ it/ Conscience of your nonsense/ In ’88, sold more powder than Johnson & Johnson... Ain’t no other kings in this rap thing, they’re siblings/ Nothin’ but my children, one shot, they’re disappearin...”

On “What’s Beef,” he responded to Ghostface:

“Pardon my French, But ahh, sometimes I get kinda peeved at these weak MCs/ With these supreme-baller like lyrics, I call ‘em like I see ‘em, G/ Y’all niggas sound like me/ Y’all was grimy in the early nineties, far behind me/ It ain’t hard to find me” (p.197).

Some fans speculate Biggie was referencing Tupac’s untimely demise as a result of his blatant disrespect, on “Long Kiss Goodnight.” The lines “Now you rest eternally sleepy/ You burn when you creep me/ Rest where the worms and the weak be,” were sometimes interpreted as Biggie gloating over Tupac’s death. He even referenced Nas’ fall from New York’s Hip Hop savior and his foray into Mafioso rap on “Kick in the Door.”

“Your reign on the top was short like leprechauns/As I crush so-called willies, thugs, and rapper dons” (*Life After Death*, 1997)

This was in response to a dis from *Nas' It Was Written* that was initially thought to be referencing Tupac: "Fake thug, no love/ You get the slug/ CB4, Gusto, your luck though/ I didn't know till I was drunk though" (*It Was Written*, 1996)

Hardcore rap was definitely headed for, to borrow a phrase from the diamond-obsessed rappers to follow in Big's footsteps, an "ice age" (Reeves, 2008, p.199). Rather eerily, *Life After Death* connected Biggie with the forefathers of gangsta rap, *NWA*, by collaborating with *Eazy-E's* protégés, *Bone Thugs & Harmony*, on "Notorious Thugs," and even contained an ode to the state in which he would meet his untimely demise, "Going Back to Cali" (Reeves, 2008, p.200).

Murdered in Los Angeles just six months after *Tupac Shakur's* death, *The Notorious B.I.G.* also remains a legendary figure in Hip Hop culture. Martyrs of 1990s Hip Hop, both were quickly tagged gangsta rappers after their demise, though crack and crime were not their only topics (George, 1999, p.47). Nelson George says:

"A lot of drivel has been written about these two dead young black men. Heroes for a generation. Victims of their violent recordings. Martyrs. Villains. Whatever. For a moment, let's just discuss them as artists. If, over twenty years it evolved out of the Bronx, Hip Hop is an art form, then these men built profoundly on that foundation. Far from being simple oppositional figures in an East Coast-West Coast soap opera, Pac and Biggie complemented each other, though outwardly they seemed mismatched" (George, 1999, p.47).

POST TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT (1998-PRESENT)

The evolution of commercial rap music from the *Sugarhill Gang's* "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 to its current form was the result of a myriad of factors. The original factors were socioeconomic, which birthed two separate cradles of culture within the urban decay of New York City and Los Angeles. Next, was the recognition that Hip Hop culture was being consumed by a white suburban audience, far from inner-city black neighborhoods. Recording labels then saw the culture as a global commodity, specifically its musical element. Once that was discovered, the music naturally evolved from party oriented lyrics to reflecting the social issues affecting the black community. This was evidenced by *Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five's* "The Message" in 1982. Hip Hop was officially inclusive of all races upon the release of *Afrika Bambaataa's* "Planet Rock."

The lyrical shift towards more street-oriented lyrics was evident in the rise of Def Jam artists *Run-DMC* and *LL Cool J* in the mid-1980s. During this time period, white consumption of rap music continued to grow due to Run-DMC garnering heavy viewership on MTV and their rock influenced singles on each of their first three albums from 1984-1986. Around this time, the crack-cocaine epidemic was destroying black communities across the country, namely New York City and Los Angeles. Musically, their responses differed. In New York, the lyricism took on a knowledgeable and conscious personality, with MCs gradually incorporating more poetic devices into their rhymes, including internal rhyme schemes, extended metaphors, and other forms of complex wordplay. The late 1980's was a period of growing Afrocentricity. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, the gang culture spawned from the late 1970's resulted in a much more violent, confrontational lyrical response, which was later termed gangsta rap. Attention from local and federal authorities thrust the new subgenre further into the mainstream, and once again, white consumption of black popular culture resulted in its commodification.

By the early 1990s, the advent of Soundscan and the recognition of gangsta rap as the new white youth rebel music caused a shift in music industry practices in which mostly gangsta rap artists were prominently featured (Watkins, 2005). Socially conscious artists, especially those from New York, were not heavily promoted, causing conflict between West and East Coast Hip Hop artists. The gangsta rap genre had begun with *NWA (Niggaz With Attitude)* and was

extended through the departures of two of their members, *Ice Cube* and *Dr. Dre*. While Cube went east to New York work with *Public Enemy* producers, the *Bomb Squad*, Dre began Death Row Records and turned gangsta rap to pop music with his *G-Funk* production style. The West Coast gangsta rap genre accounted for much of the Hip Hop music industry's income; its influence was so strong that socially conscious artist *Tupac Shakur* actually joined Death Row Records upon his release from prison and switched his style to the gangsta mantra.

The New York Hip Hop scene continued on its socially conscious path into the early 1990s. When it was evident that social consciousness was not profitable, an East Coast form of gangsta rap resulted, called Mafioso Rap. Instead of lyrics being focused on gang culture of the West Coast, lyrics were fixated on the lifestyle of the mafia and drug kingpins. The most prominent practitioners of this new subgenre released albums from approximately 1994-1997, the years immediately preceding and following the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. These practitioners included *Raekwon* of the *WuTang Clan*, the *Notorious B.I.G.*, *Nas*, and *Jay-Z*.

On February 8, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Telecommunications Act, the first overhaul of American telecommunications policy in over sixty years. It lifted the caps of radio ownership, allowing media conglomerates to purchase hundreds of radio stations and consolidate them under one format. This has resulted in the stagnation of local artist ascension and public discourse in the black community, nationalized playlists, the mergers of multinational corporations, and most importantly, caused an unnatural shift in the evolution of commercial rap music. Now that radio airplay was controlled by record labels, the already limited power of the artist was placed into the hands of white executives with no organic links to the culture, only a focus on the bottom line. This resulted in all the caricatures, misogynistic, materialistic and self-indulgent criminal portrayals of Hip Hop artists to be the only ones promoted, since it had been proven by statistical methods of communication research (Soundscan) that these portrayals were the most profitable. Socially conscious rap music was banished to the underground, and gangsta rap artists became the face of the culture. Also, premier MCs *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.* were both murdered within a year of the signing of the Telecommunications Act, and the effects of their lyrical content are still prevalent today because their respective rhyming styles/personas at the time of their demise influenced all of today's lyricists. The results of the aforementioned events and factors are further discussed.

The late 1990s and early 2000s was an era that continued to be influenced by the Telecommunications Act; First, the New York Hip Hop scene emerged superior, reminiscent of the late 1980's, except lyrical content was no longer socially conscious; it was purely materialistic (Watkins, 2005) Def Jam Records, as it had done in the mid-1980s, monopolized the industry as the distributor of Roc-A-Fella Records, Ruff Ryders Records, and Murder Inc. Records, which were the labels of artists *Jay-Z*, *DMX*, and *Ja Rule*, respectively. Secondly, the murders of *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.* resulted in a diaspora of rap music, primarily to the South and the Midwest.

Although existing since the 1980s, the Southern Hip Hop movement was catapulted into the mainstream after the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and southern cities such as Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Miami, and Memphis became major players in the Hip Hop music industry, and major labels flocked to secure distribution for proven successful independent labels such as New Orleans' No Limit Records and Cash Money Records (Sarig, 2007). The Midwest produced a plethora of rappers including *Nelly* of St. Louis, Chicago's producer/MC *Kanye West*, and the first successful commercial white rapper after *Vanilla Ice*, Detroit's *Eminem*. His success brought issues of race, talent, cultural theft, and acceptance into discussion, as white males have always been the primary consumers of hardcore rap, and *Eminem*'s astronomical record sales can be somewhat attributed to the primary consumer's racial identification with him.

And finally, Jimmy Iovine's Interscope Records again became a force in rap music after *Dr. Dre* signed *Eminem* to his Interscope-distributed Aftermath Records, and when *Eminem* signed the most prominent gangsta rap artist since *Tupac Shakur*, Queens MC *50 Cent*. After the signing of *50 Cent*, his troubled past (which included the childhood murder of his mother, his arrests for selling crack-cocaine, and being shot nine times on the verge of stardom) and beefs with other prominent artists became the blueprint for new artists, as street credibility and confrontation became necessities for successful hardcore MCs. The Mafioso rap and gangsta rap genres coalesced in the South and resulted in a new subgenre, cocaine rap. Although its roots could be seen in earlier mid-1990s artists (namely Houston's *UGK* and New York's *Jay-Z*), cocaine rap resulted in the emergence of numerous Southern artists that boasted of tales of not only selling crack cocaine in the inner city, but widescale cocaine distribution, and influenced the current period of rap music that I refer to as the "D-Boy" or "Dopeboy Era." Prominent artists that have

furthered the trend include Atlanta MCs *TI*, *Young Jeezy*, and *Gucci Mane*, Virginia's *The Clipse*, and most recently, Miami's *Rick Ross*. The cocaine rap era also brings into focus the Telecommunication Act's effect on the importance of street credibility versus entertainment value.

Def Jam Subsidiaries

By 1998, Def Jam Records had not only the *WuTang Clan's Method Man* and Brooklyn female MC *Foxy Brown* on their roster, but was the parent label to three separate independent labels, each with their own marquee artists. Yonkers, New York MC *DMX* belonged to the Ruff Ryders label, along with Yonkers rap group the *L.O.X.*, who had successfully defected from Sean Combs' Bad Boy Records. Roc-A-Fella Records was *Jay-Z's* label, and Murder Inc.'s premier artist was *Ja Rule*.

In 1998, Def Jam released *It's Dark and Hell is Hot*, the debut album of rapper *DMX*. This release was strategically designed to represent hardcore, street sensibility, in the face of the materialistic "Bling Bling" era that was being experienced at the time. He wore a choker (literally a dog's chain) around his neck, which contrasted the diamond encrusted chains and medallions of his commercial counterparts. *DMX* commented to Marcus Reeves (2008):

"This isn't Hip-Hop. This is rap going down. If it were Hip-Hop, niggas would be real with it. They would communicate with the essence of the culture, which is the streets. They wouldn't take it to make sales...sayin', 'I want to dance like this. I want to shine like this.' You can't take money with you to heaven, baby. You can only take love" (p.224-225).

Reeves says when Ruff Ryders released *DMX's* single "Get At Me Dog," commercial rap music and America were "waist-deep in the ice age." Hedonistic danceability, self-indulgence, self-absorption, and rampant materialism became staples of the lyrical content embodied in the aforementioned corporate rap that resulted with the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (p.227). *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot* was the first of five consecutive *DMX* albums to debut on the Billboard charts at #1. He also released the album *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood* in 1998, becoming the first artist to debut twice at #1 in the same year; both releases reached multi-

platinum sales. In fact, his first five albums (the others titled *And Then There Was X*, *The Great Depression*, and *Grand Champ*) all debuted at #1. His sixth album, *Year of the Dog...Again*, was released in 2006 and debuted at #2. *DMX's* shaved head, brushes with the law, and thugged-out persona influenced comparisons to Hip Hop's fallen soldier, *Tupac Shakur*. His ongoing legal transgressions and admitted drug abuse have continued to hamper his career.

After his 1996 debut *Reasonable Doubt*, *Jay-Z* released an album every year from 1997 to 2003; each went multi-platinum. Just as his single "Ain't No Nigga" was released on the 1996 motion picture soundtrack of *The Nutty Professor* (starring Eddie Murphy and Jada Pinkett-Smith), he again utilized effective cross-marketing with 1998's "Can I Get A," which was released on the soundtrack of the movie *Rush Hour* (starring Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan). His following album, *Vol.2 Hard Knock Life*, sold over five million copies. *Jay-Z* has since used this technique of releasing singles on major motion picture soundtracks such as "Girl's Best Friend" (*Blue Streak*, starring Martin Lawrence) and "La La La" (*Bad Boys II*, starring Martin Lawrence and Will Smith). He has successfully transitioned rap music's commodification into numerous endorsements and investments including a clothing line (Rocawear), Budweiser commercials using his music, and partial ownership of the NBA franchise, the New Jersey Nets. These economic opportunities were a result of the consolidation of major media industries including movie production companies and music recording labels, and Hip Hop's rising stature in the world as a global commodity. As the biggest face of rap music, *Jay-Z*, corporately, has taken Hip Hop culture to new heights as a commercial rap artist.

Ja Rule was born Jeffrey Atkins in Queens, NY and was featured on *Jay-Z's* single "Can I Get A." His guest appearance successfully set up his debut album, *Venni Vetti Vecci*, released in 1999, and has since sold over 3 million copies globally. His next two albums, *Rule 3:36* (2000) and *Pain Is Love* (2001), steered by their R&B and party themed lyrics and sing-songy hooks, which were characteristics of the corporate rap era, each sold over 3 million copies in the U.S. and over 5 million copies globally. His dispute with rapper *50 Cent* resulted in a highly publicized feud that finally resulted in *50's* rise to stardom and *Ja's* record sales drastically plummeting.

After the successful 1998 release of Jay-Z's album *Vol. 2 Hard Knock Life*, both DMX and Ja Rule and their respective camps accompanied him on the Hard Knock Life Tour, a nationwide Hip Hop tour that remains the most profitable in rap music history, and there was no reports of criminal mischief from fans or artists. The effects of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 were already being felt within two years of its signing.

Early Southern Hip Hop

The Hip Hop music industry had already profited off the musical exploits of West and East Coast artists. After the deaths of *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.*, the door was opened for the artists in the Southern United States to garner mainstream attention. Their lyrical subject matter, like that of early New York Hip Hop, was geared towards the party element. However, as lyrical dexterity began to evolve, social issues began to filter into content. Simultaneously, the subject matter that was discussed in other forms of Hip Hop was not as metaphorically uniformed, and drug-dealing, along with pimping, and high levels of sexual explicitness are observable.

By the early 1990s, Southern Hip Hop music had not garnered much respect or commercial attention aside from the hits derived from Miami Bass music, which influenced Atlanta's burgeoning Hip Hop scene. Earlier, in 1982, Hip Hop had just begun its shift from being viewed as a novelty to becoming acknowledged as a new genre of music (Sarig, 2007, p.13). The synthesizer, and the Roland TR-808 drum machine were tools used to compose *Afrika Bambaataa's* breakthrough hit "Planet Rock." The 808 hit the market in the late 1980s and Miami producers began to pick up on the electro-funk sound. In 1985, Miami's Luther "Uncle Luke" Campbell moved his parties from a skating rink to a more centrally located area called Liberty City, and called it the Pac Jam Teen Disco. He, along with a newly signed group named *2 Live Crew*, spawned local hits in the late 1980s, many of them, sexually explicit, and as Miami Bass music grew into popularity, their music began to reach white kids in suburbs far away from Miami (Sarig, 2007, p.23).

In 1989, the group released *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, filled with X-rated humor and sexual aggression; the lead single, "Me So Horny," shot to #1 on the Billboard Hot Rap Singles chart.

Its popularity came during the tumultuous period of 1985-1990, which began when future second lady Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Center spurred congressional hearings on lyrics in pop music and ended with the music industry diffusing the censorship debate by voluntarily agreeing to put warning stickers on records with objectionable lyrics (Sarig, 2007, p.25). *2 Live Crew* became a target of Florida attorney Jack Thompson and Florida's Republican governor, Bob Martinez. A U.S. District Court found that the album was obscene, the first time in U.S. history that a sound recording had been ruled as such. Nevertheless, the album eventually sold over two million copies, the first Southern act to go platinum.

While Miami Bass music trickled north through North Florida and Atlanta, Georgia, Houston, Texas began making noise through James "Lil J" Prince's Rap-A-Lot Records. The group, the *Geto Boys*, were the premier act, and were eventually joined by a Southside MC named *Akshun* (Sarig, 2007, p.48). *Akshun's* local track, "Scarface," had garnered attention and eventually, he changed his name to just that, *Scarface*, and was one of the first references to the drug dealing kingpin tales that would later become staples in Mafioso rap and cocaine rap. Meanwhile, Chad "Pimp-C" Butler and Bernard "Bun-B" Freeman of Port Arthur, Texas combined to form *UGK* (*Underground Kingz*) and released the album *The Southern Way* in 1992 (Sarig, 2007, p.54). Songs included "Cocaine in the Back of my Ride" (precursor to the cocaine rap era) and "Trill Ass Nigga," which introduced Southern Hip Hop vernacular ("trill" meaning the combination of "true" and "real"). A decade later, an Atlanta group even named themselves *Trillville*, but felt no need to cite *UGK* as its progenitor (Sarig, 2007, p.55). Songs such as "Pocket Full of Stones" referenced crack-cocaine dealing.

UGK's classic 1996 release *Ridin' Dirty* furthered the now-extensive usage of Southern slang, introducing the terms swisha and sweets (referring to marijuana blunts rolled in the cigar brand Swisher Sweets), candy paint (bright colored paint for vehicles), and leanin' (being under the influence of codeine cough syrup) (Sarig, 2007, p.57). This was later referenced in Memphis group *Three 6 Mafia's* hit single "Sippin on Some Syrup," which featured *UGK*.

UGK reached past their regional affiliation by collaborating with New York artist *Jay-Z* on his hit single "Big Pimpin'," which was included on his 1999 album release, *Vol. 3 The Life and Times of S. Carter*. In fact, *Jay-Z* has been influential in collaborating with Southern artists and

can even be credited with furthering the trend, as he had previously worked with Atlanta producer/rapper *Jermaine Dupri* on “Money Aint a Thing” in 1998, and Cash Money Records’ Juvenile on 1999’s “Ha Remix.” The success of Houston’s Rap-A-Lot Records and *UGK* enabled more local independent labels to grow; notably Suave House Records, whose act *Eightball & MJG*, originally of Memphis, were able to duplicate the success of *UGK* right alongside them (Sarig, 2007, p.59).

Premro Smith (*Eightball*) and Marlon Jermaine Goodwin (*MJG*) grew up together in the Orange Mound area of Memphis, Tennessee. Fellow Memphis native Tony Draper had moved to Houston to launch his label, Suave House, and the duo relocated to Houston to become the label’s premier act (Sarig, 2007, p.71). Their debut, *Comin’ Out Hard*, referenced the pimping and hustling lifestyle that was prevalent in Memphis and introduced more trends and vernacular into Southern Hip Hop culture. Their gold teeth and references to driving Cadillacs with Vogue tires and sipping “yak” (cognac) were representative of the environment they were from and further evidenced on their second albums, *On the Outside Looking In* (1994) and *On Top of the World* (1995). Tracks like “Break-A-Bitch College” and “Space Age Pimpin” were indicative of the pimping lifestyle that was portrayed within their lyrics (Sarig, 2007, p.74). Together, *UGK* and *Eightball & MJG* served as the lyrical foundation of future rap superstar *T.I.*, as his debut album, *I’m Serious*, would be engulfed with references to pimping and hustling (selling dope). *T.I.*’s second album title, *Trap Musik*, references “the Trap,” which according to author Roni Sarig, wasn’t a term *T.I.* invented, but rather a word he made his own (Sarig, 2007, p.210).

“Specifically, trap was the ghetto slang for a drug house—a run down, boarded-up rattrap where humans go in and don’t always come out. More generally, it was street life centered on dead-end hustles and other fast tracks to jail or the morgue. Trap music was the soundtrack to this grim world, and, in glimmers of hope, a buried map showing the way out” (Sarig, 2007, p.210-211).

Atlanta rapper *Young Jeezy* would later rise to national prominence with the mixtape titled, *Trap Or Die*, an interpolation of Sean “P. Diddy” Combs 2004 presidential campaign slogan, “Vote or Die.”

The drug-infested streets of New Orleans, Louisiana would become Southern Hip Hop's new breeding ground shortly after the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was signed, and the deaths of *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.*. Percy Miller had been a high school basketball star and earned a scholarship to the University of Houston before injuring his knee. Following the shooting death of his younger brother, he relocated to Richmond, California, and with \$10,000 won awarded from his grandfather's malpractice lawsuit, opened a record store called No Limit Records. (Sarig 80) Recruiting family members including his wife Sonya, his brothers Vyshonn (*Silkk the Shocker*) and Corey (*C-Murder*, now *C. Miller*), and cousin (*Mo B. Dick*), Percy, or P, began releasing independent albums, reaching success with 1994's *The Ghetto's Tryin to Kill Me*. Capitalizing of Death Row's monopolization of the Hip Hop industry with the gangsta rap genre, P released 1995's *West Coast Bad Boys*, featuring Northern California artists *E-40*, *Rappin 4-Tay*, and *C-Bo*, and helped give No Limit a national profile. P returned to New Orleans and recorded his breakthrough single, "I'm Bout It."

After securing distribution with Priority Records, P released the album *Ice Cream Man* in 1996, with "ice cream man" being a metaphoric representation of the neighborhood dope dealer. The first week of May 1996, *Ice Cream Man* debuted at #3 on the R&B/Hip Hop chart and was a strong indication that the independent rap business had taken root in areas outside New York and Los Angeles, and had grown to become a powerful force in Hip Hop (Sarig, 2007, p.85). Now known as Master P, *Ice Cream Man* combined *Chronic*-influenced West Coast style songs as well as tracks rooted in the grittier Southern style, catering to a mass audience. The album went gold independently (over 500,000 copies sold) and the next year, P's album *Ghetto Dope* went double-platinum. With the in-house production group *Beats By the Pound*, a "soldier" mentality and motto that was shown by the No Limit tank symbol, and lavish Photoshopped-album covers designed by Pen & Pixel Graphics, P's No Limit Records would churn out albums by artists almost every month over the next two years. In 1998, all seventeen albums released by the label that year landed in the top twenty of Billboard's R&B/Hip Hop chart, twelve in the top five, and six at #1. On the pop chart, eleven made the top twenty, five made the top five, and two reached #1, including P's *MP The Last Don* (Sarig, 2007, p.89). The aforementioned album, along with *Silkk the Shocker's Made Man*, *C-Murder's Bossalinie*, and *Da 504 Boyz Goodfellas*, capitalized

off the Mafioso Rap era with their album titles, and each sold at least platinum (1,000,000 copies).

The label revenues in 1998 were listed at \$56.6 million, and placed Master P at number ten on Forbes magazine's annual list of the forty highest-paid American entertainers. 1998 was the first year that Hip Hop music's total sales accounted for over \$1 billion and saw rapper *Snoop Doggy Dogg* leave Death Row Records to join No Limit. In August, No Limit released Snoop's *Da Game is to Be Sold, Not to be Told*, which topped Billboard charts and according to Sarig (2007), represented a major psychological leap for Southern Hip Hop, as it was the first time a major rap star left one of the music industry's centers to live and record in the South, for a Southern label (p.89).

Another New Orleans independent label, Cash Money Records, was founded in 1993 by Bryan "Baby" Williams and his older brother Ronald "Slim" Williams (Sarig, 2007) After meeting local producer *Mannie Fresh*, Baby asked him to do some tracks for Cash Money for a hundred dollars a beat before offering him the opportunity to serve as Cash Money's in-house producer, a position that allowed him to write, record, and release dozens of songs a year with an entire cast of rappers (Sarig, 2007, p.263). However, rappers *Kilo-G*, *Pimp Daddy*, and *Yella Boy* of the Cash Money group *U.N.L.V.* were all murdered.

Cash Money's next generation of artists were 15-year old Christopher Dorsey and 13-year old D'Wayne Carter (Sarig, 2007) They were named the *B.G.'z*, or *Baby Gangstaz*. Christopher, aka Doogie, became *Gangsta D* and D'Wayne became *Baby D* (p.264). However, once Wayne's grades began to slip, his mother pulled him out of the group and he wound up on just two of the eight tracks of their debut EP, *True Story*. Christopher dominated the record so much that fans assumed his name was *B.G.*, and the name stuck. Cash Money later released his first full-length album, *Chopper City*, and then New Orleans bounce rapper *Juvenile's* album, *Solja Rags*. *B.G.'s* two volumes of his *It's All On U* record solidified him as the label's primary street figure. He, *Juvenile*, *Wayne*, and new artist *Turk* combined to form the supergroup the *Hot Boys*, and released their album *Get It How U Live* (Sarig, 2007).

Even *Baby* and *Mannie* combined to form a group, the *Big Tymers*, and released an album called *How U Luv That*; the album had a Pen & Pixel design similar to those of the No Limit Records album releases (Sarig, 2007) Universal Records signed Cash Money to a \$30 million distribution deal and re-released the *Big Tymers* album and *Juvenile's 400 Degreez* before the end of 1998 (Sarig, 2007, p.266). *Juvenile's* single "Ha" reached number eleven on the charts and spawned a remix featuring none other than *Jay-Z*. The third single, "Back That Azz Up," garnered major video airplay on both *MTV* and *BET* and the album reached nearly five million copies sold. By the week of November 20, 1999, four Cash Money album releases were in the Billboard Top 20. *Juvenile's 400 Degreez* at number eight (having peaked at #2), *B.G.'s Chopper City in the Ghetto* (which peaked at #2 as well) at number nineteen, and the *Hot Boys'* second album *Guerilla Warfare* was at number twenty (after peaking at #1) *Lil Wayne's* debut, *Tha Block is Hot* entered the charts that week at #1. All four would go platinum (p.267).

The song that endured time on the charts longer than any other Cash Money single was "Bling Bling," on *B.G.'s* album. The song featured verses from *Juvenile*, *Wayne*, *Mannie*, and *Baby* and referenced anything shiny, whether it was the chrome rims on expensive vehicles or the gold and platinum diamond-encrusted jewelry they wore on their necks, fingers and wrists (p. 267). The hook goes as follows:

"Bling Bling! Everytime I come around your city/ Bling bling! Pinky ring
worth about fifty/ Bling bling! Everytime I buy a new ride/ Bling bling!/
Lorenzos on Yokohama tires"

It was perhaps the most ultimate anthem to commemorate the age of Hip Hop materialism and indulgence and spread into mainstream vernacular. It was referenced by teachers in classrooms, in newscasts by television commentators, by actors on sitcoms, and eventually became part of contemporary language, as it is now a word in the dictionary.

The same demise that had previously befallen the Death Row Records gangsta rap empire inflicted the Cash Money collective. *B.G.*, who was falling in and out of heroin addiction, filed a lawsuit over unpaid royalties, as did *Juvenile*. *Turk* and *Mannie Fresh* also left on bad terms, leaving *Lil Wayne* as the lone solo artist on the label.

Atlanta's Hip Hop scene saw preteen act *Kris Kross* reach multi-platinum success in the early 1990's under the tutelage of producer *Jermaine Dupri* and just a few years previous, Antonio "L.A." Reid and singer Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds created LaFace Records and were distributed by Arista Records. Before they found success with Hip Hop music, they found it in R&B group *TLC*. Later, they signed production group *Organized Noize*, who discovered Antwan "Big Boi" Patton and Andre "Dre" Benjamin, two teenaged rappers that called themselves *4 Shades Deep*, and later, the *Misfits*. After finding there was a rock band with that name already, they changed the group name to *OutKast* (Sarig, 2007).

The duo began recording their debut album in the basement of *Organized Noize* member Rico Love, which was referred to as "the Dungeon." *Organized Noize*, *OutKast*, and rap group *Goodie Mob* were known collectively as the *Dungeon Family*, and Laface released *OutKast's* debut album, *Southernplayalisticadillacmusic* in 1994, and was the first Southern Hip Hop album to garner respect from their New York peers. The album peaked nationally at number twenty on the pop chart and number three on the Hip Hop/R&B chart (Sarig, 2007, p.134). In January 1995, they won the Best New Artist category at the Source Awards in New York. However, that was the same evening that Death Row Records CEO Suge Knight insulted Bad Boy Records CEO Sean Combs. The New York hometown crowd, who had taken sides against any artists not from the area, booed them as they collected their award. Andre defiantly announced:

"It's like this though. I'm tired of folks...closed minded folks. It's like we got a demo tape and don't nobody want to hear it. But it's like this. The South got something to say, and that's all I got to say" (p.134).

Their debut album went platinum, and Laface Records released *Goodie Mob's Soul Food* in November 1995. *OutKast's* second album, *ATLiens*, was released at the end of August 1996, just two weeks before the shooting death of *Tupac Shakur* in September. The double-platinum sales of *ATLiens* helped solidify the South's growing influence in the Hip Hop music industry. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 had been signed six months earlier, in February, thus forever solidifying the presence of Southern Hip Hop as commercially commodifiable rap music, preceding the aforementioned New Orleans Hip Hop scene and a second revival of contributions

from both Houston and Memphis. Each of *OutKast's* three following album releases have gone multi-platinum.

While New York and Los Angeles had forefathers of their respective forms of rap music, the South also had their own. Therefore, while the genesis of Southern Hip Hop music can be directly attributed to the influence of other regions, the evolution of Southern Hip Hop can be traced to their pioneering artists. For example, the sometimes sexually explicit lyrics of *Trick Daddy* from Miami, Florida, and *Plies* from Fort Myers, Florida, can be credited to the influence of not only the “fun-in-the-sun” environment in which the state of Florida is located, but also to the sexual lyrics of *Uncle Luke* and *2 Live Crew*. The lyrics of *UGK* and *Eightball & MJG* would serve as the foundation for later artists along the evolutionary path of Southern Hip Hop, and will be mentioned later in this final analysis of the effects of the Telecommunications Act.

White Consumption of Black Popular Culture and Eminem

Because of the prevalence and significance of white consumption of black popular culture, it was virtually inevitable that significant events and factors would produce a white rapper. The conversation regarding race and the development of rap music becomes increasingly complicated when discussing white rappers, most notably, *Eminem*. Issues including but not limited to acceptance, authenticity, racism, and cultural theft are frequently mentioned. The relationship between whites and Hip Hop authenticity has been a commuted one, which is specifically a result of the historical relationship between black art and white people and, more generally, the result of ubiquitous white supremacy (Ogbar, 2007, p.55). Since the late 1800s minstrelsy, whites have been fascinated by commodifiable black cultural production despite the brutality and open acceptance of white supremacy among whites for most of the country’s history. In Greg Tate’s *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*, he notes that a long line of “black impersonators” from Paul Whiteman, Elvis Presley, and the Rolling Stones, to Britney Spears, Pink, and *Eminem* have reaped the financial benefits of cultural mimicry (Tate, 2003, p.4-6).

In Bakari Kitwana’s *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*, he explains that the centrality of blackness to Hip Hop is far too established and salient for the same kind of white co-optation that happened with rock and roll:

“Hip Hop, as the mainstream pop culture of our time, has been appropriated by young white Americans. Still, in our visual age, no matter how mainstream Hip Hop gets, it will never duplicate rock and roll’s metamorphosis, becoming more strongly associated with white Americans than Blacks. In fact it would take an army of *Eminems* to divorce the image of Hip Hop from young Black men, who after thirty years still dominate the art form” (Kitwana, 2005, p.2).

The *Beastie Boys*, who released their first album on Def Jam Records in 1986, predated the popularity of both gangsta and black nationalist expressions of “realness” (Ogbar, 2007, p.56). They were viewed by many as zany friends rather than cultural bandit interlopers due to their associations with fellow Def Jam artists *Run-DMC* and *Public Enemy* (Ogbar, 2007). *Vanilla Ice*, however, was not able to enjoy black peer validation; this was due in majority to his embellishment in various press releases and interviews that he was raised in a tough black neighborhood in Miami and involved in criminal activity, which later proved false. Even other white rappers, such as *3rd Bass*, mocked him. *MC Serch* (a white MC) of *3rd Bass*’ chant of “Elvis, Elvis, baby, no soul, no soul” was a mockery of the hook for *Vanilla Ice*’s hit song, “Ice Ice Baby” and reflected the historical consciousness of white cultural banditry and the legendary Elvis Presley, who was widely believed to have publicly expressed racist comments as he appropriated black art (Ogbar, 2007, p.56).

After the swift decline of *Vanilla Ice*, other white rappers such as *Marky Mark*, *3rd Bass*, and *Young Black Teenagers* struggled for acceptance in various ways; they spoke against racism and took shots at *Vanilla Ice* in a process that helped to affirm their credibility and mitigate allegations of cultural theft (Ogbar, 2007, p.56-57). They also cultivated images, from expressions of violence to malt liquor consumption, that were intimately familiar with life in urban Black communities in their videos and songs. In 1992, the Irish-American group *House of Pain* scored with their hit song “Jump Around,” and affirmed their street credibility both in lyrics and in a video that featured an urban, cool toughness with a simultaneous affirmation of white ethnic pride and appropriation of dominant gangsta styles from the West Coast (p.57). As a guest on conservative talk show host Bill O’Reilly’s *O’Reilly Factor*, *American Idol* host Simon

Cowell referred to white rapper Eminem as a genius, stating, “He’s somebody who understood that white boys want to be Black and he exploited that fact” (Kitwana, 2005, p.14).

The attraction of affluent white youths to Hip Hop’s hardcore ghetto narratives was one of the great cultural mysteries of the 1990s and a complete enigma to music insiders and observers (Watkins, 2005, p.96). The idea that whites enjoyed Hip Hop because it was a source of rebellion was a widely shared view though not certainly unique to the moment, as pop music has been a call to arms in young people’s uprising against parental and adult authorities for decades; but the degree to which white youth immersed themselves in Hip Hop was different, both quantitatively (music, film, magazines, videos, apparel) and qualitatively (lifestyle, attitude, language) (p.96-97). Others argued that white youth’s fascination with rap music was a sign of the dismantling of racial hostilities; supposedly, the fact that young whites were observing and enjoying ghetto-derived narratives and images highlighted the erasure of longstanding racial tension (p. 97). However, Simon Cowell’s aforementioned statement regarding Eminem has some validity; despite the ways African American men have been vilified during this younger generation’s lifetime, more and more young whites are abandoning old apprehensions about young Blacks and openly embracing Black youth culture (Kitwana, 2005, p.15). Kitwana concurs:

“A white kid engaging in the predominantly Black medium of Hip Hop is going to be deemed cool by his peers, if he can pull it off, especially in a climate where Hip Hop is mainstream youth culture. By doing so, however, that kid is not choosing race suicide. *Eminem* is not seeking to become Black and abandon whiteness. Instead, his being white is what makes him so attractive to the marketplace. Or as Lisa Scott, director of social equity at Pennsylvania’s Bloomsburg University, pointed out to me in an informal discussion with a handful of Black intellectuals on the topic of white kids and Hip Hop, “Part of what Eminem is selling is whiteness” (p.15).

Kitwana believes five primary variables helped create the climate for these new racial politics to emerge: the rise of the global economy and a resulting sense of alienation among young whites in the 1980s and 1990s; significant ruptures in the popular music scene; a further

shifting American economy at the turn of the millennium, which was accompanied by a declining sense of white privilege; the institutionalization of key aspects of the civil rights movement; and finally the sociopolitical range of post-1960s Black popular culture (p.23). The last factor, specifically the exposure to Black culture that this generation has experienced as a result of mass communications should never be underestimated (p.44). Satellite and telecommunications have had one of the most defining influences on Americans this century and in many ways, this exposure has defined the way we think and live. For example, the extreme Black presence in popular culture has changed the way white Americans engage race, especially for a generation of youth that have lived their entire lives with such technological access. (p.44) Young whites are engaging with Black youth culture just as corporate culture has become a tool for marketing everything, even Blackness, via pop culture; Todd Boyd, author of *The New HNIC* (Head Nigga In Charge): *The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop*, in a lecture at the University of San Diego, February 17, 2004, said:

“With the racial barriers down, [referring to the end of legal segregation] people can now gravitate toward what they like” (p.79).

On the contrary, Bill Yousman wrote a piece in the November 2003 issue of *Communication Theory* titled “Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music and White Supremacy.” It states:

“White youth adoption of Black cultural forms in the 21st century is also a performance, one that allows Whites to contain their fears and animosities toward Blacks through rituals not of ridicule, as in previous eras, but of adoration. Thus, although the motives behind their performance may initially appear to be different, the act is still a manifestation of White supremacy, albeit a White supremacy that is in crisis and disarray, rife with confusion and contradiction” (p.103).

Yousman argues that white kids are accepting Hip Hop Culture only to an extent; he believes that Black kids selling images of Black criminality and inferiority and white kids buying them to reinforce their superiority is the real driving force behind white suburban teens’ desire to consume Hip Hop, not an authentic appreciation of Black culture (Kitwana, 2005, p.103).

Furthermore, Yousman compares white youth appropriation of Hip Hop to 19th century white minstrel performers in Blackface. Bakari Kitwana (2005) states:

“It is impossible to dismiss critics like Yousman given the glaring moments when Hip Hop as a pop culture phenomenon does invoke old stereotypes about Blacks (as criminals and oversexed), yet, the pervasiveness of these stereotypes, rooted in old racial politics, has not stopped young whites from consuming Hip Hop that contains them” (p.104).

Kitwana goes on to state that this trend is emerging at the same time that Hip Hop studies is entering the academy and questions whether white Hip Hop scholars will fare better than those who are Black (p.104):

“Black youth who’ve grown up in and are defined by Hip Hop and go on to pursue graduate degrees focused on Hip Hop report resistance from Black and white professors alike. White (and honorary white) graduate students doing the same report little or no resistance. This is not a Hip Hop conspiracy theory. Students report various reasons for their mentors’ response to Hip Hop, such as older Black scholars who tell younger ones that Hip Hop as a field of study is too limiting. However, the result is a restricted circle of scholars emerging at a time when Hip Hop is making its debut as an intellectual line of inquiry. Such scholars will ultimately lay the groundwork for the discipline...Given Hip Hop’s influence on American youth, any intellectual inquiry into Hip Hop should be actively exploring ways of empowering youth, with young people of color prominently in the picture. If Hip Hop studies fail to do this and Hip Hop intellectuals allow it to become about individual careers and endless pontificating, the result could be the following: the emergence of white Hip Hop critics (far removed from the culture) farther out ahead in the field than Black critics (closer to the culture), placing their stamp on the groundwork for how Hip Hop will be defined and the history of Hip Hop culture in all its manifestations will be recorded and remembered for the ages; and

alongside them, and often behind them in the wings, will sit Black and brown academics so steeped in academic jargon that their analysis of Hip Hop will do little to intervene in the lives of the youth now empowered by it...These critical questions are directly linked to the unsubstantiated myth of Hip Hop's primary audience" (p.105).

This historical analysis of the lyrical content of commercial rap music can be summed up with the previous excerpt. It is important for youthful Hip Hop cultural participants to be knowledgeable of how lyrics have evolved to this point, and the factors shaping that evolution. What began as art imitating life, has changed to life imitating art.

All the aforementioned factors complicate the discussion of the evolution of Hip Hop culture and rap music, specifically, when speaking of white consumption. In Eminem's song "White America," he admits that he can sell more CDs because of his race (Higgins, 2009, p.47). S. Craig Watkins offers his perspective in *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*:

"Since the introduction of Soundscan in 1991, a new logic has dominated Hip Hop's corporate identity. Though the movement's creative and entrepreneurial elite will never admit it, their efforts since the early '90s have focused primarily on the young white consumers who make Hip Hop a lucrative culture industry. *Eminem*, like every other successful figure in Hip Hop, wants black kids' respect and white kids money. "*Eminem* told *Rolling Stone* in 2002, 'In the suburbs, the white kids have to see black people liking you or they won't like you.' That is the peculiar logic of corporate Hip Hop. Even as the "keeping it real" mantra pays homage to Hip Hop's urban roots, the effort to "get paid" hones in on suburban spenders" (Watkins, 2005, p.108).

Marcus Reeves (2008) believes unease over the larger implications of *Eminem's* superstardom, whom he calls an "incredibly gifted MC," is a valid emotion, especially given the history of Black music in America:

“One example after another of stolen property; Blacks build it and whites, while earning most of the money, take the credit. The most noted example is rock and roll. Although the genre was created from black rhythm and blues, its most famed architects being Little Richard and Chuck Berry, the “King” is Elvis, and the genre, without much debate, is considered “white music,” the emblematic channel for American white teen angst” (p. 248).

Watkins (2005) comments on *Eminem* in relation to his acceptance by the Hip Hop community:

“As a kid growing up in and around Detroit, there was no reason, other than perhaps desperation and youthful innocence, to believe that he actually had a future in a musical genre so closely associated with young African Americans...*Eminem*'s emphasis on his demoralizing past and the anger he harbored toward society played well because these were also pivotal themes in Hip Hop. It was as if *Eminem* were saying to the Hip Hop nation, ‘I too am young, poor, and despised.’ In short, ‘Look past my whiteness and you will see that I’m one of you.’ Deeply rooted in *Eminem*'s appeal to the disadvantaged and the poor, irrespective of race or color, is a powerful message: that despite their real and perceived racial differences, impoverished communities share important interests” (Watkins, 2005, p.92-93).

Eminem's rise from poverty is well documented, from being raised in the working class suburbs of Detroit to his presence in Detroit's underground battle scene, where his ability to freestyle (recite impromptu raps) got him a recording agreement with local producer Marky Bass (Reeves, 2008, p.250). His first LP, *Infinite*, didn't turn heads, but after a 2nd place finish at the Rap Olympics in 1997, and Interscope head Jimmy Iovine playing *Dr. Dre* a few songs off his independently produced *Slim Shady EP*, Dre's Aftermath Entertainment released *Eminem*'s commercial debut, *The Slim Shady LP* in 1999 (p.251). *Eminem* comments on *Dr. Dre*'s tutelage and his idolization of *NWA* as a youth:

“It was an honor to hear the words out of Dre's mouth that he liked my shit. Growing up, I was one of the biggest fans of *NWA*, from putting on the

sunglasses and looking in the mirror and lipsyncing to wanting to be *Dr. Dre*, to be *Ice Cube*. This is the biggest Hip Hop producer ever” (Watkins, 2005, p.98).

The previous statement helps to validate that a teenaged Eminem was a part of the original young white male demographic that helped push gangsta rap to prominence.

With its rhymes about rape, drug abuse, and murder, its expressions of white poverty, and punch lines that humorously appealed to white popular culture, *Eminem* used his alter-ego, “Slim Shady,” as a means of challenging all that white America, its moral and cultural ideals, and its glorious notions of “whiteness,” hold dear. A suicide attempt, estranged relationships with his wife and mother and a missing father are all recurring subjects in his lyrics (Kitwana, 2005, p.137). The opening lines of his first single, “My Name Is,” are as follows:

“Hi kids! Do you like violence?/ Wanna see me stick nine inch nails through each one of my eyelids? (Uh-huh!)/ Wanna copy me and do exactly like I did? (Yeah! Yeah!)/ Try ‘cid (acid) and get fucked up worse than my life is?...Ninety-nine percent of my life I was lied to/ I just found out my mom does more dope than I do” (Reeves, 2008, p.252).

Other lyrical excerpts include:

“If I Had”

“I’m tired of being white trash, broke and poor/ Tired of taking pop bottles back to the party store/ Tired of not driving a BM(W)/ Tired of not working at GM (General Motors)/ Tired of not sleeping without a Tylenol PM” (p.253)

“Rock Bottom”

“I’m hoping things look up but there ain’t no job openings/ I feel discouraged, hungry, and malnourished/ Living in this house with no furnace...I’m sick of working dead-end jobs for lame pay/ And I’m tired of being hired and fired in the same day” (p.253).

Eminem's lyrics acknowledged a population of white poor and dispossessed and proved that the rage and frustration of “poor white trash” could be just as desperate as a black gangsta’s (p.253-254). *The Slim Shady LP* went on to sell three million copies and had two videos (“My Name Is” and Guilty Conscience”) in heavy rotation on MTV. The album won two Grammys, Best Rap Album and Best Rap Solo Performance for “My Name Is.”

On Tuesday, April 20, 1999, in predominantly white Littleton, Colorado, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, two Columbine High School students, went to their high school armed with shotguns, pistols, and pipe bombs and opened fire (Reeves, 2008, p.254). Though they also shot students at random, they specifically targeted jocks and girls, and reportedly called a black student athlete a “nigger” before shooting him to death. The two students killed twelve students and a teacher and wounded twenty-four others before turning their guns on themselves. Instead of examining the obvious, flimsy gun laws and easy access to guns, or the deranged and bigoted hearts and minds of the killers themselves, critics began to point the finger at the violent and misogynistic language of popular music. As a result, shock-rocker Marilyn Manson and *Eminem* became targets of public outcry before the release of his second album, *The Marshall Mathers LP*. (Reeves, 2007) The album sold 1.7 million copies in its first week, and over 8 million units in two months (Kitwana, 2005, p.138).

This album, *Eminem* deepened his perverted expressions of anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction and turned them into critiques of society’s hypocrisy (Reeves, 2008, p.255). He also negatively referenced other figures of pop culture within his lyrics. On “The Real Slim Shady,” he rhymes:

“Y’all act like you never seen a white person before/
Jaws all on the floor
like Pam/
Like Tommy just burst in the door/
And started whooping her ass
worse than before...I’m sick of you little boy and girl groups,
all you do is annoy me/
So I have been sent here to destroy you” (p.256).

On “Marshall Mathers”:

“I’m anti-Backstreet and Ricky Martin/
With instincts to kill N’Sync, don’t get me started/
These fuckin’ brats can’t sing and Britney’s garbage/
What’s this bitch retarded/
Gimme back my sixteen dollars/
All I see is

sissies in magazines smilin’/ Whatever happened to wildin’ out and being violent/ Whatever happened to taking a good old fashioned, passionate ass-whoopin’/ And getting your shoes, coat and your hat taken’ ... *Vanilla Ice* don’t like me/ Said some shit in Vibe (Magazine) to spite me/ Then went and dyed his hair just like me” (p.256).

On “The Way I Am,” he speaks on his annoyance with his celebrity and compared his anger to that of the Columbine killers:

“Sometimes I just feel like my father, I hate to be bothered/ With all of this nonsense, it’s constant/ And ‘Oh, it’s his lyrical content!/ The song Guilty Conscience has gotten such rotten responses’/ And all of this controversy circles me/ And it seems like the media immediately points a finger at me/ So I point one back at ‘em, but not the index or pinky/ Or the ring or the thumb/ It’s the one you put up, when you don’t give a fuck/ When you won’t just put up with the bullshit they pull/ ‘Cause they full of shit too/ When a dude’s getting bullied and shoots up his school/ And they blame it on Marilyn, and the heroin/ Where were the parents at?/ And look where it’s at/ Middle America, now it’s a tragedy/ Now, it’s so sad to see/ An upper class city having this happening/ Then attack Eminem ‘cause I rap this way/ But I’m glad, ‘cause it feeds me the fuel that I need for the fire to burn/ It’s burnin’ and I have returned/ And I am, whatever you say I am/ If I wasn’t, then why would I say I am/ In the paper, the news, everyday I am/ Radio won’t even play my jam” (p.256).

He cleverly references the hypocrisy and contradictions of society on “Who Knew”:

“I don’t do black music/ I don’t do white music/ I make fight music, for high school kids...Oh you want me to watch my mouth? How?/ Take my fucking eyeballs out and turn ‘em around/ Look, I’ll burn your fucking house down, circle around/ And hit the hydrant so you can’t put your burning furniture out/ I’m sorry, there must be a mix-up/ You want me to fix up lyrics while the President gets his dick sucked?...Don’t blame me

when little Eric jumps off of the terrace/ You should have been watching him, apparently you ain't parents...So who's bringing the guns in this country?/ I couldn't sneak a plastic pellet gun through customs over in London/ And last week I see this Schwarzenegger movie/ Where he's shootin' all sorts of motherfuckers with an Uzi/ I see these three little kids up in the front row/ Screaming 'Go!' with their seventeen-year-old uncle/ I'm like, 'Guidance?'/ Ain't they got the same moms and dads who got mad when I asked if they liked violence?/ And told me that my tape taught 'em to swear/ What about the makeup you allow your twelve-year-old daughter to wear?/ So tell me that your son doesn't know any cusswords/ When his bus driver's screamin' at him, fuckin' him up worse" (p. 256).

The misogynistic views evident on "Kill You" and "Kim" rivaled his venomous lyrics towards homosexuals on "Criminal":

"My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge/ That'll stab you in the head/ Whether you're a fag or lez/ Or homosex(ual), hermaph(rodite), or a trans-a-vest(ite)/ Pants or dress,. Hate fags?/ The answer's yes" (Higgins, 2009, p.93).

The album received four Grammy nominations amidst *Eminem* finding himself the face of hatred and violence, especially to gay activists still dealing with the aftermath of the October 1998 murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard. In May 1999, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) began a campaign against "hate lyrics and the continued glorification of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people" (Reeves, 2008, p.258-259). They demanded MTV not allow him to perform at the 2000 MTV Music Video Awards. However, the fuss surrounding *Eminem* as a homophobe was put to rest when he performed "Stan" on Grammy night with openly gay rocker Elton John. (p.260) Because of the controversy and a 2001 Grammy win for Best Album of the Year, *Eminem* hadn't become just a musical icon and youthful symbol of free speech, he "damn near became the American face of rap music," according to Marcus Reeves (p.260). He acknowledged his race playing a factor on the Grammy winning album in "I'm Back":

“Became a commodity/ Because I’m W-H-I-T-E/ ‘Cause MTV was so friendly to me” (p.260).

On the album *The Eminem Show*, Eminem further mentions the obvious race component on “Without Me” and “White America” respectively:

“Though I’m not the first king of controversy/ I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley/ To do black music so selfishly/ And use it to get myself wealthy.”

“Kids flipped when they knew I was produced by Dre/ That’s all it took/ And they were instantly hooked/ Right in, and they connected with me too, because I look like them/ That’s why they put my lyrics up under this microscope/ Searching with a fine tooth comb, it’s like this rope waiting to choke” (p.261).

Bakari Kitwana (2005) comments on the lyrical content of *The Eminem Show*:

“By the time *The Eminem Show* was released, he (*Eminem*) began focusing more on the type of youth alienation specific to those coming of age in the 1980s and 1990s global economy, accompanied by its schizophrenic racial politics (old and new warring together), complete with anti-woman “bitch and ho talk” commonplace in mainstream 1990s chart-topping Hip Hop. His was an in-your face confrontational rap style rooted in his freestyle battle rap beginnings...” (p.139).

His semi-autobiographical film, *8 Mile* grossed over \$242 million worldwide and the soundtrack sold two million copies (eventually sold four million units in total), and as of March 2011, *The Eminem Show* has sold ten million records. At the time of Reeves’ publication in 2007, it had sold seven million copies. (Reeves, 2008, p.262). In October 2004, he released *Encore*, selling over four million copies in the first five months, making him the second most successful rapper ever, trailing only *Tupac Shakur* (Ogbar, 2007, p.58).

The phenomenal success of *Eminem* included global recognition, high record sales, high praise from white America, the eager support of the mainstream media, and the personal freedom to say what he wanted, however he wanted to say it (Reeves, 2008, p.262). Meanwhile, black rappers were strongly encouraged by labels to rap about niggas, bitches and riches. Kitwana (2005) offers an accurate perspective of the contradictory nature of *Eminem*'s success:

“It is not unprecedented in America’s white supremacist culture for mediocre whites who perform well as Blacks, in an area dominated by Blacks, to find themselves elevated through the stratosphere (European ballplayers in the NBA, for example)...The success of a white boy in a Black-dominated medium in a predominantly white society, more than anything else, is a crash course in America’s racial politics. On the one hand, given his upbringing as an outcast outsider in a nation that feeds on its young and in an economy with narrowing options for working-class youth, he’s a victim, oppressed. On the other hand, in a society where the caste system of whiteness often prevails and still bestows privilege, he’s part of the oppressor class. But it’s the latter identification that *Eminem*'s *Source* critics have focused on” (p.141).

Kitwana is referring to *The Source* Hip Hop magazine’s press conference on November 17, 2003, in which they played pieces of two recordings, reportedly of a teenaged *Eminem*, rapping lyrics such as:

“Black girls are stupid/ White girls are cool...All the girls I like to bone have big butts/ No they don’t ‘cause I don’t like that *nigger* shit (Reeves 264)...Blacks and whites they sometimes mix/ But Black girls only want your money/ ‘cause they be dumb chicks” (Kitwana, 2005, p.136).

In a calculated attempt to raise his personal profile in the Hip Hop industry, The Source magazine co-owner and Boston rapper Raymond “*Benzino*” Scott recorded “Die Another Day,” in which he compared *Eminem* to David Duke and called him “a culture stealer” (Watkins, 2005, p.85) and a “rap Hitler” (Reeves, 2008, p.263). In return, *Eminem* released “The Sauce” and “Nail in the Coffin.” He addresses the race factor with “Comin’ up, it never mattered what color

you was/ If you could spit, then you could spit, that's it, that's what it was" (Reeves, 2008, p.263). *Eminem* further denounced *Benzino's* beef as a publicity stunt to bolster his rap profile and that he was unethically using *The Source* to promote his feud and himself; Though *Benzino* portrayed himself as the "rap Huey" (referring to Black Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton) and "the rap Martin and Malcolm," no one believed his sincerity or intent. But as news of the recording began raising eyebrows, *Eminem* immediately issued an apology (p.264). Excerpts include:

"The tape they played today was something I made out of anger, stupidity, and frustration when I was a teenager. I'd just broken up with my girlfriend, who was African-American, and I reacted like the angry, stupid kid I was. I hope people will take it for the foolishness that it was, not for what somebody is trying to make it into today" (Watkins, 2005, p.87).

Ultimately, the intervention of Hip Hop industry legend Russell Simmons prevented the incident from becoming detrimental to *Eminem's* image and career. In a statement, Simmons states:

"These lyrics are disgusting but the oneness of Hip Hop culture has transformed many young people in trailer parks around the country away from their parents' old mind-set of white supremacy. We believe *Eminem's* apology is sincere and forthright. He continues to not only be an icon of Hip Hop but...gives back money, time and energy to the community" (Reeves, 2008, p.264).

Eminem had already been fully aware of the precarious nature of his celebrity and the racial lines that it stood upon, and throughout his ascension to stardom, had always made it a point to show respect for black music. When asked by *Rolling Stone* in 2000 if he would use the word *nigger* on a record, he replied:

"That word is not even in my vocabulary. I do black music, so out of respect, why would I put that word in my vocabulary" (Watkins, 2005, p.87).

On *Encore's* autobiographical “Yellow Brick Road,” he offered further context and an unorthodox apology for singling out an entire race:

“I’ve heard people say they’ve heard the tape, and it ain’t that bad/ But it was, I singled out a whole race/ And, for that, I apologize/ I was wrong/ Cause no matter what color a girl is she’s still a ho” (Reeves, 2008, p.268).

His statement reflects the fundamental hypocrisy of *The Source's* outcry at his comments against black women. Nearly every commercial rapper, including those praised by *The Source*, calls black women “bitches” and “hos” in their song; *Chuck D* of *Public Enemy* saw the outcry as suspect, considering widespread acceptance of anti-black woman remarks from black male rappers (Ogbar, 2007, p.63):

“[Russell] Simmons, *The Source* and others have endorsed this attitude like a house slave watches the field yet eats from the kitchen. Blackfaces of these Negroes endorsing “nigga-ism” are responsible for having the world look at us black people in America [as] inferior to everyone else here. Negroes like this have used culture to, in essence, sell us back into slavery. Now after drinking from the same jug of “selling the integrity out” they want to point their crooked ass fingers at a white boy they’ve tried to sell this attitude to in the first place” (p.63).

While gaining credibility is important to all MCs, a few white ones have been able to achieve the ultimate “ghetto pass”: usage of the n-word (p.63). While *Eminem* has achieved more acceptance than any white rapper in Hip Hop, he has never once used the word once his commercial career began. In fact, the only rappers to go gold or platinum since 1997 who have not used “nigga” on a song have been white: *Eminem*, *Bubba Sparxxx*, and *Paul Wall*. Ironically, each rapper, however, has recorded a song where a fellow MC, who is black, uses the term (p.65). *Benzino* even refers to *Eminem* as a “nigga” in his dis song, “Pull Your Skirt Up.”

Marcus Reeves’ (2008) quote sums up the historical significance of *Eminem* within rap music’s evolutionary context:

“If *Eminem* had become anything for rap music and Hip Hop culture, besides its Elvis, he was (and still is) a symbol of how profoundly the voice of post Black-Power America has become a voice for twenty-first century America, one that’s increasingly multiracial, multiethnic, and technologically connected America, one where every kid has a democratic means to air his feelings without selling himself or his audience short. And if he or she has skills enough to move the crowd, then he or she can become that somebody, that anybody, who grabs the mic and screams” (p.268).

The shock value of Eminem’s controversial lyrics can be attributed to the early influences of NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes).

50 Cent and “Beef”

Conflict and competition between Hip Hop artists have been prevalent since its inception. The documentary “Beef” details one of the first MC battles between MC *Busy Bee* and the *Treacherous Three’s Kool Moe Dee* in the early 1980’s. The documentary also references the Bridge Wars between *KRS-ONE* and *Boogie Down Productions* and *MC Shan* and the *Juice Crew* during the late 80’s and the East Coast vs West Coast conflict (*Tupac vs Biggie*). Following the death of the *Notorious B.I.G.*, the title of “King of New York” was up for grabs and the two competitors were *Nas* and *Jay-Z*. Since *Nas’s* classic debut *Illmatic* in 1994, his following three releases were seen as increasingly materialistic by critics while *Jay-Z* had taken materialism and used it to his advantage. By 2001, tempers had flared on record and *Jay-Z* attacked *Nas* on his fifth album, *The Blueprint*, which coincidentally, was released September 11. *Jay-Z’s* scathing verse on “Takeover” and its interpretation follows:

I know you mentioned Nas the FAAAAAAAME!
But along with celebrity comes bout seventy shots to your frame
Nigga, you a LAAAAAAAME!
You’s the fag model for Karl Kani/Esco ads

Went from, Nasty Nas to Esco's trash
Had a spark when you started but now you're just garbage
Fell from top ten to not mentioned at all
till your bodyguard's "Oochie Wally" verse better than yours
Matter of fact you had the worst flow on the whole fuckin song
but I know the sun don't shine, then son don't shine
That's why your - LAAAAAAAME! career has come to an end
It's only so long fake thugs can pretend
Nigga, you ain't live it you witnessed it from your folks pad
You scribbled in your notepad and created your life
I showed you your first tec (Tec-9 machine gun) on tour with Large
Professor
(Me, that's who!) Then I heard your album bout your tec on the dresser
Oh yeah I sampled your voice, you was usin' it wrong
You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song
And you ain't get a coin nigga you was gettin fucked and
I know who I paid God, Serchlite Publishing
Use your BRAAAAAAAIN! You said you been in this ten
I've been in it five - smarten up Nas
Four albums in ten years nigga? I can divide
That's one every let's say two, two of them shits was due
One was 'ugh', the other was "Illmatic"
That's a one hot album every ten year average
And that's so LAAAAAAAME! Nigga switch up your flow
Your shit is garbage, what you tryin' to kick knowledge?
(Get the fuck outta here) You niggaz gon' learn to respect the king
Don't be the next contestant on that Summer Jam screen
Because you know who (who) did you know what (what)
with you know who (yeah) let's keep that between me and you for now
(The Blueprint, 2001)

Jay begins by comparing his mainstream success to Nas' lack thereof. ("I know you missing all the fame.") He follows with the heavily regarded opinion that Nas had fallen off skill-wise, before referencing his lack of criminal history ("Fell from top ten to not mentioned at all...there's only so long fake thugs can pretend...you scribbled in your notepad and created your life.") After referencing his sample of Nas' "The World Is Yours" for his song "Dead Presidents," Jay later claims that Nas' classic debut, *Illmatic*, was his only good album release, before sarcastically referring Nas' social consciousness (What you tryin' to kick knowledge?") before finishing with a reference to an affair with Nas' child's mother ("You know who, did you know what with you know who, lets keep that between me and you.")

Nas responded on his December release, *Stillmatic*, which catapulted him back into the ranks as one of Hip Hop's top MCs. Excerpts from the song "Ether" include:

This for dolo and his manuscript just sound stupid
When KRS already made an album called "Blueprint"
First, Biggie's ya man, then you got the nerve to say that you better than
Big, dick suckin lips, whyn't you let the late, great veteran live...

Y'all niggas deal with emotions like bitches
What's sad is I love you 'cause you're my brother
You traded your soul for riches
My child, I've watched you grow up to be famous
And now I smile like a proud dad, watchin his only son that made it
You seem to be only concerned with dissin women
Were you abused as a child, scared to smile, they called you ugly?
Well life is harsh, hug me...

You a fan, a phony, a fake, a pussy, a Stan
I still whip your ass, you thirty-six in a karate class
You Tae-bo hoe, tryna' work it out, you tryna' get brolic?
Ask me if I'm tryna' kick knowledge
Nah, I'm tryna' kick the shit you need to learn though

That ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow...

You no mustache havin, with whiskers like a rat
Compared to Beans you wack
And your man stabbed Un and made you take the blame
You ass, went from Jaz to hangin with Kane, to Irv, to Big
And, Eminem murdered you on your own shit
You a dick-ridin faggot, you love the attention
Queens niggas run you niggas, ask Russell Simmons
Ha, R-O-C get gunned up and clapped quick
J.J. Evans get gunned up and clapped quick
Your whole damn record label gunned up and clapped quick
Shaun Carter to Jay-Z, damn you on Jaz dick
So little shorty's gettin gunned up and clapped quick
How much of Biggie's rhymes is gon' come out your fat lips?
Wanted to be on every last one of my classics
You pop shit, apologize, nigga, just ask Kiss
(Stillmatic, 2001)

In response to *Jay-Z's* verbal jabs, *Nas* first addresses issues of originality, referencing an album by *KRS-One* titled *The Blueprint*, and the often recycled punchlines of the *Notorious B.I.G.* that he is known for. He then mentions Jay's "selling out" to the mainstream and corporate America for record sales and his often misogynistic lyrics ("You traded your soul for riches...you seem to be only concerned with dissin' women. Were you abused as a child, scared to smile, they called you ugly?"), his age ("You thirty-six in a karate class?"), and his socially conscious lyrics ("Ask me if I'm tryin' to kick knowledge..."). *Nas* ends the last verse of the song referencing one of Jay's subordinates being more talented (*Beanie Sigel aka Beans*), his change of social circles (*Jaz-O, Big Daddy Kane, Irv Gotti, the Notorious B.I.G.*), a guest appearance by Eminem in which he was regarded as having a superior lyrical performance, and the fact that Def Jam Records, at the time, was under the control of Russell Simmons, who like *Nas*, was a native of Queens, while *Jay-Z* is from Brooklyn.

Though *Nas* is generally regarded as the victor in the battle, the most important message that fans and fellow rappers took from the confrontation was that it stayed on record. The still unsolved murders of Hip Hop's most prominent figures still weighed heavily on the collective consciousness of the Hip Hop community. When *50 Cent* entered the Hip Hop industry, it appeared as though those peaceful thoughts were non-existent.

A product of Southside, Jamaica, Queens, NY, Curtis Jackson was born to a teenaged mother who also happened to be a drug dealer. During his childhood, she was murdered, making Curtis's transition to the streets much easier. In 1994, he was busted for selling crack to an undercover police officer. Just a few weeks later, a search warrant was issued for his home and cops seized seven bags of crack cocaine, an envelope containing heroin, an air gun, and \$695 in cash (Brown, 2005, p.141). In his autobiography, "From Pieces to Weight," 50 discloses that \$15,000 was actually confiscated, and only \$695 made it to the evidence docket (Jackson, 2005, p.124). After being sentenced to seven months in a shock incarceration boot camp, he decided to find a more legitimate hustle. He named himself "*50 Cent*," after a notorious Brooklyn stick-up artist and began to write rhymes.

Jam Master Jay of *Run-DMC* took 50 under his wing, and 50 stopped selling drugs. Eventually, he signed a deal with the Columbia Records and production team the *Trackmasters*, who had been responsible for the *Notorious B.I.G.*'s hit song "Juicy" as well as songs on *Nas*' second album, *It Was Written*. He garnered a buzz with his song "How To Rob," in which he humorously described robbing some of the music industry's most well-known figures including New Orleans rapper *Juvenile*, and New York rappers *Jay-Z* and *DMX*. He also had a conflict with fellow Queens rapper *Ja Rule* (Brown, 2005). 50 felt that Ja was a "studio gangster" and was portraying a lifestyle on his records that 50 actually lived. This resulted in numerous altercations including an incident at New York's Hit Factory Recording Studio that resulted in 50 being stabbed. Two days before he was scheduled to shoot his first video in May 2000, he was shot nine times at close range. During his thirteen days in the hospital, his debut album, *Power of the Dollar*, was shelved, and 50 was blacklisted from the industry because of fears of violence. The mythology of *Tupac Shakur* had begun after his robbery/shooting at Quad Studios in 1994 (Brown, 2005, p.155) and the same effect began to take hold once 50 recovered from his

shooting, which left him with a missing tooth and a slight slur in his voice from a bullet that went through his cheek.

50 then went on a guerilla marketing campaign, rapping over beats by well-known artists and releasing several street albums (mixtapes) that often outsold major label releases. These mixtapes caught the ear of *Eminem*, who along with *Dr. Dre*, began courting 50 to join their Interscope-distributed label, Shady/Aftermath. 50 signed and released his major-label debut *Get Rich or Die Tryin* in February 2003. The previous record for opening day record sales had been 802,000 copies of *Snoop Doggy Dogg's* debut *Doggystyle*. Ironically, 50's rise to prominence mirrored Snoop's inception nine years earlier with his first degree murder charges. Street credibility, once again, had become a factor in an artist's mainstream success. *Get Rich or Die Tryin* sold 872,000 copies the day of its release, and went on to sell over 12 million units worldwide. He was then granted his own label, G-Unit Records, and released albums by artists *Lloyd Banks*, *Young Buck*, and *Tony Yayo*. Both Banks' and Buck's album went multi-platinum. Excerpts from 50's lyrics include:

“What Up Gangsta”

“They say I walk around like I got a S on my chest/Naw, that's a semi auto(matic handgun) and a vest on my chest” (*Get Rich or Die Tryin*, 2003)

“Many Men”

“Many men, wish death upon me/Blood in my eye, dog, and I can't see/I'm tryin' to be what I'm destined to be/And niggas tryin' to take my life away/I put a hole in a nigga for fuckin' with me/My back on the wall now you gon' see/Better watch how you talk when you talk about me/'Cause I'll come and take your life away/Many men, many, many, many, many men/Wish death upon me/Lord I don't cry no more/Don't look to the sky no more/Have mercy on me/Have mercy on my soul/Somewhere my heart turned cold” (*Get Rich or Die Tryin*, 2003)

“If I Can't”

“Even my mama say it’s something really wrong with my brain/Niggas don’t rob me, they know I’m down to die for my chain” (Get Rich or Die Tryin, 2003)

These lyrics contrasted the pop appeal of the lead single,

“In Da Club”

“You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub/Mama I got what you need, if you need to feel a buzz/I’m into having sex, I ain’t into making love/So come and give me a hug, if you into getting’ rubbed” (Get Rich or Die Tryin, 2003)

Before the release of 50’s second album, *The Massacre*, West Coast rapper *The Game* released his debut album, *The Documentary*, through a joint venture between *Dr. Dre’s* Aftermath Records and *50 Cent’s* G-Unit Records. *The Game* had the biggest street buzz of any West Coast Hip Hop artist since Snoop Doggy Dogg in the early 1990s and was projected to bring the region back to prominence. The album, released in January 2005, sold over five million copies. In the midst of all of 50’s success, he began feuding with New York rappers *Jadakiss* and *Fat Joe* over their collaboration with *Ja Rule*, “New York.” He released a dis song, “Piggy Bank,” which also insulted *Nas*, and was to be included on his next album release. Hip Hop fans had come to affiliate 50 with having beef with other artists, and Hip Hop publications and blogs capitalized on the frenzy, as they had done with the East Coast/West Coast Hip Hop War of the mid-1990s.

In March 2005, *The Massacre* sold over a million copies during its first week of release and eventually sold over five million copies. 50 began conflicting with *The Game* over accusations of disloyalty, and ousted him from the *G-Unit* collective, resulting in another long running feud. After a live argument with Harlem rapper *Cam’ron* on New York’s Hot 97 radio station in 2007, 50 decided against releasing the album *Before I Self Destruct* and named his third album *Curtis*, referencing *Cam’ron’s* taunts of his real first name. He successfully manufactured a “beef” with Chicago producer/rapper *Kanye West*, and both decided to release their albums on the same day, September 11, 2007. 50 promised to retire if Kanye outsold him. *Curtis* was hugely successful,

selling 691,000 copies its first week, but debuted at number two on the Billboard charts behind the 957,000 copies sold of Kanye's album, *Graduation*. The defeat didn't deter 50, as it was the largest day of total record sales in Hip Hop music history. *Curtis* eventually went platinum.

Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson has been able to successfully parlay his life experiences into a number of lucrative business endeavors. He has released two books, two video games, and even released his own clothing line and sneakers. He has also starred in several movies, including the semi-autobiographical *Get Rich or Die Tryin*. His most lucrative investment was purchasing a 10% stake in Glaceau to create a Vitamin Water drink. In 2007, Coca-Cola bought Glaceau for \$4.1 billion, and 50 Cent walked away with \$100 million after taxes. He references the acquisition in his song, "I Get Money," on the album *Curtis*:

"I took quarter-waters, sold em' in bottles for two bucks/ Then Coca-Cola came and bought it for billions, What the fuck!"

50 later released his fourth album, *Before I Self Destruct* in November 2009, amidst a conflict with Miami rapper *Rick Ross*, who had started a beef with 50 by insulting him in the song "Mafia Music." *Young Buck*, who had released 2 albums while signed with *G-Unit*, left the label on bad terms with 50. The conflicts have not stopped his progress; Cheetah Vision, the film production company he founded in 2009, has recently been granted \$200 million in funding. The gangsta rap ethos that Jackson originally lived by has become his ticket to enormous wealth.

Cocaine Rap

The December 2006 issue of *XXL*, currently one of Hip Hop's top magazine publications, published a feature titled "All White," with a timeline of rap music's relationship with cocaine. The timeline begins with 1983's "White Lines," released by *Melle Mel* of *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*, and it documents the cocaine abuse of numerous Hip Hop artists, and their rhyming about its usage and distribution. On *Raekwon's* seminal debut, 1995's *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, he and *Ghostface Killah* not only reference sniffing cocaine, but the sound effects of a person snorting the narcotic can be heard at the beginning of the song "Knowledge God." Writer Kris Ex claims:

“In today’s rap, it seems as if the world revolves around the trade of crack cocaine...From artists such as *Lil Wayne*, who, having been under the wing of Cash Money Records since he was knee-high to a kilo(gram), has no verifiable trafficking history, to *Juelz Santana* (with the moniker ‘Human Crack in the Flesh’), cocaine rap is the choice of the new generation. Even an artist like *Busta Rhymes*, known mostly for feel-good party anthems throughout his long career, chose to play up his stint in the drug game for the run-up to his latest album, *The Big Bang*, and jumped on the beat from *Rick Ross*’ ‘Hustlin’,’ bragging about ‘that inconceivable guap (money)’ he made selling cocaine during the Reagan Era” (XXL 106).

The first prominent references to the crack cocaine epidemic in rap lyrics were made by *Ice Cube* on *NWA*’s “Dopeman.” But the genesis of cocaine rap began in the mid-1990s by both New York Mafioso rap artists and Southern Hip Hop artists. *Jay-Z*’s debut album *Reasonable Doubt*, and *UGK*’s *Ridin’ Dirty*, both released in 1996, contained heavy references to cocaine distribution. *The Notorious B.I.G.* referred to himself as “the Black Frank White”; Christopher Walken’s famous character in the motion picture *King of New York* plotted to consolidate the drug trade in New York City. Even *Nas* referred to himself as “Escobar,” named after the famous drug kingpin Pablo Escobar. His fellow Queens rapper, *Noreaga*, chose his name from Panama’s defected dictator, Manuel Noriega, whose country laundered drug profits during the 1980s. Houston’s *Scarface* is self-explanatory, as on-screen protagonist Tony Montana’s rise in the Miami cocaine underworld is revered within Hip Hop culture, and is a cult favorite in American popular culture. The emergence of New Orleans record labels No Limit and Cash Money, contained the same lyrical content regarding cocaine and the destruction that it caused to their communities. Several terms including, but not limited to the reference of cocaine include, yayo, raw, fishscale, yola, bricks, kis (pronounced “keys,” refers to kilograms), bricks, and white girl.

In 2001, Atlanta MC *T.I.* released his debut album *I’m Serious* (Sarig, 2007), which contained a song called ‘Dope Boys in the Trap,’ in which he references the prices of cocaine. “A quarter go for five, and a half go for nine,” he raps. His second album, titled *Trap Musik*, also contained references to narcotic trafficking. The “trap” is a reference to a drug-dealing area. Previous to his recording career, *T.I.* had already incurred numerous arrests for crack cocaine possession and

distribution. *Trap Musik* and *T.I.*'s following four albums, which contain similar lyrical content, have all sold at least a million copies each.

In 2002, Virginia rap group the *Cliipse* released their album *Lord Willin'* (Sarig, 2007), which detailed their lives as drug dealers, and displayed an "offer no apologies" attitude for their lifestyle. *Cliipse* member *Malice* rapped "Scout's honor, started with my grandmama/Who distributed yay(o) she had flown in from the Bahamas." His brother, *Pusha T*, raps "I'm the neighborhood pusher...Kids call me Mr. Sniffles." The album's lead single, "Grindin," is in fact a reference to "grinding" or "hustling," which in this particular context, are synonyms for selling dope. The group has since started a collective called *The Re-Up Gang*. To "re-up" is to purchase more product, whether it is cocaine, heroin, or marijuana, to package and distribute.

Ironically, *Jay-Z*'s commercial success allowed him to ascend to the presidency of Def Jam Records. During his reign, Atlanta rapper *Young Jeezy* and Miami's *Rick Ross* have taken cocaine rap to new heights. Jeezy's 2004 mixtape *Trap Or Die* solidified his status in the Southern Hip Hop underground and garnered him a deal with Def Jam Records, while simultaneously performing in the group *Boyz In The Hood*, who were signed to Sean Combs's Bad Boy Records. His major-label debut, *Lets Get It: Thug Motivation 101* is deemed a classic in Southern Hip Hop circles and has sold over a million copies. There are numerous references to cocaine and turning cocaine powder into crack cocaine:

"Thug Motivation 101"

"Kitchen's fumed up, niggas jammin' Tupac, Get my Benihana's on,
workin' two pots..."

I seen it all, every gram, every bird (kilogram of cocaine). I spit the truth,
every noun, every verb" (*Lets Get It: Thug Motivation 101*)

"Standing Ovation"

"My brains pulse through my veins, man I can't understand it. Infatuation
with the birds, I watch Animal Planet" (*Lets Get It: Thug Motivation 101*)

“Go Crazy”

“Still smell the blow in my clothes, like Krispy Kreme I was cooking’
them O’s (ounces). Like horse shoes I was tossing’ (selling) them O’s...”
(Lets Get It: Thug Motivation 101)

...When they play that new Jerzy, all the dopeboys go crazy, and watch the
dopeboys go crazy” (Lets Get It: Thug Motivation 101)

“Get Ya Mind Right”

“I’m the realest nigga in it, you already know, got trapper of the year four
times in a row. (What they give you?) A lifetime supply of baking soda and
clientel. A rollie (Rolex) watch, two pots, and three scales” (Lets Get It:
Thug Motivation 101)

Baking soda is mixed with powdered cocaine to create crack cocaine, ‘clientel’ refers to his customers, while the pots are used to cook the narcotic and scales are used to measure the ingredients. Jeezy, by far, had been the most descriptive rapper as far as the habitual process of being a cocaine dealer.

Before the release of his second album, *The Inspiration: Thug Motivation 102*, he was engulfed in controversy surrounding the sale of T-shirts with his “Snowman” logo. The “snowman,” referencing cocaine, was pressed onto T-shirts and was worn to school by adolescents, even though Jeezy himself wasn’t behind the production of the shirts. He referenced the media outcry on his mixtape, *Can’t Ban the Snowman*. *The Inspiration* went platinum, as did his 2008 album, *The Recession*, which referenced not only the financial meltdown occurring within the United States, but the desperation of African-American inner-city youths and their dependency on the sale of cocaine as a means of survival. *The Recession* included the politically charged anthem “My President” featuring *Nas*, whom he had previously had a brief spat with over the title of *Nas’* album *Hip Hop is Dead*, a charge that had been attributed namely to the rise of Southern Hip Hop artists. He has since released mixtapes titled *Trappin Aint Dead*, *Trap Or*

Die 2, and *1000 Grams* (referencing a kilogram of cocaine), in anticipation of his fourth Def Jam release, *Thug Motivation 103*.

Consequently, the lyrical content of the cocaine era of rap music seems to become more embellished as an artists' career begins to blossom. For example, the *Notorious B.I.G.* progressed from a midlevel crack-dealer on his debut album, *Ready to Die*, to a cocaine kingpin on his second album, *Life After Death*, as well as numerous guest appearances on other artists records. For example, when featured on the title track of basketball icon Shaquille O'Neal's 1997 album, *You Can't Stop The Reign*, he references "being tied up by Columbians, 'cause eighty grams was missing." On *Illmatic's* "Life's A Bitch," *Nas* speaks of cooking crack cocaine and "cutting small pieces to get my loot back" while he raps on *It Was Written's* "Street Dreams," "a drug dealer's destiny is reaching a ki(lo)." These lyrical interpretations of progressing in the drug game were characteristic of the mid-1990s Mafioso rap era and are evident in the lyrics of today's artists as well, particularly because of the crack cocaine era of the 1980s and the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

As previously mentioned in the analysis of Southern Hip Hop music, once *Juvenile, B.G.*, and *Turk* left Cash Money, *Lil Wayne* was left as the lone solo artist. There weren't any overt, personal drug dealing references on his debut album, *Tha Block Is Hot*. However, the lead single of his second album *Lights Out* was titled "Get Off The Corner," which was a warning to rival drug dealers to do just that. During the song, he boasts of having "heroin in bundles" and "powder and o's (ounces)" in addition to claiming "I cook it (mix powder cocaine with baking soda), cut it (chop the resulting solidified mixture into small pieces), ship it (transport it to its destination), and move it (sell it)." His first album release following the departure of his fellow group members was titled *500 Degreez*, subliminally suggesting that he was "hotter" than *Juvenile*. The song "Where You At" features Wayne rapping "Sold coke in the nineties, I'm honest man/Nothing big, maybe ounces, grams."

His next album, *Tha Carter*, is not only a reference to his last name, but also a reference to the apartment complex taken over by Wesley Snipes' drug-kingpin character Nino Brown in the motion picture *New Jack City*. Wayne's 2005 album release, *The Carter II*, features a verse on the song "Money on My Mind," in which he metaphorically claims "in the heart of the summer,

we need a snowplow” and “coke transactions on the phone, we call em’ blow jobs.” Later in the song, the line “hopping off the boat, meeting papi at the docks” is a loose interpretation of picking up a multi-kilogram shipment of cocaine from a Latin American supplier. The album also features songs titled “Hustler Musik” and “I’m a Dboy,” with the term “dboy” meaning “dopeboy” or dope dealer. The album’s “Feel Me” features Wayne claiming he “used to make a thousand dollars every time I played hooky” from school.

As a result of his progression in introspective lyricism, and increasingly dramatic and over-exaggerated drug references and transactions, *Lil Wayne’s* album sales and fan base have increased with each following release. His last Hip Hop album, 2008’s *Tha Carter III*, sold over a million copies during its first week of release and has gone triple-platinum. The album won a Grammy award for Best Rap Album. Capitalizing on his new “rock-star” celebrity and suburban white audience, he released *Rebirth* in February 2010, a heavily rock-influenced album with Hip Hop elements incorporated as well. Although it garnered generally negative reviews, it still sold over 500,000 copies.

The practice of marketing a rap artist’s street credibility and their past criminal exploits was commonplace during the ascension of West Coast gangsta rap during the 1990s (Reeves, 2008) It appears as though the Telecommunications Act has allowed artists with suspicious, inaccurate, or even fabricated criminal histories to prosper despite the fallacies within their accounts in interviews, and even lyrics. Once finally gaining entry into the rap music industry, *50 Cent* viciously lambasted *Ja Rule* for being a “studio gangster,” or claiming a life on record that he didn’t really live. Supposedly, Brooklyn rapper *Gravy*, in an attempt to create publicity, arranged his own shooting in the buttocks outside of New York’s radio station Hot 97 in 2006. Gravy later portrayed the *Notorious B.I.G.* in the 2009 biopic, *Notorious*. During confrontations between Hip Hop artists, a lack of street credibility or a fabricated past is normally the first mode of attack. However, because of the Telecommunications Act and a purchasing audience that is predominantly white, street credibility has maintained only a certain level of necessity, but will be excused if the featured artist is prominent enough. A prime example is Miami rapper *Rick Ross*.

As mentioned, Miami had previously been at the forefront of Southern Hip Hop music in the late 1980s with the contributions of *Uncle Luke* and *2 Live Crew*. Besides Luke, they would remain off the radar until the late 1990s before being recognized through the debut album of rapper *Trick Daddy*, titled *Based On A True Story*. The album's cover portrayed the artist, born Maurice Young, standing in a police line-up, shirtless, with a food stamp in the background, symbolically portraying the South, crime, and poverty. Trick had gotten his start with a guest appearance on Luke's 1996 hit "Scarred," and his debut album was released by independent label Slip-N-Slide Records. The record portrayed real life in Liberty City, the area of Miami from which Trick hailed, and was heavier on truth and consequences than some gangsta fantasy. (Sarig, 2007, p.308) A huge regional response resulted in over 100,000 copies sold. Regional success progressed to national success in 1999, when he released the album *www.thug.com*, and the hit single "Nann Nigga," which introduced new female rap artist *Trina*. *www.thug.com* was the first of a series of albums that *Trick Daddy* released with "thug" in the title. He followed with *Book of Thugs: Chapter AK, Verse 47, Thugs-R-Us, Thug Holiday, and Thug Matrimony: Married to the Streets*. These albums are indicative of the posthumous influence of fallen rap icon, *Tupac Shakur*, whose philosophy of "Thug Life" was embedded within all hardcore rap artists after the Telecommunications Act and his death, especially Southern rappers. Author Roni Sarig (2007) says:

"*Trick Daddy* remains the quintessential Southern Hip-Hop thug. For Trick, though, "thug" is just about keeping it real, staying connected to the streets, and, like a modern-day bluesman, capturing the pain of the hood" (p.309).

Sarig goes on to comment that Trick doesn't talk much about material possessions, as opposed to the bling-bling of so much Hip Hop (p.310). Trick says "There's more people in the world with problems than there is with material things" (p.310). His lyrical content is vastly different than that of his Miami counterpart, *Rick Ross*.

Born in Mississippi and raised in the Carol City area of Miami, Florida, William Roberts graduated from Carol City Senior High School and later attended Albany State University before returning to Miami. He took on the name *Rick Ross*, which referred to the drug-dealing exploits

of “Freeway Rick” Ross, and pursued a career in rap music. The real-life Ross was almost single handedly responsible for the influx of crack-cocaine in Los Angeles during the 1980s. It was revealed in California journalist Gary Webb’s 1999 article series “Dark Alliance” that Ross was receiving large shipments of cocaine at a discount rate through a CIA operative, and that drug proceeds from his transactions were being used within the Iran-Contra affair.

In 2002, the rapper now known as *Rick Ross* was featured on the lead single of Trina’s *Diamond Princess* album, “Told Y’all.” Unlike Trick, Ross embraced his city’s reputation as a center for drug trafficking and portrayed himself as a crime lord for the entertainment of the nation (Sarig, 2007, p.310). By 2005, the cocaine rap era had become the vanguard of Hip Hop music due to the recent successes of Atlanta rappers *T.I.*, *Young Jeezy*, and newcomer *Gucci Mane*. The time period was perfect for Ross to release his single “Hustlin.” Lines from the song include “I’m into distribution, I’m like Atlantic/I got them motherfuckers flyin’ across the Atlantic/ I know Pablo (Escobar), Noriega/The real Noriega, he owe me a hundred favors.”

In August 2006, through a joint venture between Slip-N-Slide Records and Def Jam Records, his debut album *Port of Miami* was released. The title is a reference to Miami being a major destination of cocaine shipments. The official remix to “Hustlin” featured not only *Young Jeezy*, who was also signed to Def Jam Records, but *Jay-Z*, who at the time was president of Def Jam Records. The album’s second single, “Push It,” sampled the song “Push It to the Limit” from the movie *Scarface*, yet another cocaine reference. Other song titles include “For Da Low” (insinuating low cocaine prices), “White House” (meaning a drug storehouse), and “Pot and Pans” (referencing the cooking materials used for converting powder cocaine into crack).

In March 2008, Ross’ second album, *Trilla*, was released. The drug-kingpin characterization continued, and his moniker the “Boss” became more universally recognized through the album’s lead single, “The Boss,” featuring *T-Pain*. However, in July, *The Smoking Gun*, a website that posts legal documents, arrest records and police mugshots, posted documents proving that Ross had previously been a correctional officer, even including a photograph of him in uniform. Ross initially denied the validity of the photo, stating:

“My life is 100 percent real. These online hackers putting a picture of my face when I was a teenager in high school on other people’s body. If this shit was real don’t you think they would have more specifics, like dates and everything else? I’m in the entertainment business and a lot of people like to hate because I’m on top of my game. Like I said before my life is 100 percent real” (Rick Ross Exposed By TheSmokingGun.com. (2008). Retrieved March 4, 2011, from <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/news/id.7356/title.rick-ross-exposed-by-thesmokinggun-com>).

In October 2008, Ross admitted his past as a correctional officer to *Don Diva* magazine:

“Yes, it's me," Ross *tells* Don Diva. "I never tried to hide my past. I put my name inside my CDs. My company has my [Social Security number]. I could've put a company name...I done been up and I done been down and that's what makes me what I am. I never ratted on a nigga. I never prosecuted a nigga. I never locked up a nigga, that's first and foremost. I always felt that me being the nigga that I am, I never owed a nigga an explanation. When I'm making my music and I'm talking about blow, it's because I did it. When I say that I'm rich off cocaine, it's because I did it. Those are the street principals that apply” (Rick Ross Admits Correctional Officer Past. (2008). Retrieved March 4, 2011, from <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/news/id.7847/title.rick-ross-admits-correctional-officer-past>)

Several rappers voiced their dismay at the admission, often making comments in interviews akin to, “If he lied about this, what else has he lied about?”

In January 2009, Ross began a feud with rapper Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson, which many believed to be a publicity stunt, including 50. 50 told MTV:

“When people get more publicity than they usually get -- from an artist's standpoint -- and it has nothing to do with their music, what usually happens is you make the public totally aware of you,” the Queens native explained. “Which is good until the release date, and you see no one has bought your record. The public is totally aware you're trash and your material's not generating any interest. That's when you do the damage to yourself, because you don't want more publicity than your actual music is commanding” (50 Cent Says Rick Ross is ‘Gusto from CB4’, Laughs Off Ross’ Sales Predictions. (2009). Retrieved March 17, 2011, from <http://www.ballerstatus.com/2009/03/03/50-cent-says-rick-ross-is-gusto-from-cb4-laughs-off-ross-sales-predictions>)

After claiming that 50 did not properly acknowledge him at the BET Awards, Ross released the song “Mafia Music,” and lyrically alluded to the then-recent allegations made by the mother of 50’s son, who claimed that 50 had someone burn down her New York residence. 50 responded with the song “Officer Ricky (Go Head, Try Me),” and a series of *Officer Ricky* cartoons on his website, www.thisis50.com. 50 went on to interview the mother of one of Ross’s children and posted it on You Tube. The interview includes her confirmation of his past as a correctional officer and his drug dealing exploits as fraudulent. In an interview with MTV’s Mixtape Mondays, 50 states:

"It's *CB4*. You ever seen the movie? He's Gusto," he added. "It never gets worse than this," 50 added. "You get a guy that was a correctional officer come out and base his entire career on writing material from a drug dealer's perspective” (50 Cent Says Rick Ross is ‘Gusto from CB4’, Laughs Off Ross’ Sales Predictions. (2009). Retrieved March 17, 2011, from <http://www.ballerstatus.com/2009/03/03/50-cent-says-rick-ross-is-gusto-from-cb4-laughs-off-ross-sales-predictions>)

The 1993 motion picture *CB4* starred comedian Chris Rock as MC Gusto, an aspiring rapper who steals the criminal background of an incarcerated crime kingpin, and goes on to superstardom. Ironically, the film was released during the era of dominance by West Coast

gangsta rap and the reign of Death Row Records. The film satirized the industry practices of the time, which was marketing the criminal backgrounds of their artists in an effort to boost their street credibility, and ultimately, record sales. 50's comments, though meant comically and to insult Ross, were actually correct. The CB4/Gusto reference was also used on 1996's *It Was Written*, as *Nas* referenced the *Notorious B.I.G.* and a questionable criminal background. Originally, the line was thought to be aimed at *Tupac Shakur*.

The negative backlash did not affect Ross, as he released his third album, *Deeper Than Rap*, to positive reviews in April 2009. He briefly addresses the accusations about his fabricated past on the song "Valley of Death," admitting to his position as a correctional officer, and not a police officer, but offered no explanation for his initial denial, which ultimately, was more than likely based on the traditional Hip Hop ideology of street credibility, which was a necessary attribute in the beginning stages of gangsta rap, now evolved to cocaine rap. On July 3, 2010, a lawsuit filed by the real-life *Rick Ross* was thrown out. The lawsuit claimed that the rapper had profited off his projected image of a drug kingpin and also named *Jay-Z* and Def Jam Records as defendants.

After the lawsuit's dismissal, Ross released his fourth album, *Teflon Don*, on July 20. The title irked the son of the late notorious Gambino crime family boss, John Gotti. The album's lead single, *B.M.F. (Blowin' Money Fast)* also sparked controversy as he mentioned incarcerated drug kingpin Demetrius "Big Meech" Flenory in the hook of the song. ("I think I'm Big Meech, Larry Hoover...") Within the Hip Hop community, it is common knowledge that Atlanta rapper *Young Jeezy* was heavily affiliated with Big Meech and his nationwide cocaine distribution network, B.M.F. (Black Mafia Family). Jeezy responded with a recorded rhyme (freestyle) titled "Death Before Dishonor," referring to Meech's motto, in which he questions Ross' connection to the faction. Ross replied with the song "The Summa's Mine," but it is currently unknown whether an actual problem between both artists exists.

It appears that the validity of an artist's past has absolutely no credence when paralleled with record sales. After his first three albums debuted at number one on the Billboard chart, Ross' *Teflon Don* was not only received well by critics, but fans alike, and debuted at number two. His past notwithstanding, his success continues amidst the revelation of his lack of criminal history. *Lil Wayne*, who was sentenced to a year in prison at Rikers Island, New York City's main jail

complex, on a weapons possession charge, stands to greatly profit upon his November 2010 release from prison and upcoming album release, *The Carter IV*. Other rappers such as Memphis' *Yo Gotti*, Ft. Myers, Florida's *Plies*, and Atlanta's *Gucci Mane*, *OJ the Juiceman*, and *Waka Flocka Flame* also reap the benefits of the current cocaine rap era. OJ and Waka are a part of *Gucci Mane's Brick Squad Clique*, the term "brick" referencing a kilogram of cocaine. In 2009, Waka's hit single, "O Let's Do It," featured the line "I fucked my money up, now I can't re-up." As mentioned previously, re-up means to purchase quantities of narcotics for distribution. The remix featured, not only *Rick Ross*, but Sean "*P. Diddy*" Combs, who was instrumental in orchestrating the image and career of one of the forefathers of cocaine rap, the *Notorious B.I.G.*.

DISCUSSION

The original goal of my research was to find and analyze the change in lyrical content in commercial rap music and the factors that influenced that change. A historical analysis of the history of commercial rap music revealed not only the subject matter of the earliest Hip Hop recordings, but the subject matter of prominent rap artists' lyrics immediately preceding the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and the lyrics immediately following its signing. This historical analysis also led to the discovery of numerous socioeconomic and technological factors during the 1980s that led to a change in the lyrical subject matter, which in turn led to the music industry focusing on the promotion of the gangsta rap subgenre. This focus was determined after the recognition that white suburban males were rap music's primary consumer audience and their preference of the violent lyrical content within gangsta rap. Because the Telecommunications Act of 1996 came into effect during a pivotal time period in the development of Hip Hop culture in which the trends that sold the most records were being emulated, the mass radio and music label consolidation that followed caused an unnatural evolution in the lyrical subject matter, as new gangsta rap subgenres, Mafioso and cocaine rap, respectively, developed amidst a national Diaspora of rap music following the still-unsolved murders of *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.*.

The party-oriented lyrics of the *Sugarhill Gang's* 1979 single "Rapper's Delight" were the original standard for Hip Hop musical compositions. The theme of artistic credibility that is still prevalent within Hip Hop culture was also observed with the success of the *Sugarhill Gang*, who were dismissed as a watered-down representation of the true Hip Hop culture. Their historical contribution to rap music, though, cannot be overlooked. The party-themed lyrics of rap music were the standard until the early 1980s, when MCs (rappers) began to address social issues within their music. The example used within the historical analysis is "The Message" by *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*, released in 1982. By taking on an activist stance within rap music, it was discovered that the voice of inner-city Black communities was no longer a musical fad, but an acceptable genre of music. 1982 also was the year that *Afrika Bambaataa* released "Planet Rock," and cemented the relationship between Hip Hop and rock music. "Planet Rock" was described as "when Hip Hop became global."

The aforementioned relationship between Hip Hop and rock music helped rap music crossover to a suburban white audience. This was exemplified with the ascension of rap group *Run-DMC* in the mid-1980s. Each of their first three albums contained singles that featured heavy rock guitar riffs. Also, their popularity came about during a burgeoning age of media and entertainment; their music videos garnered major airplay on the MTV (Music Television) network and several motion pictures depicting the elements of Hip Hop culture were released during the early to mid-1980s. These factors, combined with the fact the group was signed to an exclusively Hip Hop music label (*Def Jam Records*), enabled *Run-DMC's* street-oriented lyrics to become the face of rap music. Other successful Def Jam artists included *LL Cool J* and white rap/rock group, the *Beastie Boys*.

During the 1980s, the crack cocaine epidemic severely impacted Black communities nationwide, but specifically, those of New York City and Los Angeles. The result was the emergence of two separate cradles of cultural artistic expression as a response to the socioeconomic conditions facing Blacks in America. New York MCs began a shift towards social consciousness and elevated the art of rhyme, utilizing layered sample rhythms within the instrumentation and a more poetical approach to the lyrics. Los Angeles, however, began a more aggressive shift toward the cultural and political status quo, appealing to black youth nationwide with the new subgenre known as gangsta rap. The recognition of the two distinct movements is important because the separate responses to the crack cocaine era/Reaganomics laid the foundation for the direction of rap music in both regions. The New York artists included *Rakim*, *KRS-ONE*, and rap group *Public Enemy*. The most important practitioners of the West Coast gangsta rap genre was Compton's *NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes)*. It was during this period (the late 1980s) when the discovery of the young suburban white male consumer demographic was identified.

An important finding was how the invention of Soundscan affected the music industry. After its inception in 1991, the sales of *NWA's Efil4zaggin (Niggaz4Life)* showed not only that the primary buying demographic of rap music was young suburban white males, but that their preference was the violent and expletive-laden imagery found within the lyrics of gangsta rap music. This was instrumental in industry marketing and talent searching protocol; Gangsta rap artists not only became the most sought after commodities, but would soon become the only rap

artists to garner heavy mainstream exposure. These artists' criminal backgrounds were even marketed to bolster their street credibility and increase their record sales. This was exemplified within the analysis with the defection of both *Ice Cube* and *Dr. Dre* from *NWA* and the rise of California gangsta rap label, *Death Row Records*. A lack of exposure and record sales caused friction between California's gangsta rap artists and New York's socially conscious artists.

Eventually, most rap artists shifted towards a "gangsta" theme to either increase record sales or to reach a larger audience. While several artists of rap music's eras were highlighted in groups, cultural icon *Tupac Shakur* was used as an individual focus within the historical analysis of the development of rap music. A socially conscious artist in 1991, he gradually shifted to a gangsta mantra after a brief incarceration in 1994 until his death in 1996. He signed with gangsta rap label *Death Row Records* until his untimely demise. Meanwhile, New York artists developed a new subgenre of gangsta rap called Mafioso rap, in which the criminality of gangsta rap music was applied to a Mafia/drug kingpin theme. Early practitioners of this new subgenre were *Nas*, *Jay-Z*, and *Raekwon* of the *WuTang Clan*. The emergence of the *Notorious B.I.G.* coincided with the Mafioso rap era, and his album, *Life After Death*, was exemplary of the subgenre's characteristics. Unfortunately, the *Notorious B.I.G.* was shot and killed in Los Angeles two weeks before the album's release in March 1997.

Amidst the peak of West Coast gangsta rap and the development of Mafioso rap, the Telecommunications Act was signed on February 8, 1996 by President Bill Clinton. The Act essentially deregulated the radio industry by lifting caps of radio ownership and decreasing the government's role in oversight. This enabled companies such as Clear Channel and Cumulus to absorb and acquire the vast majority of radio stations in the United States. The resulting competition heavily impacted radio programming; nationalized playlists, the streamlining of output, and squeezing out diversity and local programming were the outcome. By frequently replacing local programming with nationally syndicated programming, it severely compromised the democratic potential and artistic diversity of a traditional digitalized Black public sphere, Black radio, and has regulated the terms and conditions of debates and political viewpoints in both radio shows and music.

Because gangsta and Mafioso rap artists were garnering high record sales previous to the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the subject matter prevalent within those artists'

lyrics were the foundation for new artists in the Hip Hop music industry. The socially conscious voice of rap music was stifled and not given any mainstream access. The result was an era of lyricism based on excess materialism and the acquisition of diamonds, generally referred to as the “Bling Bling Era.” The national Diaspora of rap music that resulted after the murders of *Tupac Shakur* and the *Notorious B.I.G.* enabled a third cradle of artistic expression to be exploited by the music industry: the South. Several Southern independent rap labels had proven the ability to sell millions of records without any major-label backing, and signed lucrative distribution deals which enabled their music to reach a national audience as opposed to a limited regional audience. Southern Hip Hop was influenced by both West Coast gangsta rap and New York’s Mafioso rap subgenre. These influences helped to create the cocaine rap era in which Hip Hop music has evolved to, or what I refer to as the “D-Boy” or “Dopeboy Era.” Southern Hip Hop artists such as *Young Jeezy*, *T.I.*, *Rick Ross*, and *Lil Wayne* have been the beneficiaries of this era and genre of rap music.

Simultaneously, the main consumer of rap music continued to be the young white male suburban demographic. After numerous failed attempts (*Vanilla Ice*, *Everlast*, etc.), the combination of that lucrative demographic, music industry trends which supported violent and misogynistic lyrical content, and actual talent, white MC *Eminem* signed with one of the label of one of gangsta rap’s founders, *Dr. Dre’s Aftermath Records*. His rise to superstardom brought issues including but not limited to acceptance, authenticity, racism, and cultural theft are frequently mentioned. The relationship between whites and Hip Hop authenticity has been a commuted one, which is specifically a result of the historical relationship between black art and white people and, more generally, the result of ubiquitous white supremacy.

The development of rap music and its lyrical content is important because detractors of Hip Hop culture tend to focus on the violence, misogyny, and foul language contained within it. However, it is virtually impossible to critically analyze rap lyrics without having a thorough knowledge and understanding of the factors which shaped that lyrical content. The music industry is now a mere subsidiary of multinational conglomerates. There is no organic connection between the music industry and the culture’s roots of artistic cultural expression during a historical epoch in American history in which the voice of inner-city Black Americans had been silenced. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 played an instrumental role in the

development of Hip Hop culture as a whole, and rap music in general. Now, the music has evolved from a potential continuation of the Civil Rights/Black Power to an inaccurate representation of Black culture that is broadcast to a global audience to which Hip Hop culture is very influential. The evidence is Hip Hop culture permeating everything from former U.S. President Clinton's interviews and current President Barack Obama's speeches, to clothing, sports, automobile, and alcoholic beverage endorsements. Hip Hop entrepreneurs have ventured into authoring books and writing, producing, and starring in their own funded motion pictures, leaving no stone unturned.

The evolution of commercial rap music was analyzed from a strict communications perspective, as the messages being communicated within the lyrical content of rap music was the focus of my research. Suggestions for further study include analysis of commercial rap music, or Hip Hop culture as a whole, from a sociological perspective. The socioeconomic factors and social issues that have faced Black Americans since the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement in the 1960s have a large effect on the subject matter discussed in rap music. For example, the current cocaine rap era is a reflection of the large number of Black males who are left with narcotic distribution as a means of survival amidst a global recession, and a society that already oppresses them through institutionalized racism. The socioeconomic factors that resulted in the birth and development of Hip Hop Culture, combined with governmental powers, and public policy and local, state, and federal legislation has often been labeled as a contrived effort to control the minds of inner city youth based on the influence of rap music. Also, the female MC and her role was not researched in an effort to maintain focus. These are aspects that could be potentially explored when further study is enacted.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing commercial rap music in a historical context, it can be concluded that the *Sugar Hill Gang's* "Rapper's Delight" was the genesis of what later became a lucrative global commodity. The single was indicative of the party-oriented lyrics of early rap music. The evolution of rap lyrics to socio-political and socioeconomic commentary was evidenced by *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's* "The Message." Simultaneously, *Afrika Bambaataa's* "Planet Rock" was introducing Hip Hop Culture as a whole to a global audience.

Also, another shift in lyrical content occurred with Profile Records/Rush Management's group, *Run-DMC*. Their lyrics were geared towards street consciousness and were the first embodiment of the "Bad Nigga Hero" archetype. *Run-DMC* were the first Hip Hop artists to attain a crossover white audience during the mid-1980s, due to their rock-influenced singles and videos on *MTV* (Music Television).

During this time frame, the production of motion pictures depicting the various elements of Hip Hop culture became prevalent and included *Breakin*, *Wildstyle*, and *Krush Groove*. This added media exposure helped rap music to escape the confinements of black neighborhoods and expanded into white suburban areas. Because of this expansion, the music industry began to focus its efforts on marketing select music styles to white suburban teen males, who were identified as the main demographic that purchased rap music. This later resulted in the heavy marketing push of the gangsta rap subgenre, the superstardom of *NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes)* in the late 1980s, and later, the artists of gangsta rap label *Death Row Records* beginning in the early 1990s.

Another objective of this study was to not only give an accurate account of how the lyrical content of commercial rap music evolved to its current state, but to analyze the several factors that dictated this evolution. While detractors of Hip Hop culture claim that rap lyrics have supported violence, misogyny, the usage and distribution of narcotics, and sexual conduct, this study supports that these images are strategically projected to mainstream popular culture because of a combination of verbal artistry, socioeconomic oppression, racial conflict, globalism, public policy, and technological advancement that has been deemed profitable by corporate America.

The evolution of party-oriented lyrics to social consciousness was followed by the exploitation of the criminalized black male image for a profit. This helped produce the West Coast gangsta rap subgenre, which had initially begun as a confrontational cultural response to the crack-cocaine epidemic, gang culture, and police brutality. The invention of Soundscan in the early 1990s was used as a tool by white music executives who had discovered years earlier that the aforementioned white suburban teen male demographic was the primary consumers of rap music.

This study will be able to potentially contribute to recent discussions regarding artist responsibility, how legislation and socioeconomic factors drastically affect the content within rap lyrics, and how the white consumption of popular culture is the driving force behind the stereotypical images that are presented to a worldwide audience. Rap music began as a voice of the oppressed and an artistic response to the urban decay that plagued New York City and Los Angeles and has now become a global commodity, and its organic roots become less and less prevalent as socially conscious artists are given no mainstream access due to the consolidation of radio and record labels choosing only to promote prominent gangsta rap artists.

The dominance of the gangsta rap genre in the early to mid-1990s caused a shift in label marketing practices, as common practices included highlighting an artist's criminal history in an attempt to bolster street credibility, which would boost record sales. This analysis concludes that during the current cocaine era of rap music (2004-present), these practices have become obsolete and artists whose individual criminal histories have not been validated, or have even been fabricated, continue to prosper while posturing themselves in the image of the criminalized Black male. This image continues to drive record sales, which are still primarily being supplied by the white suburban audience. The heavy promotion and astronomical record sales caused a rift between East Coast socially conscious rappers and West Coast gangsta rappers and was ultimately a factor in the negative atmosphere surrounding the still unsolved murders of Hip Hop Culture's two most prominent artists, Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace aka The Notorious B.I.G.. The white consumption of black popular culture eventually led to the genesis of white Hip Hop artists trying to gain recognition in a Black-dominated art form. After many failures, success was finally found with the ascension of a credible white rapper to superstardom, Eminem. Questions that deal with acceptance, authenticity, racism, and cultural theft are

explored and issues regarding whether or not his success can be attributed to his skin color, or to his skill and talent as a lyricist. This study concludes that the answer is yes to both inquiries.

Furthermore, the deaths of Shakur and Wallace and the signing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 all took place within a year and these events played a pivotal role in the evolution of Hip Hop music. Their deaths also created a national diaspora in which several regions of the United States, specifically the South, were able to develop their own distinct Hip Hop cultures. Gangsta rap eventually evolved to the current prevalent genre of cocaine rap, and the criminalized image of the young Black male continues to be not only the defacto representation of Hip Hop music, but also the most heavily promoted image by the multinational corporations that came about after the “mergermania” caused by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Other effects of the Telecom Act included the consolidation of musical outlets (radio stations and record labels) and the successful commodification of the art form as a product. This commodification resulted in the birth of several gangsta rap subgenres including Mafioso rap, and the current era of cocaine rap.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated radio station ownership, lifting a regulation that limited ownership media channels to owning no more than 40 stations. Soon after the lifting of this regulation, companies such as Clear Channel and Cumulus bought the majority of local radio stations. After a period of media consolidation and a series of corporate mergers, radio station playlists were nationalized, a maneuver which has stifled the voice of socially conscious musicians and promoted certain genres of music, specifically gangsta rap. This paper illustrates how commercial rap music became a global commodity, how the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has caused a change in the tapestry of Hip Hop music, and points to specific examples of musical styles that have been marginalized. This study concludes that these changes have ensured that the commercialization of Hip Hop culture, and rap music specifically, has led to the music art forms that present a warped representation of the black community as a global commodity.

Future researchers should observe trends and correlations found within the limitations listed in this study. Limitations of the interpretation of the information presented is due to a focus on commercial rap music according to its capitalist connotations. The conspiracy theory of the generational devolution of rap music has been thoroughly discussed in Hip Hop circles. The

combination of the socioeconomic factors resulting in its birth and development, caused by governmental powers, and public policy and local, state, and federal legislation has often been labeled as a contrived effort to control the minds of inner city youth based on the influence of rap music. That particular perspective was not discussed within this analysis. Rather, the state of the music has been analyzed as opposed to the state of the population that it catered to at its inception. The following limitations should also be considered by future researchers; Hip Hop culture as a continuation of the Civil Rights/Black Power movement; rap music analyzed from a sociological perspective as opposed to a communications perspective; the incorporation of more artists and their lyrics into the tapestry of lyrical evolution; the role of the female MC and gender and sexual issues; finally, the emergence of new technological trends that weren't discussed within this analysis such as MP3s, digital downloads, and the presence and influence of the Internet in general.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maurice Lowell Johnson II was born to Robin (Russelle) and Maurice Johnson on August 15, 1984 at Langley Air Force Base Hospital in Hampton, Virginia. As the child of U.S. Army veterans, Maurice lived in several states during his childhood, as well as abroad in Europe and Central America. He graduated with honors from Woodside High School in June 2002.

Maurice began his undergraduate studies at Florida A&M University, located in Tallahassee, Florida, during the fall of 2002. After earning his Bachelor of Science degree from the School of Journalism and Graphic Communication in April 2007, Maurice served as an admissions representative within the online division of Everest University in Tampa, Florida until returning to Tallahassee in the fall of 2008 to begin graduate studies.

After completing the necessary coursework to earn a Master of Science degree in Integrated Marketing Management and Communication, and graduate certificates in both Digital Media and Project Management at the Florida State University, Maurice defended his Masters' Thesis titled, "A Historical Analysis: The Evolution of Commercial Rap Music" in during April 2011, and will receive his degree during Summer 2011.

Maurice will begin his doctoral studies at Florida A&M University in the field of Educational Leadership, beginning in Fall 2011.