

'The New White

Negro' in Hip

Hop

A CRITICAL STUDY OF EMINEM

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Table of Content

Introduction	4
Methodology of Review	7
Review of Literature	8
Hip Hop—A Brief History	8
Hip Hop as Black Music	12
Intersection of Black and White Worlds	19
Review of Eminem’s Music	
Slim Shady, Eminem and Marshall Mathers	25
- <i>Slim Shady</i>	27
- <i>Eminem</i>	29
- <i>Marshall Mathers</i>	31
- <i>Race</i>	32
Discussion of Findings	34
Expressing the Reality of the Oppressed	35
Being the Oppressor	38
Implication on Society—Definition of Racism	43
Implication on Education	44
Suggestions for Further Studies	47
References	48

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Introduction:

Hip Hop fans should forever be faithful to the culture's four original elements, graffitiing, breaking dancing, djing and emceeing. However, they should also open their hearts to an evolving fifth element, "academizing," as the culture continues to gain legitimacy in the academic world. Led by the writings and lectures of Hip Hop scholars such as Michael Eric Dyson, Tricia Rose, Mark Anthony Neal and Robin D. G. Kelley, many undergraduate and graduate programs have courses and seminars exclusively on Hip Hop housed under African American studies, popular music studies, English, cultural studies, communication, media studies, Sociology, media studies, etc.¹ Hip Hop is becoming popular in academics because it is now being recognized as a legitimate form of expression that has captured the joys and pains of America's urban society.

This document chronicles the history of Hip Hop, critically defining its cultural elements and its roots, presents the manner in which it has moved beyond its initial subculture into mainstream American (U.S) culture, and examines its impact on the U.S. society, including its implication for education. The following discussion pays close attention to the music of Eminem, a White rapper, and discusses his existence and legitimacy in Hip Hop. The conclusion reflects on the impacts of the Hip Hop culture, and Eminem in particular, on the discourse and definition of race. It also proposes that, while maintaining its cultural roots, Hip Hop can be an important factor in other arenas, such as education, where it can help often-misunderstood minority and poor students to use the rich form of self-expression that is in Hip Hop.

Historically, Hip Hop has been performed mostly by African American artists describing the lifestyle, reality and culture of African American youth in United States of

¹ Forman, 2004.

America. Unlike any other form of expression, it has been the primary instrument used to paint the picture of the various facets of the life of young African Americans in America's ghettos. Chuck D, the lead rapper of the rap group Public Enemy, once said that Hip Hop is the Black CNN, or "the only thing that gives the straight-up facts on how the black youth feels..."² Furthermore, Hip Hop has often been used as a tool for critiquing racial relations. For example, the spiteful relationship that exists between America's young Black males and the police during the early 1990s was best captured on Tupac Shakur's first album *2Pacalypse*. In its purest form "Hip Hop is nothing, however, if not resilient," and it is undeniable that it is authentically Black youth culture.³

If the argument above is to be deemed factual, one must wonder if there is space for multiculturalism in Hip Hop. As America moves farther from the Civil Rights era, it has embraced, more widely, the intermingling of different races, and different cultures, at least on a superficial level. With such environment, can Hip Hop be considered a culture solely for African Americans? The historical background of Hip Hop reveals evidence of the significant role that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans played in the creation of this culture. As such, what is their role and place in Hip Hop? With the publication of Bakari Kitwana's book, *Why do White Kids Love Hip Hop?* it has suddenly been brought to the attention that White Americans are also part of the Hip Hop culture, or are they? The Eminem phenomenon continues to sweep the country as a White rapper continues to gain legitimacy from fans of Hip Hop. Therefore, is Hip Hop only an African American culture?

² Leland 1999, pg 71

³ George 1998, pg 12

The main research goal is to investigate Eminem, as a rapper, in Hip Hop. What has been his role in Hip Hop? Can this White artist be really considered a legitimate participant in an all Black cultural art form? What has his identification as a White artist in a Black forum meant for White mainstream Americans? How has Eminem helped redefine White America through his representation of the low socioeconomic White population in his music? More importantly, and more profoundly, what has been the influence of Hip Hop on the definition of racial relations in America?

Methodology of Review:

The methodology used in this study consists of two parts. First, there is a review of literature that includes historical writings about the evolution Hip Hop. This literature also includes journalistic writings that chronicle the rising popularity of this cultural art form. Further, the literature also reviews the works of scholars who have used academic theories in their interpretation of Hip Hop. These forms of literature provide solid background information of the topic at hand. In addition, the literature presents more specific works and theories that address Marshall Mathers (Eminem), his role in Hip Hop, and the social implications of his participation. Moreover, articles from sources, such as VH1.com, CNN.com and MTV.com, are used as it provides public perception of Marshall Mathers.

Second, the music of Marshall Mathers is analyzed. Lyrics from his four albums that he recorded with Interscope Records, — *The Slim Shady LP*, *The Marshal Mathers LP*, *Eminem Show*, and *Encore*—serve as my sample and were coded into three categories---Slim Shady, Eminem and Marshall Mathers. Though Marshall Mathers recorded and released music before his signing to Interscope Records, his most recent work is used because it is this work that brought him fame and notoriety. In addition, a few songs featured on the 8 Mile soundtracks were included in the sample as well as his feature on Jay-Z’s song “Renegade.”

Review of Literature:

Hip Hop—A Brief History

The inception of Hip Hop as a genre of music and an art form is debated among its scholars; however, it is often agreed that it came to being in the 1970s. The first chapter of Nelson George's Hip Hop America begins the account of the story of Hip Hop by stating that "this story begins as another is ending." During this period, the United States had just awakened from the decade of the Civil Rights Movement when African Americans demanded and gained certain basic civil liberties. While the nation legally abandoned segregation in most parts of the country to live up to its promise of "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" to all its citizens, American cities were still filled with over-flowing poverty; poverty that was mostly suffered by urban communities populated by Hispanics and African Americans. As a result of this reality, White middle class Americans fled to the suburbs, leaving the cities more desolate.

The suburban revolution, the one supported by the government and celebrated by major industry (auto, oil, rubber, real estate), along with the prejudice against blacks and Hispanics, had left large chunks of our big cities economic dead zones....⁴

It was in such depressing conditions that brought about Hip Hop. Bronx, one of New York's five boroughs, was home to one of the most disturbing urban realities of the time period, especially its southernmost section.⁵ In addition to economic disparities, the Bronx was raided vigorously by gang and drug activities. In 1973, there were an estimated 315 gangs, with 19,503 members.⁶ Gang battles, one of which lasted for ninety-two days, between the Black Spades and the Seven Crowns, two of the most powerful gangs, would lead to neighborhoods being afflicted with constant gun fires and drive by shootings.

⁴ George 1998, pg. 10

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hager 1982, pg. 15

Afrika Bambaata, one of the founding fathers of Hip Hop, was a member of Black Spades. His natural ability to lead led him to elevate beyond an ordinary member. “After many of the original Black Spades were killed, jailed, or dropped out of the gang, Bambaataa took on an increasingly influential role.⁷” However with the tragic shooting of his closest friend, Soulski, on January 10, 1975, Bambaata ended all his affiliation with the gang. Similarly, gang activities in the Bronx began to decrease in 1975 because of the emerging of an alternative activity. In an article in *The Village Voice*⁸, Steven Hager (1982) describes this occurrence:

For over five years the Bronx had lived in constant terror of street gangs. Suddenly, in 1975, they disappeared almost as quickly as they had arrived. This happened because something better came along to replace the gangs. That something was eventually called hip-hop (Pg. 18).⁹

In 1992, *The Source*, a Hip Hop magazine, published an interview that brought its readers the story of the beginnings of Hip Hop from the point of view of Afrika Bambaata, Grandmaster Flash, the two pillars of Hip Hop, and Kool DJ Herc, often referred to as the founder/inventor of Hip Hop. Nelson George, the interviewer, conducts the interview in a manner that portrays two important aspects of Hip Hop. Firstly, the introduction and the brief description of the background of these three pioneers present a richness of the music’s past.

The Jamaican born Clive Campbell, Kool DJ Herc, migrated to the Bronx with his family to a housing project in the Bronx in 1967. Influenced by the DJing culture of reggae, calypso and dancehall, it is said that he invented Hip Hop in 1973 when he

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The Village Voice is one of the first avenues for publication about Hip Hop

⁹ Afrika Bambaataa also expressed that “women were more important.” Because they were fed up with gang activities as they readied to start families

extemporized at the birthday party of his sister.¹⁰ However, his most important influence on the music is his eclectic collection of records that he used to create Hip Hop. Along with DJing came the act of acquiring technical knowledge in order to best use the equipments. Trained as an electrician Joseph Sadler, Grandmaster Flash, mastered and created dj equipments. Many of the artful forms of DJing signature moves—known as scratches—are credited to his creativity.¹¹ In addition, his invention of the beat box to add the sound of drums to the sounds of his turn tables, has made a lasting impact on the music. Africa Bambaataa’s influence on Hip Hop is often seen with a sociological lens. While he was socialized with the culture of his neighborhoods and was a product of his environment, he was able to elevate and analyze the faults of his surroundings. Further, he used this emerging art form, Hip Hop, to create an organization, the Zulu Nation, which served to eventually replace The Black Spades.¹² This ability to use this very young culture for social purpose foreshadowed the social consciousness of Hip Hop that was to come.

The second aspect described in George’s interview allowed Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool DJ Herc to talk about the evolution of the components of Hip Hop. Hip Hop as a cultural art form has four different components: graffiti, break-dancing, DJing and rapping.¹³ The oldest of these art forms, graffiti, was the first topic of conversation. Kool DJ Herc expressed that he was a graffiti artist first. Bambaata added,

¹⁰ This is a history that is not formally recorded but is widely told in informal sources.

¹¹ George 1993.

¹² Hager 1982.

¹³ Rose 1994.

“See before the whole word hip-hop, graffiti was there before that.¹⁴” And as Hip Hop came about, these DJs used graffiti flyers to advertise their parties.

While young, street youth had always scribbled on abandoned trains, and in abandoned neighborhoods, graffiti went further to use paint to artistically paint their names—known as tags. During the early 1970s, graffiti became so popular that tagging gained political attention in New York City from then-mayors John Lindsay and Abe Beame. With the introduction of different legislation, the city made all efforts to put an end to graffiti. However, “to those young or observant enough to see beyond the nuisance caused to travelers, graffiti was the voice of kids using spray paint and Magic Markers to scream for attention and make art.¹⁵”

The second topic of conversation in the interview was break-dancing. This, according to the legends, became a “macho” competition that, similar to graffiti, was based on the idea of leaving behind one’s mark or one’s symbol by way of physical expression.

“Breaking is a way of using your body to inscribe your identity on streets and trains, in parks and high school gyms... [it] is a competitive display of physical and imaginative virtuosity, a codified dance-form-cum-warfare that cracks open to flaunt personal inventiveness.¹⁶”
Breaking is also a very significant feature of Hip Hop because it symbolizes the contribution of Latinos to the evolution of Hip Hop. “The Puerto Ricans carried break dancing.¹⁷” In their conversation, Bambaataa affirmed that while Hip Hop has a strong affinity with Blacks, its creation was as much that of Latinos as it was Blacks. “Now one thing people must know, that when we say Blacks we mean all our Puerto Rican or

¹⁴ George 1993, pg. 47.

¹⁵ Ibid, pg 12.

¹⁶ Banes 1981, pg. 8.

¹⁷ George 1993, pg. 47.

Dominican brothers. Wherever the Hip Hop was and the Blacks was, the Latinos and the Puerto Ricans was too.¹⁸”

The elements of Hip Hop that have lasted longer are DJing and rapping. As original DJs, Bambaataa, Kool DJ Herc, and Grandmaster Flash spent a significant part of their conversation reflecting on the evolution of the various aspects of their career as djs. For example, Bambaataa was praised for his immense collection of records and Grandmaster Flash was credited for his creativity in the inventions of his DJing equipments. With reference to rapping, Kool DJ Herc’s accompanist—known as an MC, master of ceremonies—Coke La Rock is known to be the first one to add words to a running beat, or rap, as it is know today. The joyous recollection of this rich history came to a close with the discussion of the beginnings of the commercialization of Hip Hop. Though it gave way to a faster distribution of this art form to various parts of the nation, such as the west coast and eventually Midwest and the south, who in turn added to the evolution of Hip Hop, it also gave way to this rich sub culture being part of America’s mainstream culture. The discussion of commercialization was also the first mention of the role of White Americans in the history of Hip Hop.

Hip Hop as Black Music

The assertion that Hip Hop is Black music is often viewed as radical for several reasons. Imani Perry, a professor at Rutgers Law School and a scholar on Black culture—art, music, literature and film best portrays this notion, in her book *Prophets of the Hood* (2004). However, before she builds her argument, she explains hesitations that others may have in making this assertion.

¹⁸ Ibid.

First, according to the author, it is misconceived that defining Hip Hop as Black music fails to recognize its diverse origins. The idea of something being Black is perceived to present the notion that it is 100% Black. However, this is not the case as with many aspects of American culture deemed American—for example hamburgers, pizza, rock and roll and American football—have its roots, or are significantly influenced by other cultures. While to deem something French or English rarely implies that it contains outside influences is far from the reality of American culture. The idea that Hip Hop is Black music without external influences “emerges from the absurd reality that Blackness in the United States is constructed as a kind of pure existence, a purity, to most, of negative kind, defined by a pure lack of sophistication and complexity and a pure membership in a group of undesirables.¹⁹”

Other critiques of Hip Hop being Black music argue on the basis of “originalism,” or the debate about who was the founder of Hip Hop, or who made the first rap record. While this is important for historical acknowledgment, it fails to capture the cultural identity in the music. Ethnomusicologist John Szwed properly resolves this argument as he clarifies that “things in the United States have never been ...that pure. The origins of everything American can twist and shout their way through history, giving and taking as they go, inventing and reinventing themselves, praising their authentic beginnings about as often as they deny them.²⁰” However, it is on this very argument that Paul Gilroy refutes Perry’s argument.

Gilroy, a professor of Sociology at Goldsmith’s College of the University of London, a DJ and a music journalist, argues that while Hip Hop or other forms of Black

¹⁹ Perry 2004, pg. 10-11.

²⁰ Ibid, pg. 12

performance culture, for that matter, may once have been authentic, it is now a “profane practice.” He adds that “It [hip hop] has been propagated by unpredictable means in non-linear patterns.²¹” Furthermore, Gilroy argues that “the most important lessons music still has to teach us is that its inner secrets and its ethnic rules can be taught and learned.²²” In other words, the very cultural values that exist in music are not restricted only to the one group of people, but can be disseminated different group. The author concludes by citing that “promiscuity is the key principle of its continuance.²³” By this, he suggests that the influence of other cultures is not only present but also necessary. While Perry agrees with the “non linear pattern” of Hip Hop’s emergence, she insists that “the manner in which the music [Hip Hop] became integrated into the fabric of American culture was a Black American cultural production, through an overwhelmingly Black American audience, and using Black American aesthetics as signature features of the music.²⁴” In this statement, Perry acknowledges the influence of other cultures, but proposes that Hip Hop was introduced to the United States and to the world by Black American culture.

In addition, critics of Hip Hop as Black music turn to Afro Atlanticism ideologies, or Afro-Diasporic ideas. As mentioned above, the emergence of the art form is practically credited to Kool DJ Herc, a native Caribbean. Moreover, the lasting importance of djing techniques and the presence of reggae music in Hip Hop are both of Caribbean descent influence. Given those premises, would it not be accurate to define Hip Hop, not as Black American music, but as African Diaspora music? To the ears of

²¹ Ibid, pg. 13.

²² Gilroy 1995, pg. 115.

²³ Ibid, pg. 117.

²⁴ Perry 2004, pg. 12.

Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, Ron Karenga, and Molefi Asante, all proponents of building and strengthening the relationship between people of the African Diaspora, this may sound ideal; yet, the relationship between the different members of the Diaspora demonstrates a different reality. Black Caribbeans, Africans and African Americans, with all that they have in common, also share many frictions in their relationships.

Although the stories of Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima give evidence that without an accent or other forms of outward identification, a Black person in America is just another Black person, interpersonal relationships between Africans, Black Caribbeans and African Americans has not always been copasetic. In this relationship, where all parties have at various times been antagonistic towards each other, it is hardly possible to argue that Afrocentrism or Afro Atlaticism is not often romanticized.²⁵ Also, it can be simply stated that the view of American society and American culture is different from the perspective of the different members of the African Diaspora. For this reason, to argue that Hip Hop is Black music, according to Perry, is accurate because while it tells the culture and reality for African Americans, it may not do the same for Africans or Black Caribbeans.

The previous discussion has addressed critics who disagree with the definition of Hip Hop as Black music; however, it has not described why Hip Hop is Black music. Perry, the proponent of this idea presents four central characteristics of the art form that makes it Black music. They include: 1) the primary language used in the music is African American Vernacular English, 2) its political location in society is distinctly ascribed to Black people, music and cultural forms, 3) its origination from Black American oral culture, and 4) its derivation from Black American musical traditions.

²⁵ Ibid.

First, Hip Hop is a product of Black music tradition in America. This is most evident in the consistent use of other forms of Black music—jazz, blues, bee pop—in Hip Hop. Sampling, a tradition set by Sugar Hill Gang’s 1979 release “Rappers Delight,” which sampled “Good Times” by Chic, is not only meant to pay respect to musicians of prior generations but, also to show the authenticity of Black music in today’s Hip Hop.

Second, it is undeniable that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Ebonics is the required language in the art form. This requisite is so enforced that artists from coming cultural backgrounds other than Black American culture, such as Fat Joe and Big Pun, ascribe to this language usage in order to be recognized as legitimate participants. While these artists often borrow language from their cultural background, as is also done by an artist such as Wyclef Jean, it is evident that the dominant language usage is AAVE. Even artists such as Will Smith (The Fresh Prince) and DJ Jazzy Jeff, who emerged from middle class African American families where the use of AAVE is not as prevalent as it is in the lower class ghettos, use the music’s dominant language in order to participate in Hip Hop. “Coded language, in the form of the other languages or increasingly obscure dialect has become an essential element in maintaining a private Hip Hop community.” And without complying with this, one is simple not admitted into the world of Hip Hop.²⁶

The importance of this vernacular in Hip Hop is symbolic of the importance of verbal dexterity in the African American culture. Evident in the fact that it is a skill that most African American leaders posses, the ability to master oratory skills, not just formal English, but also the African American Vernacular is very essential. This is exemplified by the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, Rev. Al Sharpton, and

²⁶ Ibid.

more recently, Barack Obama. Furthermore, the appreciation of African American Vernacular is so strong that it often spills over into mainstream American language. This is evident in the fact that Snoop Dogg's "fo shizzle" became a common saying among high school students and politicians at the same time.

Similarly, Perry presents that the art of story telling in Hip Hop as an element that can be directly attributed to African American culture and its African roots. Hip Hop, described by Perry (2004) as "trickster music" has attributes that can be seen in the West African fables featuring Kweku Ananse, the trickster spider. Evidenced in any Ananse story, the use of wit and cleverness is an appreciated item in lyrics, Hip Hop beats, and even break dancing. "Breaking [dancing], the original dance form to emerge out of Hip Hop culture is intelligent dance. Mythologized for replacing fighting with dancing battles, it represents the triumph of wit over force;" much similar to how Ananse defeats all his opponents. Furthermore, the complexities of the speech of a trickster are present even today in Hip Hop lyrics. To fully understand the content of a rap song, one needs to know much more than the current slang of the day because it often entails references to other artists, locations, and many other ideas.²⁷ For example, Common uses this element of trickery in his song "I Used to Love H.E.R.," where he describes a relationship he had with a girl. Beginning the story as a at ten years old, the artist takes the listener through the different stages of their relationship, describing how they both grew and evolved over the years. Throughout the song, the artist is able to persuade the listener that he is talking about a girl until the very last line when he reveals that "who I'm talking about is Hip Hop."

²⁷ This is also evident in an artist like Jay-Z or Nas ending a song with "shouts to Marcy" or "shouts to QB" to commemorate where they came from. Without knowledge that this is where they grew up, one would not understand this element in their music.

By far the most valuable justification of Perry's (2004) argument of Hip Hop as Black music comes in her discussion of Hip Hop as a political tool. Apart from its aesthetic beauty, the art form stands as a form of identity, "a politically charged identity."²⁸ From its early beginnings, with songs such as "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash, Hip Hop took a liberal political image often criticizing and highlighting aspects of governmental policies that led to the struggle of African Americans. "Without ever mentioning [Ronald] Reagan by name, "The Message" capitalized on the sense of despair felt by the Black community during those years."²⁹ While other musical genres have their political elements, Hip Hop specifically concentrates on Black politics because its artists address the same political issues that Black politicians such as Rev. Jesse Jackson address. Today's Hip Hop, although not as popular as it was in late 1980s and early 1990s with artists such as Public Enemy, KRS One, A Tribe Called Quest, and De La Soul, maintains its involvement in Black politics through the music of performers like Talib Kweli, Mos Def, and Dead Prez.

In her compelling book *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose, professor at University of California at Santa Cruz and an expert on 20th century African-American culture and politics, social thought, popular culture and gender issues, makes a similar argument with the help of an expansive cultural study by James Scott., "*Domination and the Art of Resistance*." "While exploring the relationship between cultural and political oppressors and the oppressed, Scott identifies how power relationships between the two entities are solidified and challenged through social transcripts. First, he presents that the dominant public transcript is a "short hand way of describing the open interaction between

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Walden 2003, pg. 260.

subordinates and those who dominate” which supports the unjust social order.³⁰ On the other hand, the hidden transcript is a “discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ or in disguised form,” critiquing and resisting the social order.³¹ Rose adds an interpretation that the hidden transcript “creates alternative codes that invert stigmas, direct our attention to offstage cultures of the class or group within which they originated, and validate the perceptions of the less powerful.³²” In this view, Hip Hop is a hidden transcript. “Among many other things, it uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities.³³” This political aspect of Hip Hop is arguably the art form’s most important element.

Intersection of Black and White Worlds

Though Imani Perry (2004) successfully defines Hip Hop as Black music, the involvement of White America is very significant. In the process of moving from a sub culture into mainstream culture, and international eminence, the involvement of non-Blacks must be recognized. Given the history of Hip Hop, it has already been demonstrated that the art form was not created solely by Blacks, and the influences of Latinos and Caribbeans have also been recognized. However, the role of White Americans has been only slightly mentioned. Involvement of White Americans in the Hip Hop has been very essential to the growth of the art form from its very beginnings to today. White Americans in Hip Hop can be examined in three categories: entrepreneurial and business involvement, White fans, and White artists.

³⁰ Rose 1994, pg. 100

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

First, the myth that Hip Hop, at any point of its history, was owned and controlled by Blacks must be debunked. While the very early beginnings of rap, perhaps Sugar Hill Records, was financed by Blacks, most rap music from 1981 to the present day is owned by White entrepreneurs.³⁴ Nelson George (1998) claims that “on the owner front, . . . without White entrepreneurial involvement Hip Hop culture wouldn’t have survived its first half decade on vinyl.” White entrepreneurs who took a business chance on a genre that was not predicted to last capitalized immensely on Hip Hop. Some of the most influential White investors in Hip Hop include: Rick Rubin, who along with Russell Simmons brought Def Jam Records acts, such as Run D.M.C., L.L Cool J., Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, etc; Dante Ross Elektra Records who brought about Brand Nubian; Michael Berrin who brought about Nas; and Jon Schecter and David Mayes—founders of *The Source* magazine.³⁵

Apart from all these individuals, and other unmentioned White entrepreneurs, arguably the most important White Men in Hip Hop are Barry Weiss of Jive Records and Jimmy Iovine of Interscope Records. While other record companies often signed artists who fit the image of the record company—Suge Knight for example only signed artists who would perform hardcore “gangsta” rap—Weiss pursued all forms of artists. His list of artists who he has signed or helped sign include: R. Kelly, KRS-One, DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince, Kool Moe Dee, A Tribe Called Quest, Too Short, Spice I, E-40, etc.³⁶ Jimmy Iovine’s Interscope Records has been home to some of the pioneers of Hip Hop on the west coast, such as Dr. Dre, Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg, and some of today’s

³⁴ George 1998.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

most popular artists, such as Eminem, 50cent (and G-Unit), The Game, and Jadakiss (and Ruff Ryders) (Interscope Records).

Second, the presence of White Americans in Hip Hop can be seen through their participation as fans and buyers of the music. If it was arguable that White Americans were substantial consumers of Hip Hop in its early days, this fact can now be claimed with great accuracy. The claim that Hip Hop is mainstream is credited to the very fact that Hip Hop is now topping Billboard Charts. As of July 30th, 2005, five of Billboard's top 10 albums were rap albums, and at any given point this fact remains true. How did this phenomenon come into being? How, why, and when did White Americans become so involved in Hip Hop?

As an underground product, Hip Hop appealed to its White audience as a “form of activism,” claims an early White Hip Hop fan Kyle Stewart.³⁷ Unlike it is today, it was a culture that was embraced by politically inclined, leftist White kids who saw it as a form of defying the status quo. “Like punk, hip hop was a counter counterculture. It gave youth a voice to tell the truth and exposed the ills of society, especially racism and our hypocritical government.”³⁸ Also, there were White Hip Hop fans who enjoyed the music simply because they appreciated the Black cultural form. To these groups, it was not embraced as a form of imitation but as genuine fans who were astounded by the art. Bakari Kitwana (2005), in *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*, presents anecdotes of stories of Jeremy Miller, the Chief Operation Officer of the *Source*, to demonstrate this reality. In describing his first listening of “Rapper’s Delight” Miller states “that was the day I first heard hip-hop, and that was the day my life took the turn of having to have anything

³⁷Kitwana 2005.

³⁸ Ibid.

that sounded like this one song I had heard.”³⁹ Be it for political or aesthetic reasons, these lovers of Hip Hop gained the reputation as “nigger lovers” which eventually birthed the term “wiggers.”⁴⁰

However these two categories of Hip Hop fans are not to be found today. The late 1980s and 1990s brought about a plethora of Hip Hop fans as this era saw a drastic change in popular culture. After White rock artists, such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam, had achieved enormous success, the hype about grunge music began to die down, especially after the suicide of Nirvana’s Kurt Cobain. “Sometime after [his] death, the hip hop kid...emerged as the nineties embodiment of youthful, white alienation.”⁴¹

Additionally, this era epitomized the commercialization of Black culture, which subsequently transformed to become part of pop culture, and the culture of the present generation. Starting from the mid 1970s to present, Black culture in the media gained center attention in a massive way to be now known as pop culture. The following is a list of different items that contributed to this present acceptance of Black culture:

Television Shows: *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977); *Good Times* (1974-1979); *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985); *What’s Happening?* (1976-1979); *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992); *A Different World* (1987-1993); *Living Single* (1993-1998); *The Martin Lawrence Show* (1992-1997); *In Living Color* (1990-1994); *Family Matters* (1989-1998); *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996).⁴²

Music Videos: The creation of MTV and *Yo MTV Raps!* The creation of BET.

The Oprah Winfrey Show and her movies *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*

Sports: The presence of Michael Jordan with the Chicago Bulls. The brashness of Charles Barkley with the Houston Rocket and many other Black NBA Stars. Also, Mike Tyson should be mentioned.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Aaron 1998, pg. 27.

⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 215.

⁴² George 1998.

Movies: The contribution of Spike Lee movies such as *She's Gotta Have it* (1986), *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Jungle Fever* (1991) and *X* (1992). Other movies such as *Bulworth* written and directed by Warren Beatty; Quentin Terantino's movies *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown*. Black Gangsta movies such as *Boyz N the Hood*, *New Jack City*, *Menace II Society* and *Belly*.⁴³

Politicians: Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton.

With the over abundance of Black culture in the media, the soundtrack to all of this, Hip Hop, brought about the adoption of this music into the mainstream. But unlike earlier fans, Hip Hop fans of this time were attracted to this culture for other reasons. For most, it was a form of rebelling against their parents. These parents who grew up in the Civil Rights Era did not understand, agree, or support the open embracing of Black culture that their children were experiencing. "My early love for hip-hop was in part a revolt to growing up in a very upper-class, extremely closed society where I saw firsthand that money doesn't bring happiness."⁴⁴ As entrepreneurs packaged "gangstanes" on records of artist like the NWA, the young White teenage fully embraced the violent, gangsta, harsh elements of this rebellious music, and the very attributes that spawned protest.

Regardless of the motive to be involved in Hip Hop, Whites continuation to participate, be it for genuine reasons or superficial reasons, has brought about a new form of racial relations. Henry Giroux, a professor at Penn State University and author of several books on pop culture, describes Hip Hop as:

The only popular culture that takes seriously the relationship between race and democracy in America. This music has had a grip on white kids for fifteen to twenty years, and everybody calls it pathology and that's that. Are all these white kids idiots who are being duped and manipulated by the record? Who is cynical and arrogant and detached enough to believe that? Sure, some kids are just

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kitwana 2005, pg. 65.

latching onto the moronic gangsta elements, but the vast majority are caught in some middle space where they're trying to figure themselves out.⁴⁵ In other words, Hip Hop is, in some ways, bringing Whites closer to the reality of Blacks, as was done during the Civil Rights era. Hip Hop has created a space of discourse, a space of self searching, and a place for the White youth to reevaluate themselves, as individuals of inherit power solely based on their race. "If Hip Hop can be a tool for White kids to defy their racial destiny, that's amazing. They may look corny and say some really stupid things, and they may do some really stupid things, but I think they're making a genuine effort not to inherit the racism of their forefathers. Their souls tell them it's not right."⁴⁶

The least popular avenue for Whites to participate in Hip Hop has been as artists or MCs. While the music was being influenced on the investor and consumer end by White Americans, performers of Hip Hop have and continue to remain exclusively African Americans and Latino dominated, with a few exceptions. White performers of Hip Hop or any other form of Black culture can group in two categories. Charles Aaron categorizes White rappers into "The Elvis Syndrome" or the "White Negro Problem." The Elvis Syndrome is described with the characterization of Elvis Presley, "a White man [who] became the biggest pop star of this century by singing and dancing like a Black man...."⁴⁷ Todd Boyd (2003), professor at University of South California and Hip Hop scholar, describes these artists who have the Elvis Presley syndrome as imitators. In Hip Hop, the classic example of an imitator is the Dallas raised Rob Van Winkel, more widely known as Vanilla Ice.

⁴⁵ Aaron 1998, pg. 225.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 227.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pg. 219.

“The White Negro Problem”, on the other hand is derived from the term “white negro”, a term popularized in 1959 in an essay written by Normal Mailer for *Dissent*, a political journal. In this essay, Mailer described the emergence of the “Hipster,” who “had absorbed the existentialist synopsis of the Negro and could be considered a White Negro.” He further claims that Whites sought after the way of life of the Negroes because

The Black man lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust...and despair of his orgasm....⁴⁸⁴⁹

In these terms, 3rd Bass, White rapping duo can be placed in this category of White Negro. Born and raised in Queens, MC Serch, one of the members of 3rd Bass, gained credibility at Latin Quarters, “a legendarily treacherous times Square club where great MCing and chain snatching thrived simultaneously.”⁵⁰ This can be best viewed when MC Serch plays the only White rapper on the all Black Hip Hop group that appears in Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled*. In the movie, MC Serch adopts the name 1/16th—claiming to be 1/16th Black—as he performs on the group’s single “Blak is Blak,” a song expressing their very militant pro-Black attitudes.

The main difference that can be drawn between the two categories is the following. While Vanilla Ice who gained his stardom from being an imitator from the outside and went as far as to fabricate his past for credibility, 3rd Base was bred in the

⁴⁸ Mailer 1959.

⁴⁹ Outraged, James Baldwin countered Mailer’s arguments his essay “The Black boy Looks at the White Boy.”

⁵⁰ George 1998

culture, and influenced by the culture.⁵¹ Where does Eminem fit amongst these categories? He is what Carl Hancock Rux refers to as the “New White Negro.”^{52*}

Review of Eminem’s Music

Slim Shady, Eminem and Marshall Mathers

In order to understand the music of Marshall Mathers III, one must examine his background and more importantly, the manner in which his pseudo names, Eminem and Slim Shady evolved.

Debbie Mathers-Briggs married Marshall Mathers Jr. when she was fifteen years old. Less than three years later, Debbie Mathers-Briggs almost died in her delivery of her first son Marshall Mathers III in a seventy-three hour labor.⁵² A small sickly child, the Martheses moved from St. Joseph, Missouri to North Dakota. Due to her husband’s “erratic behavior” she ran away with her son to return to her mother’s home in Missouri. After several years of holding menial jobs, the pair moved to a working class Detroit neighborhood, where young Marshall was the only White child in the Black neighborhood. When he began elementary school, he “suffered the first in a series of beatings that ultimately left him in a coma.”⁵³ His assailant, DeAngelo Bialey, an African American classmate, subjected Marshall to months of abuse that led to a lawsuit filed by Marshall’s mother. Due to economic instability and sufferings such as these, Marshall bounced from school to school at a rate that by the time he enrolled in Lincoln High, in Warren, MI, he had attended as many as twenty schools.⁵⁴

⁵¹ It can be argued that the Beastie Boys leaned closer to the Elvis Syndrome than towards the White Negro Problem.

* This concept will be further discussed later on in the paper.

⁵² Elrick 2000.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

In 1989, Marshall finally dropped out of school, after failing ninth grade several times, to begin cooking and washing dishes at a restaurant.⁵⁵ At the same time, Marshall, along with a friend and rap enthusiast Mike Ruby began rapping and recording in Ruby's basement. He then created his rap name, M&M, his initials, which later turned into Eminem. After struggling to gain credibility as a rapper, Marshall became a battle MC, trading insults in free-style battles in the local Detroit venues. As he gained popularity for his lyrical abilities, he caught the attention of local producer Marky Bass and immediately recorded his first album "Infinite." Filled with tracks about love, unity and trying to get on in spite of hard times, this album gained minimal recognition. At the same time, Marshall married his high school sweet heart, Kim Scott, with whom he also had their first daughter, Hailie Jade. Fed up with the difficulty of working a minimum wage job to support his family, tapping into his childhood rage, and anger, and frustrated at the poor results of his work, Marshall created Slim Shady, a "drug dealing, bloodthirsty thug who spits furious rhymes about murder, rape, drugs and living by the law of the urban jungle."⁵⁶

Appropriately, analysis of Marshall's music can be categorized in three voices that compliment each other, contradict and at times fight each other. The voice of Slim Shady, arguably the most well known and the most troublesome of the three, symbolizes the darkness, the profanity, the violence, the misogyny, and the homophobic artist that is despised. Eminem, a character that has slowly reemerged as the artist evolves, presents a critique of American society, addressing social topics from topics ranging from poverty to religion. Amidst these two main characters, is the voice of Marshall Mathers himself

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

who simply shares the story of the man behind the music. The following section will define these characters in greater depth.

Slim Shady

The discussion of Marshall's music often begins with his violent, rapist, drug infested and homophobic lyrics. To a listener of his music, it is often the first element of his music that is noticed. As it was appropriately stated in one of the first articles written about this White artist, Marshall "pushes real limits" with his lyrics.⁵⁷ He vividly and graphically rapes one's imagination forcing it into corners that it dares not enter, forcing us into shock that not only did he think of such vulgarity but he also wrote and publicly shares it with the world. But amidst this, the voice of Slim Shady can be further dissected into sub categories.

First, as displayed mostly on his first album, the *Slim Shady LP*, Slim Shady lives up to the core of his mental insanity when he just screams profanity, for the sake of screaming profanity, or as Marshall later explains, for the sake of "pushing people's buttons." For example, in his first single, "My Name Is" he begins his song with the following:

"Hi kids! Do you like violence? (Yeah yeah yeah!)
Wanna see me stick Nine Inch Nails through each one of my
eyelids?"

Later, in the song, he assaults his English teacher who threatens to fail him.

I smacked him in his face with an eraser,
chased him with a stapler
and stapled his nuts to a stack of papers

More pointless obscene lyrics can be found in songs such as "My Fault," "Role Model,"

"As the world turns," "I'm slim Shady," "Still Don't Give a Fuck," and "Guilty Conscience."

⁵⁷ Kaufman 1990.

While all of these songs on the first album, almost entirely contain these blatant lyrics, his subsequent albums contain less of such lyrics. This, however, is not to say that profanity in his music decreased, Slim Shady does not die out. However, a close look demonstrates that the Slim Shady character evolves, or dare say matures, from childish, immature, screaming fits to obscenity rooted from his troubled relationship with his mother, his troublesome marriage or his attacks from the media. While his first album had only one song that entirely profanely attacks his wife (“’97 Bonnie and Clyde), and only a few remarks about his mother, his second, the *Marshal Mathers* thrived with the use of such anger towards his mother and his wife. After amassing immense popularity and criticism in the media, Marshall allows Slim Shady to address his critics.

Addressing his mother, he says on “Kill You”:

(AHHH!) Put your hands down bitch, I ain't gon' shoot you
I'ma pull YOU to this bullet, and put it through you
(AHHH!) Shut up slut, you're causin too much chaos
Just bend over and take it like a slut, okay Ma?

Addressing his Wife he writes on Kim:

My baby's mom, bitch made me an angry blonde
So I made me a song, killed her and put Hailie on

And to his critics he answers:

Motherfuckers want me to come on their radio shows
just to argue with 'em cause their ratings stink?
FUCK THAT! I'll choke radio announcer to bouncer

The use of such profanity significantly decreases on his third album, *The Eminem Show*, as he progresses to address other issues. His disappointing fourth album *Encore* portrays Slim Shady, not as his an angry foul mouthed self, but as a puking, farting bathroom comic.

Eminem

Marshall Mathers' first rap persona, Eminem, was the protagonist in the artists' pre Interscope record *Infinite*. On this album, the character was personified as one who critiques society for its inequalities preaching to his listeners that they can defeat the odds of this stressful life. Eminem best expresses this self on his song "Its Ok" with the chorus:

It's a broke day but everything is ok (It's Ok)
I'm up all night, but everything is alright (It's alright)
It's a rough week, and I don't get enough sleep (I can't sleep)
It's a long year pretending I belong here (Belong here)

On the first verse he writes:

One day I plan to be a family man happily married
I wanna grow to be so old that I have to be carried
Till I'm glad to be buried
And leave this crazy world
And have at least half a million for my baby girl
It may be early to be planning this stuff
Cause I'm still struggling hard to be the man, and its tough
Cuase man its been rough, but still I manage enough

Later on the song he continues

But in the mist of this insanity, I found my Christianity
Through God and there's a wish he granted me
He showed me how to cope with the stress
And hope for the best, instead of mope and depressed
Always groping a mess, of flying over my chest

I won't become as dumb as some and succumb to scum
Its cumbersome, I'm trying to do well on this earth
Buts its been Hell on this Earth since I fell on this Earth

After the disappointment of *Infinite*, Eminem took back seat to Slim Shady. The appearance of Eminem reduces significantly on the *Slim Shady LP*, only appearing on songs such as "If I had," and the introduction to "Rock Bottom."

On *Marshall Mathers LP*, Eminem reappears, using some elements of Slim Shady's harsh brash delivery of lyrics, to address more specific social topics. In a song such as "Who Knew," Eminem touches on various issues, amidst his Slim Shady persona.

For example, in response to his critics who attack him for being a bad influence on children, he addresses the responsibility that parents have, and the notion that parents should be more dedicated to parenting.

But don't blame me when lil' Eric jumps off of the terrace
You shoulda been watchin him - apparently you ain't parents
He continues on by describing the double standard that exists for his music.

And last week, I seen a Schwarzanegger movie
where he's shootin all sorts of these motherfuckers with a
uzi
I see three little kids, up in the front row,
screamin "Go," with their 17-year-old Uncle
I'm like, "Guidance - ain't they got the same moms and dads
who got mad when I asked if they liked violence?"
And told me that my tape taught 'em to swear
What about the make-up you allow your 12-year-old daughter
to wear?
(Hmm?) So tell me that your son doesn't know any cuss
words
when his bus driver's screamin at him, fuckin him up worse
Furthermore, the chorus of this track also presents a seemingly genuine Eminem saying,

I never knew...I would get this big
I never knew...I'd affect this kid
I never knew I'd, get him to slit his wrist
I never knew I'd, get him to hit this bitch

And in such manner, Eminem's presence is felt on this album as he tackles various other topics. He speaks of the poverty of low socioeconomic White Americans "Stan." He addresses various aspects of the media on songs such as "Who Knew," "The Real Slim Shady," "Marshall Mathers," and "Bitch Please 2." "The Way I am" continued to address parents and parenting while "Remember Me" and "Criminal" addressed politics and the government. Attracting protests for his obscene lyrics, Eminem fired back at his critics—in songs like "Who Knew," "The Way I am," "I'm Back," and "Criminal"—arguing for his lyrics not to be taken literally.⁵⁸ Finally, the song

⁵⁸ Eminem also appears on Jay-Z's song "Renegade," where he speaks about marriage.

“Criminal” touches on hypocritical religious leaders who use their position exploitatively as they also indulge in the craving of worldly and material things.

As powerful as Eminem was on the *Marshall Mathers LP* he appeared even stronger on *the Eminem Show* as he helped the artist reach his artistic peak. Continuing where he left off, Marshall allowed Eminem to come back stronger addressing similar topics on his third album with songs such as “White America,” “Cleaning out my Closet,” “Square Dance,” “Soldier,” “Without Me,” “Sing for the Moment,” “Say what you Say,” and “Till I Collapse.” And on the fourth album, *Encore*, Eminem appearance on “Mosh,” solidified his image as a politically conscience as this song, released months before the 2004 Election, heavily critiqued the Bush Administration and encouraged young voters to the polls.

Marshall Mathers

The human character Marshall Mathers appears throughout his whole career. This element of his music, arguable the most essential among the other two, remains constant from *Infinite* to *Encore*. At any given point in any of his songs, on any album, Marshall’s voice is heard discussing various facets of his story including his identity crisis, his fears and frustrations, his experience in school, being bullied, his relationship with his father (or the lack there of), his relationship with his mother, his relationship with his wife, his relationship with his daughter, his poor “white trash” background, his frustrations with the media, his “never give up” attitude, being arrested, making money, his gratitude for his childhood, etc. This aspect of his music, more than the others characters, successfully provides Marshall’s background and describes his socialization in a Black environment.

Race

As a White American in a Black American dominated field, Marshall rightfully does not shy away from the discussion of race in his music. On his four albums, there are thirteen tracks that in some way speak about race. Described by Snoop Dogg on the song “Bitch Please 2” on Marshall’s *Marshall Mather’s LP* as the “Great White American Hope” of rap, he seldom strays from this identity as he outwardly reminds his listeners that he is White on several tracks. On his first album, when he defines himself as “white trash” on “If I Had.” On “The Real Slim Shady” he begins by boasting “Y’all act like you never seen a White person before.” More profoundly, Marshall does not simply speak of his race but also recognizes his unearned privilege as a White male in America on his song “White America”

Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself
If they were brown Shady lose, Shady sits on the shelf
But Shady's cute, Shady knew Shady's dimples would help
Make ladies swoon baby (ooh baby!) Look at my sales
Let's do the math - if I was black, I woulda sold half
I ain't have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know
that

On “I’m Back,” he continues with

You think of my name now whenever you say, "Hi"
Became a commodity because I'm W-H-I-
-T-E, cuz MTV was so friendly to me

And at the same time, he admits that he has exploited Black music as done by Elvis

Presley when he says the following in “With Out Me:”

No I'm not the first king of controversy
I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley
to do black music so selfishly
and used it to get myself wealthy

Furthermore, the discussion of race is used by the artist as a way of describing the notion that his music is most protested, more than the music of any other rapper, because White children who listen to him identify with him as a racially White person. In this

sense, he is a greater threat to White American parents who are more likely to listen and receive his music than they would the music of Black American Hip Hop artists. On

“White America” he screams this reality in his chorus.

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White America! I could be one of your kids
White America! Little Eric looks just like this
White America! Erica loves my shit
I go to TRL; look how many hugs I get!
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He adds later on that

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Hip-Hop was never a problem in Harlem only in Boston
After it bothered the fathers of daughters startin to
blossom
So now I'm catchin the flack from these activists when they
raggin
Actin like I'm the first rapper to smack a bitch or say
faggot, shit!
Just look at me like I'm your closest pal
The posterchild, the motherfuckin spokesman now
for...[White America]
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While his songs concerning race similar to the ones described above solely provide commentary of his interpretation of race in America, Marshall Mathers was called to personally answer accusations as a racist recently when an earlier recording accused him as such.* He further addresses this accusation on his latest album including the song “Yellow Brick Road” that takes the listener through the depths of Marshall’s interaction with race as a poor young White American male.

Discussion of Findings:

With Imani Perry’s (2004) interpretation of Hip Hop as Black music, the music of Marshall Mathers III can be examined under this spectrum to see how closely he uses the various elements. First, as a Hip Hop artist he follows the tradition of Black Music. And more importantly, as it is widely done in Hip Hop he follows the trend sampling, though

* This will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

he samples more White artists, such as Aerosmith. Second, he abides by the requirement of using African American Vernacular English in his music. Socialized around African Americans, this aspect almost comes naturally, as he distinguishes himself from previous White artists such as the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice. In his song, “The Way I Am,” the artist expresses his frustration to White Americans who view him as trying to be a “wigger” because of the manner that he talks.

And I just do not got the patience (got the patience)..
to deal with these cocky caucasians who think
I'm some wigger who just tries to be black cause I talk
with an accent,

Marshall fulfills the requirement of using coded lyrics in his music to maintain the privacy of Hip Hop and appropriately uses the vernacular while respectfully abstaining from the use of the word “nigga,” which has become a household word in the world of Hip Hop.

The third element described in the previous section for the definition of Hip Hop as Black music is the verbal dexterity that is present in lyrics. And perhaps this is the element that Marshall has been able to tremendously exceed expectation and surpass the average Black Hip Hop artist. Lyrically, it obvious he is one of the best of his time as he stands on the levels of other Hip Hop greats such as Jay-Z and Nas. As an artist who thrives on painting detailed images, Marshall equally exceeds the element of story telling. The use of wit in his lyrics is very obvious, and he perfected the Kweku Ananse story feature in his song “Stan.” Finally, his political and social critique, though does not directly appear until his latter albums, can be seen in his music as well. The very significant difference is that he does not discuss issues of Black Americans but similar issues that are also face by poor White Americans.

It can be seen in this brief analysis that Marshall indeed uses all elements of Black music in his music. For this he is able to gain credibility and authenticity, and in this alone accomplishes an incredible feat. So how or why is this possible? And why is he able to escape comparisons with Vanilla Ice and gain comparisons with Tupac Shakur instead. Bakari Kitwana, explains that this reality is a “crash course in America’s racial politics.”

“On the one hand, given his upbringing as an outcast outsider in a nation that feeds on its young and in an economy with narrowing options for working-class youth, he’s a victim, oppressed. On the other hand, in a society where the caste system of whiteness often prevails and still bestows privilege, he’s part of the oppressor class.”

And it’s his existence in this tight space—both as the oppressed and the oppressor—that makes him an essential character in the discussion of the Hip Hop as a cultural expression. But more importantly, his existence as such makes him a significant in the discussion of race in America.

Expressing the Reality of the Oppressed

In the remarkable documentary *Tupac Resurrection* about the life, the thoughts, and the beliefs of Hip Hop’s most influential artist Tupac Shakur, the viewer gains a critical insight to an underlying motive of Tupac’s career. In the fourth chapter of the documentary, the artists explains his motive for making graphically detailed records—such as “Brenda’s Got a Baby”—on his album.

Its like you got the Vietnam War, and just because the reporters showed us pictures at home...that’s what made the Vietnam War end when it did end or the shit probably would have lasted longer...if no one knew what was going on and we just thought they were dying...in some beautiful way...but because we saw the horror, that’s what made us stop the Vietnam War...so that’s what I’m going to do as an artist, as a rapper...I’m gonna show the most graphic detail of what I see in my community and hopefully...they’ll stop it quick.

In such a manner, Marshall tells his story and speaks through Eminem and Slim Shady to present this detailed reality of poor White Americans. And similar to use of graphic detail in Shakur's work, Marshall uncovers the unknown details of the realities of the poor describing the horrifying aspects of their lives such as broken families, drug addiction, holding minimal wage jobs, etc. Also similar to Shakur, often dedicates a whole song to expressing such message. On his first album, his song "If I had" expresses many of his pain, and frustrations.

I'm tired of life
I'm tired of committing so many sins
Tired of always giving in when this bottle of Henny wins
Tired of never having any ends
Tired of having skinny friends hooked on crack and mini-thins
Tired of having to deal with the bullshit without grabbing the steel
Tired of drowning in my sorrow
Tired of having to borrow a dollar for gas to start my Monte Carlo
I'm tired of motherfuckers spraying shit and dartin off
I'm tired of jobs startin off at five fifty an hour then this boss wanders why I'm smartin off
I'm tired of being white trash, broke and always poor
Tired of taking pop bottles back to the party store
I'm tired of not having a phone
Tired of not having a home to have one in if I did have it on
Tired of not driving a BM
Tired of not working at GM, tired of wanting to be him
Tired of not sleeping without a Tylenol PM
Tired of not performing in a packed coliseum

The epitome of this form of expression—expression of the oppressed—was captured on Marshall's "Cleaning out my Closet." By far one of his most popular songs, this song continues to take fans and critics alike to the reality of the artists' past. On the song, he writes:

Now I would never diss my own momma just to get recognition
Take a second to listen for who you think this record is dissin
But put yourself in my position; just try to envision

witnessin your momma poppin prescription pills in the
kitchen
Bitchin that someone's always goin throuh her purse and
shit's missin
Goin through public housin systems, victim of Munchausen's
Syndrome
My whole life I was made to believe I was sick when I
wasn't
'til I grew up, now I blew up, it makes you sick to ya
stomach doesn't it?

And in such manner, Marshall has included a song of such outright expression of tiredness and frustration on each of his four albums. On the second album, Stan detailed the troubling story of a fanatic who identifies with Eminem's expression of a painful and trouble childhood. As such, the fan follows the artist all over the country in hopes of getting to meet his idol. While the song ends with the fans idolization of Slim Shady's obscenity, this song is very significant in expressing the oppressed self of Marshall. With this song, he moves beyond simply telling his story, but creates this tale of Stan to symbolize that there are other's who live the "white trash" lifestyle that he speaks about. On the song, Stan expresses this.

See I'm just like you in a way
I never knew my father neither;
he used to always cheat on my mom and beat her
I can relate to what you're saying in your songs
so when I have a shitty day, I drift away and put 'em on
cause I don't really got shit else so that shit helps when
I'm depressed
I even got a tattoo of your name across the chest
Sometimes I even cut myself to see how much it bleeds
It's like adrenaline, the pain is such a sudden rush for me
See everything you say is real, and I respect you cause you
tell it
My girlfriend's jealous cause I talk about you 24/7
But she don't know you like I know you Slim, no one does
She don't know what it was like for people like us growin
up

Even on jovial song such as "The Real Slim Shady," he artist expresses "and there's a million of us just like me." Marshall continues to express his oppressed self even on songs filled with the unnecessary profanity and sick humor of Slim Shady.

On “Who Knew” on *Marshall Mathers LP* urges listeners to “read up about how I used to get beat up/ peed on, be on free lunch/ and change school every 3 months.”

It is this incredible ability to be able to express himself as the oppressed that has allowed Marshall to gain entry into Hip Hop as an artist. Because this is such a strong part of the identity African American Hip Hop artists, he has gained respect for being able to identify as such. Because of this ability to identify with oppression, some consider him Black. Todd Boyd (2003) writes about Marshall as not just a White boy.

...He is not a White Boy who wants to be Black, he is Black, yet his appearance simply happens to be White. Even so, to the extent that Hip Hop has defined the real as rooted in a martial, poverty-stricken, pathologically defined existence, then Em[inem] is potentially more Black than many of the middle-class and wealthy Black people who live in mainstream White society today. In other words, to me, Em[inem] is a nigga. No doubt (Pg. 128).

Being the Oppressor

On the other hand, Marshall Mathers, the oppressor, participates in the exploitation of Hip Hop just like his predecessors who participated in Black music. Learning from the poor sales of *Infinite*, he came to the main stage of Hip Hop, with the help of Dr. Dre, by being absurdly profane. When he admits to this by calling himself the king of “rude ludicrous, *lucrative*” lyrics, Marshall exposed his symptoms of the Elvis Presley Syndrome. He uses elements of Black culture, re-packaged it in his profanity and sells it to the mainstream America who thirst for this. This can be best seen in how he advertises his albums. All of his first singles, meant to grab the attention of album purchasers, resemble the catchy tunes from artists such as Beastie Boys, Vanilla Ice, both exploiters of Hip Hop.

The challenge of Marshall as an exploiter and an oppressor is most strongly made from Raymond “Benzino” Scott, a rapper and ex-Chief Brand Executive of *The Source*, and Dave Mays, one of the co-founders of *The Source*. Following a series of lyrical feuds between Marshall and Benzino, the latter held a press conference on Tuesday, November 18th 2003 to present the ultimate punch. At this conference, Mays and Benzino held a public hearing of two unreleased 1993 freestyle records that revealed Marshall discriminately using the word “nigger” and disrespecting Black women. The first song, untitled includes the following lyrics.

And all the girls that I like to bone
Have the big butts, no they don't
'Cause I don't like that nigger shit

The second, and much longer track, includes:

Blacks and whites they sometimes mix
But Black girls only want your money cause they're dumb
chicks
So I'ma say like this
Don't date a Black girl, take it as a diss

And as expected, the release of this surmounted worldwide attention as Benzino exposed Marshall's dirty secret. Marshall released a public apology stating “The tape they played today was something I made out of anger, stupidity and frustration when I was a teenager.”⁵⁹ Russell Simmons, while calling Eminem's lyrics “disgusting,” accepted Marshall's apology as “sincere and forthright.”

Continuing discussion about Marshall as a racist, perhaps Michael Eric Dyson was one of few individuals to appropriately interpret this incident. On the Tavis Smiley Show, Dyson (2003), a scholar on Hip Hop, asserts that that Marshall's lyrics are “explicitly racist.” He further critiques the artist by stating that his apology was not good enough because it did not acknowledge his racist viewpoint but was just an apology for

⁵⁹ Reed 2003.

his act. However, Dyson's most insightful commentary on this incident puts this issue to rest when he explained that

We shouldn't be surprised, perhaps disappointed, perhaps depressed, but not surprised that any person in American society who is white will embody, internalize and sometimes reproduce consciously or unconsciously some of the racist pathologies against black people that we see going on. This issue, at its core, has little to do with Eminem as a racist and more to do with Benzino's objective to expose the White rapper and win the feud. Dyson's analysis accurately demonstrates that, taken the history of race in this country, it should not come to anyone's surprise that a White American was racist and used the word "nigger."

A closer look at this dispute between Benzino and Marshall highlights a deeper, and perhaps a more important concept. One must wonder why this dispute began in the first place. Why would a veteran struggling Hip Hop artist target Marshall? While his search and release of Marshall's old records was motivated by his feud with him, what is at the root of his dislike of Marshall? Kitwana, commenting on this topic, explains that after a decade as a mediocre artist who has not sold 250,000, he uses this dispute to gain publicity.⁶⁰ More importantly, Kitwana explains that Benzino attacks Marshall as a way of expressing his disgust with the fact that he has gained so much fame and publicity for doing things that other Black artists, like himself, have been doing for years. In an interview with MTV news, Benzino expresses this notion.

Eminem gets to talk about his issues and his pain ... killing his mother, beating his girl, drugs. We have to rock the party in order to get spins and burn on the radio. We have to entertain more than expose our true issues. When Black and Latino people try to give our pain on there we couldn't get burn. The machine doesn't want our pain to be out there."⁶¹
He argues that Marshall's identification as a White American plays to his advantage when he participates in Hip Hop and tells his story about the sorrows of growing up. And

⁶⁰ Kitwana 2005.

⁶¹ Calloway et al 2002

in this sense, his attack on Marshall is well founded. Not only does he constantly sell more than similarly talented Black artist, such as Jay-Z, he is also showered with MTV, Grammy, and American Music awards regularly. In his feature film *8 Mile*, a fictional story based on Marshall's background, this notion is portrayed. Rabbit, played by Marshall, is presented, at the end of the film, as an ingenious rapper, after out-witting a Black competitor, as he walks the neon-lit alley with his Black friends looking on and his music playing in the background. And appropriately so, he bares remarkable resemblance to "the Western Hero who, in splendid isolation, rides off into the sunset."⁶² In real life, Marshall also receives this description as a genius for his emulation of Black culture.

In the Law Center of CNN.Com, Geoffrey Christopher Rapp compares Marshall to the great White American writer Mark Twain. In the article titled "Is Eminem really any worse than Mark Twain?" the Wayne State Sports Law professor, asserts that just as Marshall is deemed indecent and obscene, Twain was also "deemed indecent and obscene" and calls the artist "The new Mark Twain." He argues that "Eminem may be foul because that's the vernacular of his time and his generation."⁶³ And it was under this same notion that Twain's similar language captures the Reconstruction America in *Huckleberry Finn*. In addition, Rapp (2003) quotes Oscar Wilde—"the public forgives anything but genius"—to say that his critics--the FCC, the Congress, Lynn Cheney and Tipper Gore—fail to recognize the genius that is Marshall Mathers.

In his article "Genius—Not," Armond White strongly contends this personification of Marshall. Why does Tupac Shakur, who in many senses better

⁶² Grundmann 2003, pg. 126.

⁶³ Rapp 2003, pg. 1.

represented these Mark Twain comparisons, not receive such praise for his work? White explains that “Eminem is proclaimed as a “genius” in order to sustain the group-esteem of Whites.”⁶⁴ He adds, “Indifferent Whites always thought rap was a sociopathic art and Eminem’s aberrant imitation seems to confirm their misconception. His belligerence is respected as if it came from a deeper hurt, a smarter head than those squabbling Negroes.”⁶⁵ And how shameful and painful is it that even amidst a Black cultural art form, White privilege takes precedence.

As powerful as race is in American society, Marshall’s ability to exist as both the oppressed and the oppressor has allowed him to abstain from being neither Black nor White. And in an America where one’s racial identification is assigned not chosen, this is a phenomenon. Marshall Mather’s makes the color of his skin disappear, as he exists between the oppressor and the oppressed. Carl Hancock Rux, a poet, novelist, rapper, brilliantly describes this phenomenon when he writes the following:

This horror-rapping member of the oppressed nation has won. He has proven to the oppressed that he is not one of us, but he is down for us—and he has proven to the oppressor that he is not one of them, but he is the product of their extreme idea of “us”—and, by virtue of neutralizing the nebulous medium, Eminem becomes us with supernatural powers beyond us. Ultimately, he replaces us, paying homage to an old abstract idea.⁶⁶

While this is not to repeat the same mistake as lifting Marshall to a super hero level for doing similar things that other Black artist have done, viewing him in the context of racial identification highlights an interesting reality. His oppressed self makes him a minority and his oppressor self makes him a majority. For his existence in this medium, Rux calls him “The New White Negro.”

⁶⁴ White --, pg. 180.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rux – pg. 28.

Impact on Society—Definition of Racism

Discussion of the oppressor image of Marshall digs up Beverly Daniel Tatum's definition of racism, an often-controversial notion of racism, as a system of advantage based on race. Tatum explains that "reserving the term racist only for behaviors committed by Whites in the context of a White-dominated society is a way of acknowledging the ever-present power differential afforded Whites by the culture and institutions that make up the system of advantage and continue to reinforce notions of White superiority."⁶⁷⁶⁸ This assertion, as the author later explains in her book, is to say that in defining racism as a system of advantage, people of color cannot be racist because the institutional structure of American society is not built to support this reality. On the contrary, Whites are racist because the societal structure of American gives them power to operate in this manner. In Marshall's case, he clearly benefits from White privilege as he moves from underground to mainstream status. He reaps the benefits of his White privilege that exists for all White American because of the power of racism institutionalized in America. Benzino, and Armond White's attack on Marshall for his oppressor status as a Hip Hop artist shows their frustration of Marshall's automatic and unearned and even at times unwanted White privilege. This unearned automatic advantage is what leads Tatum to assert that all Whites are racist because they automatically benefit from the advantage that their whiteness earns for them.

⁶⁷ Tatum 1997, pg. 10

⁶⁸ This is not to be confused with racism as defined by racial prejudice. If racism is defined as such, all individuals exhibit some form of racist behaviors.

So what has been the influence of Hip Hop on White American society? Through Hip Hop, Eminem has uncovered the question of race and racial relations in America. Though authors, such as Kitwana, will argue that Hip Hop has also brought about a redefinition of racial relations as it exist among the Hip Hop generation of Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and all other American subcultures, it has taught us a more valuable lesson. Racism, as defined by privilege, continues to exist in American society and the superiority of Whites is still celebrated, even in a Black cultural art form.

Implications for Education:

Why is it necessary to come to this realization of a racist America? Though the assertion of this concept is not new to many social scientist, this document has demonstrated how Hip Hop can be used to provide such worthy critique of society. Therefore the presentation of racism is not the most important element of this paper. Though this element should not be dismissed, the demonstration that Hip Hop indeed has a role in academia and research is extremely valuable. As done by sociologist, anthropologists and other social scientists, the academic field of Hip Hop can provide a unique critique of our society.

In a recent article titled “Making Some Noise: The Academy’s Hip Hop Generation” in *Black Issues of Higher Education*, Kendra Hamilton, presents evidence of how several scholars have participated in the “academizing” of Hip Hop in colleges and universities across the country. Hamilton writes that a decade after Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise* “a pivotal movement in the history of hip-hop scholarship appears to have arrived.” In addition to analysis of lyrics that bring about conversations of cultural representation, agency and identification and how these are bound up with nationalism, transnationalism

and cultural identity and authenticity, Hamilton also describes the study of Hip Hop that is evolving from the point of view of academically trained musicians.⁶⁹ For example, Kyra Gaunt, a professor at New York University's music department has focused her research on Hip Hop by analyzing "the aesthetic practices of Public Enemy and how they related to George Clinton and James Brown" from the perspective of an ethnomusicologist.⁷⁰ If nothing at all, this research participates in the emerging academic literature about Hip Hop.

In terms of culturally relevant curriculum for pre-kindergarten to High School, Hip Hop can be used to reach many misunderstood students because regardless of who performs the art form, it is a form of expression. All its elements are forms of expression, and while it has lost many of its authentic components, as it is now mainstream culture, Hip Hop remains a form of expression. Therefore, if a classroom were viewed as microcosm of society, Hip Hop as a form of expression could be used to reach and give a voice misunderstood, troubled, and angered, students.

In a recent issue of Education Weekly, Linda Jacobson authored a disturbing article titled "Preschoolers Expelled from School at rates exceeding that of K-12." A study released in May 17, 2005 reported that 6.67 out of every 1,000 students were being expelled while only 2.09 per 1,000 elementary, middle, and high school students were expelled.⁷¹ The report also stated that African American children were twice as likely as Hispanic and White children and more than five times as likely as Asian-American children to get expelled from schools. Literature on discipline in schools is filled with writings about inappropriate definition of discipline and its negative impact on students, especially

⁶⁹ Hamilton 2004, pg. 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jacobson 2005.

the minority youth population.⁷² Many research studies also show that minority youth are most vulnerable for school policies that emphasize expulsion and suspension.⁷³

Though it may not completely solve this problem, Hip Hop can be used as a vehicle to help remedy it. First, Hip Hop can be used to understand urban students. Many of the discipline issues faced by minority and poor students are a result of simple misunderstanding or a clash between the culture of the student and the culture of schools.⁷⁴ Therefore, because Hip Hop expresses the reality of the urban community, by understanding Hip Hop one begins to understand students from urban environments. This assertion goes along with the writings of education scholars, such as Geneva Gay (author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching*), who advocates for teachers to know the cultural background of students for a culturally relevant teaching and learning experience. Is this notion requiring all teachers to be Hip Hop fans? No, however, the immense cultural capital that surrounds Hip Hop can allow many teachers to reach these misunderstood students.

Secondly, if Hip Hop was brought into classrooms, it could enhance learning and make it more exciting. Just like several departments in college universities are taking advantage of the richness of Hip Hop in fields such as English, Sociology, cultural studies, African American studies, etc. this can also be done at the lower levels of education. Hip Hop can and should be included in curriculums to teach Language Arts, poetry, and History lessons. The hidden and often unexplored references made by artists allows for learning opportunities. While some material is obviously not appropriate for school age children the immense amount of know that exist in a Hip Hop song, such as

⁷² Long 1997, Smith and Misra 1992 as reported in Cartledge, Johnson, and Tillman 2001.

⁷³ Blyth Y Milner, 1993; Larson, 1998 as reported in Cartledge, Johnson, and Tillman 2001

⁷⁴ Cartledge, Johnson, and Tillman, 2001

“Astronomy (8th Light)” by Black Star, prove the worth of this music in classrooms. A close listen consistently demonstrate that educators do not have to reach too deep to be able to use it. They only need to be creative. Further, to present this Black cultural art form to Black students will allow them to identify with schools and remove the often foreign atmosphere that is created in schools. For their White counterparts, the use of Hip Hop in schools, identified as Black cultural form, will allow them to view African Americans in a brighter light, allowing these students to recognize Blacks as more than just former slaves. Analysis of the poetry in the music, that can take place in a Language Arts class, in the same unit with William Shakespeare, will allow all students to value the intellectual capacity of some of the artists of the music, debunking popularized stereotypes of Black Americans.

Suggestions for Further Studies:

All Hip Hop fans can attest to the precious art form in Hip Hop. And as academicians are now recognizing, Hip Hop contains many elements that are yet to be tapped into. I highly encourage scholars in the social sciences to develop research projects that use Hip Hop as a tool for critiquing and interpreting societal issues ranging from race and class to feminism and the media.

In the field of Education, an important study that must be embarked upon is the use of Hip Hop in the classroom. Sociology of education experts, Hip Hop scholars, and Curriculum Instructionists should collaborate to exam the feasibility of teaching Hip Hop by integrating it into curriculum that would also be culturally relevant. Keeping in mind nationwide learning standards for elementary and high school education, how can Hip

How can it be integrated in the teaching of Language Arts, and American History? More importantly, such a project should produce a draft of a curriculum along with a proposal for how it could be used in pre K-12 classrooms.

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