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Part 6 The 1990s and Beyond

78. Hip-Hop into the 1990s

Gangstas, Fly Girls, and the Big Bling-Bling

hip-hop without wit is like sushi without wasabi
Greg Tate[1]

The surge of mainstream popularity experienced by rap at the close of the 1980s continued into the 1990s. One of the most curious aspects of this, because it was so unexpected at the time, was the commercial ascendance of "gangsta rap." Gangsta rap, although pioneered by Northeast rappers, such as Schoolly D and Boogie Down Productions, achieved its broadest early circulation as a product of South Central Los Angeles and the nearby black communities of Long Beach and Compton. With lyrics featuring raw language in an unprecedented description of graphic violence, sex, and anger, N.W.A. (or Niggas with Attitude—mentioned briefly at the start of chapter 77) brought a new sense of urban, quasi-cinematic realism to popular music. The majority of mass media reportage focused on the sensationalistic aspects of the recordings, thereby missing two important components of N.W.A.'s approach: the driving, noisy, hard-edged, and funk-inflected grooves of the instrumental tracks produced by Dr. Dre (Andre Young, b. 1965), accentuated by the rhythmic declamations of the group's rappers (especially Ice Cube and Easy-E), and the way in which N.W.A.'s depictions of violence criticized how social institutions (especially law enforcement) perpetuated systemic racism.[2]

While the "hardcore" aspects of gangsta rappers and some other flamboyantly *outré* groups, such as 2 Live Crew, seized media attention for flaunting public taboos, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed some other, less controversial developments in rap that were every bit as notable. Prominent among them was what the music press later dubbed "alternative" or "progressive" hip-hop, represented by groups like De La

1. "Above and Beyond Rap's Decibels," *New York Times* (March 6, 1994), Sec. 2, 36.

2. Robin D. G. Kelley presents a thorough and sympathetic scholarly account of gangsta rap in "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: 'Gangsta Rap' and Postindustrial Los Angeles," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. 183–227.

Soul and A Tribe Called Quest. Greg Tate defined progressive hip-hop as "hiphop praxis wherein lyric content and raising the art form to the next level outweighs the profit margin."[3] Albums, such as De La Soul's *Three Feet High and Rising*, used the flow of radio variety shows from the pre-TV era to reinvent the album format (an innovation that was soon widely adopted), but with material that could only come from growing up in the post-TV era.[4] Combining skits that were takeoffs on TV game shows and witty, insightful and (above all) nonviolent lyrics with samples taken from all over the pop music spectrum, De La Soul and other progressive hip-hop groups became critical darlings. Another development, the politically oriented rap initiated by Public Enemy, was extended by female artists, such as Queen Latifah, who also received much favorable critical attention at the time.[5]

Nevertheless, mainstream media coverage of hip-hop almost single-mindedly conveyed a sense of moral outrage and panic, focused on the most lurid examples of hardcore rap. Articles in not-so-new publications, ranging from *Newsweek* to the *New Republic*, deplored what the authors viewed as the mindless glorification of violence and misogyny. Many of the writers directed their attention toward the "anger" that such writers heard in the music, although these accounts rarely seemed aware of how this anger was often politically motivated by a critique of white privilege (especially in recordings by Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions/KRS-One). The growing appeal of gangsta rap to young, white listeners caused the writer of a 1991 article in the *New Republic* to claim that rap music was neither "music" nor "black."[6] In contrast, Jon Pareles wrote a series of sympathetic articles in the *New York Times*, which, however, invariably elicited a round of letters to the editor protesting that hip-hop should not be included in the music section of Arts and Leisure, since rap, after all, was not really music.[7]

3. Greg Tate, "Diatribe," *Village Voice*, September 3, 1996, 46.

4. Jon Pareles explores the TV-hip-hop connection in "How Rap Moves to Television's Beat," *New York Times* (January 14, 1990), Sec. 2, 1–2.

5. See, for example, Michelle Wallace, "When Black Feminism Faces the Music, and the Music Is Rap," July 29, 1990, *New York Times*, Sec. 4.

6. The title says it all: David Samuels, "The Rap on Rap: The 'Black Music' That Isn't Either," *New Republic* (November 11, 1991): 24–29. The articles referred to in *Newsweek* were David Gates et al., "The Rap Attitude," *Newsweek* (March 19, 1990): 56–63; and John Leland, "Rap and Race," *Newsweek* (June 29, 1992): 47–52. Although this type of criticism has lessened in recent years, it has not disappeared entirely, as evidenced by the following statement in my local newspaper: "Rap consists, in large part, of people ranting and cursing to a monotonous beat. It is now America's most popular music"; see Peter Carlson, "Uncivil Discourse: The Breathless Harangue Is All the Rage," *Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin*, March 2, 2003, 9A. Originally published in the *Washington Post*.

7. See Pareles, "How Rap Moves to Television's Beat"; letters to the editor, *New York Times*, February 4, 1990, Sec. 2; idem., "Rap: Slick, Violent, Nasty and, Maybe, Hopeful," *New York Times* (June 17, 1990), Sec. 4; idem., "On Rap, Symbolism and Fear," *New York Times*, February 2, 1992, Sec. 2, 1, 23; letters to the editor, *New York Times*, February 16, 1992, Sec. 2.

We already heard from J. D. Considine in chapter 71 in the article on Judas Priest and the Scorpions. Displaying impressive critical range, Considine turns his attention to many of the issues (described earlier) that dominated media discussions about hip-hop in the early 1990s. Considine uses interviews with Chuck D (Carlton Ridenhour, b. 1960) and Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson, b. 1969, who left N.W.A. to embark on a successful solo career in 1990) to rebut many of the criticisms directed toward hip-hop, while paying particular attention to the "is it music?" question (posed here by nonrap musicians, Al DiMeola, Lita Ford, and Ozzy Osbourne) and to the social context for the violent imagery found in much rap.

Fear of a Rap Planet

J. D. Considine

In the 12 years since "Rapper's Delight" bum-rushed the Top 40, it would seem that rap has developed an unshakeable grip on popular culture. It's heard everywhere—on MTV, in movies, in advertising, even in Saturday morning cartoons, where Hammerman just replaced Kid 'N Play as the networks' favorite animated rapper.

Granted, a lot of people don't particularly *like* rap. They aren't down with "O.P.P.," have no memories of bliss concerning P.M. Dawn, and don't want to talk about sex—or anything else with Salt-N-Pepa.[8] These are the folks for whom rap is just noise with a beat, and they feel the same things their parents felt about rock 'n' roll: disinterest, distaste and disgust.

But fear? Who could possibly be afraid of rap?

Well, Bob Greene, for one. In his Chicago *Tribune* column last month, he wrote about a mugging in New York which happened to have been videotaped by the perpetrators themselves. Although he reports that police, who eventually arrested two teens, were "puzzled" by the event, what sparked this not-ready-for-prime-time crime was no mystery to Greene—rap music made them do it. Or, to be specific, rap videos, which, writes Greene, "are purposely glorifying armed violence and criminality. Most Americans probably have not seen these rap videos. But they are broadcast day and night by various cable channels, and they are frightening."

But not as frightening as the rap audience itself. Just ask all those radio stations that not only refuse to play rap records, but actually boast about it, courting listeners with slogans like "All the Best Music—And No Rap." Some are so petrified that they'll even excise rap-like passages from recordings by non-rap acts, as WLLZ-FM in Detroit did recently when it cut a few bars of unsung rhyming from "Roll the Bones" by Rush.

If you really want a sense of how deep this fear of a rap planet goes, however, check out the mass media, for whom rap seems to be a never-ending source of scare stories. When a white New York investment banker was beaten, raped and left for dead in the celebrated Central Park "wilding" incident, it was widely (and, apparently, erroneously) reported that the suspects after their arrest were happily chanting Tone-Loc's "Wild Thing"—the

8. This sentence refers to then-recent hits by those artists.

Source: J. D. Considine, "Fear of a Rap Planet," *Musician* (February 1992), pp. 34–43, 92. Used by permission of J. D. Considine.

implication being that the rap had somehow inspired the rampage. Indeed, when *Newsw* published its 1990 cover story lambasting rap culture, the magazine made sure it w Tone-Loc's face that was framed by the "Rap Rage" headline.

Then, after N.W.A.'s *Efil4zaggin* entered the *Billboard* album charts at number one (t first rap album ever to do so), the *New Republic* ran a cover story suggesting that rap, c scribed in a subhead as "The 'black music' that isn't either," isn't even listened to by blacl According to the *TNR* story, rap's primary audience is suburban white kids, and N.W.A sex-and-violence posturing is little more than minstrelsy, cartoonish blacks doing their b to entertain thrill-seeking Caucasians.

And now there's the controversy over Ice Cube's *Death Certificate*, which has been d nounced by anti-defamation activists, Korean citizen groups, syndicated columnists a even the editors of *Billboard*. Granted, Ice Cube has provided his critics with plenty ammunition, what with lyrics that characterize Korean store owners as "Oriental on penny-countin' motherfuckers," that insist "true niggas ain't gay," and that suggest h former bandmates in N.W.A. dispose of manager Jerry Heller:

Get rid of that devil real simple
Put a bullet in his temple
Because you can't be a Niggaz 4 Life crew
With a white Jew telling you what to do.

It's ugly, sure. Angry, too. But Ice Cube refuses to consider the quatrain quoted abo to be anti-Jewish. "I'm really surprised that people would take that record so out of pr portion," he says. "The record is not geared towards Jerry Heller or the Jewish communit the record is geared towards the group who attacked me. In most cases I felt that Jer Heller attacked me—in the *Rolling Stone* interview, and the *Spin* articles.

"They even attacked me on the record, and said that when they caught me, they w going to cut my hair and fuck me with broomstick. Now, I've seen them a couple of tim after that record—they haven't cut my hair, and they definitely haven't fucked me with broomstick." In other words, it's all just "woofing," with both sides making outrageous ve bal threats they have no intention of following through on.

"So why are you taking rap music literally?" he asks, rhetorically. "It's stupid to tak anything that literally, other than news. This is a form of *entertainment*. People keep forge ting that. I'm not a schoolteacher or a professor at any university. I'm a rapper. I entertain

The question is, are you amused? Or are you afraid?

It's a Black Thing, You Wouldn't Understand

Ask Public Enemy's Chuck D why people are afraid of rap, and at first he just shakes h head. "That's ridiculous," he says, "Because we don't tear up hotels, we don't tear u arenas." It isn't, after all, as if he and his fellow rappers are inciting youths to riot on nightly basis.

Chuck D's no dummy, though, and it doesn't take him long to come up with real ar swer. "Anything that comes from a black point of view that the establishment doesn't hav full control over or understanding of, they view as being offensive," he says. "And no even more so, since that point of view is coming across to white kids."

That's not to say Public Enemy's audience is entirely white, mind you. The crowd c young Baltimoreans he plays to this evening, for example, is almost 95 percent black (don they read the *New Republic*?) But overall, the audience P.E. attracts is as broad as it is big and that, as the establishment sees it, makes the group doubly dangerous.

"I look at this country as being a predominantly white male-dominated society," Chuck says. "It has never even given a black male his chance or his due, because we are seen as being not even part of that whole structure. It's a white male structure versus everything else.

"Now, some of the frustration is coming across. This stuff is coming out from all different angles, but the media have been built by white men, and the first maneuver when you can't control the play is to attack it."

If that seems a little paranoid from where you're sitting, it makes perfect sense from Public Enemy's perspective. After all, this group has spent much of its recording career articulating the black community's anger and taking flak for its efforts. First it was lambasted for endorsing Louis Farrakhan in "Bring the Noise," then for anti-Jewish remarks Professor Griff, its former Minister of Information, made in an interview with the Washington *Times*. The current controversy, for those keeping score at home, stems from a gay-bashing rhyme uttered by Flavor Flav in "A Letter to the New York Post"—"ask James Cagney/He beat up on a guy when he found he was a fagney."

Chuck shrugs off the "Letter" controversy. "I mean, you really can't take it that serious on Flavor," he says, "because he just found something that rhymes." Beyond that, though, he says he's more concerned with the motives behind these attacks than with what his attackers have to say. "I don't judge criticism, I judge the critic," he says, adding that as far as he can see, the only thing these anti-rap diatribes are meant to do is maintain the status quo.

"You have certain defense mechanisms up to keep things the way they are supposed to be and maintain order in this structure," he says. "That's because you have a lot of people who are paranoid, with no really full grasp of what they believe in, and they feel that they have something to lose. They lose belief in themselves and in their structure. They feel like they'll lose a grip on their future.

"In our view, that's not necessarily so. The black race is just trying to get a grip on itself to survive. I mean, the thing with black people in this country is they're real beat-down people. And it's really more serious than a lot of white people take to heart, because we have everything to lose—and we lost a lot. I try to tell our people, 'There's no time for making excuses, we've got to make the best of it.' But many of them are damaged goods, you know what I'm saying?

"To make a long story short, white people have to understand that black people already have respect for [them], because we've been trained to do so. We just don't have respect for ourselves. When a level of self-respect comes, then you'll see that it gets better. But self-respect has never been taught, so right now, black people are still slaves to that."

Unfortunately, what some rappers see as their efforts to uplift the race, their critics take as attacks on others. Ice Cube, for instance, explains in the liner notes to *Death Certificate* that the album is divided into two parts, with the "Death Side" being "a mirrored image of where we are today," while the "Life Side" pictures "where we need to go." But it's disturbingly easy to translate that message as "Let's stop destroying ourselves, and start destroying others."

Which, Cube says, is dead wrong. "They figure when you're pro-black, you've got to be anti-whatever," he says. "But see, that's guilt from the pain that they inflicted on blacks. We aren't pro-black to be anti-white or anti-Korean, anti-Jewish. We're pro-black so we can look back at history and make sure that it doesn't repeat itself."

Being pro-black doesn't necessarily mean articulating your ideas as violently as Ice Cube does. Take the Afrocentric movement. Although the Allan Blooms of the world consider it a threat to the very foundations of Western Civilization, Afrocentricity as

expressed by the likes of Queen Latifah is simply a means for young blacks to learn w they are, and have some pride in that knowledge.[9]

"It's very hard, because we're brainwashed in this country in a lot of ways," she sa "It's like when a little black kid grows up, what do they see on TV? They see so much whi What are they supposed to connect to? They connect to what this white thing is. So th think their hair is supposed to be long and their eyes are supposed to be light and their sk is supposed to be light and it's not, and they feel low about it. When they go out with t girls, all the guys want to talk to the light ones, or the one with long hair.

"We have a lot of stereotypes to fight, a lot of barriers to break down. And it's hard, b cause nobody's perfect. Nobody can just change all this stuff in one day. It's going to ta years and years of barrier-breaking for things like this to change."

Rap Isn't Music

"I have a problem with rap," admits Guitarist Al Di Meola. "It's not music. It's not like I' hearing an instrumentalist play, with some harmony and a good vocalist. Where are tl people who've learned to play their instrument?"

"I'm really bored with this rap music," says fellow fretboarder Lita Ford. "I think it about time that it was on its way out. It sounds like gang music to me."

"I'm a believer in melody," says singer Ozzy Osbourne. "Rap I can appreciate, but drives me nuts after about an hour. I mean, if you haven't got a melody. . . ."

When musicians talk about what they don't like about rap, the points that come up rare concern racial politics; instead, it's the rap musical value they question. *It hasn't got a melod They don't play instruments, they don't have any ideas, they steal everything. It's just not music.*

Rappers, naturally, counter that such talk is just so much sour grapes. "It's not *their* i strument [on the record], so it's not music," laughs Russell Simmons, president of Def Ja Records. "Drummers are the same—they say there's no live drummers on it, so it's not rea it's not a record. 'Course, now that live drums are back, drummers think those same recor are fine. I think they're ridiculous."

"A lot of people don't like that we could take a song that's been done before and prol ably sold 300,000, and do 1.3 million with it," adds Ice Cube. "Like Hammer took 'Sup Freak,' and made it into a bigger hit than Rick James did. That's why I think people get ma at us. They've got to understand that we took something and just made it better. The tale we put on top of it was better than the talent that was on it originally."

Not that it takes a sampler to steal a groove. A decade ago, the pioneering rappers Sugar Hill all recorded with a live rhythm section. But as Matt Dike, whose productio credits include Tune-Loc's "Wild Thing," points out, "What they were doing was playin grooves from other records, that they had stolen. Like the bass in 'White Lines' was from song by Liquid Liquid, this underground New York band. They were ballsier than any body! They just replayed the whole thing, and acted like they wrote it."

Besides, if it takes no talent to make rap records, Ice Cube has a simple question: "I sa 'Why don't *you* try to do a hit rap record?'

"They'd be lost, in most cases."

Maybe so, but rap's critics do raise some valid questions. For instance, given that ra vocals rarely change pitch (and certainly aren't "sung" in any conventional understandin of the term), is it fair to say that rap records don't have any melody?

9. Allan Bloom (author of a conservative diatribe against late 20th-century mass culture), *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), which was widely discussed during this period.

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No way, answers producer Bill Laswell. "That's just people who have been conditioned into thinking a certain chord sequence ending on middle C is the absolute concept of melody," he argues. "If you're familiar with Asian or African music, you realize that a lot of the melody is inherent in the drumming. In African drumming, you hear all kinds of melodies and phrases, and there's as much melody in hip-hop and rap as in African drumming—and that's a lot of melody. You just have to listen."

True enough. Even a seemingly simple rap record, like Naughty By Nature's "O.P.P.," reveals unexpected complexity if you know where to look. Sure, it has the "ABC" piano hook, looped right off the original, which is probably the only "melodic" element anyone noticed when it first came up on the radio. But there's also a reggae-style bassline churning up a nice rhythmic cross-current with the syncopated kick drum, a fair amount of percussive interplay (check out the parallelism between the two-note piano part that sets up each two-bar phrase and the two-beat cowbell accent that leads into three each measure), and, of course, the raps themselves, which spin clever variations on the bassline's cadence—sometimes stretching across the bar, sometimes double-timing the beat, sometimes pulling up short to add to the track's rhythmic tension.

Even though they use samplers, sequencers and drum machines instead of guitars, bass and drums, rap acts orchestrate their rhythm frameworks as thoughtfully as any rock act would. Take Public Enemy, for example. "They're the only rap group I know of that can take five or six snippets of a record, put it together and make it sound like one band," said Branford Marsalis after contributing a tenor solo to "Fight the Power."

"They're not musicians, and don't claim to be—which makes it easier to be around them. Like, the song's in A minor or something, then it goes to D7, and I think, if I remember, they put some of the A minor solo on the D7, or some of the D7 stuff on the A minor chord at the end. So it sounds really different. And the more unconventional it sounds, the more they like it."

On the latest Public Enemy album, *Apocalypse 91 . . . The Enemy Strikes Black*, the group extends that approach. "We've taken a lot of instruments and processed them through computers," says Chuck D, who explains that the P.E. approach often relies on playing the samples on a keyboard to lend more of a live feel to the tracks. "The only difference between sampling and live sound is change," he says. "When a bass player plays bass, he makes mistakes sometimes. But he fixes the mistake so quick that it's just a change in the pattern, an ad-lib. But your programming is not going to program a mistake. So what we try to do is, we don't program it so much. We play the keys. Like 'Homey Don't Play That' from the *Terminator X* record. I played the bass on keys."

Then there's the rap itself. Those who don't rap often assume that rap lyrics are little more than simply metered rhyming doggerel—which, to be honest, a certain amount of them are. But the best rappers take as much care with their cadences as they do with the rhythm beds, so that the words flow along with the music instead of just hammering home the beat.

Chuck D, for instance, won't even start writing until he has a groove to work from, and often sketches out his rhythmic ideas with nonsense syllables before filling out his raps. "I'll have a groove that inspires me, do my vocals in a certain way and then fill it with words," he says. "And if it doesn't fit the groove, I'm not going to fuck with it."

Ironically, once he's finished recording, Chuck then has to go through the laborious process of relearning what he has written. "I have a bad memory for remembering words," he laughs. "People say, 'Didn't you write it?' I say, 'Yeah, I wrote it, and it's on a piece of paper. Is it in my head? It came out of my head, but now I have to relearn it.' A lot of people don't understand that.

"You know who's got a crystal-clear memory? Ice-T. Ice-T recites records from back in 1981, line for line. He can recite every single one of his records line for line, word for word. Ice Cube is the same thing. They're like Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson. I guess I'm like [Charles] Barkley—I gotta work for everything I got.

"The only thing that might be natural about me is my voice. But a voice doesn't me nothing if you don't know how to use it."

"It all comes with style," explains Ice Cube. "A lot of raps that come straight on the be were written without a beat, know what I'm saying? They put a beat in their head and ju write from that. Then they get the music and the music isn't exactly what they had in the head, but they can come down on every beat and make it work. I choose to have my mus first. I'll write a rap that fits it like a glove, or at least try to. I can take breaths here, I can slo down here, I can speed up here, and just try to throw some style and flavor on it withou sounding so robotic."

As for material, Ice Cube says there's never any shortage of things for him to writ about. "Living just gives me records to do," he says. "I just finished *Death Certificate*, an I've thought of three topics that I might want to write on for my new album.

"I just live life, man, however it comes. When things come up that I think need to b talked about, then I do it. I just start writing."

79. Nuthin' but a "G" Thang

In the wake of the successes of N.W.A. and Ice Cube, gangsta rap became the dominant form of hip-hop in the early 1990s. The level of censorship and political attention that rap received rose correspondingly. Political militancy assumed heightened levels of confrontational violence in tracks, such as N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police" (1988); Public Enemy's "Arizona" (1991, criticizing Arizona's failure to recognize Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday); Ice-T with Body Count's "Cop Killer" (1992); and Dr. Dre's (now recording on his own) "Deep Cover" (1992). Many of the songs emanating from Southern California seemed eerily to anticipate or comment upon the May 1992 uprising following the exoneration of Los Angeles police officers in the beating of Rodney King. With the PMRC's rating system already in place (and with the recordings just mentioned all receiving "parental advisory" stickers), pressures mounted on recording companies to limit such confrontational recordings. Time-Warner, in response to the pressure, first dropped "Cop Killer" from the *Body Count* album and then released Ice-T (a Los Angeles rapper who had recorded an album called *O.G. Original Gangster* in 1991) from his contract.

Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* became the best-selling hip-hop album of 1992 (the title is a reference to test-grade marijuana). Dre had modified his sound from N.W.A., producing a smoother form of funk that featured high-pitched, whiny synthesizers and (frequently) sung choruses. Now

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recording with soon-to-be-notorious Death Row records, Dre introduced rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg (Calvin Broadus, b. 1972) on *The Chronic* and "Deep Cover," the single that preceded it. Dre and Snoop shared rapping duties on about half the tracks on *The Chronic*, the lyrics of which were written mainly by Snoop. The critique of racist institutional policies that had featured prominently in early N.W.A. recordings became increasingly implicit in *The Chronic*'s detailed depictions of sex and violence, which fans appreciated because of their humorous language and apparent fidelity to experience. The notion of "keeping it real" thus assumed greater importance in the evaluation of hip-hop.

Snoop Doggy Dogg's solo album, *Doggystyle*, repeatedly described in the press of the time as the "most anticipated rap album of all time," was released in late 1993 and quickly became the best-selling rap album ever. As described in the following article by Touré, the notion of "keeping it real" took on a macabre cast when Snoop was arrested in conjunction with a shooting while finishing the album. Yet, as he notes here (echoing the words of Ice Cube in chapter 78), the words of his songs should not be taken literally, but rather as entertainment. Clearly, the line was blurring between the way in which the words "should be taken," and how rappers and listeners were actually taking them. Also of interest here are Snoop's comments on his delivery and approach to rhythm, which, again, confirm the statements by Chuck D and Ice Cube in the previous article.[1]

Snoop Dogg's Gentle Hip Hop Growl

Touré

It's past midnight on a cool Friday in September, and a photo shoot for a beer ad is breaking up. The photographer's lights still illuminate a small parking lot in West Hollywood, Calif., which is empty save for a few Mercedes-Benzes, Jeeps and low-riders and a handful of young black men.

At the center of the group, looming over all, is the shoot's subject, a thin, dark-skinned 6-foot-4 rapper with sunken cheeks and a razor-sharp nose. He leans at what appears a 45-degree angle, surveying the scene around him out of the corners of his eyes. Hours ago he had turned himself in to the police on the charge of murder and was released on $1 million bail; in minutes he will return to the studio to work on his debut album, "Doggystyle," the most anticipated hip-hop album ever. His name is Snoop Doggy Dogg.

1. For a more in-depth portrait of Snoop around this time, see dream hampton, "Snoop Doggy Dogg: G-Down," *The Source* 48 (September 1993): 64–70. Particularly interesting in this article are Snoop's comments about the early stages of the West Coast–East Coast rivalry and his connections with the Crips and Bloods—rival African American gangs in Southern California.

Source: Touré, "Snoop Dogg's Gentle Hip Hop Growl," *New York Times*, November 21, 1993, p. 32.
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Over this past year the 22-year-old rapper has been the most ubiquitous man in hip-hop. His voice has flowed from Walkmans, DJ turntables and Jeep stereos as his face graced MTV and the cover of Rolling Stone, all thanks to his featured role on Dr. Dre's album, "The Chronic," which has sold more than three million copies, becoming the fifth-biggest-selling rap album.

On Tuesday, Death Row Records will release "Doggystyle," from the man born Calvin Broadus in Long Beach, Calif., and nicknamed Snoop by his mother. The album follows the first single and video, "What's My Name?" and is expected to enter Billboard's pop album chart at No. 1, a first for a debut album. "This is the biggest buzz I've ever seen," says Chris Lighty, president of Rush Management, which handles many of the top rappers. "The last time there was anything close was probably Jimi Hendrix, no, N.W.A.'s *Niggaz4Life*. People are going to the store asking, 'Is it in yet? Is it in yet?'"

Snoop's music is gangster rap, a genre marked by rhymes that describe the violent challenges of urban living. Gangster rap is probably hip-hop's best-known subset, but it is no more the definitive expression of hip-hop than fusion is of jazz. Like jazz, all hip-hop may sound the same to the inexperienced ear, but beneath the posturing and booming beat lies one of pop's most complex forms. With its collagist ethic, hip-hop pulls from all of popular culture, from old television shows to up-to-the-minute slang, to inform the rapper's often autobiographical presentation. But just as jazz celebrates mastery, hip-hop prizes originality; in (now dated) hip-hop parlance, the word fresh meant excellent. At the moment, "dope" means great.

There are rappers with greater rhythmic flexibility and tonal dynamism than Snoop, but where newness is the virtue, Snoop matters, because his vocal approach is, in every sense, fresh. "Snoop ain't the dopest," says Jermaine Dupri, the producer of the platinum-selling rap group Kris Kross, "but he's king right now."

Snoop's vocal style is part of what distinguishes him: where many rappers scream, figuratively and literally, he speaks softly. Compare the treatment of the murder of a police officer in the song "Deep Cover," from the soundtrack of the 1992 movie of that name, with that of Ice-T's "Cop Killer." Both songs gained popularity in the summer of 1992, but "Deep Cover" did not provoke the controversy "Cop Killer" did because of Snoop's subtlety: to understand "Deep Cover's" refrain—"'cuz it's one eight seven on a undercover cop"—one has to know that in Los Angeles police terminology the number 1-8-7 means homicide.

"It's the way you put it down," Snoop explains. "I put it down with a twist. Everybody in the whole world knew 'Cop Killer' meant kill a cop. And every policeman knows the municipal code is 187, but everybody in the whole world didn't know that."

Soft tones mark Snoop as vocal descendent of the soul vocalists Al Green and Curtis Mayfield. His voice is a nasal tenor, especially distinct because of his Southernish twang (derived from his Mississippi-born parents and grandparents) and the considerable restraint of his delivery. It all projects the aura of a man who is ultra-cool.

"It's a basic conversation," Snoop says of his style. "I don't rap, I just talk. I don't like to get all pumped up and rap fast 'cause that ain't me. I want to be able to relax and conversate with my people. It's a distinction between Steven Seagal and Clint Eastwood. Seagal ain't laid back. Eastwood is."

Laid-back cool places Snoop in the African-American tradition of making light of personal horror. From the same emotional source from which bluesmen found the grace to understate the weight of their pain comes Snoop's nonchalance in the middle of warring gangs and the police.

Snoop Doggy Dog sounds even cooler when that conversation is juxtaposed against the ominous, sinister, funk-inspired music of his producer, Dr. Dre, an innovator as important in hip-hop as Quincy Jones has been in jazz. Unlike most hip-hop producers who create tracks by sampling from original sources, Dr. Dre uses a band. It's led by T-Green, a

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one-time George Clinton collaborator and a longtime member of the funk band the Dramatics.

"You know how you would be real sensitive and delicate with a newborn baby," Snoop asks. "That's how I treat the beat when I'm rapping: like a newborn baby. Even if it's a hard track, what I'm saying will move you, because I'm delicately putting it down."

Rage, a female rapper who appears on "The Chronic" and "Doggystyle," says Dr. Dre has contributed much to Snoop's success. "I don't know if Snoop would be as big, because Dre's production plays a big part," she says. "If you don't have good beats, then you might not get as much recognition."

While Snoop delivers rhymes delicately, the content is anything but. Growing up poor, often surrounded by violence, and having served six months in the Wayside County jail outside of Los Angeles (for cocaine possession) gave Snoop experiences upon which he draws: "My raps are incidents where either I saw it happen to one of my close homies or I know about it from just being in the ghetto," he says. "I can't rap about something I don't know. You'll never hear me rapping about no bachelor's degree. It's only what I know and that's the street life. It's all everyday life, reality."

It's all reality is the most-repeated refrain in hip-hop, a proclamation of integrity in a world where it's cool to be from the inner city with a checkered past and many lie about their background. Hip-hop fans prefer artists who are honest, but, in fact, the argument over "realness" may be pointless: they are entertainers. As Rakim, widely considered one of the best rappers, puts it: "You got groups that come out saying they're killing, but in all reality, they're just rappers."

It is important that the rapper's voice and stories be realistic, but must they be the author's own? To thoughtful fans, what's important is how credible the lyrics sound. Here again Snoop stands out: his attention to detail makes him sound extremely credible. According to Mr. Dupri, the producer, "The details in Snoop's writing makes people think, 'Damn, he must've really seen that.'"

For example, in Snoop's favorite song on "The Chronic"—whose title is laden with obscenities—he describes a hot day, when, minutes after completing six months in prison, the protagonist is driven to his girlfriend's house, bursts in brandishing a Glock pistol and finds her having sex with his cousin. He considers shooting her but does not, deeming women not worth killing.

Snoop may sound—and be—more honest than most, but that does not mean he is as tough as his gangster posture or his handlers would suggest. Snoop began rapping in the sixth grade, sang in the choir of Golgotha Trinity Baptist Church in Long Beach and graduated from Long Beach Polytechnic High School. He maintains that he never joined a gang, though he hung out with gang members. Watching them gave Snoop his subject matter; imprisonment focused him.

"I started thinking about my life," he says. "Do I want to keep coming back to this place, or do I want to elevate myself and make my mother proud of me? At Wayside I listened to all the stories people told, wrote them down on my note pad and turned them into raps. That's the first time I really started getting serious about rapping. The older inmates would take me aside and say, 'Youngster, you don't need to be inside this place. God gave you some talent, and you ought to use it.'"

The assertion that lyrics are drawn from reality is also hip-hop's biggest excuse for not passing judgment on what it describes. Rappers routinely discuss violent and obscene situations without taking responsibility for the implications, like reporters from the street willfully lacking a worldview.

Snoop contends he does take a stand against what he describes. "I feel like it's my job to play the backup role for parents who can't get it across to their kids," he says. "For little kids growing up in the ghettos, it's easy to get into the wrong types of things, especially

gangbanging and selling drugs. I've seen what that was like, and I don't glorify it, but don't preach. When my momma would whoop me and tell me, 'You can't do this,' it mac me want to go do that; I bring it to them rather than have them go find out about it f themselves."

It takes very critical listening to hear Snoop's implicit message. Far easier is losing on self in his accounts of renegade days and nights. He may not intend to, or want to admit but Snoop adds epic gloss to his life with the skill of a Hollywood movie star.

Yet soon, all of Snoop's talent may be overshadowed. On Aug. 25, Snoop's bodyguar Malik (McKinley Lee), shot a man named Philip Woldermariam twice—once in the back- from the passenger seat of the Jeep that Snoop was driving. Other details surrounding th event are in dispute. Snoop says the shooting was in self-defense and pleaded not guilty his arraignment on Oct. 1; his next hearing is set for Nov. 30.

Back in the parking lot, Snoop speaks of his dream. "After I take care of my album," h says, "I'm going to try to eliminate the gang violence. I'll be on a mission for peace." If th trial is on his mind, it does not appear so as he speaks of the future, neglecting to note th on Aug. 25 he could not prevent the 187 that may destroy his life. "I know I have a lot o power," Snoop says. "I know if I say, 'Don't kill,' niggers won't kill."

80. Keeping It a Little Too Real

Gangsta rap and the notion of "keeping it real" continued to dominate hip-hop music following *Doggystyle*. New rappers emerged in the New York City area who modified elements of the West Coast style, either by emphasizing partying and material acquisitions, as in the recordings of Biggie Smalls (Christopher Wallace, a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G., 1972–97), or through heightened obscurantism and bizarrely imaginative humor and music, as in the Wu Tang Clan. Wu Tang Clan, which boasted up to nine members, illustrated the tendency toward increasingly large posses or crews among rap artists. Touré, writing in 1995, describes the development as a move from the late 1980s–early 1990s emphasis on Afro-Centrism to "blockism," this being

> **the idea that your neighborhood block is the center of the world, the people there the most important audience to impress. It's also the directive that if you get off the block, your peeps come too. . . . it's led to the family-like structure behind the three biggest entities in hiphop today: the Wu-Tang Clan, Death Row, and the Biggie Smalls clique.**[1]

1. Touré, "The Family Way: The Hiphop Crew as Center of the World," *Village Voice*, October 10, 1995, 49.

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The contradictions and ambiguity embedded in notions of "keeping it real" and rap as "only entertainment," which the arrest of Snoop in 1993 had begun to expose, intensified with the arrest of 2Pac (Tupac Shakur, 1971–96) late in 1994 on sexual assault charges, followed by the shooting of Shakur (from which he recovered) under mysterious circumstances before the trial began. Tensions began to build between West Coast rappers, centered on Death Row records, and East Coast rappers, many of whom recorded for Bad Boy records (the "Biggie Smalls clique" referred to earlier, which included Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs). A crisis point was reached in the murder, first of 2Pac, in September 1996, and then of Biggie Smalls, in March 1997. The following articles provide background on the West Coast–East Coast feud and show a range of reactions to the murders. While many decried how mass media accounts misrepresented the victims by implying that everyone involved with hip-hop was a criminal, even committed fans could not ignore the relationship between the deaths of two of hip-hop's biggest stars and the increasing rate of black-on-black violence.[2]

Rap Sheet

Sam Gideon Anso and Charles Rappleye

The murder of Brooklyn rapper Notorious B.I.G. early Sunday morning in Los Angeles cast a pall over a rap industry that had for weeks basked in the glow of a declared truce in the so-called East Coast/West Coast wars—an outbreak of peace that infused the festivities of the annual Soul Train Awards the night before.

Instead, the shooting recalled the scene at the 1996 Soul Train Awards, an event marred by a guns-drawn confrontation between delegations including Tupac Shakur of L.A.'s Death Row Records, and Biggie Smalls, who'd sold platinum for New York's Bad Boy Entertainment. Shakur was gunned down in September in Las Vegas; now B.I.G., whose real name was Christopher Wallace, is dead as well.

Kevin Kim, who was on the scene providing security for Faith Evans, Wallace's estranged wife, said he believes the shooting was a planned attack on Wallace. "They knew who they were shooting at," Kim said in an interview Sunday afternoon. "Look at the shot pattern—tight shots, not like a regular West Coast drive-by where gang members are spraying bullets all over the place."

However, Kim cautioned against speculation that Wallace's murder was linked to the much publicized rivalry between Wallace, Shakur, and the respective companies. "The East Coast/West Coast thing is all blown up," Kim said. "At the party that night, everybody was dancing together, artists hugging each other. . . . They squashed that beef, and it is still squashed."

Kim is referring in part to the truce, memorialized last month in an episode of the sitcom *The Steve Harvey Show*, in which Death Row's Snoop Doggy Dogg and Sean "Puffy" Combs, CEO of Bad Boy Entertainment, publicly laid aside the dispute that has be[en] simmering between rap's leading labels for more than two years.

In the twisted logic of the rap game, even the coziness between Snoop and Puffy, w[ho] had been seen together in recent weeks in New York, raised eyebrows and fueled talk t[hat] Puffy—and by extension B.I.G.—was disrespecting Death Row and its chief Marion "Sug[e]" Knight, who'd been sentenced to nine years in state prison the week before. "Puffy a[nd] Biggie thought with Suge put away it was all good," said one West Coast rap insider. "B[ut] it's not all good. There is still a lot of tension out there. And Snoop and Puffy hanging o[ut] like they are best friends—that shit ain't right."

The chronology of the feud begins with gunfire in the building lobby of a Manhatt[an] recording studio, where Tupac Shakur, then on trial for the rape of a fan, was shot five tim[es] and robbed of $40,000 worth of jewelry. In a jailhouse interview with *Vibe* following his co[n]viction, Shakur left no doubt that he suspected Wallace, who was upstairs in the studio [at] the time of the shooting, had set him up. Wallace and Combs denied any involvement in t[he] shooting.

From there the events unfold in rapid succession. In August 1995, Knight "dis[re]spected" Combs from the podium of The Source Awards at Manhattan's Paramount Th[e]ater. A month later, Knight accused Combs of having a hand in the shooting death of Dea[th] Row employee (and reputed member of a Compton Blood set) Jason "Big Jake" Robles at [an] industry party in Atlanta. Combs again denied involvement, but Knight was sufficient[ly] suspicious that he allegedly assaulted an independent record promoter named Ma[rk] Anthony Bell at yet another party—this one following an MTV awards show in Los Angel[es] in December 1995—in an effort to get information about Combs, including his hom[e] address.

While Knight and Combs issued repeated denials that a beef existed at all, their albu[ms] and videos were peppered with incendiary remarks directed coast to coast, most notor[i]ously Shakur's boast, "I fucked your bitch, you fat motherfucker," on last year's "Hit 'E[m] Up." All of which helped sell millions of records and magazines, and all of which ma[de] fertile ground for speculation when Shakur was slain in Las Vegas.

Las Vegas police have named a suspect in Shakur's murder—a Compton resident an[d] reputed member of the Southside Crips gang named Orlando Anderson, who fought wi[th] Shakur and his entourage in the lobby of the MGM hours before the shooting. According [to] a search warrant affidavit made public last month, the fight at the MGM grew out of an ea[r]lier incident in which Anderson and a group of seven or eight Southside Crips stole a Dea[th] Row Records medallion from Travon Lane, a Death Row associate and reputed member [of] the MOB Piru Blood set, at a Foot Locker store in the Lakewood Mall. Anderson denies an[y] involvement in the Shakur killing. Police detained him for questioning in September, b[ut] have made no arrests.

While this would seem to lay to rest any East Coast connection in Shakur's killing, th[e] affidavit also suggests a link between Wallace's label and Anderson's Southside Crip se[t]. Bad Boy Entertainment, according to the affidavit, "employed Southside Crips gang mem[]bers as security."

The Compton connection figures prominently in some informed speculations on th[e] killing. According to one source, the hit on Wallace was pulled off by Compton Bloods, wh[o] came to the party in the entourage of a well-known Compton rap artist, and coordinated th[e] shooting over cell phones. Another report put an individual dressed in red standing outsid[e] the party with a cell phone saying "Biggie is here now."

"This was a hit, something pre-planned," said one Blood from Compton. "And there['s] going to be a few more hits."

The killing is harder to swallow coming in the midst of a reduction of hostilities in th[e] hip hop nation. At last year's Soul Train Awards, says one source, "Biggie had half a doze[n]

2. Particularly moving on this account was Touré's eulogy for hip-hop in the form of a letter to a cousin, "It Was a Wonderful World," *Village Voice*, March 18, 1997, 41.

Source: Sam Gideon Anso and Charles Rappleye, "Rap Sheet," *Village Voice*, March 18, 1997, p. 40.

or so bodyguards and they were very conscious of looking over their shoulders." With the exception of a smattering of boos from the balcony as Wallace and Combs came onstage to present an award, this year's festivities were marked by positive vibes. Which may have something to do with the fact that Suge Knight was cooling his heels in the L.A. County jail.

"For the next six months no one is going to feel comfortable," says Kevin Kim. "Can I trust this person? Or is he setting me up?"

Party Over

Selwyn Seyfu Hinds

As with Tupac, much has been made of the self-prophetic element in Big's passing. *Ready To Die*, his classic debut, was an organic mesh of Brooklyn bad boy narratives and the flossy party aesthetic, all tinged by no meager dose of suicidal musings—a phenomenon encapsulated by a frighteningly realistic video that featured a screaming Puff, a depressed Biggie dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, and the pound of a reverberating, eventually stilling heartbeat.

Big's pending album, *Life After Death . . . 'Til Death Do Us Part*, is very different, although certain elements remain consistent. Part cinematic (and calculated) tie-in to the debut, it is the creation of a once desperate, now well-paid baller negotiating the pitfalls endemic to rap success—jealousy, envy, and the like. It is celebratory and triumphant at some junctures, remorseful and contemplative in others.

Life After Death also possesses no small degree of tragic irony—the intro, which picks up where *Ready to Die* left off, with a morose Puffy mourning the passing of his man: "Damn/We was supposed to rule the world baby/We was unstoppable/The shit can't be over"; the enthusiastic "Going Back to Cali": "Y'all niggas is a mess/Thinkin' I'm gon stop/Giving L.A. Props"; an interlude where an anonymous caller threatens to kill Big and urges him to "watch his fucking back"; and "You're Nobody 'Til . . ." ("somebody kills you"), a piece of metaphoric tough talk that now packs a heartbreak.

Big's gone and this album is his last artistic testament. An MC who felt that he'd never received his due props *Life After Death* would have allowed Big to witness the 'cross-the board affirmation he so desired. And although it's too late to pour this sentiment out, maybe Christopher Wallace can still feel it somewhere and rest satisfied: you were the best, baby baby.

Town Criers

Natasha Stovall

Radio station Hot 97 acted as town crier and community center, just as they did after Tupac. In one of the most painful moments of the day's broadcast, Biggie protégé Delvico, from Junior M.A.F.I.A., called in from Brooklyn, in tears and waiting for the call to go to the West Coast. "I don't believe it, yo. I just don't believe it's real." The DJs let him know, "Y'all are our family, on the air, off the air, we're here for you. Ain't nothing fake going on here."

Source: Selwyn Seyfu Hinds, "Party Over," *Village Voice*, March 18, 1997, p. 42.

Source: Natasha Stovall, "Town Criers," *Village Voice*, March 18, 1997, p. 42.

"I'm turning on the news and that's really what's getting me upset," the Fugees' Wycl told 97 DJ Dr. Dre. "Let's get one thing straight. Biggie Smalls was an inspiration to us MC and the whole hip hop community. Every time it's hip hop they're trying to bring us down "I look at it this way," said Public Enemy's Chuck D, also on Hot 97. "When the magazin and the newspapers and the radio shows all come out and go 'Whoop! Whoop! Ea Coast/West Coast,' it becomes a big story. It becomes a hysteria. If you add hype and hy teria to a situation, it can bring craziness from any direction."

Chuck D spoke at length about the larger picture, in which Biggie Smalls's death is onl a puzzle piece. "It's bigger than rap. Until black people control our reality, not only will a imitate life, but life will start to imitate art." The fact that Biggie's and Tupac's deaths wer just larger manifestations of the staggering number of black men under 30 who are mu dered each year loomed large in the minds of Brooklyn residents. Back in front of Baker' Janice's friend Tasha sighed, "It was just a murder, not a West Coast/East Coast thing."

Ultimately, the most numbing thing about Biggie's death is its proximity to Tupac's. " feel like I just hung up with you about Tupac," Roxanne Shante told Hot 97. Brooklyn los another son way too early, but next week another death will eclipse his. "I loved the brothe He was a good brother, a righteous young man," a man selling pictures of Biggie for $2 out side KFC put it. "Now I'm a capitalist, and I've got two of these left. Do you want to bu one?"

81. Sample-Mania

It may be that the death of gangsta rap's stars hastened its demise or that the genre had simply run its course; whatever the reasons, gangsta rap seemed to fade from view following the shootings of Biggie and 2Pac. In its place came rap that emphasized partying and material opulence. As I mentioned earlier, the recordings/videos of Biggie Smalls, while depicting gang life and violence, had also featured grandiose displays of wealth. Biggie's producer, Sean "Puff Daddy" (later "P-Diddy") Combs, heightened this trend in many of the songs and videos for his first solo album, *No Way Out*, which followed closely on the heels of Biggie's *Life After Death* (both 1997). Combs, while a weak rapper, was a great judge of talent and an astute reader of the audience. His image, in both his appearances in *Life After Death* and his own album, attempted to project hipness via association with material success, rather than with the "hardness" associated with gangsta rap and, as such, demonstrated the increasing importance of "image" relative to the MCing skills that defined "old-school" artists of the 1980s.

Neil Strauss addresses another aspect of some of the songs on *No Way Out and Life After Death:* the use of large sections of previous songs, which inaugurated a new era in sampling and quotation. Strauss's account, though laced with humor, is largely critical, noting how acceptance of this practice contrasted with previous disdain among hip-hop fans. His critique raises a pressing question: Does this new development in sampling differ from the types of creative reuse of materials that have characterized previous forms of African American music? Strauss points out the diverging receptions of Puff Daddy's work and the recordings of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, but what about the value of Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" and Run-DMC's "Walk This Way," which were also constructed almost entirely around preexisting recordings?

Sampling Is (a) Creative or (b) Theft?

Neil Strauss

It was early 1991, and two songs ruled the radio airwaves: "U Can't Touch This" by M. C. Hammer and "Ice Ice Baby" by Vanilla Ice. The popularity of both songs was not necessarily due to the rapping skills of their performers. It was due to the fact that both melodies were sampled from familiar pop tunes, "Superfreak" by Rick James and "Under Pressure" by Queen and David Bowie, respectively. At the time, these derivative hits seemed to threaten the legitimacy of rap, which had always prided itself on its street credibility and a refusal to pander to popular taste. Consequently, the artists, justly or not, were soon mocked out of existence.

This summer, however, songs based on samples of previous hits are not only back but so pervasive that they deserve to be re-evaluated. The issue is not just sampling, the now standard music-making tool of using digital excerpts of sounds and songs. The issue is making a sample the song itself, so that a chorus lifted wholesale from an earlier hit becomes the basis of a new hit. There are two ways of looking at the practice: Is taking pieces of a well-known song and incorporating them into a personal musical vision the equivalent today of remaking a pop standard? Or are these hits evidence of a creative slump, a sign that pop musicians have lost their ability to write effective melodies and songs?

The king of sampled hits is Sean (Puffy) Combs, better known as Puff Daddy, whose "I'll Be Missing You," "No Way Out" and "Mo' Money, Mo' Problems" (a collaboration with the Notorious B.I.G.) were three of the summer's most popular songs.

All are based on excerpts from hits, including ones by the Police, Grandmaster Flash and Diana Ross.

Meanwhile Will Smith looks to Patrice Rushen's "Forget Me Not" for "Men in Black," Lil' Kim uses Kool and the Gang's "Ladies' Night" for the chorus of "Not Tonight," and Wyclef Jean of the Fugees leans on the Bee Gees for "We Just Trying to Stay Alive." The difference between 1997 and 1991, however, is that unlike M. C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice, these artists are respected in their fields. And, more so than their predecessors, they are repeat offenders when it comes to plundering pop's collective memory.

Source: Neil Strauss, "Sampling Is (a) Creative or (b) Theft?," *New York Times*, September 14, 1997.
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Since its inception, sampling has offered its practitioners myriad new ways of remaking a song in their own image—to slice and dice a song so drastically that they don't even have to call it by its original name—and talented artists from Public Enemy to the Chemical Brothers have emerged in this genre. But musicians are no longer content just to pilfer a drumbeat, a bass line or a vocal snippet. They want huge chunks, unchanged from the original. After all, asks the pragmatic producer, why mess with something that already works.

Consider Wyclef Jean's "We Just Trying to Stay Alive." Listening to his eclectic solo album, it's clear that "We Just Trying to Stay Alive" was added because the record needed a hit single. So, inspired by the success of "Killing Me Softly," the Roberta Flack hit that put the Fugees on the pop-music map, he snatched the chorus and bass line of the Bee Gees' disco classic "Stayin' Alive" and sandwiched a few irrelevant raps between the choruses.

When he sings along with the Bee Gees, his hit simply sounds like a karaoke version of "Stayin' Alive." Nostalgia, not creativity, made the song a success.

Only when plundering and originality come together to create something new does sampling become reminiscent of pop's pre-rock days, when new and vital music came out of the intersection between a good song, a good interpreter and perhaps a good arranger.

The same cliché that applies to any remake applies to sampled songs: in a valid, worthwhile version, an artist makes the song his or her own. Examples range from John Coltrane playing "My Favorite Things" to Frank Sinatra singing "I've Got You Under My Skin."

Somewhere between interpretation and quotation is Janet Jackson's new single, "Got Till It's Gone," which uses Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" as part of its chorus but doesn't rely on it to carry the entire song.

An even better example involves the English groups Portishead and Tricky, each of which released a song that samples the same Isaac Hayes melody. Both songs use that sample to anchor different musical interpretations of desperation, but if you removed it from the songs, they would still stand up.

In future months, expect to see newcomers breaking into the pop charts riding a stolen song. It's a clever way for pop singers to remake a classic and keep some of the writer's royalties for themselves.

If you get tired of the formula, you can always try it yourself. Just program a drum machine with any 4/4 rhythm with a strong back beat. Now grab a pop song that is no longer current but still recognizable, like Survivor's uplifting "Eye of the Tiger." Let your beat run for a few bars to create a groove, then drop in the chorus of "Eye of the Tiger" completely unchanged from the original. Follow it with a vapid rap along the lines of: "It's the eye of the tiger/The tiger of the eye/I'm working hard just to get by/Got more moves than Rocky/I'll sip a glass of sake/Pay some royalty checks/Cause Survivor's on the decks." Then go back to your "Eye of the Tiger" chorus (sing along or scratch a record over it if you like) and you've got your hit.

Just make sure you send me a portion of the proceeds after it's on the charts. Survivor has reunited to cash in on the revival, and with the blessing of the Rolling Stones, you're on to your next hit, "(I Still Can't Get No) Satisfaction."

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82. Women in Rap

The new pluralism in hip-hop in the mid-1990s also expanded the role for women. Rappers, such as Foxy Brown and L'il Kim emerged who used their sexuality aggressively, often presenting men in their songs as important only for how they might satisfy their (the rappers') needs.[1] This development might be viewed as resurrecting the classic blues singer's persona: a strong woman who knows what she wants and isn't afraid to demand it, while refusing to be defined by her relationship with a man. In another vein, Lauryn Hill (b. 1975) broke through with the Fugees in *The Score*, which became the hip-hop smash of 1996—an album viewed as "progressive hip-hop" and a critical fave by some, while being dismissed as inauthentic fluff by others. Hill impressed with her verbal skills and rapping dexterity, as well as with her R&B singing chops: The biggest hit on the album, a remake of Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly," featured Hill's alto in a faithful re-creation of Flack's vocal.

The following year Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot (Melissa Elliot, b. 1971) released her first solo album after writing songs for, as well as performing on, many other people's recordings. Her wacky, surreal, and decidedly nonglamorous (in the conventional sense) persona/image has proved remarkably durable, and her subsequent releases, aided and abetted by the innovative production of Timbaland, continue to earn her critical and commercial success.

Although the careers of many female rappers thrived in the late 1990s, it was Lauryn Hill who became the first big crossover female superstar in hip-hop. Her solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, received five Grammy awards in 1999, and her photo appeared on the February 8, 1999, cover of *Time* next to the caption, "Hip-Hop Nation: After 20 Years—How It's Changed America." Hill's crossover (and the largely favorable *Time* article) signaled a new level of acceptance of hip-hop by the mainstream audience, and it was safe to say that, in terms of recording sales at any rate, hip-hop had *become* the mainstream. Hill seemed to be the perfect figure to accomplish this: Multitalented, a philosophy major at Columbia, attractive, articulate, and adamantly religious, she was a far cry from the denizens of Death Row. The rest of the *Time* article and the portrait of Hill, which are reprinted here, revisit some ideas presented in

1. See "Nuthin' but a G String," a forum featuring two articles: Robert Marriot, "Starring Lil' Kim as the Posthiphop Hussy," and Kweli I. Wright, ". . . and Foxy Brown as the Moschino Macktress," *Village Voice*, December 24, 1996, 63.

earlier entries, especially the turn in hip-hop toward the glorification of materialism and the withering of political content. In discussing figures, such as Hill and Puff Daddy, it becomes clear that the popularity of hip-hop had largely transcended racial boundaries and that the influence of hip-hop had spread to other genres. Whether this symbolized a breakthrough in race relations or new opportunities for white voyeurism of African Americans remained an open question. Although this change in status raised worries about whether hip-hop could maintain its creativity and "underground" credibility, changes in recording technology meant that an increasing number of people who were not successful enough to worry about such issues could create their own high-quality demos. The contrast between the generally favorable tone of this article and a number of articles that appeared in mass circulation publications in the 1980s and early 1990s (cited in chapters 75 and 78) reveals how rapidly the social position of hip-hop had changed. Of course, a lot of this change may have been due to hip-hop's increasing slice of the music industry pie, as noted in the beginning of the article that follows.

Hip-Hop Nation

Christopher John Farley

How will we remember the last days of the '90s? Most likely, to the rough-hewn beat of rap. Just as F. Scott Fitzgerald lived in the jazz age, just as Dylan and Jimi Hendrix were among the rulers of the age of rock, it could be argued that we are living in the age of hip-hop. "Rock is old," says Russell Simmons, head of the hip-hop label Def Jam, which took in nearly $200 million in 1998. "It's old people's s______. The creative people who are great, who are talking about youth culture in a way that makes sense, happen to be rappers."

Consider the numbers. In 1998, for the first time ever, rap outsold what previously had been America's top-selling format, country music. Rap sold more than 81 million CDs, tapes and albums last year, compared with 72 million for country. Rap sales increased a stunning 31% from 1997 to 1998, in contrast to 2% gains for country, 6% for rock and 9% for the music industry overall. Boasts rapper Jay-Z, whose current album, *Vol. 2 . . . Hard Knock Life* (Def Jam), has sold more than 3 million copies: "Hip-hop is the rebellious voice of the youth. It's what people want to hear."

Even if you're not into rap, hip-hop is all around you. It pulses from the films you watch (Seen a Will Smith movie lately?), the books you read (even Tom Wolfe peels off a few raps in his best-selling new novel), the fashion you wear (Tommy Hilfiger, FUBU). Some definitions are in order: rap is a form of rhythmic speaking in rhyme; hip-hop refers to the backing music for rap, which is often composed of a collage of excerpts, or "samples," from other songs; hip-hop also refers to the culture of rap. The two terms are nearly, but not completely, interchangeable.

Rap music was once called a fad, but it's now celebrating a 20th anniversary of sorts. The first hip-hop hit, *Rapper's Delight* by the Sugar Hill Gang, came out in 1979. Hip-hop got its start in black America, but now more than 70% of hip-hop albums are purchased by whites. In fact, a whole generation of kids—black, white, Latino, Asian—has grown up

Source: Christopher John Farley, "Hip-Hop Nation," *Time*, February 8, 1999, pp. 55–58, 59–64; and Christopher John Farley, "Lauryn Hill," *Time*, February 8, 1999, p. 59. © 1999, TIME Inc., reprinted by permission.

immersed in hip-hop. "I'm hip-hop every day," declares 28-year-old Marlon Irving, a black record-store employee in Portland, Ore. "I don't put on my hip-hop." Says Sean Fleming, a white 15-year-old from Canton, Ga.: "It's a totally different perspective, and I like that about it." Adds Katie Szopa, 22, a white page at NBC in New York City: "You do develop a sense of self through it. You listen and you say, 'Yeah, that's right.'"

Hip-hop represents a realignment of America's cultural aesthetics. Rap songs deliver the message, again and again, to *keep it real*. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that "a work of art is good if it has sprung from necessity." Rap is the music of necessity, of finding poetry in the colloquial, beauty in anger, and lyricism even in violence. Hip-hop, much as the blues and jazz did in past eras, has compelled young people of all races to search for excitement, artistic fulfillment and even a sense of identity by exploring the black underclass. "And I know because of [rapper] KRS-1," the white ska-rap singer Bradley Nowell of Sublime once sang in tribute to rap. Hip-hop has forced advertisers, filmmakers and writers to adopt "street" signifiers like cornrows and terms like player hater. Invisibility has been a long-standing metaphor for the status of blacks in America. "Don't see us/but we see you," hip-hop band the Roots raps on a new song. Hip-hop has given invisibility a voice.

But what does that voice have to say?

Now tell me your philosophy
On exactly what an artist should be.
—Lauryn Hill, "Superstar"

It's a Friday night, early December 1998, and you're backstage at *Saturday Night Live*. You're hanging out in the dressing room with Lauryn Hill, who is sitting on the couch, flipping through a script. The 23-year-old rapper-singer-actress is the musical guest on this week's show. It's her coming-out party, the first live TV performance she's done since releasing her critically acclaimed and best-selling album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. She might also do a little acting on the show—*SNL* staff members have asked her to appear in a skit. But as Hill reads, her small rose-blossom lips wilt into a frown. She hands you the script. It's titled *Pimp Chat*—it's a sketch about a street hustler with a talk show. Hill's role: a 'ho. Or if she's uncomfortable with that, she can play a *female pimp*. Hmmm. Now, being in an *SNL* sketch is a big opportunity—but this one might chip away at her image as a socially conscious artist. What's it going to be?

It's all about the Benjamins, baby.
—Sean ("Puffy") Combs, "It's All About the Benjamins"

You are in a recording studio in midtown Manhattan, hanging out with hip-hop superproducer Sean ("Puffy") Combs. It's 1997, and Puffy is keeping a low profile, working on his new album, his first as a solo performer. This album will be his coming-out party. He's eager to play a few tracks for you. People have him all wrong, he says. He majored in business management at Howard. He's not just about gangsta rap. Sounds from his new album fill the room. One song is based on a bit from the score to *Rocky*. Another, a sweeping, elegiac number, uses a portion of *Do You Know Where You're Going To?* That's what he's about, Combs says. Classic pop. "I'm living my life right," he says. "So when it comes time for me to be judged, I can be judged by God."

You're mad
because my style
you're admiring
Don't be mad—UPS is hiring.
—The Notorious B.I.G., "Flava in Your Ear (Remix)"

Hip-hop is perhaps the only art form that celebrates capitalism openly. To be sure, fil makers pore over weekend grosses, but it would be surprising for a character in a Spielbe film to suddenly turn toward the camera and shout, "This picture's grossed $100 millic y'all! Shout out to DreamWorks!" Rap's unabashed materialism distinguishes it sharp from some of the dominant musical genres of the past century. For example, nobody expe bluesmen to be moneymakers—that's why they're singing the blues. It's not called t greens, after all. As for alternative rockers, they have same relationship toward success tl one imagines Ally McBeal has toward food; even a small slice of the pie leaves waves guilt. Rappers make money without remorse. "These guys are so real, they brag abo money," says Def Jam's Simmons. "They don't regret getting a Coca-Cola deal. They br about a Coca-Cola deal."

Major labels, a bit confused by the rhythms of the time, have relied on smaller, clos to-the-street labels to help them find fresh rap talent. Lauryn Hill is signed to Ruffhous which has a distribution deal with the larger Columbia. Similar arrangements have ma tens of millions of dollars for the heads of these smaller labels, such as Combs (Bad Bo Master P (No Limit), Jermaine Dupri (So So Def), and Ronald and Bryan Williams (Co-CE of Cash Money, home to rising rapper Juvenile).

"I'm not a role model," rapper-mogul-aspiring-NBA-player Master P says. "But I s myself as a resource for kids. They can say, 'Master P has been through a lot, but he chang his life, and look at him. I can do the same thing.' I think anyone who's a success is inspiration."

Master P introduced something new to contemporary pop: shameless, relentless an canny cross-promotion. Each of the releases on his New Orleans-based No Limit label co tains promotional materials for his other releases. His established artists (like Snoop Dog make guest appearances on CDs released by his newer acts, helping to launch their debut And his performers are given to shouting out catchphrases like "No Limit soldiers!" in th middle of their songs—good advertising for the label when the song is being played on th radio.

Madison Avenue has taken notice of rap's entrepreneurial spirit. Tommy Hilfiger h positioned his apparel company as the clothier of the hip-hop set, and he now does a billio dollars a year in oversize shirts, loose jeans and so on. "There are no boundaries," sa Hilfiger. "Hip-hop has created a style that is embraced by an array of people from all bac grounds and races." However, fans are wary of profiteers looking to sell them back the own culture. Says Michael Sewell, 23, a white congressional staff member and rap fan: "I' heard rap used in advertising, and I think it's kind of hokey—kind of a goofy version of th way old white men perceive rap."

But the ads are becoming stealthier and streetier. Five years ago, Sprite recast its ads t rely heavily on hip-hop themes. Its newest series features several up-and-coming rap star (Common, Fat Joe, Goodie Mob) in fast-moving animated clips that are intelligible only t viewers raised on Bone-Thugs-N-Harmony and Playstation. According to Sprite bran manager Pina Sciarra, the rap campaign has quadrupled the number of people who say tha Sprite is their favorite soda.

Hollywood too is feeling the rap beat. After Lauryn Hill passed on a role in *The Cider House Rules* (an adaptation of the John Irving book), filmmakers cast hip-hop soul singe Erykah Badu. Ice Cube, who has appeared in such movies as *Boyz N the Hood* and *Fridays* will soon star with George Clooney in the Gulf War thriller *Three Kings*. Queen Latifah, fea tured in the recent film *Living Out Loud*, is now set to be the host of a TV talk show. And th former Fresh Prince, Will Smith, has become one of the most in-demand actors around. Ic Cube—who performed a song with Public Enemy titled *Burn Hollywood Burn* in 1990—say Tinseltown wants rapper actors because "we add a sense of realism where sometimes trained actor can't deliver that reality the way it needs to be done."

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Warren Beatty, who directed and starred in *Bulworth*, a comedy about a Senator who becomes possessed by the spirit of hip-hop, became interested in the subject because "it seemed to have a similar protest energy to the Russian poets of the 1960s. The Russian poets reigned in Moscow almost like rock itself reigned in the U.S. Ultimately it seemed to me that hip-hop is where the voice of protest is going in the inner city and possibly far beyond because the culture has become so dominated by entertainment."

Even Tom Wolfe, who documented the counterculture in the '60s and greed in the '80s, found himself buying a stack of hip-hop records in order to understand Atlanta in the '90s for his best-selling book *A Man in Full*. In several sections of his novel, Wolfe offers his own sly parodies of today's rap styles: "How'm I spose a love her/Catch her mackin' with the brothers," Wolfe writes in a passage. "Ram yo' booty! Ram yo' booty!" Most of the characters in *A Man in Full* are a bit frightened by rap's passion. It's Wolfe's view that "hip-hop music quite intentionally excludes people who are not in that world." That world, however, is growing.

We in the '90s
And finally it's looking good
Hip-hop took it to billions
I knew we would.
—Nas, "We Will Survive"

All major modern musical forms with roots in the black community—jazz, rock, even gospel—faced criticism early on. Langston Hughes, in 1926, defended the blues and jazz from cultural critics. Hard-core rap has triumphed commercially, in part, because rap's aesthetic of sampling connects it closely to what is musically palatable. Some of the songs hard-core rappers sample are surprisingly mainstream. DMX raps about such subjects as having sex with bloody corpses. But one of his songs, *I Can Feel It*, is based on Phil Collins' easy-listening staple *In the Air Tonight*. Jay-Z's hit song *Hard-Knock Life* draws from the musical *Annie*. Tupac's *Changes* uses Bruce Hornsby. Silkk the Shocker samples the not-so-shocking Lionel Richie.

The underlying message is this: the violence and misogyny and lustful materialism that characterize some rap songs are as deeply American as the hokey music that rappers appropriate. The fact is, this country was in love with outlaws and crime and violence long before hip-hop—think of Jesse James, and Bonnie and Clyde—and then think of the movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, as well as *Scarface* and the *Godfather* saga. In the movie *You've Got Mail*, Tom Hanks even refers to the *Godfather* trilogy as the perfect guide to life, the I-Ching for guys. Rappers seem to agree. Snoop Dogg's sophomore album was titled *The Doggfather*. Silkk the Shocker's new album is called *Made Man*. On his song *Boomerang*, Big Pun echoes James Cagney in *White Heat*, yelling, "Top of the world, Ma! Top of the world!"

Corporate America's infatuation with rap has increased as the genre's political content has withered. Ice Cube's early songs attacked white racism; Ice-T sang about a *Cop Killer*; Public Enemy challenged listeners to "fight the power." But many newer acts such as DMX and Master P are focused almost entirely on pathologies within the black community. They rap about shooting other blacks but almost never about challenging governmental authority or encouraging social activism. "The stuff today is not revolutionary," says Bob Law, vice president of programming at WWRL, a black talk-radio station in New York City. "It's just, 'Give me a piece of the action.'"

Hip-hop is getting a new push toward activism from an unlikely source—Beastie Boys. The white rap trio began as a Dionysian semiparody of hip-hop, rapping about parties, girls and beer. Today they are the founders and headliners of the Tibetan Freedom Concert, an annual concert that raises money for and awareness about human-rights issues in Tibet.

Last week Beastie Boys, along with the hip-hop-charged hard-rock band Rage Against the Machine and the progressive rap duo Black Star, staged a controversial concert in New Jersey to raise money for the legal fees of Mumia Abu-Jamal, a black inmate on death row for killing a police officer. Says Beastie Boy Adam Yauch: "There's a tremendous amount of evidence that he didn't do it and he was a scapegoat."

Yauch says rap's verbal texture makes it an ideal vessel to communicate ideas, whether satirical, personal or political. That isn't always a good thing. "We've put out songs with lyrics in them that we thought people would think were funny, but they ended up having a lot of really negative effects on people. [Performers] need to be aware that when you're creating music it has a tremendous influence on society."

In Mill Valley, Calif., in a one-bedroom apartment above a coin-operated laundry, Andre Mehr, a white 17-year-old with a crew cut, and Emiliano Obiedo, a ponytailed 16-year-old who is half white and half Hispanic, are huddled over a PC. A beat spirals up. Obiedo offers some advice, and Mehr clatters away at the keyboard. They are making music. Once they settle on a beat, Obiedo will take a diskette bearing a rhythm track home and lay down some rhymes. Soon they hope to have enough for a CD. Boasts Obiedo: "I'm going to change rap."

Across the country, similar scenes are playing out as kids outside the black community make their own hip-hop or just listen in. Some say they don't pay much attention to the lyrics, they just like the beat. "I can't relate to the guns and killings," says Mehr. Others are touched more deeply. Says 15-year-old Sean Fleming: "I can relate more and get a better understanding of what urban blacks have to go through."

Todd Boyd, a professor of critical studies at the University of Southern California, says rap can bring races together: "It's a little more difficult to go out and talk about hate when your music collection is full of black artists. That is not to say that buying an OutKast record is the same as dealing with real people, but it is reason to hope." Ice Cube is a bit more cynical: "It's kinda like being at the zoo. You can look into that world, but you don't have to touch it. It's safe."

Nonblack performers are increasingly drawing from rap. Beck expertly combined folk and hip-hop. Hanson's hit *MMMBop* included deejay scratching. Portishead refashioned hip-hop into ethereal trip-hop. Singer Beth Orton, whose enchantingly moody album *Central Reservation* is due out in March, blends folksy guitars with samples and beats. Doug Century, author of *Street Kingdom: Five Years Inside the Franklin Avenue Posse*, studied hip-hop culture as he documented the lives of gang members; he predicts white acts will eventually dominate rap, just as white rockers pushed out rock's black forerunners. "It's possible that in 15 years all hip-hop will be white," Century says. "[Then] black youth culture will transform itself again."

Already the white b-boy has become an iconic figure—ridiculed in movies like *Can't Hardly Wait* and the forthcoming *Go*, and in songs like Offspring's *Pretty Fly (for a White Guy)*. In *Pretty Fly* the punk band Offspring mocks whites who adopt hip-hop styles, singing, "He may not have a clue/And he may not have style/But everything he lacks/Well he makes up in denial." Irish-American rap-rocker Everlast, whose new CD, *Whitey Ford Sings the Blues*, has proved to be a commercial hit, says the song makes him laugh: "They ain't talking about me, 'cause I'll beat the s_____ out of every one of those guys." In fact, Everlast feels confident enough about his standing in the rap world to take a verbal swipe at Puffy Combs: "I don't think Puffy really cares about what he's doing. He's a brilliant businessman, but he's no different from the Backstreet Boys or the Spice Girls because he's just creating a product."

Wu-Tang Clan producer-rapper RZA is also concerned about maintaining standards. He believes many performers are embracing the genre's style—rapping—but missing its essence, the culture of hip-hop. "I don't think the creativity has been big. I think the sales

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have been big, and the exposure has been big," says RZA. "Will Smith is *rap*. That's not hip-hop. It's been a big year for rap. It's been a poor year for hip-hop."

Underground rap is available for those industrious enough to seek it out. At New York City's Fat Beats record store, you can pick up vinyl editions of independently released songs by such promising new acts as the Philadelphia-based Maylay Sparks (call 215-492-4257 for more information) and the all-female antimisogyny hip-hop collective Anomolies (917-876-0726). Maylay Sparks' spirited *I Mani* and the New York City-based Anomolies' raucous tune *Blacklisted* (a collaboration with the group Arsonists) are two of the best songs to come out this year.

Other groups, signed to major labels, are trying to perpetuate rap's original spirit of creativity. The rapper Nas's forthcoming album *I Am . . . the Autobiography* promises to be tough, smart and personal. And the Atlanta-based duo OutKast's Bib Boi: "We're not scared to experiment."

One of the most ambitious new CDs is the Roots' *Things Fall Apart* (named after the book by the Nigerian Nobel laureate Chinua Achibe). The CD features live instrumentation, lyrics suitable for a poetry slam and a cameo from Erykah Badu. Roots drummer Ahmir hopes, in the future, the more creative wing of performers in hip-hop will form a support network. "There are some people in hip-hop that care about leaving a mark," he says. "There are some of us that look at *Innervisions* as a benchmark, or *Blood on the Tracks* or *Blue* or *Purple Rain*. Leaving a mark is more important than getting a dollar. I think Lauryn's album is one of the first gunshots of hip-hop art the world is gonna get."

> *You could get the money*
> *You could get the power*
> *But keep your eyes on the final hour.*
> —Lauryn Hill, "Final Hour"

It's Puffy's 29th birthday party, and the celebration is being held on Wall Street. Inside the party, women in thongs dance in glass cages. Above the door a huge purple spotlight projects some of Puffy's corporate logos: Bad Boy (his record company) and Sean John (his new clothing label). But where's Puffy?

The music stops. The crowd parts. Muhammad Ali arrives. He's only the appetizer. The score to *Rocky* booms over the speakers. Only then does Puffy enter, in a light-colored three-piece suit. Forget being street. He's Wall Street, he's Madison Avenue, he's le Champs Elysées. Donald Trump is at his side. It's Puffy's moment. His album *No Way Out* played on some familiar gangsta themes, but it's a smash hit. Puffy is a household name, a brand name. In fact his name comes up again and again, in gossip columns and other people's rap songs. He has transformed himself into a human sample. He is swallowed by the crowd.

You are at the Emporio Armani store on Fifth Avenue in downtown Manhattan. There's a benefit here tonight for the Refugee Project, a nonprofit organization Lauryn Hill founded to encourage social activism among urban youth. Hill is here, and the cameras are flashing. Her musical performance on *Saturday Night Live* has boosted her album back to the upper reaches of the charts. In a few days she will receive 10 Grammy nominations, the most ever by a female artist.

She never did do that *SNL* skit about the hooker. She says she feels too connected to hip-hop to do a movie or TV role that compromise the message in her music. She addresses the crowd. "I'm just a vehicle through which this thing moves," she says. "It's not about me at all." You think back to some of the rappers you've talked to—Jay-Z, Nas, the Roots, Grandmaster Flash. A record cues up in your mind: "Ain't no stopping us now . . ."

Lauryn Hill

Strange that something so alive now could have begun in a museum. In late 1997, Laury Hill was visiting Detroit to produce a song that she wrote for her childhood hero, Areth Franklin. On the way to the airport, she stopped at the Motown Museum. The Supremes Stevie Wonder, the Jackson 5—these were the performers she was reared on. She could picture their 45s scattered across her bed. "It was incredible to me and really inspiring," say Hill. Now she was ready to push forward on her own solo album.

Looking back, looking back, Hill grew up in South Orange, N.J.; her father was a management consultant, her mother a grade-school English teacher. From an early age, Laury (she has an elder brother Malaney) was into singing and performing. When she was in middle school, she was invited to sing the national anthem at a high school basketball game "People went wild," says LuElle Walker-Peniston, Hill's guidance counselor at Columbi High School. "I don't think we had a winning team, but *she* was inspiring." Fans liked he rendition so much that recordings of it were played at subsequent games.

While still in high school, Hill landed a recurring role as the troubled runaway, Kira, or the TV soap *As The World Turns*. In 1993 she was cast as a difficult teen in *Sister Act 2*. There's a scene in that film in which Hill's character reels off a rap as her classmates look on. "None of that was scripted," says director Bill Duke. "That was all Lauryn. She was amazing." While in high school, she formed the rap trio the Fugees (short for refugees) with classmate Prakazrel ("Pras") Michel and Wyclef Jean, who went to a nearby school. The group's debut album, *Blunted on Reality*, sold poorly. Hill spent about a year at Columbia University but left school when the Fugees' second album, *The Score*, took off. It has sold more than 17 million copies worldwide.

But Hill wasn't satisfied. In the studio, she and Jean were "innocently competitive," gently sparring to see who could spin off the wittiest rhymes. Hill was eager to see what she could do solo. She booked a recording studio in New York City and gathered up every instrument she could think of—a harpsichord, a timpani, a trombone, a Hammond B-3 organ. She wanted to create hip-hop with live instruments.

She still needed another spark. So she flew to Jamaica. Hill is engaged to Rohan Marley, the son of reggae superstar Bob Marley and the father of her two children, one-year-old Zion and three-month-old Selah. ("We haven't been in front of a minister yet, but we will be soon," says Hill. "Our marriage right now is more a spiritual one.") As part of the extended Marley clan, she was allowed to record in the studio in the Bob Marley Museum. She says she could feel Marley's spirit as soon as she arrived. The first day there she wrote *Lost Ones*. As she began to rap, the various young Marley grandchildren who happened to be wandering around that day joined in, chanting the last word of every line. Everyone could feel the energy.

Hill says that before Rohan, she had "dysfunctional" relationships. She tried to channel the pain of those experiences into her music. "It wasn't someone writing for me; it wasn't someone telling me what I felt," says Hill, who wrote and produced the songs on *Miseducation*. "It was exactly how I felt the moment I felt it." Her maverick vision hasn't been without controversy. Late last year a group of four musicians who worked on *Miseducation* filed a suit claiming they deserved additional songwriting credits. Hill denies the allegations. Gordon Williams, who worked as the sound engineer on every song says, "Definitely the driving force behind that record was [Hill]."

Her colleagues worry about Hill's frantic pace. "She's a workaholic," says Williams. "She doesn't stop. To be a mother, two times, and then have all this stuff going on is crazy. Sometimes I just look at her and go, 'Lauryn, take it easy.'"

But Hill plans to push ahead. She says the Fugees "definitely aren't broken up," though the members have to "sit down and see where all our heads are at." She has her own

production company, and she might steer it in a unique direction: "I'm looking to produce black science-fiction films." Then there's her tour. She'll perform her first solo show in the U.S. on Feb. 18 in Detroit. But she'll take time out to attend the Grammys in Los Angeles on Feb. 24, for which she has received 10 nominations. "There are kids in the audiences now who weren't born when there wasn't hip-hop," says Hill. "They grew up on it; it's part of the culture. It's a huge thing. It's not segregated anymore. It's not just in the Bronx; it's all over the world. That's why I think it's more crucial now that we, as artists, take advantage of our platform."

83. The Beat Goes On

Since the late 1990s, subgenres have continued to proliferate in hip-hop. While artists, such as Ja Rule and the irrepressible P-Diddy, continue to rap about diamonds, cars, and women's physical features, the bar for achieving "real" gangsta-hood floats ever higher and the utility of thuglife stories for promotional purposes remains strong, as witnessed by the recent emergence of 50 Cent. A *Rolling Stone* article entitled "No. 1 with a Bullet" described 50 Cent with the following anecdotes: "After being shot nine times, Eminem protégé 50 Cent wisely decided to invest in protection," and "When 50 signed his contract, his first purchase was crack."[1] In other developments, Nelly has put St. Louis on the rap map with his devastating (and chanted rather than rapped) party jams; Jay-Z presents a blend of bling-bling with gangsta bravado with music relying on lots of lush, old school R&B samples; and Outkast has updated the zany psychedelia of P-Funk and added a new sophistication to "progressive" rap.

The most successful and controversial turn-of-the-millennium rapper has been, however, also the first white rapper to earn some measure of respect from the "hip-hop community." Mentioned in the preceding paragraph as the mentor of 50 Cent, Eminem's career took off when Dr. Dre took him on as *his* protégé (with Dre reviving his own moribund career in the process). Despite his undeniable originality and verbal skills, Eminem (Marshall Mathers, b. 1972) has been the focus of (and

1. Mark Binelli, "No. 1 with a Bullet," *Rolling Stone*, February 6, 2003, 31–32. Perhaps even more chilling is the continuation of actual violence, as in the murder of Jam Master Jay (of Run-DMC) in October 2002. Rumor has it that Jay was murdered because of his association with 50 Cent.

has probably benefited from) some of the most intense media scrutiny in years, and not only because of his race. Many of his songs feature virulent homophobia and a macabre form of misogyny.[2] He has been involved repeatedly in conflicts with other pop stars, in public fights and confrontations, and in ongoing suits involving his mother and ex-wife.

Renee Graham's brief article appeared near the end of 2003 and addressed the latest controversy to confront Eminem. Unlike previous controversies embroiling the rapper, this one centered on an event with implications that were more difficult for Eminem to dismiss: the discovery of a tape made (probably) in 1993 in which he made racist comments about African Americans. While, in spite of their offensiveness to many, his homophobic and misogynist lyrics had actually strengthened the connections between his work and some of his hip-hop contemporaries, Eminem had foresworn use of the "N-word" because of sensitivity about his position as a white rapper. The potential revelatory force of the new tape was weakened, however, owing to the vehemence with which it was pushed by the hip-hop magazine, the *Source*. The motivations of this publication, long notable for the way in which it eschewed conventional notions of reportorial distance, were suspect in this case and were quite possibly driven by the *Source*'s own questionable agenda.

Eminem's Old Words Aren't Hip-Hop's Biggest Problem

Renee Graham

When his Grammy-winning, multimillion-selling CD, "The Marshall Mathers LP," was vilified by some as homophobic and misogynistic, Eminem responded by abusing an inflatable doll (in the guise of his then-wife, Kim) in concert and flipping off the audience after performing a duet with Elton John at the 2001 Grammy Awards.

Defiant and unapologetic, Eminem racked up sales and awards. Accusations of hatred toward women and gays only enhanced his reputation as a rebel who, as he claimed on "The Real Slim Shady," was "only giving you things you joke about with your friends inside your living room, the only difference is I got the [expletive] to say it in front of y'all, and I don't gotta be false or sugarcoat it at all."

Yet Eminem's reaction has been markedly different since being branded a racist by the hip-hop magazine the *Source*.

2. For a well-measured critique, see Elizabeth Keathley, "Eminem's Murder Ballads," *Echo*, 4, no. 2 (Fall 2002); available on-line at <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/echo/volume4-issue2/keathley/index.html>

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Last week, a federal judge granted Eminem's request for an injunction against the magazine, preventing its editors from releasing with its February issue a CD featuring an old recording of the then-unknown rapper making derogatory remarks about black women. Monday, however, the judge authorized the *Source* to publish as much as 20 seconds of the recording on a CD. The tape was aired at a November news conference with the *Source's* owners, David Mays and Ray "Benzino" Scott. On an untitled song, Eminem drops N-bombs and disses black women.

Eminem quickly admitted that he had made the tape, but in a statement added the song was "made out of anger, stupidity and frustration when I was a teenager," after breaking up with a black girlfriend. Then the rapper did something he never did when he was called a homophobe and misogynist—he apologized.

"So while I think common sense tells you not to judge a man by what he might have said when he was a boy, I will say it straight up: I'm sorry I said those things when I was 16." (The *Source's* editors maintain the tape was made in 1993, when Eminem was 21.)

If Eminem never showed an ounce of remorse for his anti-woman, anti-gay rhymes, that's because he knew such vitriol was so commonplace in hip-hop lyrics that it would have no effect on his seemingly bulletproof career. But as a white rapper accused of racism, Eminem, probably for the first time in his career, is worried about negative public perceptions.

Without question, Eminem, 31, is one of the best rappers in hip-hop history. With a nasal Midwestern flow as outrageous as his lyrics, Eminem's considerable talent as a rapper cannot be denied, even if his lyrics are sometimes bullying and hateful.

But being called a racist in a musical culture that remains overwhelmingly African American could shake Eminem's career. Since his 1999 major-label debut, "The Slim Shady LP," put him on the hip-hop map, he has studiously avoided racial epithets that could alienate black fans. When asked several years ago why he never used the N-word, a staple of many mainstream hip-hop recordings, in his songs, Eminem told *Rolling Stone's* Anthony DeCurtis, "That word is not even in my vocabulary. And I do black music, so out of respect, why would I put that word in my vocabulary?" Eminem has always understood that making it in hip-hop meant more than clever lyrics and juicy beats—without the acceptance of black fans, he would be as dissed and dismissed as Vanilla Ice.

In the hip-hop industry, so far only Irv Gotti, head of the Inc. (formerly Murder Inc., label home of Ja Rule and Ashanti), has publicly criticized Eminem. But hip-hop entrepreneur and patriarch Russell Simmons defended the rapper, calling his apology "sincere and forthright." And the accusations haven't hurt Eminem with the Grammy folks; he received several nominations this month for his song "Lose Yourself."

The hip-hop community's apparent reluctance to address the tape is due to the fact that the *Source's* motives are suspect. Everyone knows Benzino is an Eminem archnemesis and seems spurred only by the notion that having a white rapper gain widespread success is somehow bad for hip-hop. (He has called Eminem "the rap Hitler" and a "culture stealer.") Benzino and Mays claim to be concerned with exposing "influences corrupting hip-hop," but there are far more serious issues—such as a lack of creativity, obsessions with wealth, and yes, anti-woman, anti-gay rhetoric—facing the community than the contents of a scratchy old tape.

Eminem has acknowledged the tape's veracity and has apologized. It's time to move on. Perhaps when the *Source* becomes as concerned with the state of rap music as with playing out a strange, personal vendetta with its own racist undertones, then the magazine may be more successful in exposing and ridding hip-hop of its corrupting influences.

84. From Indie to Alternative to . . . Seat

At the close of the 1980s, no earth-shattering developments appeared to be on the horizon for indie rock. The "indie" genre label was proving increasingly capacious, including everything from the "goth" of the Cure to the "dream pop" of My Bloody Valentine to bands bearing a more obvious allegiance to punk. In fact, articles attempting to explain and identify the almost bewildering multiplication of subgenres appeared frequently throughout the 1990s.[1] Yet, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, an indie scene that had been developing in Seattle around the local label Sub Pop displayed a new fusion of musical styles and a new alliance of social groups and subcultural symbols that would ultimately remap and reorient the entire idea of indie rock. Around this time, a new term, "alternative," was increasingly substituted for "indie," indicating a turn toward populism and a rapprochement with non-indie rock practices, both musically (through more obvious "pop" music influences) and institutionally (through bands moving from indie record labels to majors).

The caption under the title of a 1990 report on Seattle by Dave DiMartino—"Record companies are flocking to the Great Northwest, signing bands like crazy and hoping to find the Next Big Thing"—sums up the article fairly well. While addressing the questions, "Why here? Why now?," DiMartino captures a moment of transition in the Seattle scene, as bands formerly affiliated with Sub Pop began to sign with major record companies. This article reveals that the term "grunge" had already entered circulation, describing both the overdriven guitar sound characteristic of Seattle postpunk bands and the dress style of faded flannel and torn jeans. Amusing in retrospect are the passages that ponder whether local bands like Nirvana will "make it." In the course of such ponderings, DiMartino introduces his readers to Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, and Mother Love Bone (which contained two members who would later form part of Pearl Jam)—groups that would achieve

1. See, for example, Jim Sullivan, "The Age of Hyphen-Rock," *Chicago Tribune* (October 13, Sec. 13, 26–27 (a good overview of the splintering of rock genres); David Browne, "Turn that (Down," *Entertainment Weekly* (August 21, 1992): 16–25 (describes the many varieties/subgenre native); Neil Strauss, "Forget Pearl Jam: Alternative Rock Lives," *New York Times*, March 2, 19 introduction to the many subcategories that function as alternatives to alternative); and Ben R New Heavy-Metal Underground Emerges," *New York Times*, February 15, 1998 (a taxonomy of subgenres).

From Starr & Waterman, 2016

postdisco electronic dance music, or *techno*. Finally, our focus will turn to one of the few truly novel developments of the 1980s and 1990s: the emergence of so-called world music or world beat, a heterogeneous category that includes artists from Africa, the Near East, and Asia—the ultimate margins of the American music industry (and of the American musical imagination). While this category covers a great diversity of musical styles, we will focus on two examples of collaboration between American and non-Western artists.

Each of these musical genres or movements—hip-hop, alternative music, techno, world music—exemplifies the tensions and contradictions created when music is marketed to a mass audience specifically on the basis of its difference from or opposition to the popular mainstream, and taken as a whole, they give us a glimpse of the diversity and complexity of American popular music at the end of the twentieth century.

"DROPPIN' SCIENCE": HIP-HOP CULTURE AND RAP MUSIC

Of all the genres of popular music surveyed in this book, none has spurred more vigorous public debate than rap music. Rap has been characterized as a vital link in the centuries-old chain of cultural and musical connections between Africa and the Americas; as the authentic voice of an oppressed urban underclass; and as a form that exploits long-standing stereotypes of black people. In fact, each of these perspectives has something to tell us about the history and significance of rap music. Rap is indeed based on principles ultimately derived from African musical and verbal traditions. Evidence of these deep continuities may be found in features already discussed at length in earlier sections on African American music: an emphasis on rhythmic momentum and creativity; a preference for complex tone colors and dense textures; a keen appreciation of improvisational skill (in words and music); and an incorporative, innovative approach to musical technologies. Much rap music does constitute a cultural response to oppression and racism, a system for communication among black communities throughout the United States ("Black America's CNN," as rapper Chuck D once put it), and a source of insight into the values, perceptions, and conditions of people living in America's beleaguered urban communities. And finally, although rap music's origins and inspirations flow from black culture, the genre's audience has become decidedly multiracial, multicultural, and transnational. As rap has been transformed from a local phenomenon, located in a few neighborhoods in New York City, to a multimillion-dollar industry and a global cultural phenomenon, it has grown ever more complex and multifaceted.

The Origins of Hip-Hop, 1975–1979

Rap initially emerged during the 1970s as one part of a cultural complex called *hip-hop*. Hip-hop culture, forged by African American and Caribbean American youth in New York City, included distinctive styles of visual art (graffiti), dance (an acrobatic solo style called breakdancing and an energetic couple dance called the freak), music, dress, and speech. Hip-hop was at first a local phenomenon, centered in certain neighborhoods in the Bronx, the most economically devastated area of New York City. Federal budget cuts caused a severe decline in low-income hous-

ing and social services for the residents of America's inner cities during the mid-1970s. By 1977, when President Carter conducted a highly publicized motorcade tour through New York's most devastated neighborhoods, the South Bronx had become, as the *New York Times* put it, "a symbol of America's woes."

The youth culture that spawned hip-hop can on one level be interpreted as a response to the destruction of traditional family- and neighborhood-based institutions and the cutting of funding for public institutions such as community centers, and as an attempt to lay claim to—and, in a way, to "civilize"—an alienating and hostile urban environment. The young adults who pioneered hip-hop styles such as breakdancing, graffiti art, and rap music at nightclubs, block parties and in city parks often belonged to informal social groups called "crews" or "posses," each associated with a particular neighborhood or block. It is important to understand that hip-hop culture began as an expression of local identities. Even today's multiplatinum rap recordings, marketed worldwide, are filled with inside references to particular neighborhoods, features of the urban landscape, and social groups and networks.

If hip-hop music was a rejection of mainstream dance music by young black and Puerto Rican listeners, it was also profoundly shaped by the techniques of disco DJs. The first celebrities of hip-hop music—Kool Herc (Clive Campbell, born in Jamaica, 1955), Grandmaster Flash (Joseph Saddler, born in Barbados, 1958), and Afrika Bambaata (Kevin Donovan, born in the Bronx, 1960)—were DJs who began their careers in the mid-1970s, spinning records at neighborhood block parties, gym dances, and dance clubs, and in public spaces such as community centers and parks. These three young men—and dozens of lesser-known DJs scattered throughout the Bronx, Harlem, and other areas of New York City and New Jersey—developed their personal styles within a grid of fierce competition for celebrity and neighborhood pride. As Fab Five Freddie, an early graffiti artist and rapper, put it:

> You make a new style. That's what life on the street is all about. What's at stake is honor and position on the street. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good—the pressure on you to be the best . . . to develop a new style nobody can deal with. (George 1985, p. 111)

The disco DJ's technique of "mixing" between two turntables to create smooth transitions between records was first adapted to the hip-hop aesthetic by Kool Herc, who had migrated from Kingston, Jamaica, to New York City at the age of twelve. Herc noticed that the young dancers in his audiences responded most energetically during the so-called breaks on funk and salsa records, brief sections where the melody was stripped away to feature the rhythm section. Herc responded by isolating the breaks of certain popular records—such as James Brown's "Get on the Good Foot"—and mixing them into the middle of other dance records. These rhythmic sound collages came to be known as "breakbeat" music, a term subsequently transferred to "breakdancing," acrobatic solo performances improvised by the young "B-boys" who attended hip-hop dances.

Another innovation helped to shape the sound and sensibility of early hip-hop: the transformation of the turntable from a medium for playing back recorded sound into a playable musical instrument. Sometime in the mid-1970s Kool Herc began to put two copies of the same record on his turntables. Switching back and forth between the turntables, Herc found that he could "backspin" one disc (i.e., turn it

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backwards, or counterclockwise, with his hand) while the other continued to play over the loudspeakers. This allowed him to repeat a given break over and over, by switching back and forth between the two discs and backspinning to the beginning of the break. This technique was refined by Grandmaster Flash, who adopted the mixing techniques of disco DJs, particularly their use of headphones to synchronize the tempos of recordings and to create smooth transitions from one dance groove to the next. Using headphones, Flash could more precisely pinpoint the beginning of a break by listening to the sound of the disc being turned backward on the turntable. Flash spent many hours practicing this technique and gained local fame for his ability to "punch in" brief, machine gun-like segments of sound.

A new technique called "scratching" was developed by Flash's young protégé, Theodore, who broke away and formed his own hip-hop crew at the tender age of thirteen. In 1978 Theodore debuted a new technique that quickly spread through the community of DJs. While practicing backspinning in his room, Theodore began to pay closer attention to the sounds created in his headphones as he turned the disc counterclockwise. He soon discovered that this technique yielded scratchy, percussive sound effects, which could be punched in to the dance groove. At first Theodore wasn't sure how people would react:

> The Third Avenue Ballroom was packed, and I figured I might as well give it a try. So, I put on two copies of [James Brown's] "Sex Machine" and started scratching up one. The crowd loved it . . . they went wild. (Hager 1984, p. 38)

The distinctive sound of scratching became an important part of the sonic palette of hip-hop music—even in the 1990s, after digital sampling had largely displaced turntables as a means of creating the musical textures and grooves on rap records, producers frequently used these sounds as a way of signaling a connection to the "old school" origins of hip-hop.

Although all DJs used microphones to make announcements, Kool Herc was also one of the first DJs to recite rhyming phrases over the "breakbeats" produced on his turntables. Some of Herc's "raps" were based on a tradition of verbal performance called "toasting," a form of poetic storytelling with roots in the trickster tales of West Africa. The trickster—a sly character whose main goal in life is to defy authority and upset the normal order of things—became a common figure in the storytelling traditions of black slaves in the United States, where he took on additional significance as a symbol of cultural survival and covert resistance. After the Civil War the figure of the trickster was in part supplanted by more aggressive male figures, the focus of long, semi-improvised poetic stories called "toasts." The toasting tradition frequently focused on "bad men," hard, merciless bandits and spurned lovers who vanquished their enemies, sometimes by virtue of their wits, but more often through physical violence.

Although the toasting tradition had largely disappeared from black communities by the 1970s, it took root in prisons, where black inmates found that the old narrative form suited their life experiences and present circumstances. One of the main sources for the rhymes composed by early hip-hop DJs in the Bronx was the album *Hustler's Convention* (1973), by Jala Uridin, leader of a group of militant ex-convicts known as the Last Poets. *Hustler's Convention* was a compelling portrait of "the life"—the urban underworld of gamblers, pimps, and hustlers—comprising prison toasts with titles like "Four Bitches Is What I Got" and "Sentenced to the

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Chair." The record, featuring musical accompaniment by an all-star lineup of funk, soul, and jazz musicians, became enormously popular in the Bronx and inspired Kool Herc and other DJs to compose their own rhymes. Soon DJs were recruiting members of their posses to serve as verbal performers, or "MCs" (an abbreviation of the term "master of ceremonies"). MCs played an important role in controlling crowd behavior at the increasingly large dances where DJs performed and soon became more important celebrities than the DJs themselves. If DJs are the predecessors of today's rap producers—responsible for shaping musical texture and groove—MCs are the ancestors of contemporary rappers.

Hip-Hop Breaks Out, 1979-1988

Until 1979 hip-hop music remained primarily a local phenomenon. The first indication of the genre's broader commercial potential was the twelve-inch dance single "Rapper's Delight," recorded by the Sugarhill Gang, a crew based in Harlem. This record, which popularized the use of the term "rapper" as an equivalent for MC, established Sugar Hill Records—a black-owned independent label based in New Jersey—as the predominant institutional force in rap music during the early 1980s. The recording recycled the rhythm section track from Chic's "Good Times" (see Chapter 12), played in the studio by session musicians usually hired by Sugar Hill to back R&B singers. The three rappers—Michael "Wonder Mike" Wright, Guy "Master Gee" O'Brien, and Henry "Big Bank Hank" Jackson—recited a rapid-fire succession of rhymes, typical of the performances of MCs at hip-hop dances.

Well it's on-n-on-n-on-on-n-on
The beat don't stop until the break of dawn

I said M-A-S, T-E-R, a G with a double E
I said I go by the unforgettable name
Of the man they call the Master Gee

Well, my name is known all over the world
By all the foxy ladies and the pretty girls

I'm goin' down in history
As the baddest rapper there could ever be

The text of "Rapper's Delight" alternates the braggadocio of the three MCs with descriptions of dance movements, exhortations to the audience, and humorous stories and references. One particularly memorable segment describes the consternation of a guest who is served rotting food by his friend's mother, seeks a polite way to refuse it, and finally escapes by crashing through the apartment door. The record reached Number Four on the R&B chart and Number Thirty-six on the pop chart and introduced hip-hop to millions of people throughout the United States and abroad. The unexpected success of "Rapper's Delight" ushered in a series of million-selling twelve-inch singles by New York rappers, including Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks" (Number Four R&B, Number Eighty-seven pop in 1980), "Planet Rock," by Afrika Bambaata and the Soul Sonic Force (Number Four R&B, Number Forty-eight pop in 1982), and "The Message", by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (Number Four R&B, Number Sixty-two pop in 1982).

While most of the early hip-hop crossover hits featured relatively predictable party-oriented raps, "The Message" established a new (and, in the end, profoundly influential) trend in rap music: social realism. In a recording that links the rhythmic intensity of funk music with the toast-derived images of ghetto life in *Hustler's Convention*, "The Message" is a grim, almost cinematic portrait of life in the South Bronx. The rap on the first half of the recording was cowritten by Sylvia Robinson, a former R&B singer and co-owner of Sugar Hill Records, and Duke Bootee, a sometime member of the Furious Five. (Resident Sugar Hill percussionist Ed Fletcher composed the musical track, using a Roland 808 digital drum machine and keyboard synthesizer, embellished with various studio effects.) On top of the stark, cold electronic groove Grandmaster Flash intones the rap's grim opening hook:

> *It's like a jungle sometimes, makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under*

The sudden sound of glass shattering (produced on the drum machine) introduces a rhythmically complex and carefully articulated performance that alternates the smooth, slyly humorous style of Grandmaster Flash with the edgy, frustrated tone of MC Melle Mel:

> *Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge*
> *I'm tryin' not to lose my head*
> *Ah huh huh huh huh*

The two MCs—Melle Mel in particular—time their performances with great precision, speeding up and slowing down, compressing and stretching the spaces between words, and creating polyrhythms against the steady musical pulse. The lyric alternates between the humorous wordplay typical of hip-hop MC performances and various images of desperation—threatening bill collectors, a homeless woman "living in a bag," violent encounters in Central Park, a young child alienated by deteriorating public schools. The relationship between the grim reality of ghetto life and the tough-minded humor that is its essential antidote is summed up by Melle Mel's humorless quasi-laugh: "Ah huh huh huh huh."

The second half of "The Message"—a *Hustler's Convention*–style toast written and performed by Melle Mel—paints an even more chilling picture, an account of the life and death of a child born into poverty in the South Bronx:

> *A child is born with no state of mind*
> *Blind unto the ways of Mankind*
> *God is smiling on you, but he's frowning too*
> *Because only God knows what you'll go through . . .*
>
> *You'll admire all the number-book takers,*
> *Thugs, pimps and pushers, and the big money makers*
> *Driving big cars, spendin' 20s and 10s*
> *And you want to grow up to be just like them, huh-huh . . .*
>
> *Now you're unemployed, all null and void*
> *Walkin' round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd*
> *Turned stick-up kid, but look what you done did*
> *Got sent up for a eight year bid* [prison term] . . .

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It was plain to see that your life was lost
You was cold and your body swung back and forth
But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song
Of how you lived so fast and died so young.

This recitation is followed by the sound of the Furious Five—MCs Cowboy, Kidd Creole, Rahiem, Scorpio, and Mel—meeting and greeting on a street corner and discussing the evening's plans. Suddenly a police car screeches up and officers emerge, barking orders at the young black men. "What are you, a *gang*?," one of the policemen shouts. "Nah, man, we're with Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five." Flash enters from one side to defend his friends: "Officer, officer, what's the problem?" "You're the problem," the cop shouts back, "get in the car!" We hear the car driving away with the Furious Five in custody, arrested evidently for the crime of assembling on a street corner, and the track quickly "fades to black."

A whole stream within the subsequent history of rap music can be traced from this gritty record, ranging from the explicitly political raps of KRS-One and Public Enemy to the "gangsta" style of Los Angeles MCs like N.W.A., Snoop Doggy Dogg, and 2Pac Shakur. As the first honest description of life on the streets of the nation's urban ghettos in the 1980s to achieve wide commercial circulation, "The Message" helped to establish canons of realness and street credibility that are still vitally important to rap musicians and audiences.

Gold records like "Rapper's Delight" and "The Message" created opportunities for New York rappers to perform at venues outside their own neighborhoods and thereby widen their audience. They also alerted the major record companies to the commercial potential of hip-hop, eventually leading to the transition from the twelve-inch dance single as the primary medium for recorded rap (an inheritance from disco) to the rap album. The mid-1980s saw a rapid acceleration of rap's movement into the popular mainstream. In 1983 the jazz fusion musician Herbie Hancock collaborated with DJ Grandmixer DST on "Rockit," which made the R&B Top 10 and was played frequently on the still-young MTV channel. The following year, the popular soul singer Chaka Khan invited Melle Mel to provide a rap introduction for her hit single "I Feel for You," an adaptation of a Prince song that went to Number One R&B and Number Three pop.

The year 1986 saw the release of the first two multiplatinum rap albums, *Raising Hell* by Run-D.M.C. (which reached Number Three on *Billboard*'s Top Pop Albums chart and sold over three million copies) and *Licensed to Ill* by the Beastie Boys (Number One for seven weeks, with over seven million copies sold). That neither Run-D.M.C. nor the Beastie Boys hailed from the Bronx indicates the expanding appeal of rap music in the New York area. The key to the commercial success of these albums, however, was the expansion of the audience for hip-hop music, which now included millions of young white fans, attracted by the transgressive, rebellious sensibility of the genre. Both *Raising Hell* and *Licensed to Ill* were released on a new independent label called Def Jam, cofounded in 1984 by the hip-hop promoter Russell Simmons and the musician-producer Rick Rubin. During the 1980s Def Jam took up where Sugar Hill Records left off, cross-promoting a new generation of artists, expanding and diversifying the national audience for hip-hop, and in 1986 becoming the first rap-oriented independent label to sign a distribution deal with one of the "Big Five" record companies, Columbia Records.

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Run-D.M.C.—a trio consisting of the MCs Run (Joseph Simmons, b. 1964) and D.M.C. (Darryl McDaniels, b. 1964), and the DJ Jam Master Jay (Jason Mizell, b. 1965)—was perhaps the most influential act in the history of rap music. Simmons, McDaniels, and Mizell were college-educated black men, raised in a middle-class neighborhood in the borough of Queens. Working with Russell Simmons (Run's older brother) and producer Rick Rubin, they established a hard-edged, rock-influenced style that was to influence profoundly the sound and sensibility of later rap music. Their raps were literate and rhythmically skilled, with Run and D.M.C. weaving their phrases together and sometimes even completing the last few words of one another's lines. The "beats" produced by Rubin and Jam Master Jay were stark and powerful, mixing digitized loops of hard rock drumming with searing guitar sounds from heavy metal. Run-D.M.C. was the first rap group to headline a national tour and the first to appear on MTV. They popularized rap among the young, predominantly white audience for rock music; gave the genre a more rebellious image; and introduced hip-hop sartorial style—hats, gold chains, and untied Adidas sports shoes with fat laces—to millions of young Americans. The now familiar connection between rap music and athletic wear was established in 1986 when the Adidas corporation and Run-D.M.C. signed a $1.5 million promotional deal.

Run-D.M.C. Courtesy BMI Archives.

The creative and commercially successful synergy between rock music and hip-hop pioneered by Def Jam Records and Run-D.M.C. is well illustrated in "Walk This Way" (Number Four pop, Number Eight R&B in 1986), the gold single that propelled *Raising Hell* nearly to the top of the album charts. "Walk This Way," a collaboration between Run-D.M.C. and the popular hard rock group Aerosmith, was a cover version of a song written and previously recorded by Aerosmith. (Aerosmith brought a large portion of the hard rock audience to the table, having sold over twenty-five million albums since the early 1970s.) The recording opens with a sample of rock drumming from the original recording, interrupted by the sound of a turntable scratching, and the main riff of the song, played by Aerosmith's guitarist Joe Perry. Run and D.M.C. trade lines of the song's verses in an aggressive, shouted style that matches the intensity of the rock rhythm section. The chorus ("Walk this way, talk this way . . . ") is performed by Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, who sings the lyrics in a high, strained voice, a timbre associated with heavy metal music. As the track progresses, Run, D.M.C., and Tyler combine vocal forces in the interest of collective mayhem, and the recording ends with a virtuoso guitar solo by Joe Perry.

The video version of "Walk This Way"—the first rap video to be put into heavy rotation by MTV—gives visual substance to the musical image of a tense conversation between the worlds of hard rock and rap, unified by the sizzling textures of hip-hop scratching and hard rock guitar, the contrasting but similarly aggressive vocal timbres of Run-D.M.C. and Steven Tyler, and the over-the-top male braggadocio of the song's text. (The lyrics to "Walk This Way," with references to horny cheerleaders and high school locker room voyeurism, suggest that one of the few things shared by the predominantly male audiences for rap and rock was a decidedly adolescent approach to sex.) The video opens with Run-D.M.C. performing in a small sound studio. The amplified sound of turntable scratching penetrates a wall that separates this intimate but restricted musical world from that of a hard rock concert, held on the stage of a huge arena. Disturbed by the noise, the members of Aerosmith use their guitars to punch a hole in the wall, through which Run-D.M.C. run onto the stage of the concert and basically take over the show. Initially met with scowls from Tyler and Perry, the rappers succeed in winning them over, and the video ends in discordant harmony, with the huge, largely white crowd cheering. It is difficult to think of a more explicit (or more calculated) acting out of the process of black-white crossover in the history of American popular music, and the video of "Walk This Way" doubtless played a pivotal role in the mainstreaming of rap music. (Run-D.M.C. was not the first rap group to incorporate textures and grooves from rock music. Early hip-hop DJs Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaata regularly used breaks from groups like the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin.)

The Beastie Boys, the rap trio whose album *Licensed to Ill* topped the pop charts a few months after the release of *Raising Hell*, were the first commercially successful white act in hip-hop. Like Run-D.M.C., their recordings were produced by Rick Rubin, released on Def Jam Records, and benefited greatly from the distribution deal signed by Russell Simmons with industry giant Columbia Records. Although they received a great deal of criticism for ripping off a black style, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that their early recordings represent a fusion of the youth-oriented rebelliousness of hardcore punk rock—the style that they began playing in 1981—with the sensibility and techniques of hip-hop. In 1985 the Beastie Boys were

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The Beastie Boys, the rap trio whose album *Licensed to Ill* topped the pop charts a few months after the release of *Raising Hell*, were the first commercially successful white act in hip-hop. Like Run-D.M.C., their recordings were produced by Rick Rubin, released on Def Jam Records, and benefited greatly from the distribution deal signed by Russell Simmons with industry giant Columbia Records. Although they received a great deal of criticism for ripping off a black style, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that their early recordings represent a fusion of the youth-oriented rebelliousness of hardcore punk rock—the style that they began playing in 1981—with the sensibility and techniques of hip-hop. In 1985 the Beastie Boys were

signed by Def Jam Records, appeared in *Krush Groove*—one of the first films to deal with hip-hop culture—and toured as the opening act for both Madonna and Run-D.M.C. The following year *Licensed to Ill*, their first album, sold 720,000 copies in six weeks and thereby became Columbia Records' fastest-selling debut album up to that point. The most popular track on the album, the Top 10 frat-boy anthem "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party)" (a hit in 1987), established the Beastie Boys' appeal for the most rapidly expanding segment of the rap audience, young white males. After leaving Def Jam Records in 1988, the Beastie Boys continued to experiment with combinations of rap, heavy metal, punk, and psychedelic rock, and they scored a series of critical and commercial successes in the 1990s, culminating with the release of their 1998 album *Hello Nasty*.

By 1987 a series of million-selling singles had proven rap's commercial potential on the pop and R&B charts; the hits included rap ballads (L.L. Cool J's "I Need Love," Number One R&B, Number Nine pop in 1987), women's rap (Salt-N-Pepa's "Push It," Number Nineteen pop, Number Twenty-eight R&B in 1987), humorous party records (Tone-Lōc's "Wild Thing," Number Two pop, Number Three R&B in 1987), and rap specifically targeted at a young adolescent audience ("Parents Just Don't Understand" by D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, the gold single that established the career of actor Will Smith, which reached Number Twelve pop and Number Ten R&B in 1988). A number of the small independent labels that had sprung up to feed the growing demand for hip-hop music—Jive Records, Cold Chillin' Records, Tommy Boy Records, and Priority Records—followed the lead of Def Jam, signing distribution deals with the multinational entertainment conglomerates.

If 1986 and 1987 saw the emergence of new markets for hip-hop music, 1988 brought possibly an even more important milestone: the launching of MTV's first show dedicated entirely to hip-hop music. Hosted by hip-hop raconteur Fab Five Freddie Braithwaite, *Yo! MTV Raps* immediately attracted the largest audience in the network's history and was soon being broadcast on a daily basis. The mass popularity of rap was also reflected in the appearance of *The Source*, the first periodical devoted solely to hip-hop music and fashion. Over the subsequent decade *The Source* became the largest-selling music periodical in America, surpassing by a wide margin even such long-established publications as *Rolling Stone*. In 1988 the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences added a rap category to the Grammy Awards, and *Billboard* added a rap singles chart. This mainstreaming of rap music had a number of interesting consequences. While some rappers and producers focused their energies on creating multiplatinum crossover hits, others reacted against the commercialism of "pop rap," reanimating the tradition of social realism that had informed recordings like "The Message" and creating a more hardcore sound that paradoxically ended up generating some of the biggest crossover hits of all.

The tradition of socially engaged rap, chronicling the declining fortunes of urban black communities, received its strongest new impetus from the New York–based group Public Enemy. Founded in 1982, Public Enemy was organized around a core set of members who met as college students, drawn together by their interest in hip-hop culture and political activism. The standard hip-hop configuration of two MCs—Chuck D (a.k.a. Carlton Ridenhour, b. 1960) and Flavor Flav (William Drayton, b. 1959)—plus a DJ—Terminator X (Norman Lee Rogers, b.

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Public Enemy. Courtesy BMI Archives.

Richard Griffin) and by the Security of the First World (S1W), a cohort of dancers who dressed in paramilitary uniforms, carried Uzi machine guns, and performed a martial arts–inspired parody of Motown choreography.

The release of Public Enemy's second album in 1988—*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (Number One R&B, Number Forty-two pop)—was a breakthrough event for rap music. The album fused the trenchant social and political analyses of Chuck D—delivered in a deep, authoritative voice—with the streetwise interjections of his sidekick Flavor Flav, who wore comical glasses and an oversized clock around his neck. Their complex verbal interplay was situated within a dense, multilayered sonic web created by the group's production team, the Bomb Squad (Hank Shocklee, Keith Shocklee, and Eric "Vietnam" Sadler). Tracks like "Countdown to Armageddon" (an apocalyptic opening instrumental track, taped at a live concert in London), "Don't Believe the Hype" (a critique of white-dominated mass media), and "Party for Your Right to Fight" (a parody of the Beastie Boys' hit "Fight for Your Right (To Party)," from the previous year) turned the technology of digital sampling to new artistic purposes and insisted in effect that rap music continue to engage with the real-life conditions of urban black communities.

"Night of the Living Baseheads" is an instructive example of the moral authority and musical complexity of many of Public Enemy's recordings. The lyrics for "Night of the Living Baseheads" combine images of corpselike zombies with a commentary on the crack cocaine epidemic that was sweeping through America's inner cities during the 1980s. The track opens with the voice of the black nationalist leader Louis Farrakhan, sampled from one of his speeches:

> Have you forgotten that once we were brought here, we were robbed of our names, robbed of our language, we lost our religion, our culture, our God? And many of us, by the way we act, we even lost our minds.

With these words still ringing in our ears, we are suddenly dropped into the middle of a complexly textured groove. The lead MC of Public Enemy, Chuck D, opens with a verbal explosion, a play on words derived from hip-hop slang:

> *Here it is*
> *BAMMM*
> *And you say, Goddamn*
> *This is the dope jam*
> *But lets define the term called dope*
> *And you think it mean funky now, no*

In hip-hop argot the term "dope" carries a double meaning: it can function as a positive adjective, broadly equivalent to older terms such as "cool," "hip," or "funky"; or as a reference to psychoactive drugs, ranging from marijuana to the new, more devastating drug being critiqued by Chuck D in "Night of the Living Baseheads," crack cocaine. The rhetorical tactic of announcing the arrival of a compelling performance (a "dope jam") and thereby laying claim to the listener's attention is common in rap recordings. Chuck D takes this opening gambit and plays with it, redefining the term "dope jam" as a message about drug use and its effects on the black community. At the end of each stanza of his rap, Chuck D uses another pun, based on the homonyms "bass" (the deep, booming tones favored by rap producers) and "base" (a shorthand reference to "freebase," or crack cocaine).

> *Sellin', smellin'*
> *Sniffin', riffin'*
> *And brothers try to get swift an'*
> *Sell to their own, rob a home*
> *While some shrivel to bone*
> *Like comatose walkin' around*
> *Please don't confuse this with the sound*
> *I'm talking about . . . BASE*

Chuck D presents here a chilling snapshot of the effects of crack on the human body ("Some shrivel to bone, like comatose walkin' around"), and uses the bass/base pun to draw a contrast between the aesthetics of hip-hop and the devastating scourge of crack cocaine ("please don't confuse this [base] with the sound [bass]"). After this first occurrence, the bass/base homonym returns periodically in a syncopated, digitally sampled loop that punctuates the thickly layered sonic texture created by the Bomb Squad. Chuck D goes on to scold black drug dealers for vic-

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timizing members of their own community ("Shame on a brother when he dealin' [drugs on] the same block where my [Oldsmobile] 98 be wheelin'"). A sampled verbal phrase ("How low can you go?") is used as a rhythmic and rhetorical device to set up the final sequence of Chuck D's rap, which concludes with the story of a crack addict, a former hip-hop MC fallen on bad times:

Daddy-O once said to me
He knew a brother who stayed all day in his jeep
And at night he went to sleep
And in the mornin' all he had was
The sneakers on his feet
The culprit used to jam and rock the mike, yo
He stripped the jeep to fill his pipe
And wander around to find a place
Where they rocked to a different kind of . . . come on, y'all
[Samples of voices]
I'm talkin' 'bout BASE

The grim message of "Night" is enveloped in a jagged, stark sonic landscape, layered with fractured words and vocal noises, bits and pieces of music and other sounds sewn together like a crazy quilt. The producers incorporated digital samples from no fewer than thirteen different recorded sources, among them an early twelve-inch rap single, several soul music records, a gospel music group, a glam rock record, and the sound of drums and air-raid sirens. In musical terms, "Night of the Living Baseheads" is like a complex archeological dig, a site richly layered with sonic objects, the cumulative meaning of which depends on the cultural and musical expertise of the listener.

Although rap is often regarded primarily as a verbal genre, a recording like "Night of the Living Baseheads," with its carefully constructed pastiche of sampled sound sources, compels us to consider rap *as music*. Hank Shocklee has argued vociferously for a broader conception of music and musicianship:

> Music is nothing but organized noise. You can take anything—street sounds, us talking, whatever you want—and make it music by organizing it. That's still our philosophy, to show people that this thing you call music is a lot broader than you think it is. (Rose 1994, p. 82)

This philosophy is similar to that expressed by certain art music composers throughout the twentieth century who have used tape recorders, digital technology, and elements of noise in their works. But it could be argued that the most extensive and creative use of the technology of digital sampling has been made in dance music—hip-hop, R&B, house music, and techno—rather than in contemporary art music composition. Rather than creating a cold, disembodied form of self-expression—as many critics of the new technologies had feared—digital technology in pop music has often been used to create communal experiences on the dance floor. On the other hand, some critics bemoan what they see as a lack of creativity in much contemporary rap music, referring to the practice of sampling as "artistic necrophilia" and the end product as "Memorex music." Whatever one's position on these matters, Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads" stands as a pioneering example of the creative and social potential of digital sound technologies.

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Commercialization, Diversification, and the Rise of Gangsta Rap (1990s)

The expanding nationwide appeal of rap music during the late 1980s and early 1990s followed a familiar pattern. At the same time that some artists moved toward the pop mainstream, developing styles that blended the verbal cadences of rap and the techniques of digital sampling with R&B-derived dance rhythms and vocal styles, a variety of alternative rap styles emerged, reflecting the attitudes, experiences, and dialects of particular segments of the hip-hop audience. Interestingly, these marginal variants of hip-hop—especially so-called *gangsta rap*—ended up generating millions and millions of dollars in profits for the record industry.

The year 1990 was a watershed year for the mainstreaming of hip-hop. M. C. Hammer (Stanley Kirk Burrell, b. 1962), a rapper from Oakland, California, hit the charts in March of that year with *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*, which held the Number One position for twenty-one weeks and sold over ten million copies, becoming the bestselling rap album of all time. Hammer's celebrity was boosted by music videos that highlighted his impressive abilities as a dancer, by his appearances in corporate soft drink advertisements, and even by a short-lived children's cartoon show, called *Hammerman*. At the height of his popularity, Hammer was attacked by many in the hip-hop community for his lack of skill as a rapper and for pandering to a mass audience. There can be no denying that Hammer's success pushed rap fully into the mainstream, continuing a trend started in the mid-1980s by Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys. At the same time, Hammer's pop-friendly rap style opened the door for an artist widely considered hip-hop's icon of "wackness" (weakness), the white rapper Vanilla Ice (Robert Van Winkle, born 1968 in Florida). Ice's first album, *To the Extreme* (1990), monopolized the Number One position for sixteen weeks in early 1991, selling seven million copies. In hip-hop culture, a performer's credibility is correlated by fans not only with musical and verbal skill but also with the degree to which the artist in question possesses "street knowledge," that is, firsthand experience of the urban culture that spawned rap music. When it was discovered that Van Winkle, raised in reasonably comfortable circumstances in a middle-class neighborhood, had essentially invented a gangster persona for himself—a form of misrepresentation known in hip-hop parlance as "perpetrating"—many fans turned their backs on him. It is undeniable that race was also a factor in the rejection of Vanilla Ice, for he was widely regarded as being merely the latest in a long line of untalented white artists seeking to make a living off the fruits of black creativity. Yet some white rappers and producers—for example, the Beastie Boys—have managed to gain acceptance as legitimate hip-hop artists, largely by virtue of their ability to forge a distinctive style within the parameters of an African American tradition.

By the late 1980s a number of distinctive regional variations on the formula of hip-hop music were well established in cities such as Philadelphia, Cleveland, Miami, Atlanta, Houston, Seattle, Oakland, and Los Angeles. The music critic Nelson George noted this process of regionalization:

> The rap that'll flow from down South, the Midwest and the West Coast will not, and

During this period southern California became a primary center of hip-hop innovation, supported by a handful of independent labels and one of the few commercial AM stations nationwide to feature hip-hop programming (KDAY). The sound of "new school" West Coast rap differed from "old school" New York hip-hop in a number of regards. The edgy, rapid-fire delivery of Melle Mel and Run-D.M.C. remained influential but was augmented by a smoother, more laid-back style of rapping. The dialects of southern California rappers, many of them the offspring of migrants from Louisiana and Texas, also contributed to the distinctive flavor of West Coast rap. And if the verbal delivery of West Coast rap was sometimes cooler, the content of the MCs' recitations themselves became angrier, darker, and more menacing, the social commitment of Public Enemy supplanted by the outlaw swagger of artists such as Ice-T (Tracy Marrow), who in 1987 recorded the theme song for *Colors,* Dennis Hopper's violent film about gang versus police warfare in South Central Los Angeles. Both the film and Ice-T's raps reflected ongoing changes in southern California's urban communities, including a decline in industrial production and rising rates of joblessness, the continuing effects of crack cocaine, and a concomitant growth of drug-related gang violence.

The emergence of West Coast gangsta rap was heralded nationwide by the release of the album *Straight Outta Compton* by N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitude). While rap artists had previously dealt with aspects of urban street life in brutally straightforward terms, N.W.A. upped the ante with recordings that expressed the gangsta lifestyle, saturated with images of sex and violence straight out of the prison toast tradition. The nucleus of the group was formed in 1986, when O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson (b. 1969), the product of a middle-class home in South Central Los Angeles, met Andre "Dr. Dre" Young (b. 1965), a sometime member of a local funk group called the World Class Wreckin' Cru. Jackson and Young shared an interest in writing rap songs, an ambition that was realized when they teamed up with Eric "Eazy-E" Wright (1973–95), a former drug dealer who was using the proceeds of his occupation to fund a record label, Ruthless Records. Soon, the three began working together as N.W.A., eventually adding D.J. Yella (Antoine Carraby) and M.C. Ren (Lorenzo Patterson) to the group.

When the group started work on their second album, *Straight Outta Compton,* the idea of establishing a distinctive West Coast identity within hip-hop was clearly in their minds. As M.C. Ren put it in a 1994 interview in *The Source*:

> When we did N.W.A . . . New York had all'a the bomb groups. New York was on the map and all we was thinking, man—I ain't gonna lie, no matter what nobody in the group say—I think we was all thinking about making a name for Compton and L.A. (George 1998, p. 135)

Released in 1989, the album was more than a local success, selling 750,000 copies nationwide even before N.W.A. started a promotional tour. The album's attitude, sound, and sensibility was clearly indebted to earlier hip-hop recordings—particularly Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back,* released the year before—but was in some ways unlike anything heard before, featuring tracks with titles like "F—— the Police" and "Gangsta Gangsta," underlain by a soundtrack that mixed the sound of automatic weapon fire and police sirens with samples from funk masters such as George Clinton and James Brown, a bouncy drum machine-generated dance

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raps themselves were harrowing egocentric accounts of gang life, hearkening back to the bleakest aspects of the prison toast tradition. The cover of the CD—with the posse staring implacably down at, and holding a gun to the head of, the prospective purchaser—reinforced the aura of danger, one of the main appeals of the group for the young suburban audience that pushed the album to multiplatinum sales.

The acrimonious breakup of N.W.A., beginning in 1989, had the effect of disseminating the group's influence over a wider territory. During the 1990s Ice Cube went on to make a series of platinum albums totaling almost six million in sales, including the brilliant *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (Number Nineteen in 1990), a more explicitly political album recorded in New York with Public Enemy and the Bomb Squad, and *The Predator*, which reached Number One in 1992. Eazy-E sold over five million albums in the 1990s, all released on his Ruthless Records label, and M.C. Ren sold one million copies of his *Kizz My Black Azz* (Number Twelve in 1992). But the most influential and economically successful member of N.W.A. turned out to be Andre Young (Dr. Dre), who founded an independent record label (Death Row/Interscope), cultivated a number of younger rappers, and continued to develop a distinctive hip-hop production style, christened "G-Funk" in homage to the P-funk style developed in the 1970s by George Clinton, often sampled on Dre's productions. Dr. Dre's 1992 album *The Chronic*—named after a particularly potent strain of marijuana—sold over three million copies and introduced his protégé, Snoop Doggy Dogg (Calvin Broadus, born in Long Beach in 1972).

Snoop's soft drawl and laid-back-but-lethal gangster persona were featured on *Doggystyle* (1993), which made its debut at the top of the album charts. The gold single—"What's My Name?," a so-called clean remix of the opening track on the *Doggystyle* album—will give us a sense of Snoop Doggy Dogg's prowess as a rapper and of Dr. Dre's distinctive G-funk production style. (Like many rap recordings intended to cross over to the pop charts, "What's My Name" was released on the album in its original, unexpurgated version and in a "clean" version on a single designed for radio airplay and mass distribution. We will analyze the remix here, which reached Number Eight on the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart in 1993.) Although the track opens with a dense, scratchy sample reminiscent of a Public Enemy/Bomb Squad recording—actually a brief sequence from an old Parliament track, looped to create a syncopated pattern—the texture soon shifts to a smoother, more dance-oriented sound. A relaxed, medium-tempo dance groove is established by drum machine and keyboard synthesizers (including a weighty and sinuous keyboard bass part), over which a digitally processed, nasal-sounding human voice floats, singing a melismatic phrase:

> *Eee-yi-yi-yi-yi-yah, the Dogg Pound's in the hou-ouse*

A female choir enters, repeating the phrase "Snoop Doggy Dogg" in soul music style, and is answered by the sampled voice of George Clinton, intoning "Da Bomb" (a phrase commonly used to describe compelling grooves and other pleasurable experiences). After this brief mood-setting introduction, Snoop's drawling, laconic voice enters:

> *From the depths of the sea, back to the block* [the neighborhood]
> *Snoop Doggy Dogg, funky as the, the, the Doc* [Dr. Dre]

Snoop Doggy Dogg. Courtesy BMI Archives.

These two stanzas immediately establish Snoop's local identity, his indebtedness to his mentor Dr. Dre, and his street credibility, referring to the time he spent in jail.

He then explodes into a rapid-fire, percussively articulated sequence of tongue-twisting wordplay:

> *Follow me, follow me, follow me, follow me, but you betta not slip*
> *'Cause Nine-trizzay's the yizzear* [1993's the year] *for me to f—— up sh——* [make an impact]
>
> *So I ain't holdin nuttin back*
> *And once again I got five on the twenty sack* [sentenced to five years in prison for possession of a twenty-dollar bag of marijuana]

Snoop declares his arrival in no uncertain terms, asserting that 1993 is the year for him to make a major impact on the music scene. He refers to a more recent conviction on marijuana possession charges and then shifts to a more threatening posture—aided by Dr. Dre's interjection of an automatic weapon-like sound effect:

> *It's like that and as a matter of fact* (Dr. Dre: *rat-tat-tat-tat)*
> *'Cause I never hesitate to put a fool on his back* [imitating Muhammad Ali]

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(Dr. Dre: *Yeah, so peep out the manuscript* [pay close attention to the words]
You see that it's a must we drop gangsta sh—— [talk gangster talk])

Hold on, wha's my name?

The female choir reenters, introducing a bit of hip-hop history, a melodic line from Parliament's "Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof off the Sucker)" (see the discussion of this recording in Chapter 12). Then Snoop continues to add verbal layers to his gangsta persona, boasting about his potential for lethal violence, referring to himself as "Mr. One Eight Seven"—a reference to the California penal code for homicide—and departing the scene of a bloody massacre by disappearing mysteriously into the night ("I step through the fog and I creep through the smog").

The following interlude between verses introduces a digitally processed voice chanting "Bow-wow-wow, yippie-yo-yippie-yay," a sly reference to country and western music and cowboy films. (References to cowboys and country music are not at all unknown in rap music; for example, Seattle-based rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Buttermilk Biscuits," recorded in 1988, is a parody of square dance music.) In the third and final section, Snoop moves on to another favorite subject, his sexual potency. He begins with a catchphrase that goes back to the South Bronx origins of hip-hop and MCs like Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash:

Now just throw your hands way up in the air
And wave them all around like ya just don't care

Yeah roll up the dank [marijuana], *and pour the drank*
And watch your step (why?) 'cause Doggy's on the gank [ready to injure anyone who disrespects him]

My bank roll's on swoll [swollen]
I'm standin' on hit, legit, now I'm on parole, stroll

With the Dogg Pound right behind me
And rollin' with my b—— [woman], *is where ya might find me*

Layin' that, playin' that G Thang
She want the G with the biggest sack [testicles], *and who's that?*

He is I, and I am him, slim with the tilted brim

Wha's yo name?

Read as words on a page, divorced of their musical context, "What's My Name?" is simply an updated version of "Stagger Lee," a traditional African American ballad about a powerful and amoral black desperado of prison toast fame. But the commercial success of "What's My Name?" had as much to do with the musical groove and texture of the recording as with the content and flow (rhyme and rhythm) of Snoop Doggy Dogg's verbal performance. "What's My Name?" is in fact a club dance record, more than half of which is taken up by instrumental music or singing. (It could be argued that most of the people that bought

tions of the text in any case, given the use of local references and gang jargon.) This recording is obviously less musically complex than Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads," judged from the viewpoints of textural complexity, tone color, or historical references. Dr. Dre's G-funk sound, while indebted to the innovations of Public Enemy's production team, the Bomb Squad, has an entirely different aesthetic and commercial goal. Dre's approach to the use of digital sampling is much less ambitious than Public Enemy's: he uses here only three prerecorded sources—George Clinton recordings from the 1970s and early 1980s—and generally seems to aim for a clean, crisp studio sound. (The less ambitious use of digital samples may have to do with the court cases discussed in Box 14.1, which by the mid-1990s made it much more difficult for hip-hop producers to experiment with prerecorded sources.) Despite its controversial verbal content, "What's My Name?" is a quintessential pop record, bristling with hooks, catchy melodies, riffs, and verbal mottoes, organized around a medium-tempo groove, and carefully calibrated for dance club consumption.

While the conflation of gangsta rhetoric and reality at least temporarily boosted the sales of rap recordings, it also had terrible real-life consequences, as the matrix of conflict between posses—one source of the creative energy that gave birth to hip-hop in the 1970s—turned viciously in on itself during the mid-1990s. Such conflicts—evoked constantly in gangsta rap—can develop at many levels: between members of the same posse ("set trippin'"), among posses representing different 'hoods, between gangs of different ethnicity (as for example between Chicano and black gangs in Los Angeles), among larger organizations (for example, national gangs like the Crips, Hoods, and Black Gangster Disciples), and between entire cities or regions of the country.

The mid-1990s saw the violent eruption of conflicts between East and West Coast factions within the hip-hop business. Standing in one corner was Marion "Suge" Knight, CEO of Los Angeles–based Death Row Records, and Death Row's up-and-coming star Tupac (2pac) Shakur (1971–96). In the other corner stood the producer and rapper Sean "Puffy" Combs (a.k.a. Puff Daddy, P. Diddy), CEO of the New York independent label Bad Boy Records, and the up-and-coming star the Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace, a.k.a. Biggie Smalls, 1972–97). By the time the stranger-than-fiction scenario played itself out at the end of the 1990s, Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace had been shot to death; Suge Knight, already on parole for a 1992 assault conviction, was reincarcerated after an attack on two rappers in a Las Vegas casino and had come under federal investigation for racketeering; Interscope, a subdivision of Time Warner Entertainment, had severed its formerly lucrative promotion and distribution deal with Death Row Records; Tupac Shakur's mother had sued Death Row for the rights to her dead son's tapes; and Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg, Death Row's biggest stars, had severed ties with the label. In January 1998 Snoop told the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* (as quoted in RockOnTheNet.com) that he was leaving Death Row Records for fear of his life:

> I definitely feel my life is in danger if I stay in Death Row Records. That's part of the reason why I'm leaving . . . there's nothing over there. Suge Knight is in jail, the president; Dr. Dre left and 2Pac is dead. It's telling me that I'm either going to be dead or in jail or I'm going to be nothing.

Chillingly, both 2Pac and the Notorious B.I.G. had recorded prophetic raps that

Box 14.1 Hip-Hop, Sampling, and the Law

As we have seen, the tradition of incorporating beats from secondary sources is as old as hip-hop itself. However, the increasing sophistication and affordability of digital sampling technology had, by the late 1980s, made it possible for rap producers to go much farther, weaving entire sound textures out of prerecorded materials. This development triggered some interesting court cases, as some of the artists being sampled sought to protect their rights.

In 1989 the Miami-based rap group 2 Live Crew released a song called "Pretty Woman," which borrowed from the rock 'n' roll hit "Oh, Pretty Woman" (Number One pop in 1964), written by Roy Orbison and William Dees. Although 2 Live Crew had tried to get permission from the music publisher of the song, Acuff-Rose Music, to make a rap version of the song, permission had been denied. A lawsuit ensued over rapper Luther R. Campbell's (a.k.a. Luke Skyywalker's) raunchy send-up of the tune, and Campbell took the position that his use of the song was a parody that was legally protected as a fair use. The Supreme Court recognized the satirical intent of Campbell's version and held that 2 Live Crew's copying of portions of the original lyric was not excessive in relation to the song's satirical purpose.

Although the 2 Live Crew decision upheld the rights of rap musicians and producers to parody preexisting recorded material, control over actual digital sampling tightened up during the 1990s, as a result of a few well-publicized court cases. In 1991 the 1960s folk rock group the Turtles sued the hip-hop group De La Soul for using a snippet of the Turtles' song "You Showed Me" on a track called "Transmitting Live from Mars." The Turtles won a costly out-of-court settlement. That same year, an up-and-coming hip-hop artist named Biz Markie recorded a track that sampled the sentimental pop song "Alone Again (Naturally)," a Number One pop hit for the Irish songwriter Gilbert O'Sullivan in 1972. O'Sullivan was not pleased and pursued the case, eventually forcing Warner Brothers to remove Biz Markie's album from the market until the offending track was itself removed from the album. These decisions sent a chill through the rap music industry and encouraged producers to be less ambitious in their use of sampled materials. As the hip-hop historian Nelson George phrases it, "The high-intensity sound tapestries of Public Enemy have given way to often simpleminded loops of beats and vocal hooks from familiar songs—a formula that has grossed [M.C.] Hammer, Coolio, and Puff Daddy millions in sales and made old R&B song catalogs potential gold mines" (George 1998, p. 95).

triumph over his victims. (True to the logic of the popular music business, these voices were manifested in highly profitable posthumous albums with titles like *Life after Death*, *Born Again*, *Still I Rise*, and *Here After*).

Since the late 1980s the highly stylized narratives of gangsta rap have provided a chronicle of the dilemmas faced by urban communities—poverty, drug addiction, and violence—from a first-person, present-tense viewpoint. The recordings of artists

"Old Joe Clark" (Example 3.4), recorded in the early 1920s, is a typical example of a Southern folk song, and it illustrates graphically the differences between folk and cultivated traditions. The text is much more colloquial and humorous in tone than "Beautiful Dreamer." It certainly paints a less flattering picture of the female subject of the song. The vocal quality is nasal, without the sweetness of the cultured style. In many ways, it communicates much more directly (like good contemporary music) than the parlor song. The melody is repeated over and over, with little or no variation. The song has little harmonic movement, unlike classical or art song. Both accompaniment and melody are based on a modal scale; there is no sense of chord progression. The rhythm is very active, with a fast tempo and fast-flowing notes in the accompaniment. Each beat receives equal emphasis, but there is no rhythmic conflict (syncopation). In form, the song uses a rudimentary version of the verse-chorus form featured in early minstrel-show songs, as well as many popular songs of the post-Civil War period.

Although several of the qualities that distinguish "Old Joe Clark" from "Beautiful Dreamer"—notably the nasal singing style and the instrumentation—would remain the exclusive property of folk or country music, there are features of this song that found their way into nineteenth-century popular song. These include: a fast tempo suggesting a dance rhythm; more colloquial language; and frequent repetition of the main idea of a song, in alternation with a story or short vignettes.

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THE AFRICAN HERITAGE

As European influence on American popular music has diminished, African influence has grown. The initial influence of African slaves on popular music was almost exclusively visual: blackface entertainers cruelly caricatured the slaves' appearance and speech. From that lowly beginning, African values have slowly but inexorably permeated popular music. Indeed, the steadily increasing influence of African musical values is one of the most remarkable features of the evolution of American popular music. That the dominant music of a society would be increasingly shaped by a minority culture is surprising enough. That it would be shaped by a minority that was brought forcibly to this country and stripped of its freedom, its language, and its culture is even more surprising. That this minority would exert such an enormous influence on a dominant majority in spite of the often institutionalized racism that it encountered has been extraordinary.

Much of the musical heritage of Africans was suppressed, although their musical talent was recognized and even encouraged at times. During slavery, drums were banned from the plantation because masters recognized that they were used not only as musical instruments, but also as communication tools. Without a common mother language or preserved musical tradition, African-Americans created their own distinctive musical traditions, often by reinterpreting the music of whites. Spirituals, ragtime, and jazz were among the earliest styles to emerge from this ongoing reinterpretive process.

African values have profoundly and pervasively influenced virtually all American popular styles, from early blues and religious music to the vast majority of contemporary popular music styles. Parallels between the folk

music of west Africa and contemporary popular styles are uncanny in their closeness and their comprehensiveness. In most cases, the differences between the two are more a matter of resources and technology than musical conception. We can hear their close affinity in the following series of examples.

Many west African languages are tonal: that is, the same syllable may have different meanings depending on its pitch or inflection. As a result, speech in these languages already approaches song. Singing, especially singing of the narrow-ranging melodic motives common to much African music, is simply an intensification of the natural inflection of the language. (This is in sharp contrast to the clear division between speech and song that was customary in nineteenth-century classical music.)

Blues performer Blind Willie McTell, c. 1928.

"Folk Story" (Example 3.5) performed by a Wolof *griot* (a singer of tales), and "Travelin' Blues" (Example 3.6), sung by Blind Willie McTell (1901–1959), a bluesman from Georgia, show an underlying similarity in vocal style and vocal and instrumental approach, despite the obvious difference in language. In the first example, the griot is telling a story. He begins each of several sections by narrating the story in rapid, highly inflected speech. These narrations periodically blossom into song. Of special interest vocally is the smooth continuity in sound between mostly spoken passages and sung sections; the transition from speech to song is gentle rather than abrupt. The same is true in "Travelin' Blues." As in the griot song, the shifts between speech and song happen almost imperceptibly as McTell alternates between narrative passages and blues-like refrains.

I-18

IA-18

griot

I-19

IA-19

There are instrumental parallels as well. Both performers use a strummed instrument. Moreover, they use the instrument in two distinct ways: to accompany the voice and to provide interludes between vocal sections. McTell also makes train and bell sounds, and whistles, as well as producing two different guitar timbres, the steady plucking and the imitation of the voice. The exploration of new sounds is very much part of the African/African-American tradition.

Griot playing the Kora (harp); Bamana tribe, Mali, Africa. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Courtesy National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

I-20

IA-20

Example 3.7 alternates phrases from recordings by an African-American (Henry Ratcliff, performing a free-form blues song called "Louisiana") and an African (a field worker in Senegal) to show a remarkable similarity in vocal style between the folk music of the two cultures. The most important of these similarities include:

1. Vocal timbre: the basic sound and inflection of the voice
2. Melodic shape: most phrases begin high and finish low
3. Rhythmic freedom of the delivery
4. Pitch choice: the reliance on pentatonic (five-note) scales
5. The use of melismas.

pentatonic

African values have influenced the instrumentation of popular music in both instrument choice and instrumental style. The most obvious impact of African music on American popular styles has been the extensive use of percussion instruments. This shouldn't be particularly surprising, because the preeminent African instrument is the drum. Drums come in many shapes and sizes, and are capable of different pitches. Thus, drums are able to imi-

tate the tonal inflections of many west African languages, and can be used for signals. Other percussion instruments, such as cowbells, rattles, and gourds, are also used frequently in African music, as are handclaps and other human-produced percussive noises.

We needn't look further than the drum set, a staple of virtually all popular styles since the twenties, to gauge the impact of African values on popular-music instrumentation, although their growing influence goes well beyond this one instrument. There has been a steady increase in the use of percussion instruments, and percussive playing techniques on nonpercussive instruments.

The African approach to instrumental style has had a profound impact on popular music in two ways:

1. Leading musicians have cultivated distinctive sounds on their instruments. Their sounds become their signatures. A jazz fan can recognize Miles Davis or Charlie Parker in a few seconds.
2. Musicians have also experimented with ways to get totally unprecedented sounds from existing instruments, or even noninstruments.

Unlike Western instruments, which are more or less uniform from maker to maker, African instruments do not conform to a standard specification. They are usually made from available materials: logs, animal skins, and so forth, and may vary considerably from region to region. African-American musicians have been similarly resourceful instrument makers, inventing instruments out of everyday materials intended for a different purpose. The washtub bass and washboard percussion heard in some juke bands are an early example; the rhythmic record scratching heard on rap songs, a more current one.

washtub bass

washboard

More significantly, however, pioneering musicians have developed new ways to play existing instruments. Every instrument commonly used in popular music has acquired new sound possibilities through the inventiveness of African-American musicians. To cite only one example, guitarists, particularly blues and blues-influenced guitarists, have developed an entire repertoire of new guitar sounds, like the so-called "bottleneck" slide style, which has given the instrument an entirely different character. "Sunnyland" (Example 3.8), performed by Elmore James, is a blues song that illustrates the use of the slide.

bottleneck

I-21

IA-21

African music has shaped the texture of popular music in two notable ways, a general approach and one specific procedure. A preference for African-like textures has been increasingly characteristic of popular music since the swing era, while call-and-response patterns have been used in popular music since the minstrel-spiritual songs of the 1870s.

The texture of African group music tends to be dense and heterogeneous: many people perform different patterns at the same time. Musical interest is distributed throughout the texture. No one part, even a vocal line, stands out as preeminently important. Indeed, a single strand of the texture could not stand alone. (This is not the case with European-derived popular song. The many successful unaccompanied performances of "The Star Spangled Banner" at sporting events offer ample evidence of the preeminence of melody in this style.) In much African music, then, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

"Yarum Praise Song" (Example 3.9), performed by Fra-fra Tribesmen, and "Nubian Nut" (Example 3.10) performed by George Clinton, demonstrate specifically an African approach to texture and the stylistic kinship of the two cultures. They display typically heterogeneous African texture in almost identical fashion. There are three distinct elements common to both songs: (1) a quick moving percussion part; (2) riffs played by a pitched instrument; and (3) a vocal line.

The praise song is a relatively simple example. It features a percussion instrument–some kind of shaker playing a steady rhythm at sixteen-beat speed–a bowed string instrument playing a riff-like figure, and a vocal line. Clinton, one of the creators of seventies funk, offers a more complex and denser version of the same pattern in this 1983 recording. The same three elements are present. A prominent percussion part plays intermittently, also at sixteen-beat speed. Here, several pitched electronic instruments play riff figures. The solo vocal line flows over the instrumental parts, as it does in the African recording. There are, of course, additional elements in the texture: bass, heavy backbeat, and backup vocals are the most prominent. But these should not obscure the underlying similarity in texture, both in approach and result.

Ray Charles, c. 1960.

call and response

Call and response is the regular alternation of two contrasting sound colors or densities: solo voice/choir; voice/instrument; or instrument/instrument (e.g., guitar/sax). A common feature in much sung African music, it has been widely used in popular music since the thirties. In both the Bulu Chorus (Example 3.11) and "Tell the Truth" (Example 3.12), performed by Ray Charles and the Raelets, a group of singers–the African chorus and the

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Raelets, respectively—repeat a simple three-note pattern ("tell the truth," in the case of Charles's recording) over and over. At the same time, the solo singer comments between, and sometimes through, statements of the three-note response.

The previous examples highlight the influence of African music on vocal style, instrumentation and instrumental style, and texture. This influence extends to every other element: dynamics, melody, harmony, and form. For example, melodies and accompanying parts of several of the previous examples grow out of melodic ideas: the Yarum Praise Song, Bulu Chorus, "Nubian Nut," "Sunnyland," and "Tell the Truth" illustrate this style.

African music has had a profound influence on the form of American popular music. The African approach to form is the exact opposite of the forms of nineteenth-century popular song. Forms are open, not closed, and sequential, not hierarchical. We can hear the open form of African music most clearly at the beginning and end of a performance. Group music begins with the master drummer or other musician establishing a beat; others join gradually. The music ends when the ceremonial event is over. There is no sense of frame, no sense of a clear beginning and end. Both the Yarum Praise Song and "Nubian Nut" begin this way, as do many of the examples found later in the text. Some particularly good illustrations include Count Basie's "Jumpin' at the Woodside" (Example 2.9) and Herbie Hancock's second version of "Watermelon Man" (Example 18.4).

The impact of African music on form is typically even more obvious at the end of a song than its beginning. The fadeout ending, which had become commonplace by the late sixties, is the most pervasive adaptation of an African formal conception to popular music.

African group music seldom presents a clear formal hierarchy. Typically, sections simply follow one another. Divisions between sections result from shifts in rhythmic texture, melodic motive, and/or beat speed. There are no internal resting points. The Yarum Praise Song illustrates this sequential approach to formal organization in African music. Any of the rock-era "endless loop" songs, like the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" (Example 15.1), illustrate its adaptation into contemporary popular music.

"endless loop" song

CONCLUSION

The similarities between African and African-American (and African-American influenced) musical practices are extensive and remarkably close, despite obvious differences in language, technology, and culture. African-American music has in turn shaped virtually all twentieth-century popular music, at least to some degree. African influence is evident in ragtime, blues, Tin Pan Alley popular song, jazz, swing, country, Latin music, rock, disco, and funk: in other words, just about every important style to emerge in the last 100 years.

The miracle of American popular music is that such an important musical language has developed from such disparate musical sources. As we have seen, the "pre-pop" (early nineteenth-century) popular song derived from European classical music and Anglo-American folk music are different enough. But classically influenced song and African and African-American

Hip Hop and Rap

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Hip hop and its later development, rap, originated in New York during the mid-Seventies and grew to nationwide popularity during the Eighties. Both styles involved spoken lyrics performed in a rhythmic patter over complex, funk-styled rhythms. Vocals spoken in a rhythmic patter were not new to popular music. Louis Jordan had used rhythmic speech patterns in songs such as "Saturday Night Fish Fry" during the Forties and James Brown used a similar style on message songs of the Sixties such as "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." For that matter, even nineteenth-century operettas such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) and *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879) included patter songs ("When I Was a Lad I Served a Term . . ." and "The Major General Song"). Disc jockeys in Jamaica during the late Sixties had developed a style of patter-talk called toasting or dubbing which may have been influenced by James Brown's and/or Louis Jordan's speech patterns. It was those Jamaican disc jockeys that funk disc jockeys in New York imitated to create their hip-hop vocal style. Both hip hop and rap singers generally wanted the message of their lyrics to be clearly understood by their listeners and the patter format served their purposes quite well.

To accompany his rhythmically spoken vocals, the New York funk disc jockey **Grandmaster Flash** (Joseph Saddler, born in 1957) played recordings by **scratching**, which involved quickly changing the direction of a record's rotation, over and over, to create a rhythmic pulse over which he could "rap." Another copy of the same record would sometimes be played continuously on another turntable during the scratching. Multiple turntables were also used to insert sections from one recording into another (a technique known as **cutting**) and to segue from one recording to another using a **vari-speed control** to maintain a constant beat pattern when the two were not recorded at the same speed. This type of vocal background was done live on radio programs before it was actually recorded and released as a recorded style in its own right. The first hip-hop record was **The Sugar Hill Gang**'s "Rapper's Delight" (1979). The Sugar Hill Record Company recorded and contributed much to the writing of Grandmaster Flash's music until 1985 when the Grandmaster signed with Elektra Records.

Because hip hop and rap are primarily vocal styles with roots in the disc jockeys' use of prerecorded records as background, many hip-hop singers and

rappers took to the practice of **sampling** background music for their records. Sampling involved taking selected sections from other people's records and repeating and mixing those sections to create a background sound. Of course, many of the artists whose music was "sampled" saw the practice as stealing, and the ensuing lawsuits caused hip-hop vocalists to credit the sources of their samples. This eventually included the sharing of royalties. Without using samples, the vocalists had to come up with their own newly recorded accompaniments and synthesizers and drum machines became common replacements for samples.

Salt-N-Pepa was the first successful female hip-hop group. Often called the Queens from Queens, Salt-N-Pepa was a trio that included Salt (Cheryl James), Pepa (Sandy Denton) and DJ Spinderella (Dee Dee Roper). They sometimes sang in a Sixties girl-group style along with their patter-spoken vocals. The Sixties' influence on Salt-N-Pepa's style did not end with the vocals when they covered songs such as "Twist and Shout" and added guitar solos that were not part of the funk or hip-hop tradition. It was partially the pop orientation of their sound and the lighthearted, non-political approach to their song themes that kept Salt-N-Pepa in the hip hop, rather than rap, category. Salt-N-Pepa's recording of "Expression (Half-Step)" serves as an example of their hip-hop style and is outlined in the following listening guide:

"Expression (Half-Step)"
as recorded by Salt-N-Pepa (1989)

Tempo: The tempo is approximately 108 beats per minute, with four beats in each bar.

Form: The introduction is polyrhythmic and the primary beat pattern is not established until the first A section begins with the words "express yourself." The form follows the pattern: A B A Interlude B A Interlude B A A A/Interlude.

The eight-bar A sections serve as refrains.

The twelve-bar B sections have continuous patter-spoken vocals that alternate single-bar **antecedent** and **consequent phrases**. (The consequent phrase provides a sense of resolution to the incomplete-sounding end of the antecedent phrase.)

The first interlude section is four bars long, and the second is eight bars. Both feature the polyrhythms used in the introduction and include barely understandable comments spoken by men.

The final nine-bar section alternates bars from the A and interludes.

Features: Even beat subdivisions are maintained throughout the recording.

Once the first A section begins, a very strong backbeat is kept by the drums.

The bass line is very active and often polyrhythmic against the rest of the instruments.

The group vocals of the A sections are sung in a two-part, girl-group pop style.

All three singers share the patter-spoken vocals of the B sections, at times alternating phrases in a conversational manner and at other times finishing one another's thoughts.

Salt of Salt-N-Pepa

Lyrics: It is established from the beginning that self-expression is necessary to experience life to the fullest. Part of the self-expression comes through group criticism of others about who they are with or where they got their money. Another part of the expression is in the singers' pride in being women who have control of their world. The very danceable rhythm of the A sections and the vocals about working their bodies leaves room for expression of physical needs and desires.

Source: *Yo! MTV Raps, Volume 2*, Jive Records 1420.

Salt-N-Pepa have made social statements through songs such as "Negro Wit' an Ego" (1990), in which they sing about their pride in their African American heritage. However, their songs are more often personal statements about their needs as women and the ways they want men to treat them.

The Native Tongues Posse is a general title used by several hip hop artists or groups from Manhattan who use their very funky and danceable music to support song themes that display pride in their African roots. Often dressing in African clothing, these vocalists stressed optimism and unity in their portrayal of street life in Harlem and other African American neighborhoods. The older hip-hop disc jockey Afrika Bambaataa and his group the Zulu Nation was the model for the late-Eighties group the **Jungle Brothers**, led by Nathaniel Hall who called himself Afrika Baby Bambaataa. The "jungle" referred to in the group's name was indeed Harlem, but songs such as "Tribe Vibes" from *Straight Out The Jungle* (1988) celebrate the brotherhood the singers shared with their neighbors. The violent sexism for which some rap has become associated was nowhere to be seen in the music of the Native Tongues Posse. The Jungle Brothers' song "Behind the Bush" expresses the desire to share love and mutual respect with their women.

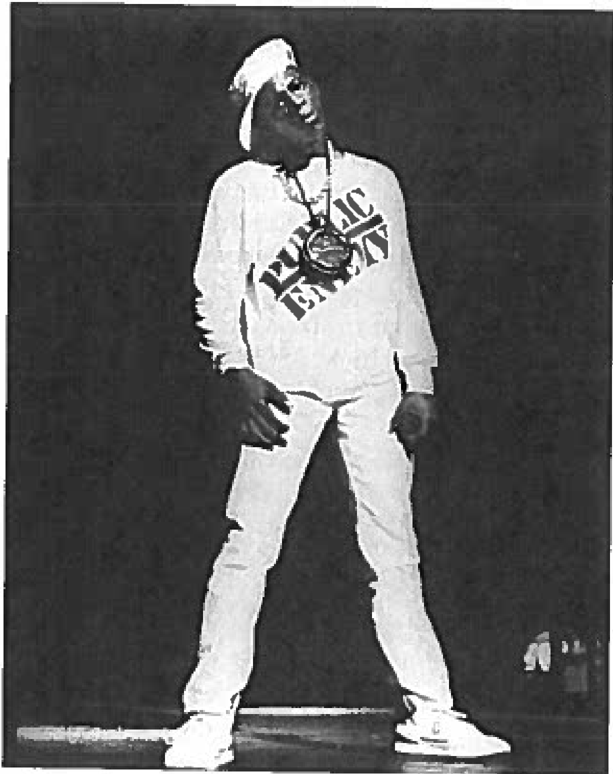
Another member of the Native Tongues Posse, **Queen Latifah** (Dana Owens) chose her name because "latifah" represents delicate sensitivity in the Muslim culture. She was joined by the British singer **Monie Love** (Simone Johnson) for a song that could be called a hip-hop anthem to feminism, "Ladies First" (included on *Yo! MTV Raps, Volume 2*). In addition to representing sisterhood among women, the song also displayed the Afrocentric orientation of the Native Tongues Posse in the call-and-response–styled vocals performed by Queen Latifah and Monie Love. The positive messages and dance-oriented music of the hip-hop artists remained popular into the Nineties despite the fact that hip hop's offshoot style, rap, began to draw negative public attention for its political and sometimes violent messages.

East Coast Rap

Rap is an outgrowth of hip hop that has left the lighthearted party atmosphere behind and gone out into the streets to make strong political and social statements. The goal of many of those statements was to encourage more unity among African Americans and have them make stronger demands for equality. Some band members and their fans wore "X" on their shirts or caps to represent their support of the teachings of Malcolm X. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five described some of the problems related to life in a ghetto in their recording of "The Message" (1982), but that song did nothing to support African American pride or, for that matter, to encourage any changes to aid their situation. However, it may have informed some white listeners that all African Americans did not live down the street from Bill Cosby's television family, but then such groups as the Temptations (in "Cloud Nine" from 1968 and other songs) have been doing that for years.

Stronger and more clearly directed social and political messages came from rap groups recorded by the **Def Jam Record Company** which was formed by Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin in 1984. At that point rap was still primarily a "Black" style, but Rubin, who was white, was out to sell a new, bold sound that would revolutionize popular music as well as spark social changes. Two of Def Jam's earliest groups were the African American rappers **Run-DMC** and the more rock-oriented white **Beastie Boys**. Run-DMC accomplished some breakthroughs for rap when they became the first rap group to have albums that went gold, platinum, and double platinum; the first rappers on "American Bandstand"; and the only rappers on the widely-viewed Live Aid show. The signing of the Beastie Boys was seen by some as Rick Rubin's exploitation of rap to make it more palatable to white listeners, but he made up for that, in some ways, by also signing Public Enemy to Def Jam Records.

Sometimes called the Black Panthers of rap, **Public Enemy** spoke out from New York to let the world know what they thought about the low-class status of many African Americans. Their primary rapper, **Chuck D.** (Carlton Ridenhour), began his career as a disc jockey on a college radio station. He had grown up seeing police brutality and a growing drug problem in his own community as well as the ways in which African American artists were often ignored by commercial radio and video stations, and he decided it was time to make his own statements to the world—and make them as strong as possible. He referred to his rap lyrics as the CNN (Cable News Network) for African Americans. His goal was to let people know what the lives of real African Americans were like and to say he and his people were not going to put up with "ghetto life" any longer.



Chuck D. of Public Enemy

Chuck D.'s fellow rapper and "minister of information," Professor Griff, laid the groundwork for others to attack Public Enemy for racism when he made anti-Semitic remarks to an interviewer for the *Washington Times*. When one's reputation is built on an anti-racist stand and one attacks another race (or culture), humanism ceases to be the issue and self-centered supremacy rears its ugly head. Well aware of this, Chuck D. made it clear that Griff's remarks did not represent the beliefs of other members of Public Enemy by firing Griff. Chuck D. used the recording "911 Is a Joke" (from the album *Fear of a Black Planet*) to point out his thoughts about public assistance programs that have not been what they should be in his neighborhood. A listening example follows:

"911 Is a Joke" ✓
as recorded by Public Enemy (1990)

Tempo: The tempo is approximately 104 beats per minute, with four beats in each bar.

Form: The form is based on eight- and sixteen-bar phrases ordered as follows: A B C Extension B C Extension C A.

The eight-bar A sections are basically instrumental, but include verbal comments in the background.

The B sections are each sixteen bars of rap vocals. The rhythmic patterns of the rap vocals are made up of four-bar antecedent and consequent phrases paired into eight-bar periods.

The eight-bar C sections function as a refrain, beginning with the words "Get up" and then including the song title, "911 Is a Joke." The first C is followed by a four-bar extension that begins with a laugh and the second is followed by an eight-bar extension similar to the first extension.

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Features: Even beat subdivisions are maintained throughout the recording.

The drums play a strong backbeat through most of the recording.

Funk polyrhythms are played by the bass, guitar, and horn (or synthesized horn sound) sections.

The production includes much mixing and overdubbing, creating a very full background. That background includes indistinguishable vocal chatter that sounds as if the recording was done at a party.

Call-and-response vocals are used in the extensions to the refrains.

The recording ends by fading out.

Lyrics: The singer claims he had called the emergency number 911 a long time ago, and no one has responded. He believes the whole idea of their availability to help people is a cruel joke because the emergency squads will get paid whether they do their job or not, so the squads don't really care about people, particularly those in African American neighborhoods.

Source: *Fear of a Black Planet*, Columbia, 45413, and *Yo! MTV Raps, Volume 2*, Jive Records 1420.

Where Chuck D. had gained a reputation for his angry remarks between songs at concerts in the past, his performances in the Nineties included serious talks about his personal commitments rather than a mere venting of rage. The state of Arizona was often a target of attack because (until the November, 1992, election) it did not recognize the national holiday for the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Chuck D. released his feelings through his rap in "By the Time I Get to Arizona," and told members of the audience who were from Arizona to think about their state's affront to African Americans. If one can step back and look beyond the emotional charge of much of Public Enemy's raps to analyze the basic messages behind their lyrics, similarities can be drawn between their anti-racist stance and that of what James Brown, Bob Marley, or, for that matter, even what Bob Dylan had to say through their music.

Because many rappers tended to take the idea of self-expression to the point of using foul language and violent subject matter in direct and unpopular ways, rap has gained as much notoriety through the anti-rap press as it has through any traditional roads to success such as radio or television airplay. As had been the case in the music of some heavy metal and punk bands of the past, the public banning or displays of record destruction can create more sales than the records would likely have had to begin with. Such was the case when the **2 Live Crew** album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* (1989) was banned in some states including their home state of Florida. The group enjoyed their highly publicized position and even advertised the banning by calling their next album *Banned in the U.S.A.* (1990). **Sister Souljah** (Lisa Williamson) was not well known outside of New York when President Bill Clinton (then a presidential candidate) attacked what he saw as racism in her lyrics and turned her into an instant cause célèbre.

West Coast Rap

While East Coast rappers spoke out for African Americans on more general political subjects, rappers on the country's West Coast had more of a tendency to take

stands on gang-related issues, particularly the way in which the police handled (or, they would say, contributed to) street violence. They insisted that the kids they spoke for didn't have the slightest idea about political figures or the government because the kids had daily problems dealing with violence on the streets—a violence politicians knew existed, but ignored. At times the rappers were accused of encouraging violent behavior when, from their point of view, they were merely reporting about it from an inside perspective.

Among the most outspoken of the West Coast rap groups of the late Eighties and early Nineties were **N.W.A.** (Niggas With Attitude). "Gangsta Gangsta," from their *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) album, even begins with gunshots. From that same album, "Express Yourself" makes it clear that N.W.A. will continue to "say it like it is" in their Los Angeles neighborhood.

"Express Yourself"
as recorded by N.W.A. (1988)

Tempo: The tempo is approximately 96 beats per minute, with four beats in each bar.

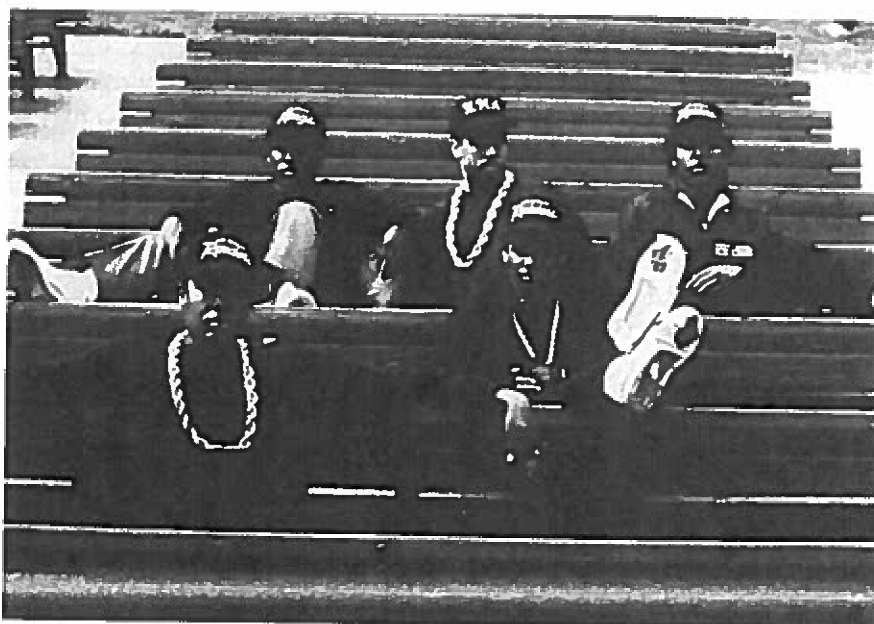
Form: The recording begins with a short spoken conversation, after which instruments and rap vocals enter for the A section. The form follows the pattern: A B A B A B.

The A sections are long, continuous periods of rap vocals made up of alternating single-bar antecedent and consequent phrases. The first A is twenty bars in length and the second and third are each twenty-four bars.

The eight-bar B sections serve as refrains and are mostly instrumental except for the addition of the title words, "Express Yourself."

Features: Even beat subdivisions are maintained throughout most of the recording, but the vocals and some individual instruments sometimes fall into uneven subdivisions.

The first beat of each bar is accented by the bass and the drums maintain a backbeat.



N.W.A.

Funk-influenced polyrhythms are played by the drums, bass, and rhythm guitar.

The bass plays a reggae-influenced two-bar riff pattern through most of the recording. The instrumental parts and the vocal phrasing of the words "Express Yourself" have been "sampled" from the introduction and instrumental background in the recording of "Express Yourself" (1970) by Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band.

The instrumental sampling drops out for a two-bar instrumental break in bars fifteen and sixteen of the first A section.

The recording ends by fading out.

Lyrics: The lead singer says he is in a "correctional facility," but is proud of his past and ready to put down anything that would cause a person to become a system follower instead of expressing his or her own opinions and beliefs. Among the things he puts down are drugs and rappers who try for commercial success forgetting the violence of their lives in the ghetto.

Source: *Straight Outta Compton*, Ruthless-Priority Records 57102, and *Yo! MTV Raps, Volume* 2, Jive Records 1420.

Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, whose recording was used for the sampling in N.W.A.'s recording were not a rap band, but a soul-oriented funk band from the Watts area of Los Angeles.

N.W.A.'s lead rapper, **Ice Cube** (O'Shey Jackson) left the group for a solo career and was replaced by former solo rapper, **Eazy-E** (Eric Wright). In spite of the way N.W.A. felt about pop-chart success in "Express Yourself," their albums *100 Miles and Runnin'* (1990) did well on the pop charts and their *Efil4zaggin* (a backwards spelling of "niggaz 4 life," 1991) broke commercial records for rap by entering the pop charts at number one. Of course that may not have happened had *Billboard* not just changed its chart research system to the new SoundScan computer system so that the charts were based on actual sales figures instead of interviews with record-store managers. Nevertheless, N.W.A.'s sales did make it appear that they had come to express attitudes shared by many others.

N.W.A. and other L.A.-based rappers had been talking about violence and police brutality for years when the 1992 L.A. riots occurred following not guilty verdicts for police officers who had beaten motorist Rodney King. In response to over 100 requests for interviews, Ice Cube would only say, "No justice, no peace." When he finally was willing to discuss the subject with newspaper columnists, he said his songs had already outlined the problems in Watts. Another rap/heavy metal singer from L.A., **Ice-T** (Tracy Morrow), also stressed the subject of police brutality in his lyrics. He followed the L.A. riots with even more anger than ever in his song "Cop Killer" (1992), in which he said he would go out and "dust off" some cops. The song "Cop Killer" upset many people who feared the reaction it may have sparked, but Ice-T responded that there was a very big difference between his fans sitting back and listening to him talk about what he might do to vent his anger and their actually going out and doing it themselves. The word was not the deed, in other words. After death threats were aimed at his record company, Ice-T pulled the song from future copies of his *Body Count* (1992) album.

Many youth gangs orient themselves around a particular ethnic identity and the effective expression of concerns of African American gang members heard in the raps of N.W.A., Ice Cube, or Ice-T caused the development of different rap

styles to represent other ethnic groups. Hispanic rapper **Kid Frost**, like N.W.A., used his raps to point out instances of street violence and police brutality, but he did so by using slang common in L.A.'s Chicano community. Examples are songs such as "Homicide," the title cut from his *Hispanic Causing Panic* (1990) album, and "Lowrider (On The Boulevard)" from *Latin Alliance* (1991). Kid Frost's background music also varied from many African American rappers because he used Latin rhythms and samples from Sixties recordings by Santana to accompany his rap vocals. That music, of course, also added support to his ethnic identity.

Rap Combined with Other Styles

West Coast rap has been linked to the gang-related themes of anger and violence, but, just as Manhattan had its hip-hop groups that spoke out for peace and brotherhood, rappers like **Hammer**, from Oakland, California, shared concerns about racism, prejudice, and homelessness in non-violent language with a very soulful funk-styled background sound. His music appealed to large, multiracial audiences. The result was one which critics attacked as banal and "sold out" to commercialism, but which reached out to listeners resistant to hard core rap. Commercial or not, there is a sense of sincerity behind most hip hop and rap music. Perhaps its sincerity and appeal lies in the fact that, like singer/songwriters, whose strength is also their sincerity, rappers usually write their own lyrics.

Summary

Both hip hop and rap are more patter-song types of vocal techniques than specific styles of music. Developed out of the rhythmic vocals that Jamaican disc jockeys spoke over the recordings they played first to live and then to radio audiences, the patter technique became hip hop through the voices of funk disc jockeys. While hip hop maintained the party atmosphere associated with funk music of the late Seventies, rap became its politically minded successor.

Rap vocalists on the East Coast generally spoke out about racism often directed at the African American communities, even by police and other government agencies that are supposed to help them, while rappers on the West Coast spoke out about gangs and street violence. Whatever the message behind the lyrics, hip-hop and rap singers write what they know and the listener can hear a sense of sincerity.

Terms to Remember

- Antecedent and consequent phrases
- Cutting
- Sampling
- Scratching
- Vari-speed control

THE DIRTY SOUTH

from Light, 1999

TALKING ABOUT SOUTHERN HIP HOP IS A PRETTY TRICKY THING. Start with the term itself. Some heads insist on calling it southern rap, a way of acknowledging that southern folks do, well, something—just not hip hop. Southern hip hop, in this view, is a quaint mutation, kind of like American karate, blues-rock, or Newark-style French cuisine.

No one really needs to reiterate the beatdown-inducing potential of that mode of thinking, especially in a region where, as of 1998, hearing something that didn't sound like Master P was reason enough to slap a choke-hold on the DJ. And we don't need to be reminded where the Afro-Atlantic verbal tradition calls when it wants to talk to its mama.

But let's pretend for a second that, say, Luke, Magic Mike, OutKast, Da Brat, Eightball and MJG, Master P, Geto Boys, Scarface, Tela, Goodie MOb, Arrested Development, 95 South, TLC, Timbaland, and Kris Kross never bumped in any Jeeps anywhere, indeed never even existed. We'd still have a hard time de-southernizing hip hop.

Scarface

by Tony Green

Imagine the rise of the low-riding West Coast and the East's glossy R&B reaction without the funk injection of the Sun Belt (or, for that matter, the northeastern school without all of those southern soul-jazz instrumentals). Snoop's Karo Syrup drawl, E-40's game-spittin', and Too Short's lyrical pimpology are, despite their purveyors' geographical location, unmistakably southern, all products of a West Coast scene whose members make no bones about their roots. Ditto for much of the Midwest, where folks like Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and Crucial Conflict are so down-home they could be spokesmen for Bergamont.

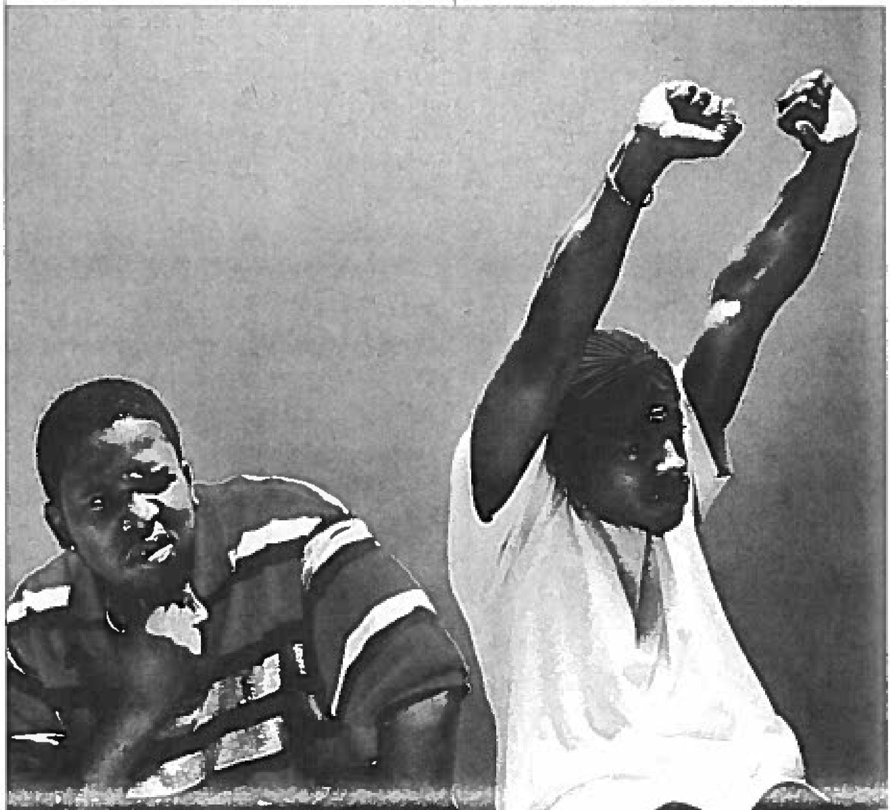
Furthermore, trying to draw an entire region under a single stylistic rubric is a tactical nightmare. Try it: Southern hip hop is—what? Shy-D? Clay D? Willie D? Bass? Bounce? Southern-fried funk? Arrested Development? Jermaine Dupri? Luke?

The South, truth be told, is full of contradictions, conundrums, and tautologies. It's a place where black middle-class aspirations do an uneasy tango around old school racism—where African-Americans seeking refuge from northern urban angst are just as likely to run into whites who are moving or retiring south to get away from them. At once expansive and insular, cosmopolitan and not-around-here reactionary, the South offers infinite interpretations. It stands to reason, then, that southern hip hop would reflect all of that.

You could say, without fear of much contradiction, that southern aesthetics—and by southern, I'm talking about the unreconstructed "urban/rural" flavor of the Deep South—were central to '90s hip hop. Master P's runaway success in 1997–98—platinum and gold successes with Mia X, Mystikal, and TRU, the neo-blaxploitation gem *I'm Bout It*, and the theatrical release of *I Got the Hook-Up*—merely put an exclamation point on a decade in which the most successful acts, more often than not, all looked and sounded like your crazy cousin from down the way, right down to the processes and gold teeth.

Just as African-American artists have sometimes benefited from knowing more about white culture than vice versa, southern hip hoppers have benefited from absorbing the lessons of the North and adding their own flavor—consider Bambaataa-influenced styles like bass and bounce or the Geto Boys' early Run-D.M.C. inflections. At the same time, though, the tell-it-like-it-is appeal of, say, Ghetto Mafia Six has clear precedents in southern blues and soul—the sister-girlisms of Denise LaSalle, the working man appeal of Z.Z. Hill and Clarence Carter, the matter-of-fact degeneracy of Peetie Wheatstraw (whose "Drinking Man's Blues," with its tales of patricide and infant abuse, chillingly mirrors the Geto Boys' graphic lyrical excursions).

The blues comparison also helps explain the sound of southern rap: even when closely allied with northern styles, as with bounce and bass, there is a discernible bacon-grease factor that brands it as distinctly, inescapably southern,



The ATLiens of OutKast (Big Boi and Dre)

like the backbone-sliding polyrhythms of DJ Jubilee's "Jubilee All" or Cheeky Blakk's "Twerk Something."

Instead of the Delta, the modern hip hop/country blues aesthetic traces its influence to Texas, home of James T. Smith's Rap-A-Lot Records. Founded in 1986—the name came from Smith's brother Thelton Polk's DJ handle, Sir Rap-A-Lot—the label made its reputation on its flagship group, the Geto Boys. The Boys had a revolving membership—the diminutive Bushwick Bill was the longest-lasting member from the lineup that debuted on 1988's *Makin' Trouble*. Still, their influence was undeniable. A lot of their appeal was undoubtedly shock value: Four Houstonians who absolutely did not, under any circumstances, even pretend to give a fuck made for great pop-cultural theater. The almost surreal violence and misogyny of tunes like "Mind of a Lunatic" provided plenty of ammunition for the rising chorus of hardcore rap naysayers (including Geffen Records, which severed ties with Rick Rubin's Def American label rather than distribute 1990's *Geto Boys* album).

The anti-Geto chorus quieted, though, with the release of 1991's breakthrough single, "Mind Playing Tricks on Me." Against a dusty R&B loop that stretched out like a long backwoods highway, the twitching sociopath of *Diary of a Madman* gave a harrowing, from-the-inside account of urban paranoia. Even more than its sales success—it went platinum—the single almost singlehandedly expanded the scope of hardcore rap. It also proved that southern artists were capable of producing music with as much thematic breadth as their northern counterparts, without resorting to mere imitation.

"There was a lot of prejudice against southerners at the time," says Smith. "And a lot of people saw what the Geto Boys were doing as letting them know that if they were from the South, it was okay to be themselves. Up until that point, everything that was coming out was sounding like New York, or had to have that flavor. But after 'Mind Playing Tricks,' even the people in New York had to say, 'Damn, this shit is too dope to deny.'" Scarface, the Geto Boys' strongest writer, would extend the "eloquent maniac" concept in his solo projects—most notably 1991's brilliant *Mr. Scarface Is Back*. Unaffected by their status, the Boys would continue to flaunt their colors—during Bushwick Bill's appearance at the 1993 National Association of Black Journalists national convention, his unapologetic defense of his use of the word "bitch" caused a mass walkout by the heavily female audience. The 1996 reunion album *The Resurrection* contained the usual combination of knowingly topical themes and "fuck all y'all" working-class chic.

While the Geto Boys and Scarface helped add artistic legitimacy to southern hip hop's hardcore contingent, some other styles—New Orleans bounce and Miami bass (later, with the addition of Georgians like 12 Gauge, Duice, the A-Town Players, and Tag Team, called merely bass)—are still waiting for it. Pop haute culture has always had a problem with undiluted dance music, from disco to techno. Bass and bounce—their chattering cross-rhythms and thunderous bottom marking them as children of Bambaataa—are not just undiluted dance styles, but undiluted black dance styles. Which meant bass artists like Orlando's Magic Mike and bouncers like DJ Jubilee never got cross-referenced with, say, avant-garde composer Edgard Varèse—such lofty company was reserved for "electronica" artists, many of whom borrowed

Master P merely put an exclamation point on a decade in which the most successful acts, more often than not, all looked and sounded like your crazy cousin from down the way, right down to the processes and gold teeth.

2 Live Crew Trial

by Anthony DeCurtis

To the powers that be they must have looked like sitting ducks: local black rappers on an independent label from a city outside the media glare who made a career out of smut-laden songs like "Me So Horny" and "Dick Almighty." What easier target could there be for anti-pornography zealots? But the 2 Live Crew, led by the willfully determined Luther Campbell, proved far too formidable for those forces of oppression. The group's acquittal of obscenity charges in 1990 stands as a landmark not merely in the annals of hip hop, but in our country's hallowed First Amendment history.

How did it all start? Amid a national environment in which controversial art of all sorts was coming under fire, right-wing groups began circulating transcripts of the lyrics to 2 Live Crew's album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, which had been released on Campbell's Luke Records, based in Miami. Admittedly, it was some raucous stuff—intensely graphic, scatological, and brutal locker-room fantasies set to the booming, bottom-heavy sound that Campbell had dubbed "Ghetto Bass." It was also hilariously funny—a fact that soon got lost in the cultural mayhem.

When Jack Thompson, a lawyer and anti-porn crusader from Miami, saw the lyrics, he sent them to Florida Governor Bob Martinez and to every sheriff in the state. Sheriff Nick Navarro of Broward County, just north of Miami, brought the album to a federal court judge in Fort Lauderdale, who promptly pronounced it obscene—the first time in the history of the United States that a federal court had set down such a ruling about a recording.

The consequences of that decision were immediate. Charles Freeman, a black record store owner in Fort Lauderdale, was arrested for selling *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*—despite the fact that the album bore a prominently displayed parental advisory sticker. Two days later Campbell and Chris Wong Won, another member of 2 Live Crew, were arrested after the group performed an adults-only show at Club Futura in Hollywood, Florida. Campbell, Wong Won, and a third member of the group, Mark Ross, eventually went to trial on obscenity charges.

Predictably, the tenor of the trial—and the heated debate surrounding it—veered from profound to absurdly comic. Given the foul-mouthed humor of Andrew Dice Clay, many critics charged, why was 2 Live Crew singled out? The answer, they felt, could only be racism. Campbell, meanwhile, launched a media offensive in which he defined himself as a hardworking, entrepreneurial businessman, the very model of the American Dream no longer deferred.

2 Live 2 Strong: Luke, Fresh Kid Ice, Brother Marquis, Mr. Mixx

"I know that in the world today there are a lot of people who just don't want to see a young black man succeed," Campbell, who was 29 at the time, told *USA Today*. "So I expected roadblocks. But this is hard."

Henry Louis Gates Jr., who was then a professor of English at Duke University, testified on the Crew's behalf and wrote a piece for the *New York Times* arguing that the group is "engaged in sexual carnivalesque" and that its "off-color nursery rhymes are part of a venerable Western tradition." In a gesture of solidarity, the white New York band Too Much Joy played rock versions of 2 Live Crew songs at Club Futura—and also got arrested.

In the end, after an extremely brief deliberation, the jury acquitted 2 Live Crew on all charges. Soon after, the obscenity ruling against *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* was reversed on appeal, and charges against Charles Freeman were dropped. Even Too Much Joy walked.

But the 2 Live Crew case was only the most prominent and sustained assault on freedom of expression in rap music—similar attacks preceded and followed it, and no doubt the attacks will continue. The case represents a moment of great victory, a gleeful, unmitigated triumph. But it should not be forgotten that it was a victory that occurred at the last line of defense—the courtroom. And it ended a battle, not the war.

liberally from hip hop. While bounce has remained a largely Crescent City phenomenon, its polyrhythmic influence the secret weapon in many of No Limit's productions, bass has gained wider notice, often, unfortunately, by linking itself with controversy.

Luther Campbell, former leader of 2 Live Crew, label head, and rising skin-industry baron, realized that flesh made controversy. Eventually, he became controversy made flesh. Campbell, a former Miami gang member turned DJ and rapper, was part of bass's first wave, along with Magic Mike and Shy-D sciousness big-time until 1990. That was the year morality crusader Jack Thompson made 2 Live and their epochally raunchy, double-platinum *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* the center of an obscenity furor, urging government officials (including then Dade County state attorney Janet Reno) to ban it from the shelves. Campbell retaliated brilliantly, casting himself as a protector of First Amendment rights, earning such unlikely allies as Bruce Springsteen (who supported 2 Live's use of "Born in the USA" for their "Banned in the USA") and cultural scholar/analyst

Luther Campbell realized that flesh made controversy. Eventually, he became controversy made flesh.

(who later sued Campbell into Chapter 11 bankruptcy). Like Too Short, Campbell drew heavily on the ribald tradition of Rudy Ray Moore, Redd Foxx, and Blowfly. But while Short took his cues from the George Clinton handbook, Luke combined his shit-talking with DJ Mr. Mixx's irresistible low-end thunder. The formula took the most visceral aspects of electrofunk, hip hop, disco, and underground black humor and spelled them in big, condom-balloon letters.

While 2 Live Crew established a major southeastern following starting with 1986's . . . *Is What We Are* and the single "Throw the D—," the group didn't hit the pop con- Henry Louis Gates Jr.—and ultimately winning the landmark case.

The sex/shock/sell strategy made Luke a very rich man, and despite the legions of bass artists that deserved just as much attention, the most famous. To those that came after him, however, the tactic was of limited use, a booty-centric dead-end that by the mid-'90s many bass acts were consciously trying to avoid. Which, predictably, left the genre foundering in search of a selling point. Every summer, some car frame–rattling tune blared out of the Southeast—Tag Team's "Whoomp! There It Is," Duice's "Dazzey Duks," Quad City DJs' "C'mon and Ride It (The Train)," 69 Boyz's "Tootsee Roll," Freak Nasty's

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"Da Dip." But no one has been able to capture the national spotlight the way Luke did. Luke came to represent not only bass but hip hop as well—for a while it seemed that everyone with an undergraduate sociology degree was offering up "What does it say about us as a society?" essays on 2 Live Crew.

Sales, it seemed, didn't matter. DJ Magic Mike racked up five gold and one platinum album, yet he remains virtually unknown to the pop music public, even in his native Florida. What bass needed, obviously, was a pop-cultural hook as strong as Luke's peep-show theatrics. Atlanta-style bass artists came up with a workable solution: Rock an R&B tune over a bass beat—a trick that had been part of that city's DJ scene for years. Dana's remake of Shirley Murdock's "As We Lay," the Ghost Town DJs' "My Boo," B-Rock & the Bizz's "My Baby Daddy," and "Shorty Swing My Way" by Mixzo featuring K. P. and Envyi all heralded the arrival of a pop bass nation. But it was still difficult for the music to break out of the summer singles cubbyhole without resorting to strip-club tactics. To quote Atlanta hit machine Jermaine Dupri, "As soon as the weather gets cold and the women put their clothes back on, people ain't with it no more."

As hardcore rap's commercial potency started to slip, pushing the shock envelope became a hit-and-miss strategy too. For the hardcore, the smart thing was to keep your nose clean, drop the headline-grabbing antics, and earn your props the old-fashioned way. New Orleans's Master P, CEO of the phenomenally successful No Limit Records, epitomized this approach. While everyone was worrying about Snoop's murder trial, or what Tupac was saying about Biggie, P (Percy Miller) wisely stayed below the scandal radar, cultivating a loyal fan base, selling records at 100,000 to 200,000 a pop, and working his ass off. Disdaining the on-wax dis-fest that erupted in 1995–96 (rappers that talk about other rappers on records are "bitch-ass niggas," he said), and operating almost completely independently, P became the most respected man in hip hop, the only artist able to move hardcore rap in early '90s quantities.

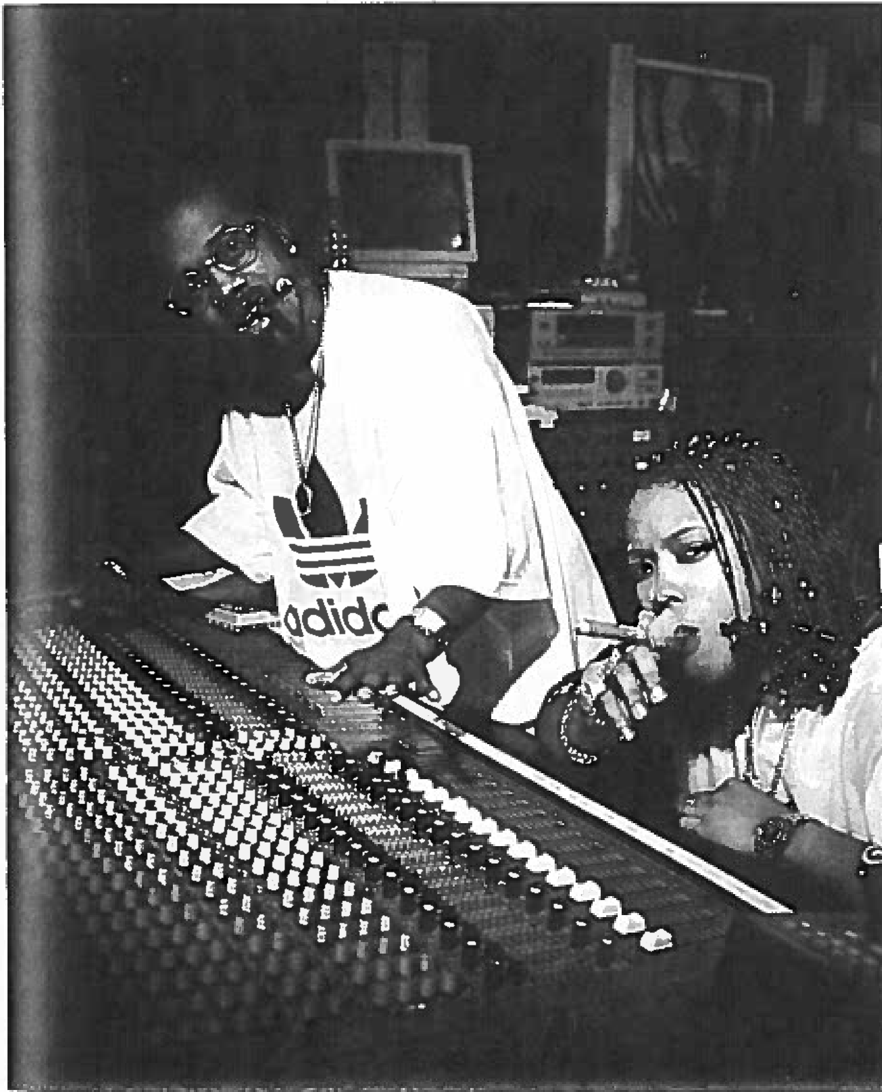
To quote Jermaine Dupri on bass music, "As soon as the weather gets cold and the women put their clothes back on, people ain't with it no more."

Though P made much of his street-hustler background, his success owed more to his college-earned business training than anything else. You could scoff at the gaucheness of P's tactics—a 900-number that allowed CD buyers to "talk live to fine-ass No Limit bitches." You could even scoff at his music; one rival crew called him the "Weird Al Yankovic of hip hop" due to his acts' penchant for remakes (though his Beats by the Pound production crew eventually proved to be one of the most reliable on the hip hop scene). And his trademark "Uhhhhh" spawned streams of Ex-Lax jokes. Still, you had to give it up to any hardcore artist who could, in the wake of the gangsta backlash, go platinum without changing one iota. Or who could use an amazingly low-budget, direct-to-video movie—the semiautobiographical *I'm Bout It*—as a springboard to mainstream cinema—1998's *I Got the Hook-Up*.

In a hip hop world where the flossin' playa in the video was often, in reality, a live-at-home Winn-Dixie stockboy, the fact that P kept the lion's share of his profits counted for more than any amount of pseudo–Nat Turner posturing. In 1997, No Limit turned out four platinum and two gold albums, its street-nigro aesthetic and assembly line production rate pumping steroids into rap's "pure entertainment" doppelganger, making No Limit the best example of, for want of a better term, "urban heavy metal": Mystikal, Young Bleed, C-Murder, Fiend, Soulja Slim, Silkk the Shocker, Skull Duggrey, a relocated Snoop Doggy Dogg. P and No Limit were everywhere, giving the masses what they wanted in over-the-top doses.

Tony Draper, CEO of Houston-based Suave House Records, is another example of home-fried business acumen. Draper, like P,

knows the value of hard work. A former worker at an Olive Garden restaurant, he founded his label in 1988, unsatisfied with the monetary rewards of his first love, DJing. His promotional sense turned out to be as sharp as his ear; after discovering and losing Big Mike to crosstown rival Rap-A-Lot in 1990, he picked up on his future showcase artists, Eightball and MJG, at a show in Memphis in 1991. Through a combination of talent-spotting savvy and tireless promotional drive—motoring across the South nonstop to promote his artists—he eventually built his label into a powerhouse, with a roster that included Crime Boss, Mr. Mike, and South Circle. Ball and MJG sold more than a million copies between 1993 and 1995 with almost no airplay. By 1997, after selling two million records in two years, the twentyish Draper had enough leverage to dump his distributors, Relativity Records, taking his smooth-rolling funk productions to the bigger boys at Universal.



Jermaine Dupri and Da Brat lay down a smokin' beat.

"If you ain't bumpin' either some Suave House or some No Limit shit in your car," he boasted in late '97, "you ain't with it." P and Draper, along with E-40 and Too Short (whose Atlanta-based Short Records marks him as the latest member of the southern hip hop crew) symbolize the new breed of hip hop radical: smart enough to realize that the only battles worth winning were the ones for a piece of the pie, that the road to true power in the music business starts with, as P said, "I own this here."

In the '90s, the spot serving up that pie had moved south, at least for black folk. Cheaper rents, more relaxed atmosphere, and a cool place to raise your kids, Atlanta is one of the prime destinations for the "reverse migration." And ever since LaFace Records set up shop there—former Klymaxx-er Joyce Irby put the bug in L.A. Reid's ear about the city—Atlanta has blossomed into one of the most diverse hip hop spots on the planet, its roiling scene big enough to accommodate every shade of hip hop.

Atlanta-based Arrested Development seemed briefly poised to take over the world in 1992, when its *3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life Of...* broke through. The group's kicked-back Afrocentrism endeared it to millions of fans, including Spike Lee, who tapped their "Revolution" for inclusion on the *Malcolm X* soundtrack. But perhaps its biggest impact was among casual hip hop fans. Kente-cloth buppies clung to AD; listening to "Tennessee" or "People Everyday" was a way to establish connection with hip hop without seeming politically

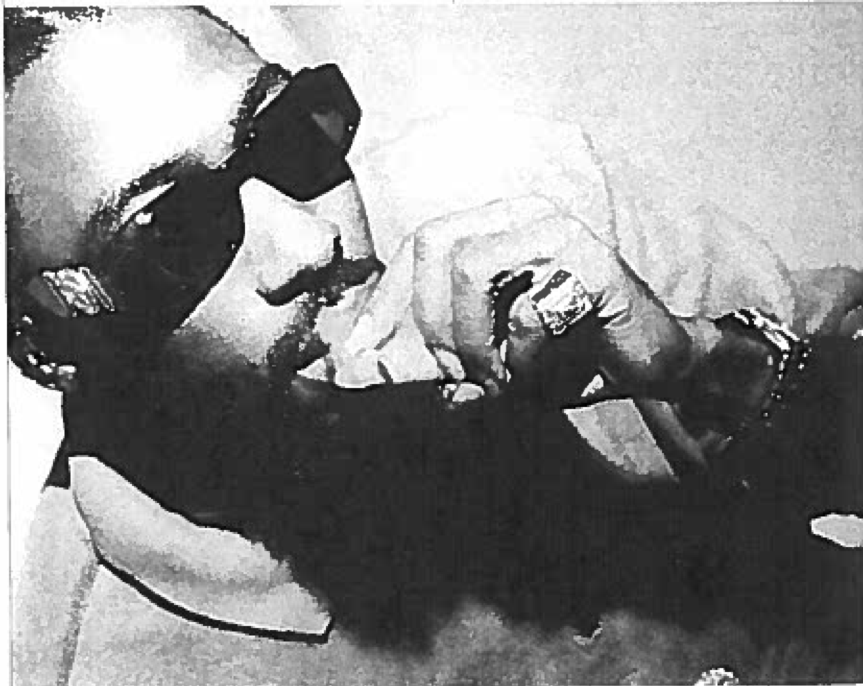
incorrect. And AD's hippyish aura endeared them to members of the rock crowd, who were still figuring out how to embrace rappers who called them names. When AD took over the rap slot on the 1993 Lollapalooza tour, some read it as the final victory for the anti-gangsta movement.

The problem was, gangsta was just feeling its legs, and AD's 1994 follow-up, the jumbled *Zingalamaduni* tanked, failing to make a dent in the bitch-slappin', gat-totin' Death Row–fueled juggernaut. AD leader Speech has soldiered on as a solo artist and promoter; his Vagabond Productions is one of the main hubs of Atlanta's progressive underground scene. Meanwhile, former backup singer Dionne Farris went on to a solo career that, starting with 1994's *Wild Seed–Wild Flower,* looks to outshine that of her former group.

Then there's the caramel-dipped pop of Atlanta's Jermaine Dupri. A former backup dancer for Whodini, Dupri was born into the music business (his musician father, Michael Mauldin, managed Arrested Development and later became the president of Columbia Records' Black Music Division). Dupri did his first stint behind the boards when he was 14, with Silk Tymes Leather's *It Aint Where Ya From, It's Where Ya At.* By age 25, he was one of the hottest producers in pop, and CEO of the So So Def label. He's known primarily as a purveyor of pure hip hop feelgoodism—his work on Kris Kross's mega-smash "Jump" recast hip hop as one of Willy Wonka's fizzy lifting drinks, providing a rap entry point for casual listeners put off by Luke's leer and N.W.A's "black menace" posturing; "Miggidy miggidy mack" may be the most wholesome declaration of pimphood ever.

Dupri built a list of credits too long to name (okay, I'll try: Mariah Carey, Biggie, MC Lyte, Xscape, TLC, Usher). His ability to assimilate and redirect existing styles—Da Brat's Dre-influenced G-funk, the So So Def Bass Allstars—has proved both a bane and a boon. A Dupri track can be pretty hard to spot, which keeps him from being associated with a particular sound or movement. So despite his legitimate claim to Puffy's pop-rap throne, Dupri's self-admitted non-style has often kept his name out of the limelight—a situation he rectified somewhat with his star-studded 1998 album *Life in 1472.*

Dallas Austin, on the other hand, comes across as Dupri's eclectic stepbrother. Like Dupri, Austin's family was in the biz his father played guitar for Jame Brown, running a club in Colum bus, Georgia, with Austin's mom After working with singing grou Troop, Austin hit paydirt wit Another Bad Creation, and the mega-paydirt with Boyz II Men' *Cooleyhighharmony* in 1993, playin drums, percussion, and pian while also arranging and produc ing. Though Austin has earne much of his reputation with radi ready pop—doing production fo TLC and the *Poetic Justice* an *Boomerang* soundtracks, as well a work with Madonna, Micha Jackson, and Paula Abdul—he h made as much noise with h outside-the-boundaries work wit the Highland Place Mobsters, Fis bone, and soul siren Joi. But th idea of black men and women th aren't sappy love-men or mindle tarts remains radical. Someone li Joi, with her overwhelming boh



MJG, big ballin' and shot callin'

sensuality and unconventional musical tastes—Betty Davis rather than Whitney Houston—remains a bit too scary for mass consumption. Though Austin has taken the hip hop and pop establishments to task for their narrow-mindedness, his vision of an Afrocentric Haight-Ashbury remains unfulfilled.

The sound of the Organized Noize production team comes closest to summing up Atlanta's distinctive flavor. Organized's collard greens space funk is rough enough for the gold teeth soul of OutKast, deep enough for Goodie MOb's socially conscious ponderings, and smooth enough for the glossy pop of TLC ("Waterfalls") or En Vogue ("Don't Let Go"). Their work—on Society of Soul's shamefully slept-on *Brainchild,* for example—is perhaps the most convincing, fully internalized update of the P-Funk aesthetic, a fat ham hock in a bowl of digital cornflakes. Their influence shows up even when they aren't working the boards: OutKast handled the lion's share of the production on their 1998 high-water mark *Aquemini,* creating a work that's as brilliant for its dope textures as it is for its lyrical content.

If the Geto Boys are southern hip hop's wild men, then Goodie MOb are its streetcorner idealists with "one foot in, one foot out of the ghetto" as they say on their sophomore album, *Still Standing.* Goodie gives the hip hop country blues a Memphis-style makeover, offering an alternative to the southern "reality" cul-de-sac by looking beyond "what is" to what could and/or should be, musing on subjects like black self-love and the myth of the "New South" (a.k.a. the "Dirty South"). Goodie's spirituality rings truer than the typical hardcore "playa confessional," where your dogg begs divine compassion after 12 tracks of mayhem ("Lord, forgive me for pimpin' that ho on the track before / I'm caught up in this dope game, Lord"). And their tales from the 'hood rise above the opaque fatalism of much of southern hardcore, where authenticity (actual or affected) too often substitutes for self-reflection and thematic range.

Sounds, however, count as much as words in hip hop—sometimes even more, though it may seem heretical to some. Hip hop's most radical statements—from the Bomb Squad to RZA—have often been framed in sound. Virginia's Timbaland, for example, one of the most visible exponents of the mid-Atlantic crew (which includes underground artists like the Unspoken Heard), is best understood in sonic context. His fractured rhythms bridged stateside hip hop and the frenetic abstractions of the Brit-born drum 'n' bass sound (which itself has roots in hip hop). More than almost any other hip hopper, Timbaland—who has worked with Missy Elliott and Aaliyah—is all sound. *Welcome to Our World* (1997), with its vacuum-packed funk, has all the appeal of a collegiate beach bash—Freaknik without the bullshit. You aren't going to learn the secrets of the pyramids from Tim or his helium-voiced sidekick Magoo, but you sure are gonna have fun.

"Things are more creative in the South," Timbaland says. "It's like southern cooking. You know how your grandmother will go to the kitchen and come up with some biscuits that you would never get from a store anywhere? Southern hip hop is like that."

discography

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT:

3 Years, 5 Months & 2 Days in the Life of . . . (Chrysalis, 1992). *Unplugged* (Chrysalis, 1993). *Zingalamaduni* (Chrysalis, 1994).

A-TOWN PLAYERS:

Playin' for Keeps (Life, 1993). *True Players: Vol. I* (Premeditated, 1995). *We Keep It Crunk For You* (Wrap, 1998).

BIG MIKE:

Somethin' Serious (Rap-A-Lot, 1994). *Still Serious* (Noo Trybe/Virgin, 1997).

B ROCK AND THE BIZ:

Ebonics (LaFace/Arista, 1998).

BUSHWICK BILL:

Little Big Man (Rap-A-Lot, 1992). *Phantom of the Rapra* (Noo Trybe/Rap-A-Lot, 1995).

CHEEKY BLAKK:

Let Me Get That Outcha (Tombstone, 1996). *Whores Pimps Niggaz Vol. 2* (Total Respect, 1998).

CLAY D:

We're Goin' Off (Convertible, 1992). *Out of the Can* (Convertible, 1994).

CRIME BOSS:

All In The Game (Suave House, 1995). *Conflicts and Confusion* (Suave House/Relativity, 1997). *Still At Large* (Suave House/Relativity, 1998).

WILLIE D:

Controversy (Rap-A-Lot, 1989). *I'm*

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Going Out Like a Soldier (Rap-A-Lot, 1992). *Trouble Man* (Wize Up/Wrap, 1993). *Play Wicha Mama* (Wize Up/Wrap, 1994).

DJ MAGIC MIKE:

And the Royal Posse (Cheetah, 1989). *Bass Is the Name of the Game* (Cheetah, 1990). *Ain't No Doubt About It* (Cheetah, 1991). *20 Degrees Below Zero* (Cheetah, 1992). *This Is How It Should Be Done* (Cheetah, 1993). *The King of Bass: Greatest Hits Volume I* (Cheetah, 1993). *Bass: The Final Frontier* (Cheetah, 1994). *Represent* (Cheetah, 1994). *Bass Bowl* (Magic, 1995). *DJ Magic Mike* (Magic, 1995). *Outer Limits of Audio Fidelity* (Represent, 1995). *Don't Talk Just Listen* (Cheetah, 1996). *Foundations of Bass Vol. 1* (Cheetah, 1997). *House of Magic* (Cheetah, 1998).

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DUICE:

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EIGHTBALL AND MJG:

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5TH WARD BOYZ:

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Rapping, Snapping, and Battling

"If it's one thing black folks in the ghetto know how to do, it's talk shit. Been talking shit, singing shit, chanting shit, rhyming shit, and mumbling shit since day one."

—Grandmaster Flash

IN THE SUMMER of 1974, Grandmaster Flash was still plain Joseph Saddler, a sixteen-year-old trying to fit in with the cool kids in his neighborhood by mastering the new B-boy styles. He told a local dance crew he could do a back flip, so they let him tag along as they went out in search of competition. "We made it as far as Third Avenue," he recalled, "where we found another crew, four deep, just like us. When Melvin said one of the other dude's mamas danced like a silverback gorilla, it was on."[1]

In those days both the insult and the dancing were street culture, learned from friends and siblings rather than from movies, television, or the internet. Not that media was irrelevant, but most of its images came from elsewhere: Afrika Bambaataa named his Zulu Nation after a cinematic epic starring Michael Caine; the B-boys picked up some of their freshest moves from Bruce Lee movies; and even films like *Shaft* and *Superfly* reflected Hollywood stereotypes more than neighborhood experiences. Over the next decades this would change in ways that were unimaginable to black teenagers in the mid-1970s, or to anyone else. Hip-hop was always far more than a music, and by now the local culture of Flash and his peers has influenced everything from high-end

marketing trends to the street styles of Dakar and Tokyo, and been made a standard-bearer for social agendas from Afrocentric separatism to postnational multiculturalism. The dissemination and commercialization of rap, turntablism, sampling, break dancing, graffiti, and their associated clothing, slang, and body language linked young people around the globe in an ongoing feedback loop with African American street culture, and by the dawn of the twenty-first century there was no way to separate what was happening on sidewalks and at parties from what was happening on records, video, and home computers.

Like any revolution, this shift brought both gains and losses. The censorship I have bemoaned throughout this book pretty much ceased to be an issue in popular culture, but with its disappearance local and regional customs faced a wave of commercial competition. Censorship, like segregation, never accomplishes its intended goals, but both can act as buffers between disrespected cultures and the mainstream. When the more obvious forms of legal segregation were overthrown by the civil rights movement, it was good for a lot of African Americans but bad for inner city black neighborhoods, which saw a mass exodus of all but their poorest residents. And as barriers against "obscene" speech disappeared or ceased to be relevant, that opened new paths for artists and entertainers, but also meant that traditions that had survived as living, oral culture could be frozen and disseminated as uniform commercial products.

The dozens had continued to surface occasionally on recordings through the soul and disco eras. In 1966 the saxophonist Jimmy Castor scored an Afro-Latin soul hit with "Hey, Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You," and followed with "Say, Leroy (The Creature from the Black Lagoon is Your Father)" and 1977's "Return of Leroy," with its perky "Your mama!" chorus. Such records always fed back into oral tradition—when Roger Abrahams asked Kid Mike about dozens dueling in the late 1950s, the young Philadelphian recited a "typical" street dialogue based on Bo Diddley's "Say Man"; when Thomas Kochman was studying Chicago teenagers in the late 1960s, one sparked a dozens duel by greeting a kid named Leroy with the title line of Castor's hit; and when David Cohen asked a group of New Jersey reform school inmates in 1980 if they knew "The Signifying Monkey," they responded with enthusiastic references to Rudy Ray Moore.[2] But the tradition remained overwhelmingly a street and schoolyard thing.

The dozens could potentially have inspired a popular or commercial performance art long before hip-hop. Physical street fighting had spawned a theatrical equivalent in boxing, which provided hopes of immediate profits and historical immortality to neighborhood kids with fast hands. In a lot of neighborhoods a fast mouth was equally useful, and when a public forum finally appeared for verbal battlers, many made the analogy: Jay-Z wrote, "I've read articles where people compare rap to other genres of music, like jazz or rock 'n' roll. But it's really most like a sport. Boxing to be exact. The stamina, the one-man army, the combat aspect of it, the ring, the stage . . ."[3] But until the rap era there was no formal space for those duels, so dozens champions took their earnings in the ephemeral coin of street reputation and their creations were forgotten or entered the anonymous oral tradition.

That situation changed in 1979 with "Rapper's Delight." The record was not exactly a dozens match, or even a prime example of the rhythmic verbal dueling that was catching on at New York dance parties. Like the first wave of jazz records, it was a studied commercial attempt to capture a vital vernacular style, and lacked the tightrope-walking thrill of an improvisational vocal jam. Nonetheless, it showcased the basic elements of party rapping, from the slick rhyming and nonsense syllables of hipster radio deejays like Frankie Crocker (who was name-checked in the lyric) and Jocko Henderson (who immediately responded with a single called "Rhythm Talk") to hyperbolic street boasts and sexual preening (a rhyme recalled by Rap Brown in 1969, "I'm hemp the demp, the women's pimp / Women fight for my delight" appears virtually unchanged),[4] and exhortations to "throw your hands in the air" and "dance to the beat." When it hit the radio, millions of kids across the United States learned how a skilled talker could "rock a vicious rhyme" into "a devastating masterpiece."[5]

The twelve-inch rap singles that flooded record bins over the next few years continued to observe radio airplay guidelines, but words like "fuck," "shit," and "nigga" can be heard on tapes of early hip-hop shows, and it is a safe bet that when MCs battled for microphone primacy at late-night parties some of them were rapping dozens rhymes.[6] At first no one imagined there could be a mainstream audience for the rougher styles, but in the mid-1980s Run-D.M.C.'s success inspired a lot of underground heroes to go for a wider market. Schoolly D's self-produced debut from 1986 has been hailed as the first landmark of what would come to be known as gangsta rap, and it found him responding to someone calling him a "motherfucker" with the offhand reply "I guess it's all right man, I don't care / But I might scare your mama out her underwear."[7] Boogie Down Productions' *Criminal Minded* took the gangsta approach to the top of the charts a year later, and included a tribute to the sexual exploits of producer Scott La Rock

that warned, "Grab your girl and run for protection / Your mama too, 'cause I'd like to mention / Scott La Rock had 'em all."[8] And a year after that, N.W.A. put the hardcore West Coast style on the map, with Eazy-E announcing, "Straight outta Compton / Is a brother that'll smother your mother / And make your sister think I love her."[9]

Some critics dismissed gangsta lyrics as violent adolescent filth, while others echoed Chuck D's assertion that they were "black America's CNN." There was plenty of evidence to back up either position. When Oakland's Too Short announced a new age of explicit language with 1988's "Cusswords," he interrupted a litany of diatribes about "bitches" and "ho's" to call out Ronald Reagan for running a cocaine empire, and continued in classic dozens style by claiming to have gotten down with the president's wife: "Like one night she came to my house and gave me a blow job / She licked my dick up and down, like it was corn on the cob."[10]

The mix of adolescent fantasy, gritty urban storytelling, and bursts of political outrage took the language of rap to a new level. But the group that prompted the legal test case for that language was not a gang of hardcore street prophets but Florida's 2 Live Crew, whose style came straight out of the southern frat party playbook of Doug Clark and His Hot Nuts. Rap scholar Tricia Rose referred to them as "a locker room with a beat," and the cover of their 1987 *Move Somthin'* showed the quartet ogling the crotch of a big-butted model while reclining in a bubbling Jacuzzi, clad in T-shirts and baseball caps. Its tracks included cheerleader-style call-and-response party chants: "What you like, fellas?—Head, booty, and cock!" (Note the southern use of "cock" for vulva.) "What your mama like?—Head, sex, and welfare checks!"[11] Florida authorities responded by declaring the Crew obscene, arresting a clerk who sold one of their discs to a fourteen-year-old girl, and turning them into a First Amendment cause célèbre. The rappers went with the flow, titling their 1989 album *Nasty as They Wanna Be* and teasing the guardians of innocence by including a dozens-style "nursery rhyme":

> My mama and your mama was talking a little shit
> My mama called your mama a bull-dyking-ass bitch
> I know your sister, and the bitch ain't shit
> She slagged me and all the boys, and even sucked our dicks.[12]

It was not innovative poetry—even one of the Crew's defenders characterized leader Luther Campbell as "simply an ignorant motherfucker whose foul mouth has gotten him rich and famous"[13]—but their success was instrumental in shifting the balance of power in rap, turning the focus south and alerting record companies to the sales potential of nasty language. Campbell had a clear concept of the group's appeal, saying that he and DJ Mr. Mixx "both had a thing for comedians like Redd Foxx and Rudy Ray Moore. In order to be different, we couldn't be coming like Run-D.M.C. and all them New York rappers, so we did the adult comedy thing."[14] Though the comic aspect of rap is often underplayed, Moore was a potent influence across the country. Ice-T, the original West Coast gangsta, cited him as a model, and New York's Big Daddy Kane recorded a duet battle, "Big Daddy vs. Dolemite."

As the standard rap format expanded from singles to albums, comedy skits were a logical way to fill out a short disc. In 1988, when N.W.A.'s Compton compatriot King Tee heralded LA's sonic aesthetic with a car-oriented, low-end anthem, "Bass," the accompanying album included a sketch right out of Moore's playbook. Introduced as a "bag-off seminar," it featured a bunch of guys trading dozens lines: "Your mama got so much hair under her arms, look like she got Buckwheat in a headlock." "Your mother's so old, she dream in reruns." "Nigger, your mother's so tall, she hit her head on Slauson and fall on Florence." "Your mama wear Lysol for perfume." "Your mother so fat, she roll over a dollar and make four quarters."[15]

Tee's skit provides a neat link between the dozens and rap, but also complicates the story. Much as I would like to draw a straight line from the old street rhymes to gangsta verses, Tee's mother insults were all unrhymed one-liners and that seems to have been the norm for the quarter century before rap hit, at least in urban areas. Few rappers made any reference to the classic insult couplets, and when the first *Snaps* book appeared in 1994 it included favorite mother-oriented one-liners from Ice-T, Big Daddy Kane, and Biz Markie, but the only rhyming contribution was from old-timer Johnny Otis: "I fucked your momma in a barrel of flour, and the baby shit pancakes for a solid hour."[16]

The dozens' strongest influence on rap may be not as a lyrical style but as a model of verbal combat. In 1990 Ice Cube left N.W.A., and his erstwhile crewmates were soon cutting skits like "Message to B. A." (Benedict Arnold), in which a young lady's voice comes over the phone: "Just calling in to say, 'cause Ice Cube is sucking so much New York dick could he come and eat some of this Chicago pussy?" After which a low male voice chimes in: "Yeah, nigger, when we see your ass we're gonna cut your hair off and fuck you with a broomstick." Cube responded with "No Vaseline," in which he accused N.W.A. of having

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sex with each other and their white, Jewish manager and threatened to lynch them. In an interview supporting that record's 1991 release, Cube placed this verbal feuding in a traditional context:

> You think I'm going to go get Eazy-E and hang him from a tree and burn him? All I have to live for and to go for? You think when they catch me they going to fuck me with a broomstick? Those are dozens, man. You can go back farther, you can go back to '81 and '82 to rap music when "Roxanne" came out and then "Roxanne's Revenge" and then LL [Cool J] versus Kool Moe D, and boom, boom, boom. It's a part of the music. Everybody plays the dozens.[17]

Styles had changed, but many rappers had a keen sense of cultural history, and a few even recalled traditional rhymes. When Cube went east to record his solo debut, Flavor Flav of Public Enemy made a guest appearance in which he rang the changes on the old "I fucked your mother on a red-hot heater / Missed that pussy and burned my peter" pattern, though phrased impersonally:

> I fucked that lady in the bed,
> I missed that pussy and I bust the spread. . . .
> I tried it again in a field of grass,
> I missed that pussy and I bust my ass.[18]

His final rhyme brought a classic dozens series up to date: Kids in the 1940s and 1950s had recited: "I fucked your mother between two cans, / Up jumped a baby and hollered, 'Superman,'" and "I fucked your mother from house to house, / Out came a baby named Minnie Mouse."[19] Flav's baby name-checked the new generation, "I fucked this lady in the tree, / The baby came out, say, 'Run-D.M.C.'"

Such direct adaptations of dozens verses were rare in mainstream hip-hop, though in 1994 the Wu Tang Clan's Method Man went back to the most familiar rhyme of all, updating the lines that had inspired Jelly Roll Morton, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston:

> Yo' mama don't wear no drawers,
> I saw her when she took them off,
> Standing on the welfare line, eating swine,
> Trying to look fine with her stank behind.[20]

In general MCs prefer not to rap obviously old-fashioned material, so when they revisit older traditions they try to create distinctive hybrids. In 1992 the Pharcyde recast Los Angeles as a theater of the absurd on their debut album *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*, and its first single was a three-and-a-half-minute track titled "Ya Mama." In an inside joke for crate diggers, the backing beat sampled an organ riff from Al Kooper's *Super Session* instrumental version of "Season of the Witch," and the lyric mixed surrealist one-liners like "Ya mama's got a glass eye with a fish in it" and "Ya mama got snakeskin teeth" with rhymed mother raps:

> "Ya mom is so fat . . ."
> "How fat is she?"
> "We got up on her back to get some burgers from Wendy's, and her skates went flat. . . . We drove her to the drive-in and she didn't have to pay, because we dressed her up to look just like a Chevrolet."[21]

Arriving seven months after the Rodney King riots, as Ice-T was being forced to pull "Cop Killer" from his latest album and West Coast rap was under fire as never before, the Pharcyde's record provided a counterpart to the gangsta style that was simultaneously outrageous and broadcast-friendly. As one of the quartet later explained, "My favorite things on that track were what we *didn't* use. If we said shit like, 'Ya mama smell like two skunks fucking in an onion patch,' it wouldn't have worked too well on the radio."[22] But the album also had some more serious messages. "It's Jiggaboo Time" was an ironic take on the commercialization of the urban gangsta image, with a white-sounding video producer telling the group, "OK, could you bug your eyes out just a little bit . . . cool . . . I mean, you know, real ghetto."

While gangsta rap's most visible critics were conservative law-and-order types and Tipper Gore's antiobscenity crew, a lot of black activists and hip-hop fans were troubled by the contradictions and cultural disconnects of gangsta marketing. The dozens, rapping, and gang-banging were all genuine aspects of black street culture, but that did not mean they were all worth celebrating, or that it was healthy for the black community to be portrayed as a world of colorful thugs—especially to audiences whose closest contact with black neighborhoods was on the screens of televisions, home computers, and suburban multiplexes. Commentators who dismissed gangsta rap as poverty porn were oversimplifying, but they were not entirely wrong. Urban MCs were angry entertainers, expressing frustrations and perceptions shared by a wide range of black youth while simultaneously weaving gaudy adolescent fantasies, and some of their fans undoubtedly failed to distinguish fact from fiction.

N.W.A.'s success proved that ferocious ghetto posing could sell millions of records, and soon a crew from Texas took that concept a

step further and joined their Florida and Los Angeles counterparts in spurring a major shift in hip-hop geography. New York had been the unchallenged capital of rap for more than a decade, but by the 1990s many of the most influential artists were coming from other parts of the country—specifically from areas that had once been centers for blues. Los Angeles was followed by Houston, Atlanta, New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, and Chicago. Like earlier "down home" styles, southern rap was often raw, violent, and pointedly unsophisticated. The breakout act was Houston's Geto Boys, who expressed their personal goals with odes to black capitalism and economic self-sufficiency, but reached a national audience by taking the gangsta approach to cartoonish extremes. Led by rapper/writer Willie D, they supercharged N.W.A.'s stories of urban violence with graphic images from slasher, horror, and porn movies. Calculated to excite, amuse, and offend, their lyrics were the dozens writ large. "Gangster of Love," a compendium of misogynistic fantasies, imagined breaking a "bitch's" heart, cheating on her, leaving her crying, and included the thought, "They have their mothers to call—but if you fucked one mom, you've fucked them all. / And I really don't give a fuck, 'cause if your mom offers me the pussy, she's stuck."[23]

As pioneering emissaries of what would become known as "the dirty South," the Geto Boys provoked anger and contempt not only from the usual anti-rap factions but from a lot of solid hip-hop heads. Willie D's response was typical: "I really didn't give a fuck. I didn't feel like anyone respected us anyway, so I was trying to piss them off."[24] What better way to do that than by playing the dozens? In 1994, with Ice Cube as guest, he confronted East Coasters who dissed the southern sound with the title song of his third solo album, *Play Witcha Mama*: "I'll go to New York and kick they ass back to Texas . . . I'm more dangerous than Jeffrey Dahmer / You wanna play with somebody, play witcha mama." For lagniappe, the disc included a whacked-out rap that took the traditional jokes to their logical conclusion:

> Your old man ain't hitting it right.
> That bitch needs some young pipe
> And I'm the motherfucking plumber.
> I wanna fuck your mama.[25]

The gangsta and dirty South trends made themes and language that had previously been considered dangerously edgy seem relatively safe. The world did not change overnight, and street language first reached prime time television through a compromise in which the gangsters

were Italian. But if it took Tony Soprano to actually say "fuck" in a hit show, rap-influenced comedy had already received a successful airing in the early 1990s with *In Living Color*. There were other shows that could be mentioned in this context—*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* is an obvious example—as well as a wave of African American stand-up comedians and movie stars. Some were more adventurous than others, but all entered the mainstream in part through the opening blasted by hip-hop, and hip-hop in turn reached much of white America through the softening effect of Will Smith, Chris Rock, and the Wayans family. Though it quickly reined in the edgiest aspects of its satire, *In Living Color* brought an unprecedented range of African American in-group joking to television, and a half dozen segments from its third season reframed shows like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* as "The Dirty Dozens Game Show" and "Wheel of Dozens," "where talking trash can win you cash." The recurring winner was Jamie Fox, playing a bicycle messenger named T-Dog Jenkins who responded to prompt categories like "Your Mama's So Fat . . ." with answers like ". . . they had to baptize her at Sea World."

These skits satirized the way African American humor and anger were routinely distorted for mass consumption, repackaging the give-and-take of the street corner as a formulaic game show with absurdly stereotyped contestants taking cues from an unctuous white host spouting condescending Ebonic catchphrases. But satire is a tricky business. Part of the artistry behind African American racial signifying is that it provides a shared joke for black listeners at the expense of oblivious white targets, but on network television the white targets are the majority and their tastes define the medium. Although the Wayanses were mocking the racism and cluelessness with which mainstream producers portrayed African American culture, many viewers—probably a majority—missed the subtleties of the critique and just enjoyed the exaggerated clowning and "yo' mama" jokes.[26] There was bitter irony in the fact that as South Central was burning, African American performers were attracting a broad, racially mixed audience by portraying exaggerated ghetto characters. So although many black actors and comedians hailed *In Living Color* as a breakthrough, harsher critics compared the show to *Amos 'n' Andy*, arguing that "despite any element of resistance it ambiguously may express," the net effect was to usher in a new era of minstrelsy.[27]

To laugh with somebody rather than at them requires empathy and knowledge. Taken out of their neighborhood context, the televised mother insults were just a black variant of the tired jokes Don Rickles

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churned out for Las Vegas lounge crowds, with the significant difference that T-Dog Jenkins did not seem like the smartest person in the room. A glance at YouTube suggests that a lot of white kids took away the lesson that the jokes were funny in a large part because black accents are funny.

Even discounting the stereotyped characters in the dozens skits, one-line insults are no closer to the give-and-take of the street tradition than a single punch is to a boxing match or a single lick to a jam session. They are, however, a good deal easier to package, and for a few years in the mid-1990s proved to be highly profitable. The *Snaps* concept was developed by a trio of show business insiders: James Percelay, a white *Saturday Night Live* producer; Monteria Ivey, the black host of the Uptown Comedy Club; and Stephan Dweck, a black entertainment lawyer—and in case anyone thinks I am inappropriately stressing their race, they called their company Two Bros & a White Guy. Their first book introduced the dozens as "the blues of comedy," and included a foreword by the music producer Quincy Jones; nine pages of quotations about the tradition from comedians, rappers, and celebrities; a historical essay from the psychologist Richard Majors; a how-to section called "Mastering the Art of Playing the Dozens"; and over 450 insults. It was a runaway success, reportedly selling almost 200,000 copies in its first year,[28] and quickly spawned three sequels, a CD, and an HBO series.

Despite occasional academic trappings (*Double Snaps* opened with an essay by Geneva Smitherman, a scholar of African American English), the *Snaps* products were primarily marketed as naughty jokes for kids who liked hip-hop. Their success sparked a fad of schoolyard mother insulting, inspired copycat books in France and Germany, and spawned hit singles in Britain (Daphne and Celeste's goofy "Ooh, Stick You" [Your mama too, and your daddy]) and Australia (Butterfingers' creepily comic "Yo Mama" [is on the top of my 'things to do' list]). It also encouraged scriptwriters to spice up any movie or TV show that featured African Americans with at least a brief "yo' mama" exchange—a *Smart Guy* episode showed two teenagers not only teaching the intellectual title character stock lines but also instructing him to say "yo' mama" rather than "your mother." As always, the commercial manifestations fed back into vernacular culture, and it seems likely that most modern dozens playing draws at least as much on books, movies, television, recordings, and the internet as on any local street tradition.

The flood of commercial and electronic dozens spin-offs presents a challenge to anyone hoping to assess the current state of the art. It is impossible to keep track of all the new permutations of dozens dispersal, much less to figure out how they represent or differ from older traditions. The *Snaps* television show was simply an extension of the books: teams of comedians traded one-line mother insults, most of them so hackneyed that there was a rule against contestants lip-synching their opponents' lines. But a later, unaffiliated film called *Street Snaps* provided a glimpse of contemporary New York dozens styles, drawing its competitors from an open call and matching them one-on-one in a boxing ring. With elimination rounds limited to thirty seconds, there was little space for the kind of relaxed improvisation one might hear on the street, and the finalists were a pair of professional comedians, onetime Apollo Theater MC Terry Hodges and a young up-and-comer named Jonathan Martin. But the interchanges showed a wide variety of verbal battle techniques, and Hodges smoked a youth named V.I.P. in three rounds by demonstrating the imaginative range of a mature street corner master.

Some of Hodges's lines were clearly pretested favorites: "Your mama's pussy so nappy, look like reefer seeds; you can eat the bitch pussy, get high at the same time." But he dominated the match by regularly stepping outside the expected comedic frame. For example, when V.I.P. trotted out an old line—"Your mama's like a shotgun; give her a cock and she'll blow"—Hodges just nodded and replied, "Mm-hmm, whatever," signifying that he had heard it all before, then turned the tables: "I ain't gonna say nothing about your mama, 'cause I like her. We getting ready to put your punk ass out." With one relaxed jibe he shifted the terrain from formulaic joking to a wise old dog schooling an eager puppy.[29]

The most ambitious and influential dozens showcase was MTV's *Yo Momma*, which presented three seasons of open-call competitions in 2006–7 featuring neighborhood "trash talkers" in Los Angeles, New York, and Atlanta facing off under the supervision of host Wilmer Valderrama. The competitors were limited to brief exchanges and at times had to shape their insults around assigned topics, but they displayed a wide variety of styles—some loud and aggressive, some smiling and sly, some mimicking television routines, some improvising imaginative riffs on their opponents' looks and manner, some playing off the crowd reaction, and some clearly out of their league. Most were black men, but women, whites, Latinos, and Asians displayed contrasting approaches and provoked some particularly focused and nasty lines.[30]

Appearing just as YouTube was providing a new forum for amateur video production, *Yo Momma* had an immediate ripple effect. Within a month of the show's first episode, there was a video online of two high

school girls facing off for the honor of their rival powderpuff football teams in front of judges who mimicked Valderrama's standard entrance by driving onto the set in an SUV.[31] Soon such contests were being filmed in schoolyards, parks, and gymnasiums across the United States, as well as in France, where North and West African B-boys staged "Yo Momma" battles (billed as such in English, though the competitors said "*ta mère*") between break dance duels.[32] As with other YouTube phenomena, the spread was rapid and unpredictable: among the first dozens-oriented videos to receive over a million views were an African American teenager battling with himself; a pair of Afro-German brothers trading insults in faintly accented English; a white actor/comedian striking obnoxious gangsta poses; and a white reporter showering black-accented "yo' mama" snaps on Shaquille O'Neill, who graciously kept replying with jibes at a clearly articulated "your mother."[33] Thousands of other kids posted comments on these productions, calling the contestants down or recycling favorite lines from the *Snaps* books, the television shows, or previous posts and videos.

Given this glut of information, we may have a more comprehensive view of current dozens playing than anyone had in the past. But it is also possible that the online videos are deceptive, resembling the TV shows because they are themselves TV, and plenty of kids may still be playing the dozens in more traditional ways. Ali Colleen Neff spent much of the 2000s researching rap in the rural Mississippi Delta, and writes that "the same explicit couplets recorded . . . by Ferris in the 1960s are familiar to . . . young people in the area today." Neff also provides a direct link between the old and new street styles, writing, "Many young rappers in the Delta cite childhood dozens competitions as a training ground for the rap 'battle.'"[34]

Battling has been a central aspect of hip-hop from the beginning, with dancers, DJs, and rappers staging artistic duels and challenging all comers. Such combat was nothing new in African American musical culture—Harlem stride piano reached its pinnacle at rent-party cutting contests, and swing-era promoters regularly staged dance competitions and battles of the bands—but where in previous styles it was accepted and even common, in rap it is fundamental. To this day many fans insist that no one can be a true MC without battle skills, and any history of the genre includes tales of classic match-ups and diss tracks: Roxanne Shante vs. UTFO, Boogie Down Productions vs. Juice Crew, and LL Cool J vs. pretty much everybody.

At the turn of the millennium, the New York rappers Jay-Z and Nas faced off in a famous exchange that the latter referred to as

"hip-hop in its purest form."[35] Primed by surrogates in their respective crews, their rivalry broke into the news when Jay-Z dissed Naz at a live show, Nas responded with a freestyle rap implying Jay was gay, and Jay released a song called "The Takeover" that described Nas as a one-hit has-been. At that point Jay-Z gave an interview saying the feud was "definitely gonna bring out the best of me. . . . It's like playing basketball with a guy. He's gonna put me on top of my game; I hope I do the same for him. I don't want to hurt the guy. It's just verbal sparring. No one is fighting. It's just records."[36]

The interchange got more heated after Nas released "Ether," which started with a shout of "Fuck Jay-Z" and described his opponent as an ugly, desperate cunnilinguist and a homosexual, calling him "Gay-Z" and punning on his Roc-a-Fella record label with the line, "I rock hos, y'all rock fellas."[37] Jay snapped back with "Super Ugly," establishing his heterosexual credentials with the claim that he and the basketball player Allen Iverson had double-timed Nas's "baby mama," Carmen Bryan, in the back of his car: "Came in your Bentley back seat, skeeted in your Jeep, left condoms on your baby seat."[38]

Although the antagonism may have been genuine, the old dozens standards remained in play. Nas suggested that Jay had lost his cool, saying that his own recording was "not emotional," but Jay Z's "was kind of emotional. I can hear it in [his] voice, he was a little angry. I was like, 'Wow, he's really touchy.'"[39] Jay was in a difficult position, because his mother had called to scold him for attacking Nas's lady and child. So he admitted he had been upset and gone too far, but suggested that Nas had flinched first: "There's an imaginary line in the sand, and most people cross it when they are off balance. You don't say things about another guy's genitalia. . . . It's like when you have nothing else to grab on to and you say, 'Fuck you! Your mother!' I take comfort from that."[40]

The history of rap has largely been written in terms of records, so its famous battles tend to be recorded duels between established stars, but those high-profile feuds came out of an older and broader tradition. The earliest MC battles seem to have been similar to the competitions between DJs or dancers: displays of verbal skill and energy, won by whoever was best at rocking a crowd. Then in 1981 Kool Moe D attacked a peppy party MC named Busy Bee Starski by improvising a sequence of brutally direct rhymes that suggested a different kind of duel: "We're gonna get right down to the nitty gritty, I'm gonna tell you little something, why you ain't shit."[41] Tapes of this confrontation were soon being traded across New York,

and freestyle battling became a basic measure of rap skill, not only onstage but in parks and schoolyards. It was by no means the only measure, and many of the most influential MCs have been stronger as writers than as competitive improvisers. But as commercial rap became more distanced from the daily experience of neighborhood kids, battling remained a way to establish street credibility. William Jelani Cobb wrote that "freestyle is to hip hop as street ball is to the NBA," adding that similar value judgments are attached: "Just as asphalt legend has it that many a pro baller got his game dissed and dismissed on the asphalt proving grounds of Harlem's Rucker League, there is no shortage of triple-platinum-level rappers who would get *took* in the freestyle arena."[42]

Like the dozens, freestyle battling can be an acrobatic verbal exchange between friends or an expression of genuine rivalries, disagreements, or hostility. Nor are those lines always clearly drawn—grudge matches can turn into friendly competitions as rappers gain respect for each other's skills, and friendly matches can get tense if the insults start hitting too close to home or someone feels he (or, less frequently, she) is losing face. The sociologist Jooyoung Lee has written about techniques by which street corner rap battlers maintain the framework of play, such as laughing after particularly harsh insults or giving each other handshakes, fist-bumps, or hugs.[43] On the other hand, I have seen a practiced battler storm out of a club when he felt the crowd had not given him his due, and another follow a losing opponent into the street after a particularly lopsided match to privately soothe bruised feelings.

Hip-hop battles tend to be more structured than the old dozens exchanges, but traditional insult play remains a familiar point of reference. Johnny Boston, the champion for several weeks at a club I attended in Dorchester, Massachusetts, explained after his first victory that although he had never battled before, "I used to cap and I know how to freestyle, so I just put those two things together." To indicate that he considered any subject fair game, he added, "I'll talk about a guy's mother, or anything." A Los Angeles rapper named June One invoked the same standard when Lee asked him if any subject was off limits, though he reached the opposite conclusion: "Maaaan, if somebody talk bad about my mama, then it's on some other shit, know what I mean?" But Lee also quoted a rapper named Flawliss sneering at that position: "Hip hop is a competitive sport, na mean? Niggas actin' all sensitive and shit when somebody makes fun of them. SO!? This is battlin'; it ain't like you tryin' to make friends and shit."[44]

Such comments indicate the range of feelings the dozens continues to tap, but like Jay-Z's and Nas's statements they may also be rhetorical gambits. "I'll fight if someone talks about my mother" is no more or less of a boast than "Only a pussy would fight over a battle insult." Battlers' reactions are almost as important as their attacks, and practiced competitors often seem to devote as much care to their listening stance as to their rhyming skills: Some display theatrical disdain, shaking their heads in disgust at an adversary's pitiful sallies. Others laugh appreciatively, demonstrating by their relaxed enjoyment that nothing impressive has been said. In a championship match between two local masters, Johnny Boston cemented his primacy when he ended a viciously specific and accurate freestyle attack by rhyming, "Don't cry, save your fucking tears / We can drink a coupl'a shots and drink some fucking beers," and smilingly embracing his disgruntled rival.[45]

Anyone familiar with rap battles will be struck by the similarities in Boone Hammond's description of the stances, gestures, vocal modulations, and facial expressions of dozens rhymers in St. Louis half a century ago: "He used a wide range of facial gestures and movements of his arms, hands, and legs. . . . Sometimes he screamed and sometimes he talked very softly; sometimes he was laughing as he contributed a verse and at other times he was very serious and composed."[46] But although the connections between rap battling and dozens play are deep, there are also plenty of differences. When freestylers make analogies to other forms of combat they tend to mention boxing, basketball, or Asian martial arts, and the hip hop era has brought changes in body language as well as verbal styles.

Even in terms of verbal ammunition, while attending five months of weekly freestyle battles I encountered barely two mother references: "Your mother shoulda swallowed, you shoulda been a hand job"—which is only tangentially a mother insult—and "I'm just trying to keep my composure before I really start wilding the fuck out. / The most beautifullest thing is your mama and your sister with a big, black dick of mines in their mouth."[47] What I heard in one club in Dorchester may not be typical, but Lee reports that insults to relatives seem to be rare elsewhere as well. He heard traditional sounding and dozens outside the club where he did his research in South Central Los Angeles—"Somebody would say something about somebody's shoes or shirt, and it would just sort of organically evolve into talking about each other's mothers"—but the same people avoided such insults in their freestyle rhymes. He suggests this was an artistic choice: "Anything that was obvious was kind of frowned upon, like talking about if

somebody was fat or skinny, or snapping on his mom."[48] Freestyle battling tends to involve boasting and demonstrations of verbal skill as much as direct insults, and although personalized attacks make a battle more exciting and prove that the interchange is improvised, the most effective jibes focus on specifics rather than formulaic mother abuse.

Although originality is highly valued, rap battlers often do fall back on familiar themes: gangsta toughness or the lack of it, homophobic slurs, and suggestions of what a rapper has done or will do to his opponent's girlfriend. And that list is a reminder that one can trace the influence of the dozens on rap without applauding it. The game was always a forum not only for verbal dexterity and cool but also for male adolescent humor, bullying, and jockeying for attention and status. Any serious writer on rap must at some point confront the fact that women have had a rough time in the genre, and the treatment of female MCs often seems distinctly similar to how girls were treated in previous street duels. Some boys have been unwilling to play the dozens when girls were even listening, and women recalling their prowess at the game often use phrases like, "I was the only girl brave enough to play the dozens with the boys."[49] Neff describes a rapper named Kimyata Dear saying that as a young girl "she had to fight to participate in the game and, perhaps because of her talent, was eventually discouraged by the older boys."[50] One of the problems with staging neighborhood rap shows is how few women tend to show up, either onstage or in the audience, and female rappers often are not accepted as serious battlers—though male hosts sometimes jokingly make them face off against each other for the crowd's entertainment even if they are not known as freestylers.[51]

As in previous eras, what is presented onstage, recorded, observed by researchers, or uploaded to YouTube is only a small sample of what kids are doing with friends and acquaintances in their neighborhoods, and may not be typical. Biz Markie recalled that in the early 1980s he came to the attention of his mentor, Marley Marl, after he "went into this park and started battling everybody and beatboxing, and . . . took everybody out"[52]—but at the time his victory made no impact on pop chroniclers. And park battling is a lot more public than the battles kids carry on in hallways and bedrooms.

As far as I know, no researcher has studied freestyling the way Labov and Kochman studied the dozens, as a normal form of interaction between ordinary teenagers. Plenty of kids freestyle with friends and acquaintances at home, on the street, and at parties, and some of these informal duels may be a lot closer to the dozens than what is

done in clubs. Susan Weinstein, a writing mentor for urban teens, was told about a home battle between two friends that lasted six hours, and quoted a young rapper named Jigs describing something like a dozens-style joking relationship. He explained that you could use nastier lines "the more that you know a person . . . 'cause you need to draw on all that stuff at the moment. One of my friends tried to say something about me, and I know him real well, and I know his girlfriend is white, so I'm like, 'I already know your girl, / You ought to keep her in place. / She used to be black / Until I came on her face.'" Weinstein noted the misogyny of this attack, but also Jigs's explanation: "I only said it because . . . he said something about the girl I was with at the time and I came back at him with that. Me and his girl was cool anyway, and we played like that sometimes, when all of us were together, although we might not play like that with everyone. It was something we was cool with."[53]

Many people would not be cool with that kind of talk even from a close friend, or might argue that no one should be cool with it. But as with friendships forged in trenches and prisons, there is a special intimacy in exchanging insults that otherwise would be unspeakable and saying things that other people find disgusting. Whatever else connects the dozens to rap, both forms have been both loved and hated, and the extent to which some people hate them has in many cases only increased their fans' enjoyment.

For myself, I tend to see the current wave of "yo mama" jokes as a sad decline from the old dozens, and rap as an innovative extension of the tradition. And, having made that distinction, I am tempted to stress the ways in which modern rappers have expanded on the dozens' intricate complexities while dismissing snaps as boring, childish nastiness on the same level as dead-baby jokes. But the truth is that some snaps are funny and plenty of rap is stupid and boring, and the dozens has always been a very mixed bag.

The rough, "unprintable" verses Jelly Roll Morton heard in a Chicago bar in 1908 would now be considered typical of mainstream youth culture. But the rhymes, jokes, and interactions that went along with those verses have also evolved counterparts that remain coded and personal, private languages shared among friends and intimates. Thanks to records, television, and computers we have far more examples of modern African American insult play than were preserved in earlier eras, but that does not mean we are missing less. Kids like Jigs are battling with friends in their bedrooms and inventing new styles every day. Kids like the ones Neff met in the Mississippi Delta are

still dueling with rhymes that are a hundred years old. And both groups are also trading lines learned from television and from the latest rap hits and from movies, and from their peers in the neighborhood, and on the internet, and maybe even from books like this one.

The dozens has been a vital source for commercial styles from ragtime to rap. But it also remains its original, disreputable self, a game kids play to amuse, annoy, entertain, impress, and hurt one another. I am fascinated by it, as many people have been before me, but I will not pretend I have explained or understood it fully or can define its meanings, permutations, or limits. It has been many things to many people, and presumably will be many more, continuing to buzz, bite, float, and sting. So I will end not with a summation but with a story told by the Malian musician Yaya Diallo about a *coredjouga*, a village wise person among the Bamana people.[54] Two children were fighting, and the coredjouga asked them why.

The first child said, "He insulted me."

The coredjouga asked, "Was it a new insult he invented?"

"He insulted my mother," the boy explained.

"Oh, that is an old insult," the coredjouga responded, laughing. "It has never killed anyone here. I would have worried if it were a new insult. That one is nothing to worry about. We have tested all the old insults, and they are harmless."

Notes

Preface and Acknowledgments

1. Alexander Hoffmann, personal communication.

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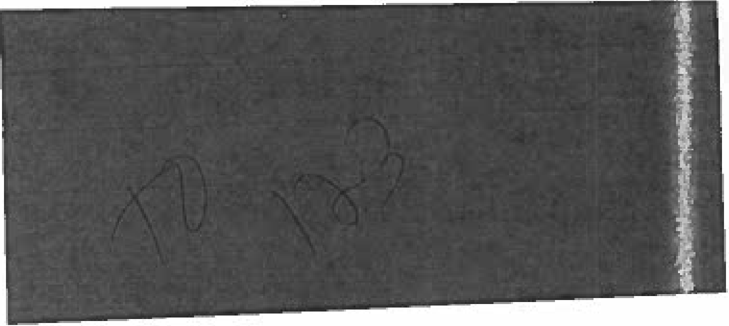
1. Danny Barker, *A Life in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 112.
2. Erskine Caldwell, *God's Little Acre* (New York: Modern Library, 1933), 142.
3. Chris Smith, "Don't Slip Me in the Dozen, Please" (New York: Chris Smith & Morgan, 1921).
4. The first record labels with the plural were Count Basie, "The Dirty Dozens," Decca 2498A, 1938, an instrumental; and Sam Price and His Texas Blusicians, "The Dirty Dozens," Decca 7811, 1940, on which Price sings "dozen" throughout.
5. Dollard and Davis, *Children of Bondage*; George Carlin, *Occupation: Foole*, Little David LP 1005, 1973.
6. William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," in Kochman, *Rappin'*, 274; Foster, *Ribbin'*, 210; Jemie, *Yo' Mama*, 46; Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional*, 1, 32; Percelay et al., *Snaps*.
7. Labov et al., *Study*, 76–77; Thomas Kochman, "Toward an Ethnography of Black American Speech Behavior," in Kochman, *Rappin'*, 258. Similar distinctions have been made elsewhere: Rap Brown distinguished *the dozens*, which involved relatives, from *signifying*, which involved insults to one's opponent. Roger Abrahams wrote that his Philadelphia informants used *sounding* and *woofing* "to refer just to the game of mother-rapping," and what Brown called *signifying* they called *mounting* and "Blacks in many parts of the country last year were calling *charging*, *cracking*, or *harping*." Abrahams, "Black Talking on the Streets," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 256. John Roberts



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GANGSTA CULTURE—SEXISM, MISOGYNY

Who Will Take the Rap?

FOR the past several months, the white mainstream media has been contacting me to hear my views on gangsta rap. Whether major television networks, or small independent radio shows, they seek me out for the black and feminist take on the issue. After I have my say, I am never called back, never invited to do the television shows, the radio spots. I suspect they call me, confident that when we talk they will hear the hardcore "feminist" trash of gangsta rap. When they encounter instead the hardcore feminist critique of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they lose interest.

To the white-dominated mass media, the controversy over gangsta rap makes great spectacle. Besides the exploitation of these issues to attract audiences, a central motivation for highlighting gangsta rap continues to be the sensationalist drama of demonizing black youth culture in general and the contributions of young black men in particular. It's a contemporary remake of *Birth of a Nation*—only this time we are encouraged to believe it is not just vulnerable white womanhood that risks destruction by black hands, but everyone. When I counter this demo-

nization of black males by insisting that gangsta rap does not appear in a cultural vacuum, that it is not a product created in isolation within a segregated black world but is rather expressive of the cultural crossing, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes, and concerns of the white majority, some folks stop listening.

The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As the crudest and most brutal expression of sexism, misogynistic attitudes tend to be portrayed by the dominant culture as always an expression of male deviance. In reality, they are part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order. While patriarchy and sexism continue to be the political and cultural norm in our society, feminist movement has created a climate where crude expressions of male domination are likely to be called into question, especially if they are made by men in power. It is useful to think of misogyny as a field that must be labored in and maintained both to sustain patriarchy but also to nourish an antifeminist backlash. And what better group to labor on this "plantation" than young black men?

To see gangsta rap as a reflection of dominant values in our culture rather than as an aberrant pathological standpoint does not mean that a rigorous feminist critique and interrogation of the sexist and misogyny expressed in this music is not needed. Without a doubt black males, young and old, must be held politically accountable for their sexism. Yet this critique must always be contextualized or we risk making it appear that the problems of misogyny, sexism, and all the behaviors this thinking supports and condones, including rape, male violence against women, is a black male thing. And this is what is happening. Young black males are forced to take the heat for encouraging via their music the hatred of and violence against women that is a central core of patriarchy.

Witness the recent piece by Brent Staples in the *New York Times*, entitled "The Politics of Gangster Rap: A Music Celebrating Murder and Misogyny." Defining the turf, Staples writes, "For those who haven't caught up, gangster rap is that wildly successful music in which all women are 'bitches' and 'whores' and young men kill each other for sport." No mention of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in this piece. Not a word about the cultural context that would need to exist for

young males to be socialized to think differently about gender. No word about feminism. Staples unwittingly assumes that black males are writing their lyrics off in the "jungle," faraway from the impact of mainstream socialization and desire. At no point does he interrogate why it is huge audiences, especially young white male consumers, are so turned on by this music, by the misogyny and sexism, by the brutality. Where is the anger and rage at females expressed in this music coming from, the glorification of all acts of violence? These are the difficult questions that Staples feels no need to answer.

One cannot answer them honestly without placing accountability on larger structures of domination (sexism, racism, class elitism) and the individuals—often white, usually male, but not always—who are hierarchally placed to maintain and perpetuate the values that uphold these exploitative and oppressive systems. That means taking a critical look at the politics of hedonistic consumerism, the values of the men and women who produce gangsta rap. It would mean considering the seduction of young black males who find that they can make more money producing lyrics that promote violence, sexism, misogyny than with any other content. How many disenfranchised black males would not surrender to expressing virulent forms of sexism if they knew the rewards would be unprecedented material power and fame?

More than anything, gangsta rap celebrates the world of the material, the dog-eat-dog world where you do what you gotta do to make it even if it means fucking over folks and taking them out. In this world view killing is necessary for survival. Significantly, the logic here is a crude expression of the logic of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. In his new book *Sexy Dressing Etc.*, privileged white male law professor Duncan Kennedy gives what he calls "a set of general characterizations of U.S. culture," explaining that "it is individual (cowboys), material (gangsters), and philistine." This general description of mainstream culture would not lead us to place gangsta rap on the margins of what this nation is about but at the center. Rather than seeing it as a subversion or disruption of the norm, we would need to see it as an *embodiment* of the norm.

That viewpoint was graphically highlighted in the film *Menace II Society*, a drama not only of young black males killing for sport, but which included scenes where mass audiences voyeuristically watched and in many cases enjoyed the kill. Significantly, at one point in the film we

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see that the young black males have learned their gangsta values from watching movies and television and shows where white male gangsters are center stage. The importance of this scene is how it undermines any notion of "essentialist" blackness that would have viewers believe that the gangsterism these young black males embraced emerged from some unique black cultural experience.

When I interviewed rap artist Ice Cube for *Spin* magazine recently, he talked about the importance of respecting black women, of communication across gender. In our conversation, he spoke against male violence against women, even as he lapsed into a justification for antiwoman lyrics in rap by insisting on the madonna/whore split where some females "carry" themselves in a manner that determines how they will be treated. But when this interview came to press it was sliced to ribbons. Once again it was a mass media set-up. Folks (mostly white and male) had thought that if the hardcore feminist talked with the hardened mack, sparks would fly; there would be a knock-down, drag-out spectacle. When Brother Cube and myself talked to each other with respect about the political, spiritual and emotional self-determination of black people, it did not make good copy. I do not know if his public relations people saw the piece in its entirety and were worried that it would be too soft an image, but clearly folks at the magazine did not get the darky spectacle they were looking for.

After this conversation, and after talking with other rappers and folks who listen to rap, it became clear that while black male sexism is real and a serious problem in our communities, some of the more misogynist stuff in black music was there to stir up controversy, to appeal to audiences. Nowhere is this more evident than in the image used with Snoop Doggy Dogg's record *Doggystyle*. A black male music and cultural critic called me from across the ocean to ask if I had checked this image out, sharing that for one of the first times in his music-buying life he felt he was seeing an image so offensive in its sexism and misogyny he did not want to take it home. That image—complete with doghouse, "Beware the Dog" sign, a naked black female head in the doghouse, her naked butt sticking out) was reproduced "uncritically" in the November 29, 1993 issue of *Time* magazine. The positive music review of this album written by Christopher John Farley titled "Gangsta Rap, Doggystyle" makes no mention of sexism and misogyny, or any reference to the cover. If a naked

white female body had been inside the doghouse, presumably waiting to be fucked from behind, I wonder if *Time* would have reproduced an image of the cover along with their review. When I see the pornographic cartoon that graces the cover of *Doggystyle* I do not think simply about the sexism and misogyny of young black men, I think about the sexist and misogynist politics of the powerful white adult men and women (and folks of color) who helped produce and market this album.

In her book *Misogynies*, Joan Smith shares her sense that while most folks are willing to acknowledge unfair treatment of women, discrimination on the basis of gender, they are usually reluctant to admit that hatred of women is encouraged because it helps maintain the structure of male dominance. Smith suggests, "Misogyny wears many guises, reveals itself in different forms—which are dictated by class, wealth, education, race, religion, and other factors, but its chief characteristic is its pervasiveness." This point reverberated in my mind when I saw Jane Campion's widely acclaimed film *The Piano*, which I saw in the midst of the mass media's focus on sexism and misogyny in gangsta rap. I had been told by many friends in the art world that this was "an incredible film, a truly compelling love story." Their responses were echoed by numerous positive reviews. No one speaking about this film mentions misogyny and sexism or white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

The nineteenth-century world of the white invasion of New Zealand is utterly romanticized in this film (complete with docile happy darkies—Maori natives—who appear to have not a care in the world). And when the film suggests they care about white colonizers digging up the graves of their dead ancestors it is the sympathetic poor white male who comes to the rescue. Just as the conquest of natives and lands is glamorized in this film, so is the conquest of femininity, personified by white womanhood, by the pale, speechless, corpse-like Scotswoman Ada who journeys into this dark wilderness because her father has arranged for her to marry the white colonizer Stewart. Although mute, Ada expresses her artistic ability, the intensity of her vision and feelings, through piano playing. This passion attracts Baines, the illiterate white settler who wears the facial tattoos of the Maori—an act of appropriation that makes him (like the traditional figure of Tarzan) appear both dangerous and romantic. He is Norman Mailer's "white negro." Baines seduces Ada by promising to return the piano that Stewart has exchanged with him for

land, and the film leads us to believe that Ada's passionate piano playing has been merely a substitution for repressed eroticism. When she learns to let herself go sexually she ceases to need the piano. We watch the passionate climax of Baines's seduction as she willingly seeks him sexually. We watch her husband Stewart in the role of voyeur, standing with his dog outside the cabin where they fuck, voyeuristically consuming their pleasure. Rather than being turned off by her love for Baines, it appears to excite Stewart's passion; he longs to possess her all the more. Unable to win her back from Baines, he expresses his rage, rooted in misogyny and sexism, by physically attacking her and chopping off her finger with an ax. This act of male violence takes place with her young daughter, Flora, as a witness. Though traumatized by the violence she witnesses, she is still about to follow the white male patriarch's orders and take the bloody finger to Baines, along with the message that each time he sees Ada she will suffer physical mutilation.

Violence against land, natives, and women in this film, unlike that of gangsta rap, is portrayed uncritically, as though it is "natural"—the inevitable climax of conflicting passions. The outcome of this violence is all positive. Ultimately, the film suggests Stewart's rage was only an expression of irrational sexual jealousy, that he comes to his senses and is able to see "reason." In keeping with the male exchange of women, he gives Ada and Flora to Baines. They leave the wilderness. On the voyage over, Ada demands that her piano be thrown overboard because it is "soiled," tainted with horrible memories. Surrendering it she lets go her longing to display passion through artistic expression. A nuclear family now, Baines, Ada, and Flora resettle and live happily ever after. Suddenly, patriarchal order is restored. Ada a becomes a modest wife, wearing a veil over her mouth so that no one will see her lips struggling to speak words. Flora has no memory of trauma and is a happy child turning somersaults. Baines is in charge.

The Piano seduces and excites audiences with its uncritical portrayal of sexism and misogyny. Reviewers and audiences alike seem to assume that Campion's gender, as well as her breaking of traditional boundaries that inhibit the advancement of women in film, indicate that her work expresses a feminist standpoint. And indeed she does employ feminist tropes even as her work betrays feminist visions of female actualization, celebrating and eroticizing male domination. Smith's discussion of misogyny emphasizes that woman-hating is not solely the province of men: "We are all exposed to the prevailing ideology of our culture, and some women learn early on that they can prosper by aping the misogyny of men; these are the women who win provisional favor by denigrating other women, by playing on male prejudices, and by acting the 'man's woman'." Since this is not a documentary film that needs to remain faithful to the ethos of its historical setting, why is it that Campion does not resolve Ada's conflicts by providing us with an imaginary landscape where a woman can express passionate artistic commitment *and* find fulfillment in a passionate relationship? This would be no more far-fetched than her cinematic portrayal of Ada's miraculous transformation from muteness into speech. Ultimately, Campion's *The Piano* advances the sexist assumption that heterosexual women will give up artistic practice to find "true love." That "positive" surrender is encouraged by the "romantic" portrayal of sexism and misogyny.

While I do not think that young black male rappers have been rushing in droves to see *The Piano,* there is a bond between those folks involved with high culture who celebrate and condone the ideas and values upheld in this film and those who celebrate and condone gangsta rap. Certainly, Kennedy's description of the United States as a "cowboy, gangster, philistine" culture would also accurately describe the culture evoked in *The Piano.* Popular movies that are seen by young black females—for example *Indecent Proposal, Mad Dog and Glory, True Romance, One False Move*—all eroticize male domination that expresses itself via the exchange of women as well as the subjugation of other men through brutal violence.

A racist white imagination assumes that most young black males, especially those who are poor, live in a self-created cultural vacuum, uninfluenced by mainstream cultural values. Yet it is the application of those values, largely learned through passive, uncritical consumption of the mass media, that is most revealed in gangsta rap. Brent Staples is willing to challenge the notion that "urban primitivism is romantic" when it suggests that black males become "real men" by displaying the will to do violence, yet he remains resolutely silent about that world of privileged white culture that has historically romanticized primitivism and erotized male violence. Contemporary films like *Reservoir Dogs* and *The Bad Lieu-*

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tenant celebrate urban primitivism. Many of the artistically less successful films create or exploit the cultural demand for graphic depictions of hardcore macks who are willing to kill for sport.

To take gangsta rap to task for its sexism and misogyny while accepting and perpetuating expressions of that ideology which reflect bourgeois standards (no rawness, no vulgarity) is not to call for a transformation of the culture of patriarchy. Ironically, many black male ministers who are themselves sexist and misogynist are leading the attacks against gangsta rap. Like the mainstream world that supports white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they are most concerned with advancing the cause of censorship by calling attention to the obscene portrayals of women. For them, rethinking and challenging sexism both in the dominant culture and in black life is not the issue.

Mainstream white culture is not at all concerned about black male sexism and misogyny, particularly when it is mainly unleashed against black women and children. It *is* concerned when young white consumers utilize black vernacular popular culture to disrupt bourgeois values. A young white boy expresses his rage at his mother by aping black male vernacular speech (a true story); young white males (and middle-class men of color) reject the constraints of bourgeois bondage and the call to be "civilized" by acts of aggression in their domestic households. These are the audiences who feel such a desperate need for gangsta rap. It is much easier to attack gangsta rap than to confront the culture that produces that need.

Gangsta rap is part of the antifeminist backlash that is the rage right now. When young black males labor in the plantations of misogyny and sexism to produce gangsta rap, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy approves the violence and materially rewards them. Far from being an expression of their "manhood," it is an expression of their own subjugation and humiliation by more powerful, less visible forces of patriarchal gangsterism. They give voice to the brutal, raw anger and rage against women that it is taboo for "civilized " adult men to speak. No wonder, then, that they have the task of tutoring the young, teaching them to eroticize and enjoy the brutal expressions of that rage (both language and acts) before they learn to cloak it in middle-class decorum or Robert Bly-style reclaimings of lost manhood. The tragedy for young black males is

that they are so easily duped by a vision of manhood that can only lead to their destruction.

Feminist critiques of the sexism and misogyny in gangsta rap, and in all aspects of popular culture, must continue to be bold and fierce. Black females must not allow ourselves to be duped into supporting shit that hurts us under the guise of standing beside our men. If black men are betraying us through acts of male violence, we save ourselves and the race by resisting. Yet our feminist critiques of black male sexism fail as meaningful political interventions if they seek to demonize black males, and do not recognize that our revolutionary work is to transform white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in the multiple areas of our lives where it is made manifest, whether in gangsta rap, the black church, or in the Clinton administration.

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From Baker, 2018

Epilogue

Gangster Rap at Thirty

THE WORLD HAS UNDERGONE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES SINCE 1985.

Technology has exploded, as has the access to information. Mobile phones are virtually omnipresent throughout the world. DNA testing and scanning social media have become routine and critical parts of police work. An increasing number of surgeries are handled laparoscopically, while GPS systems have essentially replaced paper maps. Music, which was once packaged on vinyl and cassette, graduated to CDs, which were then made obsolete by the various forms of digital distribution (ringtones, downloads, and streaming).

Thanks in part to rap's omnipresence and cultural penetration, gangster rap, which turned thirty in 2015, has thrived during each of these shifts. Since its inception, the forefathers of the rap subgenre have become grandfathers, with

OPPOSITE:
Kendrick Lamar is an artist who represents the evolution of gangster rap, according to industry insiders.

TIMELINE OF RAP

2015
Key Rap Releases

1. Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* album
2. Drake's *If Youre Reading This Its Too Late* album
3. Future's *DS2* album

US President

Barack Obama

Something Else

Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign.

offspring who live far removed from the world their elders rapped about and the environments in which they were raised. They went from the bottom of America's societal structure to being some of the most accomplished and acclaimed figures in American culture.

As artists such as Schoolly-D, Ice-T, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, MC Eiht, DJ Quik, Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, the Game, and others thrived during the past thirty years, they sold tens of millions of albums, performed in front of millions of fans around the world, starred in dozens of Hollywood blockbusters, and influenced society through their overall look, attitude, and perspective.

"Gangster rap is an image of society," Tech N9ne says. "If society wasn't like this, it wouldn't be no gangster rap. We're just the street poets that's telling you what the fuck's going on in society. So if it's going on in society, of course it's going to be a movie. Of course they're going to do documentaries, have *Gangland* on TV, because we tell you the reality. The people that didn't know, thanks to the gangster rappers, people like Ice Cube, Ice-T, N.W.A, told you what was going on in case you were blind to it, you live in the suburbs and it ain't happening in your hood. It's a camera on the neighborhood and what's going on in society."

For the artists themselves, the anger was counterbalanced with a sense of pride in making music, paying homage to the positive and negative aspects of their lives, and making a name for themselves in the highly competitive rap game and the legit business world. The members of N.W.A, for instance, aspired to be like their New York predecessors.

"The reason we wanted to put Compton on the map so much was that back then in hip-hop, everybody in New York would be hollering out their borough or their city or whatever," MC Ren said. "It was either Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, [or] Long Island in hip-hop. I can't remember nothing else. So it was like, 'Shit. We've got to talk about Compton.' We wanted Compton to be in the same sentence with the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island. People thought we was crazy. They thought we wasn't gonna do it. I had one fool come up to me. This was before we blew up. He was like, 'Y'all know you ain't never gonna be big like them New York cats.' My homeboy when I was growing up, he told me that. We were sitting on the curb. Then we blew up, and he started trying to rhyme."

Naming Compton specifically ended up being particularly significant. Once N.W.A rose to national superstardom and became one of the most important groups in rap history, the group's championing of Compton made it stand out in the competitive rap world.

N.W.A, which was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2016, also

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stands among the rare group of musicians whose work graduated from the music world into the broader pop-culture universe.

Straight Outta Compton, the album on which "Fuck tha Police" appeared, was among the twenty-five recordings named to the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry in March 2017. Other honorees include Judy Garland, for her 1939 rendition of "Over the Rainbow," and the Eagles, for *Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)*, the second-bestselling album of all time, behind only Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

"It's still moving," Snoop Dogg said. "I don't think it's done. Ice Cube is the hardest gangster rapper to ever come out. He's one of the kings of Hollywood right now, as far as movies, production, behind the scenes. So you tell me how far gangster rap can go. Dr. Dre was the hardest gangster rap producer ever. Beats by Dre sold for a couple billion dollars. You tell me how far gangster rap can go. Snoop Dogg is one of the realest gangsters to ever come up out of the rap game, catching cases, doing real shit, being around the best of the best, and look at where he is now as far as in the TV world, the movie world, the business world, just the public acceptance world."

> ***"Gangster rap is an image of society. . . . you live in the suburbs and it ain't happening in your hood. It's a camera on the neighborhood and what's going on in society."***
>
> **TECH N9NE**

Like Snoop Dogg, gangster rap's status in pop culture has undergone a dramatic shift. When Schoolly D, Ice-T, Boogie Down Productions, and Just-Ice started making gangster rap in the mideighties, the genre was an emerging segment of rap that was still finding its footing. Within a few years, Ice-T, Eazy-E, N.W.A, Ice Cube, and Dr. Dre had become some of rap's bestselling and most controversial artists.

And they remained among the genre's bestselling artists for years, outlasting the second and third generations of gangster rappers. This initial wave of gangster rap artists, ones who emerged before the term "gangster rap" even existed, all possessed an uncanny hustle. They had to overcome boycotts, protests, censorship, and government pressure, all of which seemed to instill a type of

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THE NEW STYLE

HERE'S A LOOK at some of the most promising Los Angeles–area gangster rappers of the 2010s, highlighting their hometowns, main songs, and albums.

YG

Hometown: Compton

Noteworthy song: "My Nigga" (2013)

Project of note: *My Krazy Life* (2014)

NIPSEY HUSSLE

Hometown: Los Angeles

Noteworthy song: "I Don't Give a Fucc" (2011)

Project of note: *Crenshaw* (2013)

VINCE STAPLES

Hometown: Long Beach

Noteworthy song: "65 Hunnid" (2014)

Project of note: *Hell Can Wait* (2014)

G PERICO

Hometown: Los Angeles

Noteworthy song: "Bout It" (2016)

Project of note: *Shit Don't Stop* (2016)

AD

Hometown: Compton

Noteworthy song: "Juice" (2015)

Project of note: *Blue:89* (2015)

KENDRICK LAMAR

Hometown: Compton

Noteworthy song: "Ronald Reagan Era (His Evils)" (2011)

Project of note: *Section.80* (2011)

artistic resolve and personal fortitude that served them well in the studios and in the boardrooms.

By the time N.W.A alumnus Dr. Dre was working with Eminem, the best-selling rap artist of all time, gangster rap had grown, evolved, and become an established part of rap and of pop culture in general. The road formed by gangster rap had long been paved. Eminem's lyrics were similarly shocking, but at that point, mainstream America had been exposed to rap's violent, profane, and hypersexual side for more than a decade.

"I think we scared the world so quickly, but then once Eminem did it, they were like, 'Okay,'" Ice-T said. "Now people are kinda conditioned to it. It's not like when Cube came out and said, 'Crazy muthafucka named . . .' and you were like, 'What the fuck? Who are these motherfuckas?' Now everybody's like, 'Okay. Cool. Y'all gonna Crip Walk and dance,' but it's not as threatening now."

The image of N.W.A wearing all black and dark sunglasses, of gangster rappers toting semiautomatic firearms to interviews and in their videos, of Crips wearing exclusively blue and Bloods exclusively red, and of generally being viewed as ominous has waned significantly as time has gone on.

"Back in the days, a gangster looked a certain way," said Los Angeles 92.3 KRRL radio personality Big Boy. "Now these motherfuckas are gangster and you're like, 'Oh shit.' There's no more uniform. Some cats can tuck a red rag or a blue rag, but back in the days, you knew what a muthafucka was this or that. There was no in between where, 'Oh, I'm just wearing this.'"

"I think now the new trap rappers [Southern rappers who tend to rap about street topics, doing drugs in particular], they've convinced me they can get high," Ice-T said. "They've convinced me that maybe they can sell a little drugs. They don't scare me. I think a gangster rapper has to scare you a little bit."

The perceived lack of shock current gangster rappers deliver can be partly explained by the novelty of the genre wearing off. It can also be attributed to the changing criteria of fans, who may seek different things from their artists than fans of previous generations.

"It used to be that you had to have your stripes in the nineties," Dave Weiner said. "You couldn't step up to a mic without a real, legitimate story. The story had to be real. The fights had to be real. The gunshots had to be real. It was a pedigree. It was who you are and where you came from. If you were a fraud, your music never even got the time of day, and that changed with rap taking on the mainstream appeal that it did through the end of the nineties and the 2000s, being ushered along by Eminem. But it evolved."

In the 2010s, the current manifestation of gangster rap has numerous forms. Kendrick Lamar, who many believe to be among the best of the current crop of gangster rappers, has a decidedly different approach than the cornerstones of the culture, yet he shows the ways in which gangster rap has changed and remains dominant.

"It's still reigning," Tech N9ne said. "It's a gangster that's blowing up that's multitalented though, so you don't really put him in that category because he's artistic. That's Kendrick Lamar."

After releasing his own mixtapes and collaborating with fellow Top Dawg Entertainment (TDE) rapper Jay Rock, Kendrick Lamar garnered widespread acclaim in the rap world in 2010 for his *Overly Dedicated* mixtape. The project's lyricism, social commentary, and the myriad of ways in which he could deliver his high-caliber rhymes endeared the rapper to a wide range of fans.

The *Overly Dedicated* song "Barbed Wire," for instance, features Kendrick Lamar rapping about evading crooked cops, succeeding by not having to kill other black men, and living his dreams. Toward the end of the song, though, he raps that there's always barbed wire preventing true progress. A gunshot ends the selection.

In 2011, Kendrick Lamar released *Section.80*, his first studio album. The project included "Ronald Reagan Era (His Evils)," a commentary about, among other things, how the children growing up in Compton fell victim to the policies of President Reagan, which included expanding the "War on Drugs" and an

explosion of the incarceration of nonviolent drug offenders, many of whom were lower-class black males.

"Ronald Reagan Era (His Evils)" and other Kendrick Lamar songs, such as the lyrical showcase "A.D.H.D.," helped land Lamar a recording contract with Dr. Dre's Aftermath Entertainment. Although not overtly gangster, Kendrick Lamar's subject matter, his willingness to discuss Compton, and his regular references to the gangs that inhabit the city and that helped define his life give his music gangster rap elements.

"I think Kendrick keeps a nice little hood edge on his shit, so you know he's from Compton," Ice-T said. "You know he's from the hood."

Like Ice Cube before him, Kendrick Lamar grew up in a gang-infested environment but doesn't present himself as an active gang member in his music or in his interviews, even though they both rap about the gang lifestyle and its ripple effects throughout their respective communities specifically and society in general.

"If you're in that neighborhood, you're affiliated by association, basically," said Dee Barnes, one half of rap group Body & Soul and former host of the rap video show *Pump It Up!* "I think Ice Cube is a good comparison because Ice Cube to me, as far as N.W.A, he was their conscious. I feel like that's how Kendrick is. Kendrick is the conscious of Compton, of gangster rap. He's more to me on that tip than anything because he's telling stories of what's happening in his neighborhood, what has happened from his perspective, and from a worldview. He's taken it to just a whole other level.

"He gets the real hardcore gangsters to stop and think about some things for a minute," Barnes continued. "And, I think that's good, to get them to listen, to get their attention."

Yet Kendrick Lamar's list of accolades shows how differently gangster rap is received in the 2010s compared to the eighties or nineties. The Compton rapper has won twelve Grammy Awards and has been nominated twenty-nine times as of the 59th Grammy Awards presented in 2018. Snoop Dogg, by comparison, has never won a Grammy, despite being nominated fifteen times. Kendrick Lamar also made history in 2018 when he became the first rapper to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music for *DAMN.*, his 2017 album.

This type of critical disparity could be attributed to any number of factors, from perceived authenticity to the legal drama surrounding an artist to the overall climate in the music business at the time of an artist's popularity. Regardless, this variance speaks to how different artists may have been received differently in subsequent eras.

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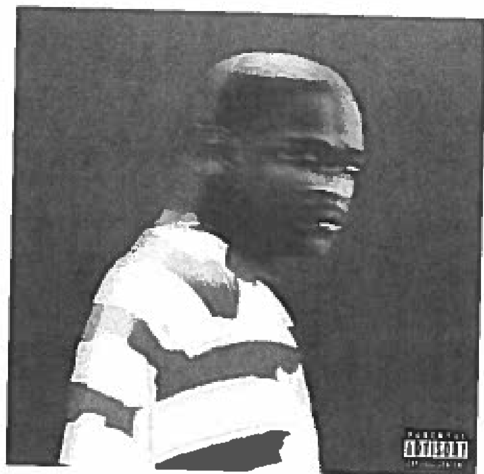
"What would Kendrick have meant in the midnineties?" Weiner asked. "He's an undeniable talent, but he wasn't coming from that gangster mentality. He wasn't hard enough. I see him as the best example of the evolution of gangster rap, because that's where he grew up and that's what he was surrounded by, and he lived that life without living that life, so to speak."

The majority of the other prominent gangster rappers emerging, from the Los Angeles area in particular, boasts of living the gangster lifestyle and of coming from that environment. Kendrick Lamar's TDE labelmate ScHoolboy Q, for instance, uses an uppercase *H* in his name, song titles, and writings in order to pay homage to his affiliation with the 52 Hoover Gangster Crips.

ScHoolboy Q's 2014 album, *Oxymoron*, featured the song "Hoover Street," which detailed his growing up around robberies, guns, drugs, and gangs. The album title itself refers to the paradoxical life he was living.

"The oxymoron in this album is that I'm doing all this bad to do good for my daughter," ScHoolboy Q said. "That's why I'm robbin'. That's why I'm stealing. That's why I done shot you, and got on, and took your car. Whatever it is that I'm talking about in my album negative, it's always for a good cause, for my daughter."

G Perico, another Los Angeles gangster rapper who rose to prominence in the 2010s and who is among the first wave of artists signed as part of the relaunching of Priority Records, raps about the gangster rap bedrocks of gangs, crime, guns, drugs, and women. Like ScHoolboy Q, though, he looks at what life is, what it was, and what he wants it to be.



GANGSTER RAP'S BIGGEST SELLERS

Album: *All Eyez On Me* (1996) by 2Pac. Ten million albums sold. Released by Death Row/Interscope Records.

Top Artist (in Terms of Album Sales): 2Pac, 36.5 million albums sold

Top Artist (in Terms of Digital Single Sales): YG, 5 million digital singles sold

FIVE THINGS BIG TRAY DEEE LEARNED FROM GANGSTER RAP

One half of the platinum gangster rap group Tha Eastsidaz, Big Tray Deee reflects on five things he learned from gangster rap.

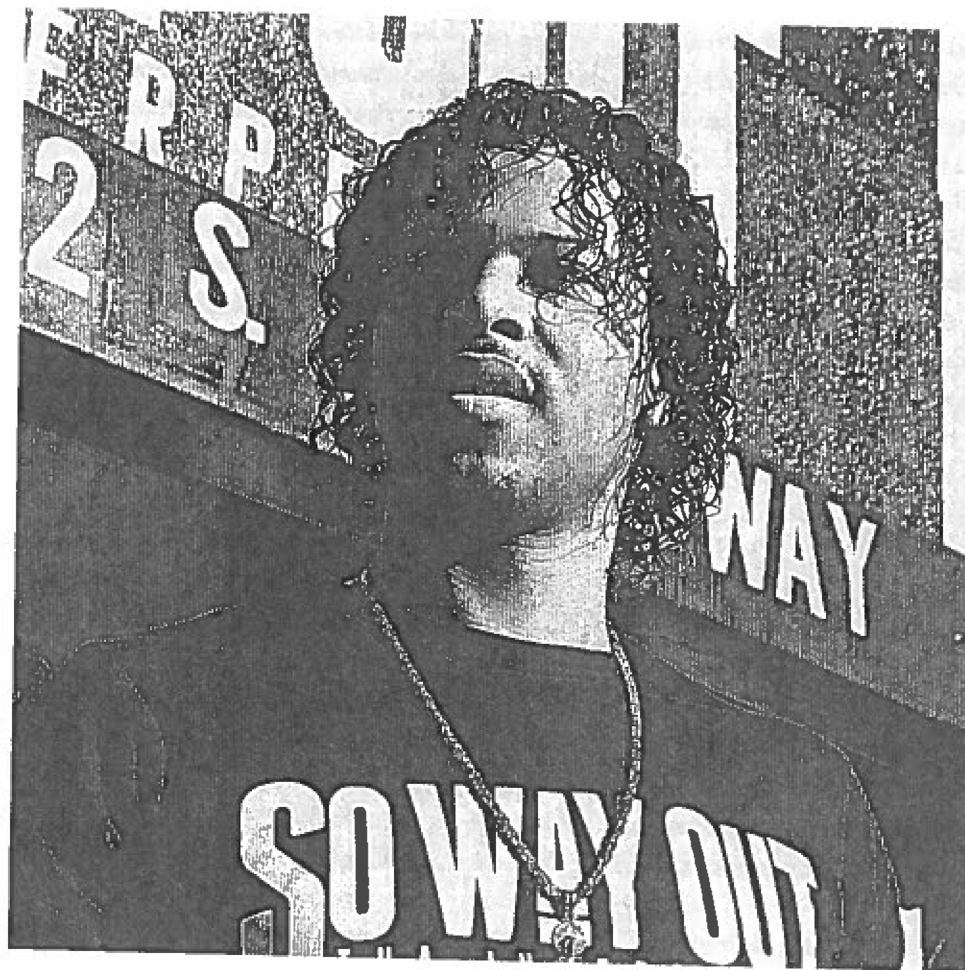
1. It was amazing that I could tell the truth and be myself and the whole world would be interested in my perspective, and be willing to support me for over two decades just being me.

2. Gangster rap, when it's real, you feel it. When it comes on, you feel it. You get that with certain WC, Jayo Felony, Ice Cube, Scarface songs. As soon as the beat drops, it's like, "Ah. Yeah. This is one of them right here."

3. Everybody that's a gangster rapper isn't a gangster. At least people in Cali, we're going to want to know if what you're saying is certified and if you're really who you say you are, and if the people you say you represent really respect you. We're going to break down your whole resume.

4. You can't be too serious in gangster rap. You still got to have fun. You still got to be able to make the women enjoy a song or two. You've still got to be able to show that you're more aware of life than, "I don't give a fuck and I'll kill you." You have to maintain some lyricism that hip-hop demands to be a real truly respected gangster rapper.

5. Gangster rap will have your muthafuckin' ass in prison, just on the fact of keeping it real. There's no off days of being a gangster. If you're a gangster rapper that gets pushed up on, you might have to go all the way with it. If you're not really with it like that, you might be put into a situation that you're really not equipped to handle, and it could cause you and the people around you their lives.



OPPOSITE:
Gangsters and rappers respect Big Tray Deee.

LEFT:
G Perico is a rising rapper whose esthetic harkens back to the look of Los Angeles area gangster rappers of the 1980s.

"My risk-taking is pretty much done," G Perico said. "The biggest risk I take is just still being around, because motherfuckers will try to kill me. I don't gamble money, but you could say I'm gambling my life a little bit. I'm prepared, though."

More so than maybe any other gangster rapper to emerge in the 2010s, G Perico has components of the uniform of a gangster rapper from the eighties and early nineties. The Los Angeles artist sports a Jheri curl, favors white T-shirts, and almost always wears blue apparel in order to identify himself as a Crip.

"When I first saw that muthafucka with a Jheri curl, he was cut from that cloth," Big Boy said of G Perico. "I was like, 'Oh shit.' Then when you explore [his music], he reminds me of what that West Coast fire was. I don't want to say 'rebirth' or 'the new,' but you hear that mothafucka and he go. Does radio have him? Not like radio should. Is that mothafucka gonna sell out at his next show? You mothafuckin' right he is. It's crazy because he's another one that stays in his path and we're walking

over to him. He's like, 'Nah. Nah. You've got to cross the street over here because I'm not crossing the street and coming over there. If you want me, come over here.'"

Compton rapper YG is the most prominent gangster rapper to emerge in the 2010s and enjoy massive commercial success and critical acclaim. After his ode to one-night stands "Toot It and Boot It" became a West Coast hit in 2010, YG signed with Def Jam Recordings. His breakthrough single with the company was 2013's "My Nigga" (the radio version was "My Hitta"), a nod to his loyalty to the people with whom he grew up and to the friends he can rely on in the streets and in life. The song, which featured Atlanta rappers Jeezy and Rich Homie Quan, sold more than one million copies in less than five months. By October 2016, "My Hitta" had sold more than three million copies.

Def Jam Recordings formally paired YG with Jeezy, who helped YG shape the direction of his major label debut album, 2014's *My Krazy Life*. Song titles such as "BPT," "Bicken Back Being Bool," and "Bompton," as well as the album title, paid homage to his affiliation with the Bloods, as the words replace the letter *C* with either a *B* or a *K* in order to show solidarity to the Bloods.

Thanks in part to the success of "My Hitta," as well as the "Who Do You Love?" single with rap superstar Drake, YG's *My Krazy Life* was certified gold in March 2016 and platinum in April 2017, even as record sales industry wide continued to wane. In order to address the shifting ways people consume music, the "album equivalent unit" was enacted in December 2014. In this new way of counting music for sales purposes, one album sale equals ten song downloads. One album sale is also equal to 1,500 song streams.

In 2016, YG's *Still Brazy* album built upon YG's momentum and showed his willingness to make incendiary political statements. In addition to the gold single "Why You Always Hatin?," the project also featured "FDT," short for "Fuck Donald Trump." A collaboration with Los Angeles gangster rapper Nipsey Hussle, "FDT" featured both artists bashing the then–presidential candidate for his anti-Mexican rhetoric and in response to black students being kicked out of a Trump rally during his presidential campaign.

Another *Still Brazy* cut, "Blacks & Browns," features YG and mentee Sad Boy examining some of the issues plaguing their respective communities. YG laments black on black crime, high levels of incarceration, and lackluster educational opportunities. For his part, Sad Boy Loko (as he's also known) examines the traps of the green card system, the preponderance of dead-end jobs, and police brutality.

The ability to make songs that trumpet his gang affiliation as well as political statements makes YG a credible artist.

"YG don't go into a phone booth and come out and say, 'Okay, I'm YG now,'" Big

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Boy said. "YG, any time you sneak up on him, you're gonna find YG. When I turn the microphone on, YG. When I turn the microphone off, that's YG. I think that YG is another one that musically is gangbanging around the world. Now I think we're also seeing that he knows how to make records, too. That's one thing that you couldn't deny when you're fucking with anything as far as the Xzibits, the Cubes, Death Row. Those were records. YG is making records and building up his catalog. He's also another one that's from the street and telling the world where he's from. He's not running away from that shit. Is he glorifying shit? Call it what you want, but that's him. He's not stealing a lifestyle from anyone."

Like YG, Long Beach rapper Vince Staples dedicates some of his music to political topics. He follows the mold of Ice-T and Ice Cube with his blend of incendiary social commentary and scintillating street reporting on such songs as "Versace Rap" and "65 Hunnid." He is an insightful storyteller with a keen grasp of history, social injustice, and the streets as he weaves the evolution of America's institutionalized racism into "C.N.B." "The sheets and crosses turned to suits and ties," he raps.

> ***"I don't want to make that kind of music. I'm not on that. [Violence] ruined my life. It killed my homies."***
>
> **VINCE STAPLES**

Similar to the first generation of gangster rappers, Vince Staples infuses his music with the reality of life on the streets. He raps about his paranoia, his doubts, and his anger about the circumstances in which he was raised. Vince Staples's music may discuss mayhem, but he does not advocate mindless violence.

"I don't want to make that kind of music," Vince Staples said. "I'm not on that. That ruined my life. It killed my homies."

The business-oriented Los Angeles rapper Nipsey Hussle made headlines in October 2013 by selling his *Crenshaw* mixtape for one hundred dollars apiece. He said he sold one thousand copies, good for one hundred thousand dollars in revenue for a project that would typically be given away for free on the Internet.

A self-proclaimed avid reader, the rapper read the book *Contagious*, by Wharton professor Jonah Berger, which details unusual and counterintuitive business successes. In the book, Berger tells the story of a restaurateur who charged one hundred dollars for his Philly cheesesteak and was both applauded and derided for the move. That tactic is where Nipsey Hussle drew inspiration for his mixtape.

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Nipsey Hussle said his idea was hatched on music's value in the marketplace. "It's time we acknowledge what we all know: The music is free," Nipsey Hussle said. "We shouldn't force people to buy it. What we should do is create different methods to monetize the connection."

Signed to Epic Records in 2009, Nipsey Hussle left the label the following year and resumed building his brand independently. In 2017, he announced he'd signed with Atlantic Records and, in 2018, released his major label debut album, the acclaimed *Victory Lap*.

Priority Records, which relaunched in 2017, returned to its gangster rap roots and tapped into the current generation of artists, including G Perico and AD. The latter is a Compton Crip rapper who embraces the evolution of gang relations in his city, as evidenced by his 2016 song "Thug," which featured YG, a Blood.

"Compton is a different place now," AD said. "As far as the gangbanging culture, Crips and [Bloods gang faction] Pirus don't necessarily beef anymore. More Pirus beef with Pirus and more Crips beef with Crips. I and YG come from two different areas who originally wouldn't get along with each other, but we don't have problems with each other. I got a relationship with a lot of his homies from way back. For 'Thug,' once we came up with that, I told him to bring his whole hood to the video shoot. It was dope, man."

More than thirty years after its inception, gangster rap shows that it continues to evolve and remains relevant to a wider range of people, ones who grew up listening to the music and forming their worldviews based in part on the gangster rap music they consumed. Gangster rap fans are now teaching school in suburban Maryland, working at post offices in Florida, and selling derivatives at Smith Barney in New York.

These are the people who were fascinated by gangster rap, the generation who looked at black kids from the ghetto with a more informed view and who voted for Barack Obama. It is a group of people who didn't base their opinions solely on what they saw on the nightly news and how it depicted young black men in particular.

For today's generation of listeners, the appeal remains, in essence, the same. In a brutal and ironic similarity, the current generation of gangster rappers has no shortage of material from which to draw, as racism, police brutality, drugs, guns, and gangs remain as relevant today as they were in the mideighties.

"It made a whole new reality in business, music, film," DJ Quik said. "These dudes just became the trendiest dudes, bigger than the sum of their parts."

from Neal et al, 2012

The Business of Rap: Between the Street and the Executive Suite

Keith Negus

Rap has usually been approached as an aesthetic form of African-American expression: a resistant, oppositional, countercultural style created via the appropriation of technology and existing musical signs and symbols (scratching, sampling, mixing), drawing on a long tradition of diasporic creativity (with varying inflections of both an essentialist and anti-essentialist argument that point both back to and away from the slave routes of the Atlantic). Although the music industry has been referred to and acknowledged by a few writers,[1] most of the writing has tended to concentrate on cultural criticism[2] and locate the "politics" of rap within the domain of a cultural struggle conducted across the broad terrain of "consumption" that is lived outside the world of the corporate entertainment industry.

This perspective has clearly demonstrated that rap has been made as a cultural practice that involves the quite explicit creative appropriation of existing sounds, images and technologies and their reconstitution as a new art form. The creation of rap has also highlighted the tangible connecting points that link the often inadequate concepts of "production" and "consumption," and has illustrated how consumption can *become* production. In the process, creative practice and aesthetic discourse have produced a particular type of cultural-political identity which can be understood in terms of a long tradition of black creative activity, not only within the United States (Fernando Jr, 1995; Vincent, 1996) but within the context of a diaspora of the black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993).

This chapter is not a direct challenge to such an account but an attempt to add a further dimension to the arguments and knowledge through which rap is understood as both a musical genre and cultural practice. My argument is that to understand rap, both in the past and its potential in the future, then cultural explanations alone are not enough. Rap is also a very particular U.S. business. As Kevin Powell wrote in a magazine profile of the highly successful Death Row Records, prior to the death of Tupac Shakur and the imprisonment of Suge Knight:

> There is no way to truly comprehend the incredible success of Death Row Records—its estimated worth now tops $100 million—without first understanding the conditions that created the rap game in the first place: few legal economic paths in America's inner cities, stunted educational opportunities, a pervasive sense of alienation among young black males, black folk's age-old need to create music, and a typically American hunger for money and power. The Hip Hop Nation is no different than any other segment of this society in its desire to live the American dream. (Powell, 1996, p. 46)

In the struggle against racism and economic and cultural marginalization, and in an attempt to "live the American dream," rap has also been created as a self-conscious business activity as well as a cultural form and aesthetic practice. A skim through consumer magazines such as *The Source* or *Vibe*, publications that address both artists and fans (often at the point where the two merge), reveals frequent references to issues of "career planning" and business management, often presented as a form of educational intelligence. A typical article in *The Source* began in the following way:

> We all have dreams, aspirations and goals ... things that we dream of but for whatever reason don't follow through on. For many of us, that dream is getting into the recording industry. So before you just dive with reckless abandon into the murky waters of the biz, here are some steps that might make the going a bit easier.
>
> Knowledge: Go to the library and do your homework. This will give you a basic knowledge of the day-to-day operations of an independent label. It's also very important that you do an internship at an independent label (a minimum of 6 months). Make contacts, ask questions and take notes. It is important that you are able to experience, first-hand, the struggles you will inevitably face.
>
> Business plan: As in starting any business, you must have a plan. You need a 5-year business plan that includes a projected budget. Your business plan should reflect you. You're the one who has to live by it. (Payton, 1997, p. 96)

The article then goes on to cover other issues under the subheadings of cash, legal counsel, operating a business, communication, artist, production, manufacturing and distribution and promotion—throwing quite a different light on to the idea of rap spontaneously emerging from "the streets" (an issue I shall come back to shortly).

In a similar way, a reading of trade magazines such as *Billboard* will turn up a number of articles in which rap artists and entrepreneurs, whether Suge Knight or Chuck D, explicitly discuss their commercial strategies and business plans or where executives such as Angelo Ellerbee, President of Double XXposure, discusses his "charm school for rap artists" (Snyder, 1996). As Bahamadia commented during the promotion for her first album:

> You have to understand that this is a business. When you sign your name on the dotted line on your contract you are literally a walking human business as well as a human being. So you have to study this business, ask questions, educate yourself and have a plan B and a plan C. (Fitzgerald, 1996, pp. 22–23)

I hope that in some small way this chapter might educate and inform. I also wish to argue that, to understand what rap might mean and its potential as a form of cultural expression and communication, it's also necessary to understand it as a business that links—and perhaps more significantly separates—artist and audience in quite distinct ways. In very broad terms, this chapter follows the central theme set out earlier in this book by considering how the industry sets up structures of organization and working practices to produce culture and also by highlighting the way that broader culture processes and practices connect with the industry—the uneasy relationship between the genre culture of rap and the corporate cultures of the music industry.

In developing the theoretical focus I outlined earlier, I shall illustrate these dynamics by analyzing how the industry organizes the production of rap in a very specific way and bases working practices on a particular construction of knowledge about the social world. The approach to the relationship between rap music and the recorded entertainment industry that I am proposing here is more complex than the often narrated tales of co-optation, exploita-

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tion and forced compromise to a commercial agenda, although these pressures are certainly not absent. At the same time, it is an attempt to avoid the celebration of black entrepreneurialism or the endorsement of rap as a type of material success-oriented "fun capitalism."[3]

The title of this chapter, "Between the street and the executive suite," signals a further broad argument and general theme that weaves throughout. First, it signals the way in which rappers who have often been identified solely with "the street" are also executives. I consider this important, for while the portrayal of rap artists as creative iconoclasts from the margins certainly reclaims a value for activities that have been devalued, it fails to adequately acknowledge that rap is, potentially, not "outside" or bursting out from the periphery but central to the development of the practices and aesthetics of the contemporary music industry. However, this is not simply to replace rap artists and entrepreneurs at the center of a fun type of capitalism. Instead, my aim is to raise questions about *why* and *how* rap has remained "on the street"—materially and discursively. Here "the street" operates as a metonym for a particular type of knowledge which is deployed by executives throughout the music industry, a type of knowledge which legitimates the belief that rap *is* and *should be* outside the corporate suite. Hence, I use the theme of the street and executive suite to signal the way in which the discourse of the street (and the mythical "being in touch" with it) is integral to how the music industry deals with rap practices. One consequence is that this maintains a separation of experiences and contributes to the ongoing reproduction of the broader economic, cultural, and racialized divisions across which r 'n' b and rap have been and continue to be made.

In approaching rap in these terms, this chapter . . . is a deliberate attempt to try and steer a course away from the dichotomy between modernist despair at the power and influence of corporate commodity production and postmodernist celebration of the possibilities provided by cultural consumption and appropriation. It is also an attempt to suggest that the politics of culture need not simply be waged on one side or the other, but during a significant series of connections and relational practices which connect production and consumption and the articulations through which the corporate organization and music industry occupations are linked to broader cultural formations.

Corporate Decisions and Cultural Divisions: The Major Companies and the Black Music Department

To understand how the recording industry has come to deal with black music in general and rap in particular, it's necessary to recall . . . how the industry, and specifically the U.S. music business, deals with different genres. As I discussed, the major record companies use a technique known as portfolio management in order to divide labels, genres and artists into strategic business units, making visible the performance, profile and financial contribution of each division. Well-established genres are often referred to as "cash cows." A genre such as rap, however, despite the revenues it has continued to generate, may be classified as a "wild cat" by industry analysts who are uncertain about its future aesthetic changes and nervous when trying to predict "potential market growth," and by business personnel who are uncomfortable with the politics of black representation foregrounded by the genre and anxious about confronting political pressure from the moral opponents of rap (these issues I shall elaborate over the following pages).

It is within the context of corporate strategies of portfolio management that the major companies and their labels have come to deal with black music in separate divisions. Historically, the contemporary management of rhythm and blues within separate formally defined corporate entities can be traced back to a reorganization of the music business that occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The creation of "black divisions" during this period was a response to commercial opportunity, social and political pressure and cultural changes.

A number of factors contributed to this. One involved pressure from activists associated with the civil rights movement and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who urged the major labels to give a more equitable remuneration to black artists and sought greater representation for industry personnel. Additional pressure came from the so-called Fairplay Committee. This was a group, associated with DJs and radio personnel, that managed to combine what many supported as "commendable aims" (a fair deal for African-American artists and music industry staff) with alleged acts of intimidation and violence and a desire to extort money through being "the prime collector of payola for all black disc jockeys" (Wade and Picardie, 1990, p. 175).[4]

A further influence came from within the major companies themselves, where senior executives were beginning to reassess how they dealt with different types of music. After commissioning research, the major companies selectively followed the key recommendations of a 1971 report for CBS by the Harvard Business School, that had advocated the formation of black music divisions.[5] This was for many executives a logical restructuring and response to promotional practices and radio broadcasting which had dealt separately with African-American recordings through a series of euphemisms which began with the term "race music" during the 1920s (Garofalo, 1994, 1997). Reebee Garofalo (1993) has also pointed out that when the "race music" labels of the 1920s (such as Black Swan, Merit and Black Patti) were hit by the Great Depression, they were bought up by major labels (such as OKeh and Paramount) and maintained as a distinct "race music" series, kept separate from other parts of the catalogue. Hence, although the major labels began setting up black music divisions and departments from the early 1970s, the practices upon which this built can be traced back throughout the twentieth century.

One benefit of such a practice is that these divisions have provided a space for black staff within a company, people who may not otherwise have gained employment in the music business. These separate divisions have also ensured that musicians are managed by personnel with knowledge, skills, and understanding of their music (not all of whom are black, obviously). However, staff within the black divisions have experienced an unstable and uncertain existence. One of the most significant disadvantages is that the department can easily be cut back, closed down or restructured by the corporation (whether this is due to an assessment that the genre has changed or simply because cuts have to be made). A similar fate can befall many departments when exposed as business units, from the cutting of the smallest Latin division in the 1980s to the reorganization of the largest hard rock division in the wake of the rise of post-Nirvana "alternative rock" in the early 1990s.

However, it is often the black music division that is subject to greater cutting than others. A notorious example of this occurred in February 1996 when Capitol Records closed its urban division, canceling the contracts of most artists and sacking eighteen members of staff (most of them black). This was yet another example of EMI's drastic restructurings. On this occasion the company publicly explained that they had closed this division so as to concentrate resources on their "stars" (such as Bonnie Raitt and Richard Marx) and their modern rock artists (Everclear and Radiohead). In the week that this occurred, I happened to have an interview arranged with Havelock Nelson, a *Billboard* writer who, over the years, has been involved in organizing various hip hop workshops and educational events. As he remarked: "This happens so much whenever there is a budget cut to be made; it's always the black department that suffers."[6]

For J.R. Reynolds (1996), another columnist working for *Billboard*, this event represented "the systematic extermination of black music at Capitol Records" and "cut the company's ties to the r 'n' b community." As such, this was far from simply an "economic" decision. Reynolds pointed out that it could not be justified in market terms: in 1995 r 'n' b and rap had sold 132 million albums and accounted for over 21 per cent of the music market in the U.S.[7]

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Despite the corporate reasoning presented to the press, the "commercial" strategies of music corporations are not simply business decisions alone, but are informed by a number of value judgments and cultural beliefs. In this instance, whatever the dynamic within the company, to many outsiders this looked suspiciously like racism and a distinct lack of commitment (in terms of staff and investment) to sustain an involvement in black music and what Nelson George (1989) has called the "rhythm and blues world." George has used this phrase to refer to the "extramusical" significance of rhythm and blues as an "integral part" and "powerful symbol" for "a black community forged by common political, economic and geographic conditions" (1989, p. xii).

Hence, one issue here is that of occupational insecurity. The music industry is a notoriously insecure place to work, but black music divisions can be particularly unstable. For as long as they have been in existence the variously named r 'n' b/black/urban divisions have been chopped and changed. They have been closed down and reopened as a way of dealing with financial booms and slumps, and staffed and restaffed as senior management has continually changed its thinking about how to deal with r 'n' b. Recent shifts include the transition from appointing senior staff with backgrounds in promotion during the middle of the 1980s to heading the black divisions with attorneys, artists' managers and producers in the early 1990s, and then bringing in artists and producers in the middle of the 1990s.[8] This instability was rather ironically signaled by a panel organized for a music business convention by the coalition Sista Friends, entitled "You're Not Really in the Record Business Until You've Been Fired."[9]

This instability intersects with a broader issue of historical continuity. Although numerous African-American executives have contributed to the formation of the modern music industry and the history of recorded popular music, all have continued to occupy a "precarious position" (Sanjek, 1997). The black music divisions have not been allowed the space to establish their own agenda. One conspicuous point here is that there are very few senior black executives within the corporate hierarchy who are above the black division and hence involved in the decision about closing down business units or restaffing existing departments. This is frequently acknowledged within the industry and has been emphasized by Garofalo, who has noted that "black personnel have been systematically excluded from positions of power within the industry" (1994, p. 275). There is a strong sense, and a justifiable belief held by many in the industry, that the black divisions have not been allowed to develop a continuity and a sense of history that is consonant with the African-American contribution to U.S. musical culture.

This issue was publicly raised by Andre Harrell, whose music industry career has seen him move from performer (in the act *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*), to head of Uptown Records (a joint venture with MCA which broke acts such as Mary J. Blige and Heavy D and The Boyz) to President and CEO of Motown for a few years in the middle of the 1990s. While at Motown he observed:

> Black music is becoming *the* music of the popular culture. Because of that, companies are repositioning their priorities and trying to get in the game. But as black music becomes more important, there should be more black presidents and black chairmen. As soon as the black executive's artist reaches platinum, suddenly the artist and manager have to deal with the president of the corporation, because *he* controls the priorities at pop radio. The black executive becomes obsolete. As his music gets bigger, his power diminishes. He's more or less told, "Go find the next act and establish it." . . . That's why young black executives don't get to become the old chairmen—the wise men who've seen it and done it. They get to stay hot black executives so long as their instincts are hot . . . the black executive is not given the opportunity to become the business *and* the music. Why not? Why shouldn't he be the one that everybody reports to? When you get an act that sells 5 million—at a major company—the black executive's out of the room. But when there's some sort of problem, the major label looks at the black executive: "Why can't you handle this act?" When the artist hires a violent manager and the violent manager is coming up to the record company the label's like: "How did it get to this?" How? Because *they* [the white executives] couldn't see it coming. Because *they're* not sensitive to his issues. By then the relationship between the record company and the artist is dysfunctional. And the black executive gets blamed and fired. But *they* created the monster.
>
> When I had the artist, I talked to his mother, his girlfriend, his babies' mother with the two children, dealt with his drug counsellor, and whatever other dysfunctional Generation X problems he has. He'd call me late at night.
>
> But he feels like they're just business people. And they *don't* understand. And they *might* be racist. He's comin' with all that energy. Even if they like him as a person, he still has 400 years of issues he has to get over to accept them. And they have a lot of work to do to gain his trust and respect. (DeCurtis, 1995, p. 94, emphasis in original)

Harrell spoke these words with considerable experience, highlighting how racial identity, racism and the history of racial antagonism inform relationships that are often blandly referred to as "business decisions" within the corporate suite. Ironically, Harrell did not last long in his post at Motown, but his comments were publicly vindicated just under two years after the publication of this interview. It was then that PolyGram (the current owners of Motown and the corporation which had appointed Harrell) removed Eric Kronfeld, their domestic music president, from the board after he made "several racially insulting remarks" in relation to the company's R&B act Dru Hill. Alain Levy, PolyGram President, immediately appointed Clarence Avant who became the company's first African-American director (Johnson, 1997).

It is within the context of this history that the music industry began dealing with rap (or not dealing with rap) during the 1980s. At one point it seemed that the major companies had neither the inclination, the understanding, nor the skills to deal with rap. It was partly anxiety, partly lack of expertise and incomprehension on the part of the majors that allowed many small companies to carve out a considerable niche during the 1980s. It's often claimed that the small companies were in touch with "the streets." But it is not as straightforward as this—the large companies have also allowed small labels to carve out such a niche.

Independents on the Street: Keeping It outside the Corporation

If one way in which the major companies have attempted to manage African-American music has involved the continual cutting and restructuring of their R&B division, the other has been based on a series of changing relationships with minor companies. There is a familiar explanation offered for why so many successful rap recordings have come from independent labels: they are "closer to the street." It's a view held by many observers of the music industry. As Tricia Rose has written:

> It became apparent that the independent labels had a much greater understanding of the cultural logic of hip hop and rap music, a logic that permeated decisions ranging from signing acts to promotional methods. Instead of competing with smaller, more street-savvy labels for new rap acts, the major labels developed a new strategy: buy the independent labels, allow them to function relatively autonomously, and provide them with production resources and access to major retail distribution. (1994a, p. 7)

This perspective draws on the long-running argument that changes in popular music are driven by the activities of independent companies. There is an element of truth in this claim:

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it is often easier to identify a new sound and participate in its circulation from outside the gatekeeper-riddled systems of the major companies. It should also be acknowledged that many black independent companies are also attempting to assert their autonomy and self-sufficiency (George, 1989). However, this is a partial and rather too neat and tidy explanation of why rap has ended up *produced* on so many small labels, even if the artists do tend to be *marketed* and *distributed* by the major companies.

There are a number of ways in which this argument has been challenged. One counterclaim has proposed that rap has been somewhat closer to the middle-class suburb than the street. According to David Samuels:

> Since the early 1980s a tightly knit group of mostly young, middle-class, black New Yorkers, in close concert with white record producers, executives and publicists, has been making rap music for an audience that industry executives concede is composed primarily of white suburban males. (1995, p. 242)

There would seem much evidence to support such a claim. Many of those involved with the influential "street savvy" labels—such as Tom Silverman at Tommy Boy, and Russell Simmons and David Harleston at Def Jam, were from educated and middle-class backgrounds. The backgrounds and actions of various artists, such as De La Soul or Chuck D, for example, could also be cited to support this argument.[10]

Yet, this claim is equally partial. In terms of production, rap has, since it first began to appear on recordings, been produced from multiple points of origin with distinct inflections of geographical place (Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington, Philadelphia, Georgia), class identity (De La Soul or NWA), ethnic representation (Fugees, Tres Delinquents, Cypress Hill), urban, rural differences (Arrested Development, Smoothe Da Hustler). Not only has rap been stylistically diverse, this diversity has been created across complex identity amalgams. Hence, it is misleading and partial to collapse these variances into any straightforward model of inspiration from the streets or collusion of the black middle class with white executives.

Equally, the idea that the integrity of rap is undermined because a large part of consumption can be located within the white suburb is also simplistic. A strong case against this claim has been argued by Rose (1994a), who has pointed out that purchasing statistics do not in any straightforward way equal "consumption." Sales figures—such as "75 per cent of rap records are owned by white teenagers" (Whalen, 1994, p. 12)—cannot account for the complex ways in which rap is *circulated* and how recordings are appreciated, used and re-used. Young males in the white suburbs may have the disposable income to purchase a recording that will sit on a shelf looking cool, while, in contrast, black urban youth may circulate recordings and listen to them repeatedly, record them, mix them—there may be a much higher "pass-along-rate" (Rose, 1994a).

What does seem clear is that, as rap has been and continues to be made, appreciated and circulated, it has intersected with and crossed numerous borders of class, neighborhood, gender, ethnic label and "national" belonging. Yet it has not been crossing many divisions *within* the music industry. There are two distinct, but interrelated, regimes of containment I want to identify here: first, organizational practices through which rap is confined to a specific "position" within the industry and not accorded as much investment (economic, staff, time) as other types of music; and second, those through which a particular type of knowledge finds expression in a discourse of "the street." These simultaneously deny the complexities I have just referred to, and in doing so construct a simplistic commercial cultural "reality" for rap production that is easily accommodated to the management practices adopted by the music industry.

Major Anxieties: Affiliations, Representations and Expectations

One of the characteristics of rap that initially confused the major companies was the way that rap proposed a series of working relationships across different musical entities: cliques, collectives, affiliations and group and label identities that connected together different "bands" and individual performers. This is signified in the continual appearance of performers on each other's recordings and the way that this establishes very specific networks of affiliation and alliances, e.g., the performers who have grouped around such entities as The Dogg Pound, Dr Dre's Aftermath and Puff Daddy and The Family.

The genre culture of rap posits a different notion of musical practice, not only in the well-documented use of existing musical elements and technologies but in terms of the idea of a "career" and sense of belonging to a musical entity. This is quite a contrast from that of the stable, bounded and predictable rock unit or pop band, the solo performer and self-sufficient singer-songwriter which the industry has become competent at producing and comfortable in dealing with. Rap posits a fluid series of affiliations and associations, alliances and rivalries—occasionally serious, and usually related to neighborhood and representation.[11] These affiliations are lived across various group and individual identities.

This is connected to another issue which the industry has also found uncomfortable, the representation of "the real" or what is often referred to as "being real" and the politics of identity which has accompanied this. This aspect has often received more superficial mass media coverage than serious debate about the issue that it raises and has frequently been reduced to simple arguments about profanity and the generic imagery of violence and misogyny that has characterized so-called gangsta rap. The "discussion" is often informed by a simple stimulus–response model of media effects and an aesthetic reductionism through which rap becomes merely lyrics. One consequence is that there have been overt political pressures put on record companies—from "community" organizations, government and state forces—and this has further encouraged the major companies to distance themselves from the genre culture of rap.[12]

Further judgments made by staff within business affairs and international departments have also had a decisive influence on the acquisition and drawing up of contracts for rap artists. There are two "business decisions" here which are far more than straightforward commercial judgments. First is an assessment of the ongoing revenue that can be generated from rap: what is referred to as "catalogue value." Rap tracks are routinely compared to conventional songs and it is asserted that they cannot be "covered"—re-recorded, re-sung, re-performed by other artists. Hence, rap tracks are judged to have a short catalogue shelf life, in terms of their ability to bring in ongoing copyright revenue from their re-use.[13] In addition, the revenue that rap can generate during any assumed "shelf life" is considered to be less than other types of music. In the words of one corporate attorney:

> Music publishing and rap is a nightmare because so much of it is parts of songs. You know, they have, like, one-eighth of this song and two-thirds of another song . . . because everything is owned by someone else that can make those deals less expensive, but also less lucrative for the publishers than otherwise. . . . The publisher looks at how much they can collect on a particular album, and sometimes because of the number of samples on the album the amount they can collect can be pretty low.[14]

As Thomas Schumacher has observed in his discussion of sampling and copyright law, rap "highlights the ways in which notions of authorship and originality do not necessarily apply across forms and cultural traditions" (1995, p. 265). Not only do they not apply, they pose problems for the "universals of legal discourse" (Schumacher, 1995, p. 265). Hence, the music industry copyright system, itself established upon culturally coded assumptions about the character of a composition

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and performance which can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Frith, ed., 1993), is inscribed into these business relationships and informs these apparently straightforward "commercial" decisions. One consequence is that rap is perceived to be less attractive in terms of the criteria through which long-term catalogue value is accorded. Hence, less will be paid to artists as advances and royalties, because less can be earned.[15]

A further pragmatic business judgment that affects the amount invested in rap is the assumption that it does not "travel well." Here a strand of racist anxiety that permeates the international music industry manages to combine with a narrow aesthetic evaluation. One senior executive in an international department remarked that he had sat in meetings and heard rap recordings being referred to as "too black" for international promotion,[16] a broad sweeping claim that is justified specifically with the assertion that lyrically rap is "parochial"—although the history of popular music is littered with parochial lyrics appearing in numerous places around the world. While rap does foreground poetic vocal performance, it is misleading to imply that this works simply as lyrics and not as an emotional performative sound event. This argument from within the industry, like Tony Mitchell's claim that U.S. rap has remained "resolutely local" (1996, p. 26), seems to reduce the genre's aesthetic complexity and rhythmic, harmonic and melodic cosmopolitanism to rap lyrics.

Hence, there are a number of ways in which the music industry seeks to contain rap within a narrow structure of expectations: through confinement within a black division; through arm's-length deals in an attempt to avoid dealing with various alliances and affiliations; through judgments about rap's long-term historical and geographical potential to endure. One consequence is a straightforward lack of investment, and the adoption of practices to keep investment down (it is easier to deal with production units than to invest in staff and office space within company). At the same time, rather than bringing the culture—the people, the practices—into the industry, the major companies have tended to maintain a sharp border. This can be contrasted with the treatment of rock in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period there was a noticeable and often commented upon movement from the rock subculture and so-called counter-culture into the music industry—a period when the "revolutionaries" were on CBS (as one marketing slogan proclaimed at time).[17] This has continued, with a new wave of young white males recruited into the U.S. music industry in the early 1990s following the success of Nirvana and the stabilization of grunge into modern or alternative rock. As Joe Levy, a music writer for a number of years, observed in 1996:

> I have not seen R&B and hip hop have the same impact that the big boom in alternative rock had on the industry. Certainly two years ago there was this influx of young people in their twenties going to labels as A and R people and vice presidents of this or that, and these were almost uniformly young white kids who were coming into work alternative rock in the wake of Nirvana. . . . There's a career path in the industry that has to do with alternative rock and I don't necessarily know that it's there for rap and R&B.[18]

Rap personnel have not been embraced or recruited in the same way. For example, when Capitol closed its black music division the company dropped most of its artists and moved only a few acts over to the EMI label. The company publicly announced that this was because EMI had the expertise to deal with them. Yet a few weeks later, when I interviewed Davitt Sigerson, President of EMI Records, and asked him to explain how he deals with rap, he said:

> I don't have anyone doing R&B A&R. What I've adopted as a model is to have a bunch of different production deals or first-look arrangements with entrepreneurs who bring me stuff . . . it's a very affiliative sort of creative community and process and I don't need to be in a camp.[19]

Earlier I referred to George's use of the term "rhythm and blues world" to suggest that R&B is more than a genre of music. Likewise, George has characterized rap culture as a "post-civi rights, ultra-urban, unromantic, hyperrealistic, neonationalistic, anti-assimilationist, aggressive Afro-centric impulse" (George, 1992, p. 93). In the above discussion I have highlighted how these genre cultures relate to the organization of the major companies and inform major independent relationships within the music industry, suggesting that rap culture is kept at a distance from the main offices of the corporations. Despite the influence of rap and hip hop on the aesthetics of music, video, television, film, sport, fashion, dancing and advertising, the potential of this broader cultural formation to make a contribution to music industry business practices is not encouraged. Indeed, as I now want to argue, this distance is maintained by the discursive practices articulated through the myth of the street.

Rebels, Indies, and the Street

I have already suggested that the major companies tend to *allow* rap to be produced at independent companies and production units, using these producers as an often optional and usually elastic repertoire source. This is not to deny the struggles of artists and entrepreneurs for both autonomy from the recognition by the major music companies. However, I am stressing the above point because I think we need to be wary of the increasingly routine rhetoric and romanticization of rap musicians as oppositional rebels "outside" the corporate system, or as iconoclasts in revolt against "the mainstream"—a discourse that has often been imposed upon rap and not necessarily come from participants within hip hop culture itself. In addition, it is important to remember that small companies are not spontaneously or straightforwardly inclined to be more in tune with new musical developments. That certain independent labels (such as Atlantic, Stax, or Def Jam) have been so at specific historical moments is beyond dispute. But most rap labels have very soon entered into formalized and fairly standard commercial relationships characteristic of those between major and minor companies, a division of labor based on a production/distribution split. Despite such close ties, the making of rap is usually explained with numerous references to "the street."

In very general terms, rap is often associated with the street by senior executives when talking about different types of music. For example, Kevin Conroy, Senior VP of Marketing at BMG, remarked that, compared to other styles, rap and hip hop "is a business that really grows from the streets."[20] In a similar way, the corporate *Advertising Age* once informed its readers, "The streets where a rap album begins, of course, are very far from the suburban record stores where it ends up" (Whalen, 1994, p. 12). As Michael Rosenblatt, Senior VP of Artist and Repertoire at MCA, remarked, aware that he was using a somewhat clichéd idea: "A lot of the rap does happen on the small labels because rap is much more of a street thing, it happens on the street. I know it sounds trite, but it really does."[21]

Apart from these very general associations of rap with the street, there are two further and more formal ways in which "the street" is articulated. First, in terms of "taking it to the streets"—what is often referred to as street marketing. Second, in terms of "bringing it from the streets"—frequently referred to as "street intelligence." Both practices involve formalized management practices and systematic commercial procedures that are by no means peculiar to rap or R&B.

Taking It to the Streets

The promotion and marketing of rap, like other genres of music, involve the use of techniques that, elsewhere, I have characterized as "promotional war games" due to the way that they are referred to by staff within record companies through a number of "war-like metaphors"

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(Negus, 1992). So, for example, when Capitol still had a presence in black music, the label's rap promotion unit was called "Capitol Punishment," and the head of the section was referred to as the "chief commander and warden" (Nelson, 1994, p. 26). The term "sniping" is routinely used to refer to fly-posting bills that make no reference to the record label involved, merely signaling the name of the act and tracks or album. The so-named "street teams" (largely made up of college or radio DJs) have been described as "right there in the trenches"[22] and as engaging in "reconnaissance missions into urban enterprise zones" (Rubin, 1997, p. 99). When I spoke to David Harleston, then Senior VP of the Black Music Collective at MCA, he referred to "the use of guerrilla marketing tactics and street promotion." When I rather naively asked what this might involve, he explained:

> Well, it's going to places where consumers are and hitting them where they live. So we no longer just rely on radio or rely on video, which are both very important. We also promote at barber shops and swap meets and things like that and . . . playgrounds where folks are shooting basketball . . . we have street teams who hit people with singles and flyers and stickers and stuff like that. . . . When you take a rap project to radio, radio wants to know that the street is behind it before they'll commit to it. You can't go to radio cold.[23]

The term "street marketing" is shorthand for building an interest in a track or artists through a long process that can involve circulating recordings to influential party-givers, using word-of-mouth networks, approaching local radio mix shows and college radio and promoting through stickers and flyers placed in public places where the targeted "demographic" will take notice. This was institutionalized by Loud Records, a label half-owned by BMG, in their promotion of a number of acts, particularly the Wu-Tang Clan. As Steve Rifkind, Chairman of Loud Records, has claimed:

> I can tell a record company in two days if they have a record or not. . . . We know that kid from the time he steps out of his house, every step he's making, where he's going to hang out, what's the scoop on where to eat lunch at, where he's getting his hair cut, what's the cool way to get it cut, what's the cool record store to go to. We know all these things, and before we attack we get all the information from the street first. (quoted in Rubin, 1997, p. 99)

Prior to forming Loud Records, Rifkind had established his reputation by promoting recordings by acts such as Boogie Down Productions and Brand Nubian. He followed this by promoting Nike sports gear, spending some time with Nike founder Phil Knight. This gave him the experience that he drew upon when formulating a strategy for selling the Wu-Tang Clan. In his own words: "a kid who's going to buy a pair of Nikes is the same kid who's going to buy a Wu-Tang record" (quoted in Rubin, 1997, p. 100).

The ultimate aim of street marketing is to build up such a "buzz" that the radio stations will feel that they have to programme a recording as they themselves will want to be heard to be "in touch with the streets." As Marcus Morton, VP of Rap Promotion for EMI, commented:

> You have to have the DJs and the people that are the trend-setters. They kind of herd the sheep around. They have to like it. And everybody else—y' know, if you look at the people that program the crossover stations, nine out of ten of them think that they are the hippest thing on the planet, but in reality they're not. They listen to somebody else. Which is either their DJ—that's why you have a mix show DJ because he's supposed to be really in tune with the streets and really in tune with what's going on. And he's supposed to play it on his show and then translate it back to the people who run the stations so that they can put it into regular rotation.[24]

In practice, the activity of "street marketing" relies upon a number of well-developed acts of persuasion that have been deployed within various industries for a number of years. This includes utilizing the "personal influence" of key opinion-formers, "selecting target markets," using concepts of "followers" and "niches," and "branding" and "positioning" products.[25] These practices are not peculiar to rap, but are used when selling a range of products throughout the entertainment and fashion industries. As Terri Rosi, VP of Black Music Marketing for BMG Distribution, commented when I remarked that "there's a lot of talk about 'the street' ": "I know and that's very annoying because the end result is that you talk about 'the street' but you really want it on radio and you want it on MTV."[26]

Bringing It from the Street

As implied in Rifkind's comments about following the movements of "the kids," street teams are also responsible for information gathering and feeding that data back to headquarters. This is sometimes described as an informal process of intuitively hanging out in colleges, neighborhood record stores, clubs, playgrounds and parties, an experiential process of "developing an instinct" by keeping an ear and eye on what is going on. However, the process is also far from spontaneous and is organized in comparable ways to other types of information gathering. To quote from Terri Rosi once more, this time at length:

> It is systematized. You have a guy out there called a street promotion person who is hanging out in stores and clubs and talking to people, and he may even actually go into a college campus. He may be wherever people gather that are those people. He has to learn his marketplace and know where he's supposed to go. They put up stickers in advance so when it comes two months, three months later, "well, yes, I know the ABC band," or whatever. So in that sense, it is a form of street intelligence and you get feedback and you learn after a while who can pick the hit, you figure that out, but it's very people-intense. You're out there, you're moving, talking and working and doing all that kinda stuff. . . . We've got twenty of them all across the country, and there will be one person in the record company who works with the street team. So they give their reports, where it's going to work, where it's not going to work and their reputation is on the line. I can't tell you that I'm the street person in Oakland and tell you, "Man, this is gonna jam," and then I ship these records in there and nobody likes it at all. Because, well, "Who did you talk to?" . . . You don't want to lose your job because you didn't do the right thing. So, yes, in that way it is very systematized.[27]

Street intelligence is about "knowing markets" and "knowing consumers" and, like street marketing, it involves employing conventional business management techniques based on monitoring, data gathering and accumulation. Yet these conventional marketing practices and business activities are elided through the discourse of the street, denying that this is similar to the other activities that are daily being conducted and initiated from the corporate suite.

More Than Music: Rap, Fashion and Product Endorsement

I referred to Steve Rifkind's association with the Nike company and highlighted how this influenced the way Loud Records presented and promoted the Wu-Tang Clan. From the days when Run DMC made reference to Adidas in their songs to the appearance of Coolio and Method Man on the catwalk to present Tommy Hilfiger's new 1996 fashions, clothing has been central to the marketing and making of rap. This has been increasingly recognized by magazines such as *The Source* (which accrue a large part of their revenue from the clothing and sports shoe manufacturers who place advertisements in their pages), performers (who have been increas-

ingly endorsing different products and creating their own lines of clothing), and record labels. As Jim Parham, Director of Sales at Tommy Boy, remarked when explaining how the music and merchandizing were being brought closer together:

> We are gradually tying the music into the clothing. Right now the clothing is sort of an entity unto itself, but the way it originally started was that we made clothing items as promotional items for the music or the label and they were really popular, so we developed it into an actual selling line and we will hopefully be expanding that in the next couple of years.[28]

Many rap musicians have recognized such connections and formed their own successful companies. Notable here is Wu-Wear, the clothing and accessory company established by the Wu-Tang Clan. This company has stores throughout the United States where you can purchase T-shirts, socks, baggy jeans, coffee mugs, and keychains, all featuring the distinctive Wu-Bat brand logo. Like other companies, Wu-Wear has recognized the importance of music video for promoting clothing as much as for selling music. As Mike Clark, CEO of Wu-Wear, observed: "Videos are hands down the best advertising you can have" (quoted in Edwards and Stein, 1998, p. 71). Not surprisingly, the Wu-Tang Clan themselves wear their own clothing in their videos. But, like other major clothing companies, they have sought other celebrity endorsements, and artists including Bjork and Rage Against The Machine have publicly worn Wu-Wear, as have various athletes. In 1997 the company made $10 million (Edwards and Stein, 1998) and also signed a deal with the Federated Department Store retail corporation, the owners of Macy's and Bloomingdale's (Parker, 1997). As Public Enemy's Chuck D proclaimed in an advertisement which appeared in *The Source* of September 1996 and in which he was launching his own Rap Style International: "So You Wanna Be in the Music Business . . . Whatcha' Gonna Wear?"

The business of rap is about more than music and clothes and can embrace all manner of consumer products, visible and audible in the way that Queen Latifah has appeared in a box of cereal during an advertisement for Frosted Cheerios, as LL Cool J has been rapping in advertising for major league baseball, and as Method Man has appeared on billboards dressed in Reebok clothing while KRS-One was promoting Nike. "Business awareness" and the range of revenue sources that can be linked to the genre have been recognized by numerous rap performers. As Allen S. Gorden "Tha Ebony Cat" explained, discussing the range of endorsement opportunities being pursued by different artists and companies: "In an increasingly complex, often hostile, marketplace, many rappers are refining their portfolio by pursuing endorsement opportunities" (1997, p. 98). Whether or not rap culture might enter the corporate suites and boardrooms of the major record labels, the discourse of portfolio management has certainly entered the business of rap.

Culture, Industry, and Rap

This chapter has focused on how the making of rap is managed by the music industry, and it has been highlighted how various corporate strategies, which utilize the technique of portfolio management as a way of allocating staff, artists, and investment, directly intersect with the deployment of a particular type of knowledge used to understand the world and to produce a "reality" that informs the perceptions and activities of staff. It is not that there are organizational structures (such as the black music division and deals with small production companies): it is that these are operated according to a particular type of knowledge through which the world is imagined in a particular way, a knowledge that depends upon many systematic data-collecting techniques. At the same time, uncritically received cultural assumptions and common-sense ideas about the social location of rap are continually articulated to

notions of the street. In many ways this situation is symptomatic of broader social relationships and beliefs about rap culture and the way in which these intersect with and become "part" of the industry—a process that requires much more empirical and theoretical work before it can be fully understood, but which I have tried to evoke through the idea of "culture producing an industry." Such broader cultural political tensions are structured into what are often taken to be straightforward economic, organizational and business practices, activities that are lived by those working within the industry as if they are merely responding to "the world out there." One significant consequence is that the rhythm and blues world and the genre culture of rap in particular are kept at a distance from the dominant interests and agendas within the main offices of the music corporations.

Yet rap produced in the United States has managed to move out from such regimes of containment—both at home and abroad. There is a final twist. The physical and discursive borders erected by the organizational arrangements and knowledge practices of the contemporary music industry have meant that rap music and musicians have not been "co-opted" or invited into the boardroom in quite the same way as have other types of music and their makers, most notably the way in which rock moved from the street to the executive suite.[29] Often denied direct access, offered licensing deals, lower budgets, poorer contracts, or simply cut from the roster when there is a financial crisis, rap has (partly out of necessity) been able to generate alternative resources, and through these the genre has continually reinvented and redefined itself in those spaces and places designated (for want of terminology rather than as a transparent description of a "reality") as "underground." That rap musicians have managed continually to redefine the style itself while crossing social and cultural barriers, both within the U.S. and beyond is a process which has occurred despite, rather than because of, the ways in which the recording industry has sought to organize the production of contemporary popular music.

Study Questions

1. Does hip-hop have something to offer as a model for entrepreneurial business practices?
2. Is economic power a legitimate way to challenge the political status quo?
3. To what extent does economic development in hip-hop funnel down to its core audiences?

Notes

1. Notable here is Tricia Rose (1994a) who notes the importance of independent labels and the significance of video in the distribution of rap. She is also careful to acknowledge that the commercial marketing of rap has produced a contradictory situation whereby the music is affirmative of black identity, yet can also be used by corporations such as McDonald's, Coke, and Nike in ways that are directly connected to anxieties about U.S. cultural imperialism. Rose (1994b) has also discussed rap in relation to the general contractual arrangements operating within the music industry, particularly in an interview with Carmen Ashurst-Watson. Also notable here is Reebee Garofalo's (1997) discussion of the music industry and rap in his history of popular music, and Nelson George's coverage of rap within the context of his critique of the music industry and its role in the "death of rhythm and blues" and formation of post-soul culture (1989, 1992).
2. A useful collection of essays is Adam Sexton (ed.) (1995).
3. An argument proposed by Ann Marlowe who has stated that: "For some time now the problem with capitalism hasn't been that it doesn't work but that it's no longer fun. Opposition culture has failed to make good on this. . . . The business of rap is just business, yet it looks like fun" (1995, p. 223).

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4. Discussed at length in relation to Atlantic and Stax Records in Wade and Picardie (1990).
5. For a more detailed discussion of this report see George (1989).
6. Personal interview, New York City, 27 February 1996.
7. See Reynolds (1996) and Rosen (1996). See also Clark-Meads (1996) for a discussion of Capitol redefining their "core business."
8. These types of changes are discussed in Sandler (1995).
9. Referred to by J.R. Reynolds in "Confab Covers Urban Industry Issues" *Billboard*, 18 May 1996, p. 20.
10. Backgrounds of various producers, artists and entrepreneurs are discussed in Fernando Jr (1995).
11. Most notable here is the well-publicized East–West NYC–LA dispute which, in the early to mid-1990s, became focused in a series of highly public confrontations between those associated with Death Row Records and Bad Boy Records.
12. Most notably C. Delores Tucker, Chairwoman of the National Political Congress of Black Women, and William Bennett (previously Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education) put pressure on Time-Warner shareholders. Likewise (then) Senator Bob Dole continually accused Warner Music and other labels of "putting profits ahead of common decency" and "glamorizing violence." For a perspective on this and its impact from within the industry see Nunziata (1995). One immediate consequence was that Michael Fuchs, Chairman CEO of Warner Music Group, announced that the company would form label groups made up of an A and R person, label head, someone from business affairs and legal personnel to judge the suitability of future releases, with particular attention paid to lyrics. On this point see Jeffrey (1995). In addition, when MCA purchased Interscope, the label that had been distributing recordings by Death Row Records, Doug Morris, CEO of MCA Music Entertainment, publicly announced that the company had an option "not to release any music it deems objectionable" (Morris, 1996).
13. This was most explicitly raised by a senior executive at a major corporate group when explaining how the company would strategically assess the value of different musical genres. It was an off-the-record interview.
14. Personal interview, Paul Robinson, Associate General Counsel, Warner Music Group, New York City, 13 February 1996.
15. This is acknowledged within the industry, but I was unable to obtain any verifiable figures.
16. This was again an off-the-record interview.
17. For discussion of recruitment from rock subculture into the industry, see Chapple and Garofalo (1977) and Frith (1983).
18. Personal interview, Joe Levy, *Details Magazine*, New York City, 22 March 1996.
19. Personal interview, New York City, 19 March 1996.
20. Personal interview, New York City, 5 April 1996.
21. Personal interview, New York City, 6 February 1996.
22. Greg Peck, a former VP of Black Music at Warner Music, quoted in Reynolds (1995, p. 26).
23. Personal interview, Universal City, Los Angeles, 6 May 1996.
24. Personal interview, EMI, Los Angeles, 24 April 1996.
25. All similar to many referred to in textbook guides to marketing; see, for example, Kotler (1994).
26. Personal interview, Terri Rosi, VP Black Music Marketing, BMG Distribution, New York City, 11 April 1996.
27. Personal interview, Terri Rosi, VP Black Music Marketing, BMG Distribution, New York City, 11 April 1996.
28. Telephone interview, 15 April 1996.
29. For an argument about the co-optation of rock, see Chapple and Garofalo (1977). For a discussion of the way in which rock has been central rather than peripheral, or oppositional, to the development of the modern recording industry, see Frith (1983).

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