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Searching for a pragmatic aesthetic: the rhetorical strategies of gansta rappers -- myths, rituals, and dramas of an outlaw music

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SEARCHING FOR A PRAGMATIC AESTHETIC: THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF GANGSTA RAPPERS--MYTHS, RITUALS, AND DRAMAS OF AN OUTLAW MUSIC

by

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Chapter 1 --The Case for Studying Gangsta Rap

Ghetto-life, politics, mainstream America, "gang-bangers," the black church, white suburban teenagers, and rap music crossed paths in the first half of the nineties, in ways one could have scarcely imagined fifteen years ago. At that time, rap music was known only to those involved in the New York street scene --- rap was a dance-hall phenomenon—content to remain in that neighborhood (Toop 16; Rose 3). Rap as a genre has survived several evolutionary periods where the types of rap music predominately produced has changed, and subsequently, the nature of the criticisms invoked against or about the music has changed as well. First, critics attacked dance-hall rap for not being music," dependent upon a collage of samples taken from reproducing parts of other songs and sounds. There were no sung lyrical vocals, only words spoken over music. Then political rap, like the music of Public Enemy, criticized as racist and too closely aligned with groups such as the Nation of Islam, fights for survival. As rap crossed over to mainstream America, the "hip hop community" began to debate whether one had to "sell-out" from original rap roots to make a profit. The commercialization of the rap music industry uniquely changed the audience for rap music.

With unanimity rarely seen across the political spectrum, politicians from Bill Clinton to Bob Dole and George Bush attacked rap artists because of their messages. Rap bashing became the political strategy of the nineties (Lusane, African Americans 120). Then cam "Gangsta rap," as the corporate world took notice of white mainstream America's interest in hard-core music from the streets. Black academics, the "black church," and middle class black America, joined forces with white conservatives, liberals and feminists, in a diverse but fairly unanimous condemnation of this latest form of rap

Most of the academics argue that Gangsta rap promotes negative stereotypes of African-American males while simultaneously glorifying sexism and violence. The lone empathetic voice for the Gangsta rapper, the cultural critic, explains that the environment the music comes from is created by socioeconomic chaos and Gangsta rap is a scapegoat for the more complex underlying social ills that are being ignored by society (Dyson, Between God xiii; Kitwana 6). Many of the cultural scholars generally condemn the "messages" produced in this environment, forcing scholars to engage in a delicate, often contradictory balancing act between condemnation and an understanding tolerance.

Once a critical target audience of civil rights leaders during the sixties, urban African-American youth are not responding favorably to traditional black leadership (All Things Considered). Gangsta rappers, as part of the urban youth community, are replacing the influence of traditional civil rights leaders (Lusane, African Americans 117). Although Gangsta rappers, typically treated negatively—in the media, in academics, and by politicians—it is apparent that for better or for worse, Gangsta rap artists are a primary influence in the urban youth community.

Focus of Dissertation

My scholarship is interested in the phenomenon of Gangsta rap and the relationship that Gangsta rap artists have with one of their audiences—black urban youth. Several questions are critical in exploring whether a cultural communication perspective produces a richer and more consistent understanding of rap music, specifically Gangsta rap music. What rhetorical strategies do popular Gangsta rap artists employ? What rhetorical motives are revealed in Gangsta rap lyrics? To what extent can a dramatistic rhetorical analysis of Gangsta rap provide any insights into current criticism of Gangsta

rap music and of rap music in general? Finally, can Gangsta rap music embrace Shusterman's pragmatic aesthetic,? If so, then how? This essay hypothesizes that examination of how social dramas play out via the use of rituals and myths in the context of Gangsta rap offers a richer, more consistent understanding of rap music culture. A more developed examination of the significance of these questions occurs in chapter two. Understanding Gangsta rap requires examination of the history, growth, and cultural impact of rap music and Gangsta rap music, in relation to young urban America. This chapter concludes by discussing the implications of the almost universal condemnation of Gangsta rap music, specifically, its' effect on the deteriorating relationship between traditional black leadership and urban youth.

Rap Music, it's Influence, and the Arrival of "Gangsta"

"Rap has been dubbed the 'hip hop invasion,' 'anti-establishment noise,' and the teenage vernacular of the '80s counterculture" (McKinney 66). The growth of rap over the last fifteen years has been extraordinary. From the Beastie Boys to MC. Hammer to N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitude) to Snoop Doggy Dogg, the pop charts have been invaded by rap music and of late, Gangsta rap. Today rap music wins, places, and hows repeatedly on Billboard pop charts, capturing over ten percent of all music sales (Strauss 8). Acclaimed as "one of the most important US cultural phenomena of the last decade by many measures... " (Dines and Humez 479), Kitwana says that "As far as influence in the black community, no group has as extensive an influence as rap artists, in terms of' their ability to capture the listening ear of black youth" (59). Research by the Philadelphia Motivational Education Entertainment group reveals that rap music followed by the "peer group" are the two major influences on today's youth (Kunjufu 68).

Specifically, 97 percent of the African American youth interviewed were fans of hip-hop music. Light says that that rap is "the single most creative, revolutionary approach to music making that this generation has constructed" (857). Rose ponders the future role of rap when she explains:

> It combines the improvisational elements of jazz with the narrative sense of place in the blues; it has the oratory power of the black preacher and the emotional vulnerability of Southern soul music. And yet, rap also speaks to the future of black culture in the postindustrial city and American culture in general. Its musical voice is achieved via the constant manipulation of high-tech equipment that will continue to have a profound effect on speech, writing, music, communication, and social relations as we approach the twenty-first century. (184)

Identification to rap messages by mainstream America has become easier since rap music is able to introduce itself into any context or forum. Raps are created with simple lyrics driven by a steady beat; others created "Gangsta' rap" which depicted the reality of life in urban America; socially conscious rappers taught self-help and self-esteem for black Americans. The result was a music that became popular to different groups of people for entirely different reasons. Rap artists Hammer, Vanilla Ice, NWA, and Ice Cube (a former member of NWA) have all spent time at number one on the Billboard Album Chart. Internationally, rap has taken over music scenes across the globe (Rose 19). Cocks argues "Rap, which began as a fierce and proudly insular music of the American black underclass, is now possibly the most successful American export this side of the microchip . . " (70). The next section discusses the origins of rap music and

then traces the movement to what is presently known as Gangsta rap.

Nineteen-ninety was the year in which rap music met mainstream America and I the cultural influence of the music spilled into non-musical aspects of society (Toop 205). Will Smith of the rap duo DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince became the star of the hit television comedy, "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." Even the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) produced a special on the genre, "Rap City Rhapsody," while advertising executives used the sound and style of rap to sell everything from fast food to fast shoes. The rap duo Kid 'n' Play starred in a movie and inspired a Saturday morning cartoon show. Another animated character, Bart Simpson, had a hit rap song, "Do the Bartman" (Milward 12). Ice-T, Ice-Cube, Queen Latifah, LL. Cool J, and Tone Loc are just a few of the rap artists who have made the transition from music to film and/or television. But the commercialized vision of rap artists and their music in the nineties, has come a long way from the roots and origins of a music started on the streets of New York during the latter part of the seventies.

The well-documented origins of rap music offer linkages throughout African-American history. The ancestry of rap music can be traced back to the traditions of ancient African tribal music. Rap followed through history from the chanting of the "old Negro spirituals" to folk tales which were used as a vehicle of expression during slavery and times of oppression (Toop 19; Rose 23). The time continuum moves into the era of jazz and often-utilized techniques like "scanting," the rhythmic use of words over jazz beats to create a human instrument sitting in with the band. The sixties brought with it the Black Aesthetic Movement—where jazz artists combined with black militant "storytellers" like to Last Poets—spoke over music to tell the stories of freedom, power,

and triumph over oppression. Rose explains:

> Musical and oral predecessors to rap music encompass a variety of vernacular artists including the Last Poets, a group of late 1960s to early 1970s black militant storytellers whose poetry was accompanied by conga drum rhythms, poet and singer Gil Scott Heron, Malcolm X, the black Panthers, the 1950s radio jocks, particularly Douglas "Jocko" Henderson, soul rapper Millie Jackson, the classic Blues women, and countless other performers. "Blaxsploitation" films such as Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song,* Donald Goines's gangsta fiction and "pimp narratives" that explore the ins and outs of ghetto red-light districts are also especially important in rap. Regardless of thematics, pleasure and mastery in toasting and rapping are matters of control over the language, the capacity to outdo competition, the craft of the story, mastery of rhythm, and the ability to rivet the crowd's attention. (55)

Rose claims that rap music is a part of the long oral tradition of storytelling in music and the historical use of the spoken word in music. Moreover, the beginnings of the style and fortnat of rap music are a direct result of the post-industrialization period that began in the Seventies (27). Grounded in the streets of urban America, the roots of rap music developed much like any other non-musical event or activity, as a competition to become the best. Culturalists discuss rap music as part of a larger "Hip Hop Culture" which emerged simultaneously during this time. Kunjufu speaks to the dynamic culture of hip- hop and trends that capture and recycle the artifacts of different experiences. Youth lingo describes "the flava" as a trend that is currently popular but one must

continue to produce new "flava" before styles lose their appeal (11). Rose, in a discussion of the relationship between the hip-hop culture and rap says, "The power of rappers' voices and their role as storytellers ensured that rapping would become the central expression in hip hop culture" (55).

Rap music began as a vehicle of entertainment and competition on the streets of New York, often a substitute for games in the park, the "normal" teenage lifestyles found in Middle America. Street dancing and rapping creates much of the early culture for urban youth and evaluation of the best rappers and Disc Jockeys (DJs) formed inside the culture. Gaines very similar to playing the "dozens" and "trash-talking" were becoming a part of the musical format of rap music. The best's ultimate goal was to create "styles" that others could not follow (Rose 61). The ability to "free-style," spontaneously-create rhymes, and "flow," letting the voice blend into the music in an attempt to become another instrument were all critical factors in evaluation. Story telling is another component of the lyrical content upon which the competition evaluated. Early rappers usually spoke of either life on the streets, politics, or simple boasting about their abilities "on the mike (microphone)" (Rose 65). But lyrical techniques were just part of the equation.

DJs faced the challenge of providing the best mixes—adjoining of several songs without a pause. Mastery of the "scratch" by running one's hand over the record to stop and start the needle in repeated fashion to create sounds factored in determination of the "best". Other standards for evaluation of rap music include the rate of action and the creativeness of the sound. The sampling of the "old" sounds and noises from the past and the re-creation of these sounds provide the process for creation of the "beats." The

samples were eclectic involving different musical styles and genres across the musical spectrum, says Rose (50). The musical, technological, and lyrical content come together to form the essence of rap. Rose again:

> Rap is a complex fusion of orality and postmortem technology. This mixture of orality and technology is essential to understanding the logic of rap music; a logic that, although not purely oral, maintains many characteristics of orally based expression and at the same time incorporates and destabilizes many characteristics of the literate and highly technological society in which its practitioners live. Harry Allen captures the relationship between orality and technology in rap when he suggests that, "hip hop humanizes technology and makes it tactile. In hip hop, you make the technology do stuff that it isn't supposed to do, get music out of something that's not supposed to give you music quite that way. (86)

The broader commercial beginnings for rap music arrived in 1979 with the recording of "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang, an instant hit on the black charts. Rap was no longer purely a resident of the New York street scene, but became widely heard by young black and Hispanic America (Toop 16; Willis 30; Rose 3). Toop says that rap music was predominantly a black art form until two events brought white America to the doorstep of urban black American music. A group named Run-D.M.C. covered an Aerosmith song with members of the band, Steven Tyler and Joe Perry. Toop says that " 'Walk this Way' was one of the breakthrough records of rap, its metal guitar riffs, rock chorus, hard beats and raps fusing into an ultimate in rebel music that MTV and radio, along with a lot of white rock fans, found impossible to resist" (163). A

second significant occurrence in the unveiling of rap to the mainstream was the emergence of the first white rappers, the Beastie Boys. Rapper Ice Cube identifies that the Beastie's popularity arose from their not attempting to "pretend to be black. Their rap was very much the idiotic, rebellious, middle-class, 'I don't like my parents' kind of rap. They did not try to be urban. They were just kids who rapped rather than sang" (Rose 128). Cube notes that the early stages of the commercialization of rap music closely resembles the beginning of rock and roll.

When rap music found an audience in white teenage suburban America, the commercialization of the genre exploded. Vanilla Ice and M.C. Hammer topped the pop charts for almost a year, as the popularity of rap music in terms of industry strength, exceeded any other music of the day. What was this fascination of white audiences with a music form that traditionally had been a vehicle for the black economically-disadvantaged? What were the implications for the rap music industry? The result was the revelation that a huge white market existed for rap music. The popularity of these softer rap artists is explained by Toop as a fascination with black culture combined with the "pop" feel of their music (209). Toop argues that Hammer's popularity arose from his abilities to "entertain" and market his self beyond just being a "rapper." However, this explanation failed to account for the success of Vanilla Ice, Toop documents Vanilla Ice's rise to stardom:

> His autobiographical yarns failed to persuade the rap community that he was Stagger Lee but, beyond that, few of his young fans cared where he grew up or what his ethnic preferences were. Maybe they wanted to act black themselves and in Vanilla Ice they had their Thespian example. It had been 10

> only a matter of time before a young Caucasian-American sprang up to make serious money from their fantasy ... As ever, record companies jumped to supply the new demand. The sting of imitators sported revealing names like Icy Blue, Fred Astaire and 4PM (four pale males)
>
> ... The rise of Vanilla Ice was the final stage in rap's acceptance by the music industry. Another day, another dollar. (209)

Commercialization of rap music fascinated a large segment of American culture with the images of the streets, demanding the "realness" of which rap musicians pledged allegiance. The only question left for the music industry was how authentic a rapper would this newfound market bear.

During the beginning of the 1990s, the music industry got its answer. Gangsta rap—a sub-genre where rap artists proclaimed themselves as gangsters, thugs, pimps, and outlaws—followed the softer artists like Vanilla Ice and Hammer with equally strong sales, often landing at the top of the charts. N.W.A. (Niggaz wit Attitude); Ice Cube; Snoop Doggy Dogg; Dr. Dre followed by Warren G. and Nate Dogg, all reached the top of the charts. Ross deconstructs the origins of the Gangsta image, explaining the linkages between street origins and natural associations with "gangsta rituals and realities" arises out of rap as an "*explicit alternative*" to gang culture (6).

As previously mentioned, there was a simultaneous explosion of "safe" mainstream rappers—Jazzy Jeff, Hammer, etc.—which coincided with the increase in the proliferation of Gangsta rap and "phony gangsta's" like Vanilla Ice, argues Dyson (Joint Hearings). However, Gangsta rap soon became the primary type of rap music produced and sold as its commercial appeal grew. Kitwana believes that commercialization and the

cross-over appeal of Gangsta rap has destroyed other forms of rap, with the corporate world entrenched in a mind-set that black and Hispanic young consumers are unpredictable, making young white consumers are the largest audience for rap music—a position which he disputes (16). The music industry money is catering to the types of rap that whites want and that is the reinforced stereotype of the streets, i.e., the Gangsta, argues Kitwana. Gangsta rap has proven marketable to both white and minority groups, so it has become the rap image of choice, produced by America's music industry (18). Several industry sales executives believe that whites purchase the majority of Gangsta rap and that black youth listen primarily to educational and political rap (Hirschberg 26; Strauss 8). But the Gangsta rap's commercial appeal has resulted in an "image hardening" transformation of other types of rap artists, in an effort to authentic the "realness" of Gangsta rap (Pareles 34). As the Gangsta rap industry gains and influences a predominant slice of overall rap sales, traditional black leadership searches for solutions to rediscover the ability to mobilize the black masses and regain it's organizational strength and unity of yesteryear. The intersection between these two phenomena provides an important nexus warranting examination.

Societal Implications of the Gangsta Rap Explosion

Traditional black leadership has been unable to mobilize a politically apathetic young black society, which during the sixties was a crucial element of the civil rights movement. However, at the same time, contemporary rap music has evolved away from the positively, tenants, and styles of earlier forms of rap music. The onslaught of Gangsta rap music has polarized black America in a generational and class chasm, and coincides with the socioeconomic disparities which are negative side-effects of the positive civil

rights advances of the sixties. Dyson notes that "Class tensions continue to brew between middle income and poor blacks. As more blacks become upwardly mobile and fan out into suburbia, the pattern of social life among blacks has dramatically changed" (Between God xi). Gates and West acknowledge the paradox of the civil rights movement "the size of the black middle class—again primarily because of affirmative action—has quadrupled, doubling in the 1980s alone. Simultaneously—and paradoxically—the size of the black underclass has grown disproportionately as well" (XI). The result—two similar race but different socioeconomic generations growing farther and farther apart, with little if any common ground.

While traditional black leadership with its strong foundation in the black church, litigation, and non-violent protest strategies, searches for methods of overcoming internal conflict and a lack of direction, some of their external focus has been targeted against the musical genre most popular with today's black youth, Gangsta rap. Some argue that traditional black leadership has, for the first time ever, taken a proactive stance against their own youth. Rose summarizes the actions of Calvin Butts, a black Harlem minister, and his censorship efforts:

> His was not a call for open social criticism of some of rap's lyrics; it was a call for censorship. His book-burning—style cassette-crushing publicity stunt was a disgraceful display of just how misguided black moral or political leadership is, and it certainly did more toward severing the fragile links between today's black working-class youths and black middle-class religious and political leadership and less toward discouraging consumption of "morally degraded" music. (183)

C. Delores Tucker—head of the National Political Congress of black Women—Reverend Butts, and several other church, political, and black intellectual—as well as many conservative whites—have begun an all-out crusade against those who produce Gangsta rap (Reynolds 11A; Holland 6; Ross A Lonely Crusader 8; Rose 183; Chideya 149). Some branches of the NAACP have joined on board in an effort to eradicate so-called "bad" rap. Tucker is so committed to the fight against rap, she is willing to join forces with anyone interested in the fight and also willing to condemn anyone not on board. Sonya Ross assesses the motivation behind Tucker's campaign as so zealous that she is willing to make very strange "political bedfellows" in pursuit of support on this issue (8).

Rap culture also perceives the current attack on their music from the traditionalist mainstream leadership. The youth and their music, speak unkindly of anyone and everyone if they are any part of the "system," and oppose the patience and tolerance required for "faith," "non-violent" action, or change which is dependent on actions by others (like waiting for those in power to "give" something to the oppressed). Perceived to be part of that system, the traditional civil rights movement and its rhetorical strategies. Reporter Phyllis Crockett reports on the state of mind of those black youth during the radio program, All Things Considered:

> Crockett: The message [of Gangsta rap] reflects the harsh realities of their world, a world often dominated by violent deaths, drugs, and despair. They believe the rappers are in touch and on target with solutions to society's problems. They don't think that's true of politicians, regardless of color—or civil rights leaders. Since 1972, community leader John "Peterbug" Matthews

has worked with more than 1,000 inner-city youth. Peterbug, as everyone calls him, says the reason rap resonates is because the traditional African- American leadership has failed.

John "Peterbug" Matthews (Community Leader): What they're saying is like, you know, that some grown people have sold us out. You can see, every time there's something going round, white folks do one thing. They buy the problem off. "Let's give Jesse some money." I'm tired of Jesse Jackson. I want him to get a job. We have all these leaders in the community that do not relate to the people at all. And then what happens, if they get invited to the White House, or they get sanctioned by white folks, then they automatically becomes the leaders...

Crockett: Stevie O'Darren is 25 years old and has an economics degree from the University of Maryland. He grew up on rap in the projects. He says few blacks penetrate the power structure, and as a result, the youth feel betrayed, not only by white America but by black leaders as well. (Hip-Hop Culture)

The only current black "leader" with any drawing power among the younger, disenfranchised audience is Minister Louis Farrakhan. The "Million Man March" and his ability to solidify "a market share of black discontent-the angry black youth subculture" (Gray A3), have strategically placed the Nation of Islam leader as the only organizational leader which seems to have the ear of poor black youth. Ironically, the identification of "black nationalist" rappers with beliefs consistent with the Nation of Islam is well-documented in critical studies of rap and black nationalism (Decker 112; Lusane, African

Americans 117). The majority of controversies in rap, prior to the advent of Gangsta rap, were regarding Black Nationalist rap and whether or not these lyrics promoted racism and/or hate speech. Many see a strong connection between the two phenomena. Errol McDonald, vice president, and executive editor for Pantheon Books tell radio personality Charlie Rose that, "I think I see Minister Farrakhan and Gangsta rap as basically obverses of each other. I believe both of them thrive on the myth of the outlaw in America, and I think that they're celebrated by the media for that reason, and they have had a certain kind of deleterious effect on the culture as a result. 'I think they're poisonous" (transcript #1488).

But this association between black youth and Farrakhan can be misleading. Many poor black youth are receptive to parts of the Minister's message, but are not willing to make the leap into Nation of Islam membership. One reason might be the confusion, sometimes intentional, between racial solidarity and Black Nationalism. Kevin Gray, president of the South Carolina American Civil Liberties Union draws a distinction that most black Americans support Farrakhan as juxtaposed to attacks on him by whites. But while most may believe in some of the Nation's ideas, most blacks fall short of extending that support to a position of all-out black nationalism (C3). What about the rappers? How closely aligned with Farrakhan are they? A study of the rhetoric of Gangsta rap artists may provide us with some understanding. While not within the scope of this project, a rhetorical comparison of Gangsta rap and Farrakhan's rhetoric would be interesting future research.

Three implications result from the growing division between traditional black leaders and the young, black, inner city America. First, when traditionalists attack the

Gangsta rap community, it fuels the validity of negative stereotypes made about the producers and consumers of the music. The relationship between the black middle class leadership and poor, black American youth offers vindication to white conservatives in their vilification of young black youth. As black feminist, bell hooks argues:

> 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 demonization 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. (115)

Second, when the traditionalist scapegoat the Gangsta rap community, attention is diverted for the real causes of the ills that the traditionalists are attempting to eradicate .(hooks 117; Dyson, Joint Hearings; Dyson, Between God 178; Kelley 148). The current chaotic nature of black leadership has created a "photo-opportunity" mentality when it comes to confronting crisis in black America. Gray identifies this political visibility approach to leadership as posturing without attempting to address the real causes of

serious problems (C3).

Finally, black leadership's condemnation of Gangsta rap fuels a further division from the group that the traditionalists supposedly are the most concerned about saving. Dyson analyzes this cycle:

> So when black leaders castigate gangsta' rap without a sense of its brief but instructive history (do they really know the difference between the DBG'Z and MC Ren?), it appears they are damning gangsta rap's excessive and romanticized violence without trying to figure out what precipitated its rise in the first place. Gangsta' rap, and the lifestyle it feeds on and reinforces, is in large measure an indictment of the survival strategies of traditional black cultural and political institutions. And by evoking the ethical standards of days gone by to urban youth who no longer find conventional methods of addressing personal and social calamity useful or compelling, black leaders simply drive a greater wedge between themselves and the black youth they so desperately want to aid. (Joint Hearings)

This study is interested in the cultural chasm between society and black youth over Gangsta rap. Chapter 2 assesses the research done on rap music, and specifically Gangsta rap in an effort to conceptualize the insights learned to date regarding the phenomenon. The study also examines the communication between Gangsta rap and black urban youth in an attempt to discover how rhetorical functions occur in the culture created and maintained between these groups.

Chapter 2--Cultural Communication Perspectives as Possibility for Transcending Limitations of Rap Music Scholarship

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the treatment of rap music, suggesting a method for classifying the music by its treatment. I first examine the academic research regarding rap music, followed by a discussion of the sub-genre, Gangsta rap. Previous research examines Gangsta rap as social commentary, as art, and as a form of cultural symbolism. Finally, I assess the strengths and weakness inherent in the various research perspectives that guide the current understanding of Gangsta rap.

The Study of Non-Gangsta Rap Music

Early scholarship on rap music documents the origins and history of the genre, as well as attempts to understand any impact of rap on its audience. The development of methods to study rap music parallels the evolution of the music itself and the scholarly treatment of rap music has been wide-ranging in the types of methodologies and perspectives employed. A diverse scholarship has emerged, ranging from numerous historical perspectives to the pedagogical possibilities inherent in the form of the genre and the cultural political space contested in the music.

Early studies of rap music utilize historical approaches, which produced categorization schemes for understanding the different types of rap. (Chideya 148; Kitwana 31). Light discusses a definition of rap music that recognizes different types of rap music on a spectrum including various forms of "message" and "Gangsta" raps, from just danceable or nonsensical rap (867). Paradoxically, Light also argues that all rap is by definition "political," as it represents a voice of the underrepresented, so no matter what the type of rap, a voice which is normally absent from the dominant mass media could be

heard (868). Dixon notes that rap music is a cultural phenomenon of "an intensely directed, nakedly rhetorical form of discourse which seeks to separate and define the needs of black urban Americans against those of other racial and class structures" (229). The rebellious nature of rap is more rhetorical than any other form of music. Hence, no matter what the content of the lyrics, the purpose of rap is to "reject the supremacy of whites and seeks to set up its own system of exchange outside the white societal construct" (Dixon 240).

These interpretations however, require further examination to explain the increase in the positive treatment of rap music as a form, which coincide with the almost universal condemnation of Gangsta rap as a substance. As the commercialization of Gangsta rap music moves "rap music further away from its grassroots origins "(Kitwana 23), the accuracy of previous examinations of rap music's form are called into question.

Rap discussions broadly categorize into two conceptual areas. One camp believes that the cultural production of rap has an artistic aesthetic that may require a degree of expertise as an a priori condition for appreciation. While lyrical content does play into considerations for artistic merit, the message is a small aspect of the overall mastery of the production. Lyrical content in this worldview takes a backseat to form,

Several scholars focus their criticism on the lyrical content produced in rap, and are keenly interested in the societal influences of those lyrics. The content-focused critics either examine the content as it is produced, or may chose to study the reasons for the content production (commercialization; post-industrialization, etc.). This essay contends that while there is little scholarly confrontation between the worldviews of rap as art and rap as commentary for most non-Gangsta rap music, the battle lines are necessarily re-

drawn when discussing Gangsta.

Appreciating Rap as Art

The sounds, styles, technical and rhetorical devices used in declaring an aesthetic in the cultural form of rap are detailed in the previous chapter. Tricia Rose dissects the non-content based components of rap music, ranging from the "beats" to sampling to technical rhetorical proficiencies like flowing and the creative use of language. She argues that the musical, technical and lyrical components fuse into an innovative cultural production called rap music (86). Rose is instrumental in illuminating the styles and tropes involved in the cultural production of rap music, although she does not stand alone in support for an appreciation of rap as art. Brennan also appreciates the non-lyrical components as an artistic aesthetic form worthy of appreciation.

Another foundational work is "The Fine Art of Rap" by Richard Shusterman, whose essay declares rap music as exemplifying post-modem art. He defines rap as, "a postmortem popular art which challenges some of our most deeply entrenched aesthetic conventions, conventions which are common not only to modernism as an artistic style and ideology but to the philosophical doctrine of modemity and its differentiation of cultural spheres" (614). Non-lyrical components like sampling and scratching challenge modem notions of originality and uniqueness (Shusterman, Fine Art 617). The temporality of rap, its creative use of technology, and the dichotomies of mass-media culture implicit in rap are other post-modern concepts inherent in rap says Shusterman. The form is often contradictory but rap music recognizes those tensions and reincorporates them as standards for the aesthetic.

Shusterman believes that verbal virtuosity and lyrical power are often the dominant consideration of rap lyrics (Fine Art 614-5). He suggests that what on the surface seems meaningless, is actually a layered contest of verbal prowess. Shusterman summarizes that, "informed and sympathetic close reading will reveal in many rap songs not only the cleverly potent vernacular expression of keen insights but also forms of linguistic subtlety. As well as multiple levels of meaning whose polysemic complexity, ambiguity, and intertextuality can sometimes rival that of high art's so-called 'open work" (615). Brennen says in a follow-up article that the quality of the rhyme and the quality of the voice open space for criticism of the music around the lyrical content but not within it (Off the Gangsta Tip 682). Brennen believes that appreciation of rap as art requires a movement by scholars away from simple criticism of lyrics to the other components of the form.

Where Shusterman and Brennen fail to agree is the role that lyrical content should play in the standards of appreciation for art, as well as the necessity of evaluating the "resistive" potential of the music. Brennan opposes hanging rap's aesthetic on the theoretical concept of post modernism and is interested in focusing rap's art evaluation away from lyrical content (Off the Gangsta 676; Light 857). Brennan argues that the discussion over the politics of rap subverts efforts to consider many of the artistic qualities of the genre. While Shusterman does contend that rap has an aesthetic which sometimes is dominated by lyrical content and crowds out the study of non-lyrical components (Rap Remix 154), he refuses to separate lyrical content from the overall aesthetic. While the technical and musical forms of rap challenge beliefs in a coherent and real history, Shusterman recognizes that rappers and their lyrics are interested in

destroying the modem belief that art and science are seen as oppositional (Fine Art 625).

The reason is that Shusterman's position constructs rap at the intersection between pragmatism and postmortem aesthetics (Fine Art 624; Rap Remix 152-153). Shusterman envisions not an oppositional dynamic between art and knowledge, but a complementary one. Shusterman responds to Brennan:

> Opposing the dominant Kantian aesthetic of pure disinterestedness and distance, pragmatism recognizes that practical and cognitive interest enhances rather than violates aesthetic experience, which is far from purposeless. This provides an especially helpful theoretical framework for an art like rap, which sees itself not only as music and poetry but also as philosophy, science, history, news-reporting, and politics. Particularly in the zestful experience of its politically militant genres, rap exemplifies this explosive union of aesthetics and praxis. For this reason, rap's aesthetic appreciation cannot be fully abstract from its political, social and moral import. Though this makes the artistic criticism of rap more complex and difficult, it can also make it richer and more powerful. (Rap Remix 153)

Whether lyrical content can and should be divorced from aesthetics of rap is a question treated shortly. However, the next section examines the lyrical content driven research, and specifically its potential for empowering or disempowering social criticism.

Rap Lyrics as Social Commentary.

Finding the value to the message in a rap song has dominated academic inquiry. Traditional early scholars identified in chapter one offer numerous historical

accounts of rap's relatively short life span. These scholars generally regarded rap music as a very positive forum, especially when used in an attempt to educate through positive social commentary.

A major reason for rap music's early appeal in scholarship is the liberating potential rap has on today's youth and its ability to captivate and energize young audiences. The music has created a forum that has produced a culture between rap artists, their lyrics, and their audience. Lipitz provides insight into the impact of the genre on youth culture, "In Public Enemy's music video 'Fight the Power,' Flavor Flav, the group's free-spirited trickster, displays a stopped alarm clock pinned to his shirt and explains that 'this means we know what time it is' "(17). The significance of time is repeatedly discussed in rap music lyrics and several scholars examine the meaning of knowing "what time it is." Critics observe that rap considers an alternative time continuum which represents resistance to dominant ideology and a consciousness of one's existence (Lipitz 17).

The connections made cross-culturally between youth as a result of the rap phenomenon provides an additional benefit for society (Rose 84). Many cross-cultural linkages have developed as rap itself has grown in popularity. Rose contends that the linkages between post-industrialization, rap music and other similar urban experiences will continue to expand across regions and nations. Rap has created unique bonds between youth in terms of influence, culture, and communication.

But as rap lyrics are accepted into the dominant culture with a harder street edge, criticism has tended to "balance" the potential of the form with positive social commentary as the ideal, against the objectionable lyrics of a particular artist or type of

rap music. These descriptive approaches praise the potential of the genre although it's usually less than a sincere compliment since they often conclude that rap music is not presently reaching that potential. An article by Krohn and Suazo entitled, "Contemporary Urban Music Controversial Messages in Hip-Hop," exemplified this trend. Concern over the societal implication of rap music has become a major focus of criticism.

The question of social influence in rap music constructed by examining parts of rap music, which either violate or support a particular sociological construct. Afrocentric, nationalist, Feminist, Culturalist, and Marxist critics all study rap artists in relation to the sociological framework in question. These perspectives usually are not mutually exclusive and overlapping treatment often informs these criticisms. However, the dominant perspective of examination is generally the focus of discussion. This essay previews each of the aforementioned criticisms with a summary of how scholars have related rap to the perspective ideology.

Afrocentric/Black Nationalist Criticism

Kitwana's Afrocentric criticism hails rap commentary, which privileges the ideal that the African Diaspora is the center of existence for blacks and simultaneously criticizes rap music that does not offer a pro-black worldview. His criticism believes that much of the early non-commercialized rap conveyed an Afrocentric ethic that has been destroyed, as rap is increasingly viewed as a mass marketable commodity. In The Rap on Gangsta Rap, Kitwana challenges rap artists to understand their place in the "struggle" and suggests that the primary goal of the form is to raise consciousness (65). He distinguishes hard-core rap from Gangsta rap and identifies a spiritual component in

hardcore, not found in Gangsta (20). Kitwana argues that while rap music can have a hardcore style and sound, lyrics can simultaneously be regressive, disempowering the liberating possibilities of the music (25).

Another consideration is impact of commercialization on musical production. Kitwana sees a proliferation of Gangsta music production as a by-product of its' commercial success of (23). Non-Gangsta artists told by music industry executives that their message is not "hard-core" enough, and consequently, they are retransfonning their image into a harder persona. Many Positive and Mainstream have attempted this transformation with varying degrees of commercial success, including: KRS- 1; MC Hammer; MC Lyte; Vanilla Ice; and LL Cool J.

A Kitwana example of nationalist rap consciousness, Public Enemy, often condemned as anti-Semitic by some critics, but simultaneously praised as the standard for political and educational rap by many of the Culturalist and Afrocentric academics. Decker points out that Public Enemy's use of imagery has much in common with the aesthetic of the sixty's black nationalist movement. "By taking on and yet revising Panther imagery, Public Enemy creatively updates the most media-conscious iconography of sixties black radicalism for a 1990s constituency" (104). Credited with bringing into focus a materialistic and direction-less music only in search of commercial success, Public Enemy "would move beyond rap's nightmare of materialism and direction-less hostility into that recurrent dream of agitation and propaganda with a funky beat" (Toop 175).

Although virtually no serious opposition exists to non-message rappers, nationalist message rap music has met with substantial criticism at times. Though

Gangsta rappers, primarily accused of graphic lyrical content, the nationalist rappers are responsible for some of the earliest media controversies surrounding rap music. These allegations usually involved racist lyrics, imagery of violent resistance, and lyrics embedded in the sexist nature of many Islamic traditions. Public Enemy charged with fostering hate using anti-Semitic lyrics in several of their songs to the point that one of the members of the group, Professor Griff was forced out. After creating a controversy in an interview where he repeated many of the same controversial statements about Jews that have been common tenants in Nation of Islam rhetoric, Griff resigned. Perkins counters that Public Enemy's association with tenets of the Nation of Islam ideology fuel a shift towards a new African-American political consciousness and offers a "dam of social energy and power" (49-50).

Sister Souljah, part of the Public Enemy crew, participated in what was—next to the "Cop Killer" controversy—the most illuminating event involving the intersection between rap and mainstream politics. Bill Clinton, in the heat of a presidential campaign and not doing very well in the polls, spoke at a National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) conference (Lusane, African Americans 120). When Clinton arose to give his remarks, he immediately attacked the NRC for allowing Souljah to speak at the event. Clinton took issue with remarks made by Souljah in a Washington Post interview from the previous day. Souljah, responding to questions about the insurrection in Los Angeles was quoted as saying, "I mean, if Black people kill Black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?" Clinton condemned Souljah, comparing her to David Duke.

Souljah's response is that her quote was out of context. Many writers and scholars agreed with her assessment. Lusane adds that "Souljah stated that in her remarks

she was describing the mentality of gang members who feel little remorse in killing other blacks and that, in their thinking, killing whites would be justified. While she herself had made inflammatory remarks, she steadfastly held that she was neither advocating or condoning the murder of whites (or anyone else)" (Lusane, African Americans 119). Clinton staffers later conceded that this decision was part of a "counter-scheduling" strategy, which fundamentally was an attempt to show whites that Clinton would not cater to Jessie Jackson. Clinton's decision proved to be strategically successful, as he rose in the polls and captured a larger share of white voters without losing much of the black vote (Lusane, African Americans 120).

The implication for rap music was unsettling. A forum that offered a voice for the marginalized, was reminded that dominant politics could obscure its meaning and place on a whim. Lusane writes,

> It was doubtful that Clinton had ever seriously listened to rap music, but, like George Bush and Ronald Reagan, the Clinton camp understood the racial calculations of political strategy and power in the United States. Rap represents a culture of resistance and expresses the alienation, frustration, anger, and rebellious mode of urban Black youth who consciously recognize their vulnerability and marginality in post-industrial United States. This social discontent is commodified and marketed by some of the most skilled advertising agencies and multinational record producers in the world. While Sister Souljah did not necessarily represent a constituency that was being wooed by the Clinton campaign, her celebrity and notoriety made her a convenient target through which the message of disassociation could be

delivered. (African Americans 120)

Several scholars have alleged the sexist nature of Afrocentric/black nationalist rap (Rose 103-4). Ransby and Matthews contend that the principles of opposition embodied in Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism, weakened by male-centered definitions of oppression and liberation, limit the liberating potential of the social criticism (67-68). Allen argues the tenets of message rap probably make it incapable of the political consciousness transformations hoped for. Allen says that the Nation Of Islam offers, "a transformed social identity—the lost/found 'Asiatic black man'—unencumbered by the weight of recorded history. However, it also envisions an ordering of male/female relations founded upon the suppression of women's rights, a belief in millennial salvation, and a rigorous personal discipline reinforced by the vigilance of the Fruit of Islam" (183). However, Feminist criticisms of rap claim sexism in the music extend far beyond nationalist rap motivated by Nation of Islam ideology.

Feminist Criticism

Feminist critiques chastise allegedly sexist narratives while praising rap artists, usually women rappers, which counter those narratives, often pointing out the inconsistencies sometimes equally present in those artist's approaches. Rose's seminal work, an entire chapter of Black Noise, contextualizes the space that women rappers occupy in the male-dominated, sexist industry of rap music. Rose contends that women are often complicit in support of sexist narratives and male rap artists are not "decidedly" sexist. She identifies the contradictory nature of assessing sexism in rap, both in terms of lyrical content and in terms of industry considerations.

Rose divides her discussion of women rap artists into one of content and form. Rose identifies the heterosexual courtship, the importance of the female voice, women's mastery of rap, and displays of black women's physical and sexual independence, as major themes in lyrical content by women rappers (147). In rap music discourse and the rap music industry, marginalization of women occurs often in the areas Rose discusses. More often than not, women rappers stand as a vanguard to challenge that marginalization, but sometimes they are complicit in it. The complex nature of Salt 'n Pepa shaking their collective thang, may ring out for the physical and sexual freedom of the black women, but also, may complicate discussions regarding objectification of women's bodies (168-9). Again Rose is quick to point out that some male artists fight sexist narratives just as some women's narratives are complicit in supporting sexist constructs (150-151). She gives examples of situations that are," easily" positioned as progressive or regressive." Other examples are more complex as contradictory messages about sexism exist in the same song or even the same set of verses. The bottom line for Rose is that simplistic readings of rap music lyrics are problematic in determining social commentary regarding gender relations. Moreover, most scholars identify the dialogic dimension as a forum for self-criticism, especially concerning sexism and women rap artists, as well as the unique production of a *forum* to create discussion about these issues.

The two methods of presentation Rose examines, are dialogic discourses, either between female and male rappers—usually involving battles over gender relations—or within a larger social dialogue, including feminism. She relies upon Lipsitz's concept of dialogic criticism that identifies popular music as a multidirectional communication process grounded in a socio- and historical conversation (148).

Rose introduces white feminism as a possible intersection for black women rappers fighting the struggle for female liberation in an oppressive genre. While the women rap artists she interviewed were hesitant to align themselves with feminist ideology, countering that they preferred to consider themselves as "pro-woman," Rose explains to the rappers the consistency of their beliefs with white feminist ideology. Rose acknowledges the unique fears of black women rappers—that concerns over allegiance with a broader white feminist movement might be used to further marginalize the black male, which is not the intent of the black women rapper at all (176).

Rapper MC Lyte supports Rose's definition of feminism which focused on the mode of analysis, although she commonly perceived (arid resisted) feminism as a label for a social movement. Although fellow artist Queen Latifah can not articulate why, she feels more comfortable with labels of being pro-woman, as opposed to a feminist. Rose discusses the paradox faced by the black woman in relation to "feminism":

> For these women rappers, and many other black women, feminism is the label for members of a white women's social movement that has no concrete link to black women or the black community. Feminism signifies allegiance to historically specific movements whose histories have long been the source of frustration for women of color. Similar criticisms of women's social movements have been made vociferously by many black feminists. As they have argued, race and gender are inextricably linked for black women. This is the case for black and white women. However, in the case of black women, the realities of racism link black women to black men in a way that challenges cross-racial sisterhood. Sisterhood among and between black and

white woman will not be achieved at the expense of black women's racial identity. (177)

Rose presents further theoretical testimony that feminist theory needs to do more in the name of inclusion across race lines, before black women will feel comfortable accepting the label of "feminist."

Cultural Criticism

Culturalists focus on the forces that give rise to rap as a form, and how those forces influence rap music production. Kitwana argues that commercialization drives the lyrical content (23-24). Rose develops the position that post-industrialization was an indispensable element in the creation of rap music. Dyson points the rhetorical finger at capitalism and commercialization for the deep materialism in rap music (178). Out of the despair of deindustrialization, came the creativity of hip-hop. "Hip hop is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate experiences of marginalization..." says Rose (21). She continues that rap is "the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop" (21).

A pair of related issues for the cultural critic regarding the commercialization of rap music is authenticity and appropriation. The appropriation debate questions why whites are interested in what began as a predominantly black cultural form, why and how the music is appropriated, and how this interest translates into changes in the production of the form. Historical accounts of the rap industry usually draw similar comparisons of what happened with appropriations of other black cultural musical forms like jazz, blues,

and rock and roll. The similarities are remarkable, but several scholars argue not identical.

In the beginning, debates within the rap industry centered on whether one had to "sell out" rap's original roots to make a profit, or "crossover" into the mainstream. Rose notes that the "crossover" phenomenon is not new and many rappers argue that crossover means dilution and theft of the cultural form by whites. Rose concludes part of the battle is for reclamation of black cultural forms from appropriation.

As the industry found more indigenous, hard-core productions sold to the mainstream as well, if not better than "watered down" rap made for the express purpose of pop consumption, the cry for "selling out" became deathly silent. The new debate within the rap community became whether artists were "being real" in an effort to stay true to the art form. Being real separates reality from fantasy and identifies the voices "true" to rap's target audience—those from the "hood"—as opposed to imitators who are solely in the "game" to make money. Realness, or authenticity, allegedly separates the middle class black youth who rap as a hobby. The hobby rapper has many "life-chances," as opposed to the young rap artist from the ghettos of South Central Los Angeles, rapping for survival and a way out of her or his socioeconomic condition. The need to be "real" has become a continuing theme in the rap music lyrics. "Keepin' it real" is the claim to the authentic voice of rap and the introduction of the Gangsta images and sounds took being real to another level.

The Study of Gangsta Rap

The nature of rap as art and as social commentary are the two primary perspectives used in evaluating non-Gangsta rap. In this section, the same two paradigms

are applied to Gangsta rap scholarship. While lyrical content is directly associated with evaluations about the value of any social commentary, when assessing rap music as art, those lines become less clear.

Gangsta Rap Lyrics as Social Commentary

The messages of Gangsta rap are complex, yet simple. Gangsta rap messages detail in graphic terms the reality of street life in urban America, while showing a side of that life many critics would choose not to hear in such graphic terms (Lusane Race and Class 49). A few scholars hail Gangsta rap artists as organic intellectuals, individuals who are indigenous to disempowered urban America, but are able to offer an insightful education about life in the ghetto (Lusane African Americans 118). Organic intellectuals impart, to all that will listen, an ethnographic knowledge of the streets that is unrivaled. The lack of formal training, presumes to explain why these intellects are insightful while simultaneously complicit with racist, sexist, violent, and homophobic speech. Most scholarship and media criticism suggests that Gangsta rappers are just what they self-proclaim: gangsters, thugs, pimps, and hustlers glorifying violence, misogyny, and nihilism in their music. Negative sociological criticism against Gangsta rap can be summarized around three issues: lyrics of violent/sexist/homophobic/racist content; the lack of "morality" in the messages; and the negative stereotyping, which accompanies authenticity." In other words, Gangsta rap messages are the antithesis of rap music as positive social commentary.

Dixon's early textual analysis on rap—even before the advent of the Gangsta who

could sell commercially—argues that although all rap is violent[1], some early pre-commercial success Gangsta rappers like Schooly D, "are stubbornly unredeemed by any hope of self-improvement" (235). Since the majority of rap was not explicitly "violent" and the messages were more indirect and tame, little treatment of this new form of "radical" rap occurred. But criticisms of the genre exploded as the commercialization of lyrics with a street realism crossed over into mainstream society. Academics were quick to assess the negative nature of the lyrics.

There have been several attempts to prove the effects of violent rap music on behavior, with limited success in demonstrating any significant relationship (Ballard and Coates 164; Took and Weiss 619; Epstein et al. 391). Criticism is the predominant tool for discussing Gangsta rap music lyrics. In newer traditional analysis, the hard-core lyrics of Gangsta rap represent the worst form of the genre and situate as oppositional to "good rap" which promotes less offensive lyrical content. Krohn and Suazo are concerned about "street language" which "usually depicts the least socially desirable elements of urban life including misogyny, illegal drugs, and violence"(142). They fear that the Gangsta rap image "which many of its aficionados see as validating the turbulent and deadly streets of America denied, is ... becoming a role model to our youth.." (146). Krohn and Suazo conclude that the need exists to monitor the influential effect these lyrics can have on young "immature" audiences.

Controversies over racist lyrics only began with the exploits of Public Enemy and the charges of anti-Semitism. Gangsta's discuss in denigrating terms, violent actions, and

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[1] Dixon asserts that rap concerts are uniquely filled with violence, a contention Rose systematically answers in Black Noise

a variety of slurs against individuals and ethnic groups for a variety of reasons. The politics of mass identify have been a part of historical discussions of oppression forever. The difference for rap music is that allegations of racism in the sub-genre Gangsta rap condemn the entire genre in much the same ways as allegations of violence, homophobia, or misogyny.

Language choices like "bitches" and "hoes," foster negative connotations whether talking to a mother in rural Iowa; a Culturalist critic in Los Angeles; or a feminist critic in New York. The apparent misogynist language of Gangsta rap calls into question many of the values of scholars when resolving the liberating potential of the genre when contrasted with lyrics that disempower entire communities. Scholars are universal in their contention that misogyny runs rampant in Gangsta rap. Some scholars go so far to identify Gangsta rap artists as women haters.

Most scholarship on Gangsta rap includes commentary on how it portrays of women and many, like Krohn and Suazo are concerned with the young, impressionistic masses for which Gangsta messages are potentially exposed. Rose challenges critics to recognize the complexity of sexual narratives in raps, and not construct female rappers as oppositional to male rappers, as previously discussed. Groups like 2 Live Crew are defended by some scholars like Henry Louis Gates, who posit that 2 Live Crew is being assessed out of context. Peterson-Lewis applies a Feminist perspective on these types of defenses and how "rationalizations" ignore the broader sociological impact of the offensive lyrics and serve to marginalize women even further (71).

Four types of rationalizations identified by Peterson-Lewis are: trivalization, particularization, spiritualization, and universalization. Peterson-Lewis says that

construction of "ghetto realities" as more important than the treatment of women, the result is trivalization (74). Particularization, that the discrimination context is only significant to a specific group, in this case, dominates society. Defenders argue that the music is "just entertainments and if contextually understood is satirical or amusing. Entertainment necessity—that the public wants these lyrics and the artist can separate from her or his music is one type of particularization. While entertainment tradition—that the portrayal of women in rap is "simply grounded in black culture"—is a second type Peterson-Lewis discusses (75). Spiritualization is the creative framing of information to avoid concrete evidence of immorality. Spiritualization implies that no proof exists to aval support the claim of misogyny. Finally, universalization is a connection of the charge of sexism in rap lyrics to the broader portrayals of women in society, challenging the uniqueness of the charge. Or that by reducing the problem to black men degrading women is to ignore the larger societal problem of black males having a self-esteem problem because they are persecuted by a larger society.

While Peterson-Lewis does not deny the possible truth of these claims, she argues that these rationalizations do not absolve lyricists from being responsible for their actions and taken to task for them. She concludes that "2 Live Crew's lyrics not only desensitize their audiences to violence against women, they also help rationalize and reinforce a nihilistic mentality among those who already suffer from the effects of ghetto reality" (79). She also denounces the possibility that degrading lyrics can be an attempt to satirize European stereotypes of black sexuality because her standard is that the satire must have "wit and humor." Finally, Peterson-Lewis rejects position that the dozens and signifying strengthens verbal skills when laced with a large quantify of profanity. "Many

believe that the heavy use of profanity is a sign of poor ability to use "normal" words," she posits (76). Moreover, that the use of profanity relates with expressions of extreme anger, which she says may be the reason for high homicide rates among black males because they have been desensitized to obscene language.

Anti-Gay hate speech is also a significant part of the Gangsta rappers vocabulary. Dyson recognizes the use of objectionable homophobic language as "vicious and downright depressing (Between God xii). Rose finds homophobic raps in lyrics by male and female rap artists, "hinting at their possible homosexuality as a way to emasculate them" (Black Noise 151). Rose concludes that homophobic language choices reaffirm heterosexual masculinity. Dyson points to homophobia as an "implicit agreement between Gangsta rappers and political elite's that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals basically deserve what they get" (Between God 184).

Grounded in the public assault on Gangsta rap, is the issue of morality. The pressure for censorship coming from both the left and right, black and white serves to fuel record sales and decrease black, youth trust in American leadership. The morality discussion revolves around the concerns that rap lyrics influence impressionable groups of youth that not exposed to these concepts. Krohn and Suazo address rap's continual glorification of drugs with the implication that because this performance is public, the effects are harmful to society (144). They balance the need for an understanding of the "black lingo" and wonders whether society can "reach a level of understanding the needs of an exploited community. On the other hand, one must be aware of the consequences of immature audiences being exposed to illicit material" (152).

The authenticity debate initiated by cultural critics took on a new perspective with the advent of Gangsta rap. As the music took a harder edge and the lyrics got grittier and raunchy, questions over the reasons for commercial appeal grew. Scholars became fascinated with the appropriation issue. A second consideration embedded in the authenticity issue revolves around the "effects" or "motivations" behind white appropriation of hard-core rap music. David Samuels in his New Republic article "The Real Face of Rap" argues that rap images of Gangstas, criminals, and sexual outlaws serve to reinforce negative stereotypes of African-Americans. The popularity of rap for whites is a desire to authenticate the experience of poor, black America from a "safe" distance, says Samuels. Gangsta rap has become the persona by which realness is measured (Perkins, Droppin Science 19). Perkins argues that "realness" of' Gangsta rap is uniquely attractive commodity to generation Xers. He explains:

> In an age of mass over consumption and media hype, Gangsta rap no doubt represents a religion and ideology of authenticity. From gang colors to "blunts" and "forties" (hip hop vernacular for marijuana and malt liquor), from drive-by shootings to woman abuse, the idea of authenticity holds a maddening appeal for the X generation. These abstract slogans of "real niggaz" "niggaz for life," and "bein and stayin' "real" sunimon up romantic notions of ghetto authenticity. Oppressed by the machinery of social regulation and the police state, black and Latino youth have created a substitute social order governed by their own code and rituals of authenticity, but there is no hype to cop stops or dead homies. So as white-bread America searches for a new identity in a post-Soviet, postindustrial, globally interconnected new world order, hip hop speaks

> to youth's desire for identity, for a sense of self-definition and purpose, no matter how lawless or pointless. As long as youth culture is dominated by the cult of the commodity, there will be a desire for the "real" (20-1)

Samuels also says that hard-core rap no longer holds any unique value as a black cultural form. Samuels sees hard-core rap production as a by-product of commercialization with the engines being driven by white corporate America and most of the raps by inauthentic middle class blacks.

Scholars generally balance their concerns about Gangsta rap music against the public calls for censorship by suggesting that active measures be taken to fight back against "offensive" lyrics, but not to censor the speech. Dyson—who argues that Gangsta rap is a scapegoat for the real ills of black America—still believes that scholars and the public should cry out against the evils of Gangsta rap. Activism, criticism, boycotts provide vehicles for change, although he feels that attempts at censorship are misguided (Between God 183). The balance between understanding the socioeconomic and political conditions and how these conditions created Gangsta rap, and the need to hold rap artists responsible for their actions has been the most popular approach to sociological study.

As the process of evaluating Gangsta rap music evolves, a clear pattern emerges, no matter what type the perspective employed. An explanation of why Gangsta rap exists, followed by a condemnation of that which is not "sociologically beneficial" and the conclusion that rap music at its best, when it liberates, must have an visionary content in its message. Kitwana's position is representative of scholarly criteria of- evaluation of rap music:

> Rap artists, rap enthusiasts, and general listeners must go beyond hard-core, *phat* beats and approach substance. We need positive, progressive, liberating action in our communities. Political consciousness needs to be raised. We need rap music that not only stays true to hard-core, underground funk (i.e., blues aesthetic), but further encourages study, struggle, dialogue, activism, creativity, discipline, community-centeredness, healing and respect for Black life. We need rap music that stays true, but simultaneously expands the discourse beyond the limited imagination of individual egos, materialism, and distorted (defonning) sexual desires. We need economic and political enlightened empowerment, and rap artists too must continue to contribute to that effort through enlightened and creative lyrics and style, creating and supporting independent Black institutions, continuing to provide space to explore youth concerns, supporting national and international human rights efforts, advancing enlightened perspectives of women and respect for Black life, creating jobs to assist communities in need, and exploring alternatives for those of us whose days are filled with more hopelessness than happiness. (65)

Generally, the sociological critic appreciates the possibility for rap music to provide positive social commentary. But feels that Gangsta rap messages generally fail to live up to it's potential and are quite detrimental to society, especially given the rise in popularity of Gangsta messages. Even cultural critics at best, offer a lukewarm endorsement of the music, asking society to not condemn it, but rather understand the reasons for its existence while vigilantly opposing it's offensive lyrics.

Gangsta Rap as Art

Brennan proclaims non-lyrical considerations of rap as art in an attempt to avoid discussions over Gangsta rap lyrics. Shusterman counters that rap music is an art form and evaluations of the music should center on counter-issues like the resistance potential of the lyrics. In the end, most scholars who consider rap's aesthetic seem willing to acknowledge the contradictions Gangsta rap provides, but unable to resolve the meaning of those inconsistencies. Perkins summarizes that while Gangsta rap's "blatant antiauthoritarianism recalls past generations of youthful rebellion" (Droppin Science 19), it's verbal harshness compares equally to nihilistic anarchy.

In Fine Art of Rap, Shusterinan only refers to positive rap message excerpts and claims that "Other raps function as street-smart moral fables, offering cautionary narratives and practical advice.." (626). This begs the question: How does one evaluate the resistive effect of rap lyrics, which are neither type Shusterman identifies? In his response to Brennan's piece on rap aesthetics, Shusterman argues that controversies like Gangsta rap distract us from exploring rap's artistic significance (Rap Remix 150)

Brennan argues that content is secondary to form, and that diversity of styles demonstrates all rap music is not about "gangsta rap and pimpin styles" (157). He correlates the lyrical content directly with the level of "art" found in the music and privileges fon-n in favor of artistic appreciation. Brennan's inconsistent plea to "forget about Los Angeles" and recognize the non-lyrical aesthetics of the art form is a call to sidestep the tough question his position presents. How can the most popular sub-genre of a pop culture form (Gangsta rap), be endowed with such limited academic artistic value?

Scholars, who suggest the art lies within the form, must examine how lyrical contradictions interact within the form.

Brennan claims that *academic* focus on West Coast Gangsta rap diverts discussion from other types of more interesting rap, he identifies several East coast rap artists. What Brennan ignores is the Culturatists contention that West Coast -rap's *commercial* focus is crowding out or creating a re-imaging (hardening) of other types of rap music. Shusterman avoids the elitist dilemma by allowing for the possibility that he just does not understand.

To summarize, an increasingly hard-core lyrical content complicates attempts at studying the fon-n of rap music. Called into question are many of the generally positive comments made about the aesthetic of rap music as rap artists take on the personas of hustlers, thugs, pimps, and Gangstas. Scholars choose to condemn, oppose, dismiss, or ignore the "sub-genre" of Gangsta rap in an effort to preserve the consistency of their original analysis. The problem is that popular modes of reception indicate Gangsta rap outsells all other types of rap and has resulted in the hardening of all the various types of the cultural production.

Whether considering rap as art or as social commentary, the allegations of offensiveness grounded in charges of sexism, glorified violence, and nihilism of Gangsta rap has reduced most critics to discussing the "potential" of rap music when done "properly." A potential being achieved less and less because of the popularity of hard-core rap. However, there is one critic in each camp whose scholarship attempts to understand the complex meanings behind the Gangsta persona.

Introducing Rap as Cultural Symbolism

Robin Kelley and Russell Potter, although starting from different perspectives, reach quite similar conclusions about the meaning of Gangsta rap messages. Kelley, a cultural critic, does not stop at just an understanding of the production of Gangsta rap. He examines the images and symbols revealed in the music culture, especially as they relate to the Historical experience of African-American myths and rituals. - Potter develops Shusterman's concept of rap as a post-modem art form, but also grounds his discussion in the historical experience of African-American vernacular, as well as the rhetorical trope of Signifying. Exploration of each author's perspectives, as well as their insights into some of the salient issues of rap study suggest that further inquiry into this third wave of scholarship is necessary before assessing the state of rap criticism.

Kelley: The Rituals and Myths of Gangsta Rap Music

Kelley departs from earlier cultural theorists by invoking historical context to describe not only the origins of the music and its production, but more importantly to decipher the meaning of the symbols used in the music. Kelley examines the "cultural politics" of Gangsta rap and includes a historical grounding of gangster images in black culture. He argues that Gangsta rap narratives embrace mythologies of gangsters, thugs, pimps, players, and criminals. Gangsta rap speaks directly to the "hood" says Kelly, taking on directly, institutions and structures of power. Kelley positions hard-core street raps as an extension of the signifying and boasting rituals steeped in the tradition of the black ghetto. Kelley identifies the rituals and myth making of Gangsta rap music as having a lineage in older black cultural forms. Specifically he explores the employment

of the black "baadman" narratives, the blaxploitation movie genre, and the sexually explicit narratives of the late nineteenth century (Kelley 119)

"Baadman narratives" are masculine verbal duels over who is the "baddest man around" (Kelley 121; Brennen, Forgetting LA 671; Judy 220). Spencer distinguishes the "bad nigger" from the "bad man," arguing the latter as a resistive folk hero, and the former as the disliked outlaw. Others challenge that interpretation, arguing instead that rappers have redefined and reread -"nigger" as "nigga," giving it similar empowering capabilities (Judy 218). Again says Kelley, signifying is invoked as a verbal contest to determine who is the "baadman." Kelley argues that Gangsta rap artists assume the role of the gang banger, hustler, pimp, or thug, to construct a detailed alternative voice. This voice speaks to practices, structures, and attitudes in mainstream society as well as within, the socioeconomic classes where these characters are bom (121). Theirs is not a detached viewpoint but an actual part of the drama—ethnography of sorts—claims Kelley. Gangsta rappers, notes Kelley, critiques socioeconomic conditions via the staging of first person narratives that signify both personal and collective experiences (124). Kelley explains that "In Gangsta rap there is almost always a relationship between the conditions in which characters live and the decisions they make. Many critics' view Gangsta rap music as just a glorification of crime, violence, and rude behaviors.

In fact, just the opposite is true says Kelley, as Gangsta rappers do not celebrate violence and crime, but critique from within (127). Kelley develops the position that Gangsta artists discuss crime as necessary for survival given life's chances; they also discuss crime as a form of rebellion. Although both tactics may serve to "glamorize" crime, but the larger set of narratives serves to repeatedly criticize lives of crime. He

claims that Gangsta rap artists offer their lives as a testimony to a "way out," sometimes they talk about the nihilism inherent in crime. For example, some scholars believe that Gangsta rappers promote drug use, many Gangsta rap narratives attack crack and cocaine drug dealers. While narratives which critiques charge with "glamorizing" actually detail reasons youth enter the drug trade (Kelley 130). When told in the first person, "outsiders" suggest that these narratives glamorize the promotion of drugs but Kelley argues that the two types or narratives do not, and are perfectly consistent with one another. Some Gangsta narratives infonn young gang members that instead of fighting one another, the "real gangsters" (the government; the police) should be the target of violence, says Kelley (126). Finally, much of Gangsta rap is anti-celebratory, offering detailed narratives of the few options for those willing to partake in the "game." detailed narratives of the few options for those willing to partake Violence against innocent victims, standing at the gravesite saying good-bye to another fallen friend and de-romanticized portrayals of gang violence are all recurring Gangsta rap narratives, points out Kelley (128).

Gangsta rap offers a "window into, and critique of the criminalization of black youth," says Kelley (118). Much of the content is strikingly similar to that of Black Nationalist message rap, with topics ranging from racism in the judicial system to police/black youth relations to access to public space. Kelley examines the analogies Gangsta rap draws between gangsterism and American capitalism, mainstream society, and unrestrained individualism (130). Numerous examples cite how Gangsta artists know and understand the music business and discuss how to attempt to succeed in the system. 2Pac Shakur in an MTV interview not long before his death said that America

was founded on ambition and urban American has learned this fact. His life, work, and art (one and the same for most rappers) is merely a reflection of that learned ambition and his lyrics are a mirror pointed back at mainstream American.

Prison life is another common topic in Gangsta rap lyrics. Kelley compares Gangsta rap dialogue about prison life and conditions, to Foucault's discussion of how prisoners convey a "counter-discourse" about the prison and judicial system (135). Detailed descriptions show both the difficult existence of prison but also the love, respect, and linkages that those on the "outside" nave for those on the "insider' Rappers blame the judicial system and the police as the cause of overpopulation of blacks in the prison system. But as Kelley conveys, Gangsta rappers tend to approach prison with a "scared straight" deterrence approach for it's audience (135).

Kelley discusses the use of the word "nigga" in Gangsta rap is an example of the complexity and controversial nature of authenticity debates. Many claim that Gangsta raps continual use of nigger serves only to reinforce the acceptability of its use by non-black individuals and reflects a form of self-hatred. Culturalists counter that Gangsta rappers are redefining the word and recontextualizing its use, much in the same way that the pejoratively negative "black" was giving new meaning during the Black Aesthetic Movement of the sixties. Kelley calls this the process of "ghettocentricity" (139). He refers to the historical context specific use of the word by blacks both in humor and redefined as an endearing term. In Gangsta rap, "nigger" re-employed as "nigga" describes not a skin color, but a condition, usually read as oppressed or a product of the ghetto. The term is not a synonym for black. Moreover, Kelley notes that signifying language of race and class oppression is a historical tenet in dominated culture (138). The

baadman narratives are an extension of this usage of the word "nigga."

Cultural critics agree with charges of sexism, although they are quick to argue that context is removed from many criticisms so that the implications of the charges may not be what they appear. Kelley and others identify a genealogy of "pimp narratives" which include blaxsploitation genre arts and the sexually explicit comedy of the seventies (Redd Foxx; Rudy Ray Moore; Richard Pryor, etc.). "Pimp narratives" even extend to linkages to other pimp/hustler cultural expressions dating back to the early nineteenth century (141). -pimps and hustlers are examples of' specific -"baadman" narratives creating the background for Gangsta rapper's staging of these characters. Hannerz's definition of "street-corner mythmaking" amply describes much of the content these narratives contain. Kelley lists common themes like "boasts about his ability to sexually please women, the number of women he sleeps with, and the money he is making in the process" in the baadman narratives (143).

Kelley believes that for a number of reasons, misogyny in rap is a "reflection of daily gender conflicts and negotiations among inner-city black youth (145). He believes that many sexist Gangsta rap lyrics are referring to the life of an entertainment "star" and his following, namely groupies. There also exists a hatred for women who rejected the star," before one's ascension into stardom.

Kelley, unwilling to present a sociological explanation for the lyrics, but does offer a variety of historicized and contextualized reasons which might explain the broader societal popularity of these pimp narratives in the nineties (143). One explanation is the broader discussion of sexism in culture and male dominance as a part of intra-family conflict and a threat to "traditional family values." Another factor is the blaming of

society's ills, like welfare explosion, on working class African-American women, labeling them as "gold-diggers" or "welfare queens." Additionally, Kelley identifies the attack on women, as part of Gangsta rapper's perceptions of unrealistically high expectations of black men. Other possible explanations may include the black males' fears of the black woman's sexuality or the level of control that black men perceive that black women have over them through the weapon of sex (Kelley 144; Rose 171). Irrespective of any of these reasons, Kelley argues that these distinctions are still a "direct form of male domination" which justifies violence against women separated as women from the "bad" women.

Potter's Resistive Post-Modernism

Early rap scholarship repeatedly celebrates the importance of language, excellence in rhetorical skills, and narrative formation in the nature of rap music (Rose 39; Dixon 231; Spencer 4; Dyson, Between God 162; Shusterman, Fine Art 615; Toop 29). Potter writes in Spectacular Vernaculars that rap is a vernacular art form which gains it rhetorical strength in incremental doses by using "guerrilla" tactics of subverting the dominant language (76). Vernacular art forms are constantly changing and within that temporality lies the power of the form. Continuous production of new styles supporting and resisting commodification, recycling "the same as difference," and making "something out of nothing" build the foundation for Potter's form of resistive postmodernism (73). Just as Kunjufti talks about rap's ever-changing "flava" and Rose identifies rap as the creation of "a style no one else can follow" (38), Potter discusses temporality of style as inherent to the rap process. The method that drives the rap process

for Potter is "signifying," and occurs both in the music and in the lyrical content.Potter speaks of a musical signifying, "repetition with a difference," similar to a jazz technique (27). He recovers the oral historical linkages between rap music and other black cultural forms:

> Thus, early on, African-American traditions were able to draw upon recorded music as one of their key sources of continuity and communication; not only did rural and urban styles cross-influence one another, but the practice of making performances that copied, referred to, or set themselves in variation against previously *recorded* works became widespread. And just as Henry Louis Gates Jr. has documented with African-American *written* traditions, the vernacular aural/oral traditions of black music produced and framed these variations through the modes of Signifying. (27)

Potter concludes that rap music is a recurring process of citing musical and lyrical archives (53). Moreover, rap music situates itself within a "long and complex musical continuum," citing itself as the site for present urban Black culture but recognizing the past from which it is constructing, all the time recognizing the "pressures of commodification"[2]

Based in the African-American oral tradition of the signifying monkey tale, lyrical signifying is a staple of rap content (Potter 83). As the story goes, a monkey and a lion are having a conversation where the monkey insinuates in vivid and figurative language that the elephant has been violently attacking the lion's reputation. The lion takes the

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[2] Commodification is the changing of a cultural symbol as a result of it's appropriation by the dominant culture.

monkey's words literally and confronts the elephant. The elephant informs the lion that he is mistaken, then beats the lion. The lion returns to the monkey, where the monkey offers additional insults and depending on the version is either: pummeled by the lion or creatively finds a method to escape. The implications for this (mis)-communication exchange are "built around the central trope of the signifying monkey as trickster figure" says Potter (83). Each action, Potter explains, has material consequences which must be considered, but unlike "Western" aesthetics, which assume an accurate reception by its audience, signifying assumes the mistaking of meaning.

Potter identifies linguistic slippages as the primary mechanism for rap's signifying practices. The redefinition of words and phrases lies at the essence of rap lyrical production. Potter explains that "the trick of signifying is to both at once, to find homonymic connections that serve either to undermine, parody, or connect in a surprising way the underlying connotations of language" (82). Potter suggests a variety of creative rhetorical strategies utilized in hip-hop that "work together here to establish, multiple and overlapping streams of association" denying the denotative while producing new connotative meanings of words and phrases. Potter views signifying as working on both micro and macro levels, as a "productive agent of difference" and in a larger framework foundation for addressing relations of power. Signifying assumes a mistaking of the message and therein lies its power. He concludes that non-listeners of rap music often mistake the figural for the literal and consequently, miss the "real political polemic which speaks through this mode" (83).

Signifying provides the spectacular cultural exchange says Potter, interesting to whites through stereotype reinforcement, while simultaneously providing a

communication vehicle that offers a mechanism for solidarity (9). Rap music as a form to resist the subjugation of the dominant culture is at the heart of the postmortem perspective.

Potter argues authentic versus inauthentic is a matter of attitude, not a question of race (73). How else does one explain how some white rap artists are treated with "street respect" while some black artists, like Hammer are perceived in the rap community as sell-outs trying to dilute the art form? Potter says it "is not a matter of the scales, beats, or words one is singing, but of their delivery, their attack, their movement from and back into the material life and cultures of African-Americans" (71). Potter describes rap music as a materialist art form that its audience considers any movement away from that materialism as "selling-out."

Some scholars counter that the dominant class appropriates subculture forms because it craves difference and so it kills two birds with one stone, bee appropriation stops the "threat" of the resistive element while serving as entertainment for the dominant class. However, rap is unique because as a commodity culture it resists commodification via reappropriation, or "robbing the mythmakers" (Potter 120). Potter's claim is that rap's tactic of resistance is it's ability to reinvent the commodification by reinventing the dominant form and it's resistance occurs from a collective strength within the dialectic.

Potter argues the collectivity arises from the historical need for African-Americans to always make "something out of nothing," by using the materials at hand (73). Hip-hop rejects the thought of the individual creative genius and Potter points the end of the rap album as proof. The rap artist's identification with a "crew" or "posse" through tributes on the album further demonstrates the resolve of the collective. Finally,

Potter views the rap production as a staging:

> In a collective work such as hip-hop, there is in a sense no singular "author," however many instigators of discourse there may be; rather, there is a case of characters: Flavor Flav and Chuck D, Humpty-Hump and Shock-G; Professor X and Professor Griff. None of these would be substantial without their costumes, without their enactment: Flavor Flav's clocks, Humpty's nose, or Professor X's ankh-emblazoned leather hat. Yet this does not at all prevent these -"stagings" from being "serious" (another rather Eurocentric standard); despite the fact that his nose is plastic, Humpty can still cut a rap ("No Nose Job") about how cosmetic surgery is used to erase blackness ... Hip-hop *stages* the difference of blackness, and its staging is both the Signifying of its constructedness and the site of its production of the authentic. (121)

The lack of understanding about the nature of signifying creates many misconceptions about Gangsta rap music (Potter 84; Kelley 120). Non-listeners (and many so-called listeners) make literal interpretations by taking seriously the figurative parts of the lyrics and failing to take seriously the political nature embedded in the discursive game. The result is what Potter calls "the logic of moral panies." For example, when Gangsta rappers signify violence, used as a ploy:

> Signifyin(g) violence, whether in Ice-T's gangsta hitman narratives or in the S1W's uniforms (on the cover of *Apocalypse* '91, they look more like ship's captains for some cruise line), is a highly self-conscious *ploy*, the equivalent of the Monkey telling the Lion "Look out sucker, that Elephant's going to kill you." Yet such a statement belies the *actual power* relations of the

> Monkey and the Lion; the Monkey is the physically weaker of the two and must rely on a verbal exchange to gain his victory. Just so, while the S IW may look threatening in their concert-wear gray camouflage fatigues, they are not there to attack anyone, but rather to Signify the global history of Black resistance. Nonetheless, they can be *taken* as threatening by audiences who find them so, and like the Signifyin(g) Monkey, hip-hop in a sense *presupposes* such a mistaking. (85)

Potter's perspective says that the direct violence read by critics in rap is but one of the "violences" occurring in the situation. He argues the force of the violences in the narrative illustrate not only the violence within black communities, but a recognition of the institutional violence which occurs against the community, as well as the possible violence of revolutionary actions against those institutional structures (85). Violence becomes one of the mythic signs that is mistaken by the Lion (dominant culture). Violence for the Gangsta is metaphorically and perhaps literally, associated with power and masculinity, which explains its frequent use in rap lyrics, Kelley infers the power analysis from Messerschmidt's studies of youth and criminality (127).

Potter argues that counterculture resistance is a common tenet in dominant culture, identifying songs about Pretty Boy Floyd and John Wesley Harding. The outlaw cultures of white Gangsta's—exemplified in recent movies like: Goodfella's, City Hall, Heat, Scarface, Godfather, Hoffa, Casino—are all romanticized in the dominant culture. But when the outlaw is a young black male, Potter counters that romance ends with criminalized stereotypes of the violent, black youth. Moreover, the moral panic snowballs, as the violences within black communities is removed from the larger context

of violences being committed against those communities; the result is a mistaking of violence for self-defense (89). Potter suggests that the sexism debate is recast in a similar way as the context of the performance is removed from the discussion. Violence, misogyny and hence, Gangsta rap as a whole, are all removed from context and the moral panics which result are used to vilify the sub-genre.

Potter does not say that criticism about Gangsta lyrics lack validity, only that removing context makes criticism questionable. He suggests that the dialogic process of signifying itself, is the method by wnic'ti rap music aciciresses controversial issues. For example, when one rap group says negative things about a fictional girl, over twelve response records to the record about "Roxanne" (91). Potter, just as did Rose, presents a black woman rapper's feminist perspective as one possible solution to misogyny in rap music. He cites a variety of approaches that women have taken, but all of those approaches engage in the dialectic process inherent in rap music production.

Questions of whether the allegations situate in the context of the narrative are again at issue. Potter's suggestion is that racism also works within the frame of moral panic where the black middle class takes the black underclass youth to task to "unify" the mythical black community. Nevertheless, condemnation has the effect of fueling the divisiveness (137).

Potter cautions that no matter how hateful these lyrics, they must be evaluated within specific contexts "framed by specific discourses on sexuality, race, and identity" (97). Consideration of these contexts should determine the nature of criticism, while less emphasis on the logic of moral panics associated with generalizations of the speech. Anti-gay sentiments from urban black youth are a part of identity politics and a consequence of

long on-going rifts among and between socio-political oppressed groups. Moreover, says Potter, black male heterosexuality is part of the response to white dominance as shown by historical linkages. Gay and male is read in the black community as weakness or less than a "man."

Potter counters many of the cultural critics by arguing that Gangsta rap creates the ultimate irony. He does not view Gangsta rap as a product of commercialization, but rather, an attempt by rap artists to direct the lyrics more towards the target audience (young black men and women of the streets). Theretore, as Gangsta rappers insulate their message, the paradox is the greater reception of white audiences to these messages. The more authentic the rap within the culture, the more popular the rap outside the culture, argues rap critics (Potter 94). The "sellout" is no longer defined by the rap artist who crosses over"—since the hardest, hard-core lyrics sell to whites—but rather by the artist who does not "keep it real" in her or his cultural production. Realness now arises from the perceptions of the target audience about the authenticity of the cultural production.

Potter makes several responses to Samuel's discussion of authenticity (103). First, the reception of language does not disempower it. If white audiences "don't get it," little is lost regarding the message within the targeted community. Second, although whites use the message to authentic from a safe distance, their awareness may still improve via reception of the message. Regarding culture, Potter rejects that reception by whites destroys authenticity of the message and just because the music produced has entertainment value, does not exclude the possibility that it can educate simultaneously as well. Reappropriation of the commodified messages provides a mechanism to combat the dangers of appropriation that Samuel's identifies.

Potter concurs arguing that "the history of African-American cultures provides the most astonishing and empowering account of resistance. It is a resistance which from its earliest days has consisted of strategies for forming and sustaining a culture against the dominant, using materials at hand" (108). He cites rap music as a cultural production, which focuses on the found, the re-valued, and the used, via transformation and confusion of sites of production and objects of consumption.

Assessing Current Rap Scholarship

Each of the three waves of rap criticism—rap as social commentary; rap as aesthetic art; and rap as cultural symbolism—all provide important insights into our understanding of the phenomenon of Gangsta rap. At the same time, each is limited in its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the music. This section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches and inquires about what research needs completion, if any, to further our knowledge of Gangsta rap.

Rap as Social Commentary Scholarship

The sociological critic creates standards used in evaluation of rap music lyrics. These standards encompass a variety of perspectives, which consider the impact lyrics have on a particular audience, relative to a particular perspective. The broadly based, general standards developed out of rap music sociological scholarship are useful insights for understanding rap music. The nature of "Good" rap has three standards in the sociologist worldview: the focus on lyrical content, the political nature of the lyrics and the positive social commentary of the lyrics. The limitations of social commentary criticism follow a brief discussion of the three strengths—the importance of lyrical

content, the focus on the political nature of rap, and the importance of positive social commentary within the lyrics.

Strengths of Social Commentary Scholarship

Several scholars identify a variety of important considerations when studying rap music-flow, style, mixing, are a few of the non-lyrical components embedded in the form. However, this essay demonstrates that the overriding consideration in evaluation of rap music quality is lyrical content. The majority of sociological scholarship discusses rap lyrics in terms of social commentary.

Rap music, irrespective of content, carries with it unique burdens not considered in the evaluation of other types of music. By definition, "rap" music suggests that every song have a lyrical component, as opposed to other types of music, which all have the opportunity for instrumental songs without lyrics. Implicit in defining rap music is the assumption that the lyrical content makes rap a unique fon-n of music. The nature of rap music is such that an analysis of rap lyrics is necessary if criticism of rap is to have any significant value.

Given the scholarship from Light, Dixon, Rose and others who conclude that all rap music is a voice of the underrepresented contesting political space, then the political nature of rap music lyrics is inherent in the genre. The theme that rap is political—implying that it is influential in the public sphere—by nature is uniformly accepted throughout rap scholarship criticism. Dixon's argument that the form challenges white attitudes and beliefs (240), and Rose's suggestion rap culture is a contestation over public and hidden space (100), offers proof that criticism assumes a political component

inherent in the genre.

The benefit that Culturalists bring to the table is the insight to consider historical context before assessing the merit of lyrical content. Dyson and Rose work diligently to establish frameworks that foster an understanding of where rap music comes from and how those considerations should effect our reception. Culturalists also reveal key issues both within and outside the rap community, attempting to contextualize questions like authenticity and appropriation.

The literature on rap music delineates a variety of positive consequences of the rap music genre. Many ot tne early assessments of rap originated before the advent ot Gangsta. Sociological critics look for lyrics that are consistent with the values and ideals of their particular perspective. For example, poly-vocal critic, Rose believes that "good" rap can combat sexism, homophobia, violence, and racism as well as fostering an agenda of empowerment for African-Americans. Generally, all sociological scholarship to date has privileged rap lyrics with positive social commentary.

Feminist scholars argue that non-sexist rap is better than sexist rap. Kitwana says that rap which relies on lyrics consistent with Afrocentric ideals and values, is better than nonsensical or sex-violence rap. Culturalists contend that rap lyrics which recognize and challenge the constraints of dominant society (like capitalism, perhaps) that the music is created in, is superior to music that reinforces those constraints. In each case, the perspective defines "good" as that which best matches the corresponding ideals based on the political nature and the positive social commentary of the lyrics. In the end, the "political-correctness" found in academic standards when evaluating "good" rap music is inescapable.

Weaknesses of Social Commentary Criticism

The decision-making calculus used in reaching those value-laden conclusions limits criticism that evaluates the sociological impact of rap music lyrics. Specifically, sociological criticism's focus on "potential listening" audiences often ignores the culture created between the artist and her or his listening or target audience. Additionally, the imposition of academic standards outside the culture is problematic when trying to understand how the culture develops, maintains, and communicates it's own set of standards within the community. Finally, sociological criticism tends to employ a transmissionai perspective of cominunication,'which fails to understand non-transmissional roles of the communication, like identification.

The assumption that rap is always "political" calls into question the definition of what "political" means, but more importantly, what it is perceived to mean by scholars studying rap music lyrics. This essay contends that rap scholars assume that "political" means opportunities to influence a particular audience. Two audiences are the primary subjects of rap scholarship's attention. The *potential listening* audience is a by-product of the definition that the rap genre inherently fights to place a voice where one is not before, as per Dixon or Rose's definitions relating to contestation over public space. Consequently, if the battle over space occurs in public—the voice is necessarily "heard" by those who would normally not hear the voice, including potentially, the critic.

A consequence of "others" hearing the underrepresented voice is that a significant part of the contestation over public space relates to the control of the content of the message, i.e., content control becomes part of the battle for public space. For the critic, resolution of who is winning the contest for public space, then becomes in part, resolution

of the content issues involved. The less controversial the message, the less the battle for space. For example, mainstream pop radio rap receives little discussion over its content, while nationalist messages and Gangsta messages almost solely relate to content-oriented discussions.

The second group or *listening* audience presupposes that rap music lyrics are directed toward the "intended audience" of the speaker, in the case of Gangsta rap, primarily poor, urban, black youth. Scholars point to the need for rap artists to provide positive leadership among black America's youth. Critics argue that rap artists have a unique social responsibility because they have the ear of an audience that other types of "leadership" seem unable to reach. For example, as discussed in chapter one, black civil rights leadership is no longer able to mobilize this audience. The special relationship that rap artists have with the target audience does is noticed in the academic community, but certainly is not the focus of most inquiry.

In the end, criticism of rap music lyrics assume one of two starting points: that Gangsta rap's messages should be evaluated assuming an insular audience within the community of black American urban youth, or that rap messages must contend with the fact that they by definition, reach a broader audience—including white mainstream society. A consideration when assuming rap music creates influence is that one must recognize which audience the speaker is addressing: none, one, or both. Rap criticism has predominantly focused on the effects that rap music may have on the potential listening audience. In fact, little discussion has occurred regarding the effect of rap lyrics on the listening audience, other than discussion surrounding the potential effects on this audience of lyrics with positive social commentary.

Analysis supporting the possible effect that rap music lyrics have on potential listeners is misguided. First, the limiting effect assessments confuse the causes of behavioral change with reinforcing existing belief systems. The causality debate drowns in opinions and unsupported assertions over the amount of influence musical lyrics can actually have over "impressionable" youth. However, youth are subject to a variety of influences, and if the Culturalists arguments about context is correct, rap lyrics are but one of many influence-creating factors. The difficulty in finding satisfactory quantitative data supporting the thesis that rap lyrics cause anti-social behavior calls into question the likelihood of a significant direct relationship, although criticism is quick to assert this relationship.

One can easily envision influence linkages in a more consistent manner with the contextuality of cultural theorists. Consideration of the influence question as a potential contributing factor in behavioral change when individuals are already predisposed at some level, to a particular behavioral attitude. Just as salt is a contributing factor for someone already predisposed as high-risk for hypertension, rap lyrics contribute to the illumination, refinement, or uncovering of individuals susceptible to offensive existing beliefs and attitudes. Rap lyrics can only influence sexist, violent, homophobic, or racist behavior if a person is predisposed to sexist, violent, homophobic, or racist beliefs and attitudes. In other words, it is unlikely that a standpoint feminist will listen to sexist rap lyrics and subsequently run to the streets and start calling women "bitches" and "hos." However, the probability of a child whose family constantly surrounds her or him with movies like the Terminator and Pulp Fiction, are more likely to have their behavior influenced by violent Gangsta rap lyrics. Failure to ask the appropriate questions and

make the right linkages confuses the debate over influence and forces rap lyric authors into unreasonable and unjustified defenses of the "effect" of their lyrics.

Another consideration for the "effect" question relates to the "apparent" nature of the offensiveness involved. If popular modes of reception differ from how the media and/or academia perceive rap lyrics, the effects on popular audiences must be re-examined. Academics have struggled with explaining how targets of perceived "offensive" acts, find a way to enjoy the lyrics in spite of those attacks. Women listening to apparent sexist lyrics; Jewish youth enjoying what seems to be the anti-Semitic lyrics of Public Enemy, gay youth engaging in apparently homophobic lyrics, are all examples which defy explanation. Several possibilities exist. Oppressed groups may simply enjoy lyrics in spite of their offensiveness fueling arguments of unconscious victimization internalized by the victim. On the other hand, maybe audiences understand the apparent offensive lyrics in different ways than the media or academia, define particular phrases or songs. For example, does self-deprecation—not a common element in most oppressive speech—change the reception of apparent offensive lyrics to targeted groups? On the other hand, does equal targeting distribution of offensiveness affect reception of messages by oppressed groups? The "apparent" oppressive language calls into question the perceived impact if the "apparent" offensiveness is mis-read by academics.

Finally, the decision to focus research efforts on the potential listening audience is often at odds with scholarship directed at the target audience. For example, Rose—who identifies her orientation for criticism as "pro-black, biracial, ex-working-class, New York-based feminist, left cultural critic"—recognizes a need to approach rap from a variety of perspectives. She acknowledges the need to "explore rap's tensions and

contradictions and to theorize about it's core organizing principles" (xiii). Rose's multi-criticism approach, or "polyvocal" as she coins it (xiii), does allow for recognition of the complex and cross-purposeful relationships in rap that often bring different sociological perspectives to odds. She concedes that her seminal work is "a selective intervention that explores many, but by no means all, of the extraordinary social, cultural, and political implications of hip hop culture" (xv)

Rose's decision to critique different texts of rap music via various perspectives (afeminist perspective to discuss the sexual politics of rap; a cultural perspective to discuss the history and origins of the production of rap; an Afrocentric perspective to discuss black nationalism), further entrenches lyrical examination in a hierarchical political framework. The framework subjects lyrics to a variety of criticisms without a method for resolving potential inconsistencies between frameworks. Rose's polyvocal approach exemplifies all academic approaches to studying rap music, which is symptomatic of identification without resolution of apparent contradictions.

For example, Rose believes the Stop the Violence (STV) movement ran counter to its intended purpose, which was the creation of a positive anti-black-on-black violence song (140). The STV movement reinforced many of the common stereotypes regarding African-Americans and criminality without focusing on the root causes which establish context, argues Rose. In the end, says Rose, the movement "accepted the sociologically based terms laid out in the media's coverage." STV's use of terms like "self-destruction" and "black and black crime" reified the dominant social pathology discourse used to explain the rap phenomenon. The focus on pathological problems, says Rose, diverts attention from economic, social, and institutional causes for nihilistic behavior. Many

other critics, including Chideya, draw the opposite conclusion, citing "Self-Destruction" movements as the highest order of positive black commentary. Black rap artists communicating to the at-risk urban youth about reducing self-destructive tendencies, a positive step as viewed by many critics.

This study contends that focusing study of rap music on possible effects to potential listeners is misguided and less significant than understanding the relationship of the culture created between Gangsta rap artists and their intended audience. Rap artists focus their attention on their audience—youth from the streets of urban America. Although Gangsta rappers do recognize that others are listening in on the conversation (and perhaps enjoying it), the primarily message emphasis should be on the target audience.

The treatment of all rap music as political, and the expectation of positive social commentary from rap artists, implicitly creates a set of standards that the academic community adheres to, no matter what the perspective employed. The standards pigeon-hole scholarship production into making assessments about a number of issues salient to the criticism's conception of what rap music lyrics *should look* like as well as assuming common definitional starting points exist. Again, the purpose of the sociologica perspective is to offer a framework for evaluating societal worth of a text relative to academic standards of norms created by a given perspective. For example, a feminist reading privileges different concerns as important relative to an Afrocentric reading.

Sometimes various sociological concerns are at odds and one implication for using sociological standards of criticism is that some method for resolving conflicting evaluations must be resolved. If a method of resolution does not exist, then one of two

things must occur. Either one must assume that the "best" criticism must stand pass the test of all sociological challenges—assuming that this is possible. It is more likely however, that decisions must be made as to which societal values are more important in a given context. In other words, which sociological perspective should be privileged in a particular context.

In either case, academic standards generate from the knowledge created within the academic community. Scholars readily concede that academic criterion for "good" rap differs from popular modes of reception. Potter's concern that imposing academic standards, no matter how sincere the intentions, becomes a veiled threat against the object of the study. Shusterman's belief—that academia may not understand popular modes of reception which means academic interpretations should not be privileged above popular ones—justifies further examination. If the academic community is unable or unwilling to suspend judgment of its own standards and listen to those standards developed within other communities, then the academic community is unable to understand the code, conversation, and community of the culture created between rap artists and their audience.

The focus of rap scholars on lyrical content, the vision of rap critics that all rap serves a political function, and the emphasis on positive social commentary in rap lyrics, all reinforce the transmissional communication perspective which dominate methodological approaches to the study of rap music. Although some critics consider the cultural form found in rap music, a description that attempts to explain why the message exists and not what the message says, is not analogous to a cultural communication analysis of the form.

Rap music research, most of which does not directly employ explicit communication perspectives, limits much analysis to the effects of messages and identification of which audiences are affected. The critic's decision to evaluate what messages rappers are sending to their audiences, presupposes that the purpose of the communicative act is primarily to transmit information from the speaker to the audience. However, criticism must also consider the relationship of the speaker to her target audience, and what rhetorical purposes influence this relationship. Moreover, this presupposition of transmissional purpose ignores the possibility that one of the purposes of the communication act may simply be to create identification with an audience(s) prior to, during, or after, the transmission of any "information." Only within these contexts can academics compare and contrast the standards created within the culture with standards imposed by external actors. Failure of scholars to consider alternatives to transmissional communication perspectives limits understanding of popular modes and creates a glass ceiling for improving the consistency of the study of rap music.

Academic consideration of the "effect" rap music transmission has on a variety of non-listening audiences is concerned with how others perceive rap messages and implicates the politics of rap scholarship. Rose's contention that black youth expressionis perceived by the media and some scholars as a "societal" threat while white youth heavy metal audiences are viewed as victims warrants further examination. One must not only be concerned with the implications of Rose's allegation, but must also examine the response of academics like Rose that claim this dualism to exist.

The media, those who politically scapegoat rap music, and critics solely concerned with the effects of hard-core rap music on "impressionable" listeners are the

primary groups who view a black youth expression like Gangsta rap lyrics as dominant oppression. The drama of rap portrays criminalized black youth, which outsiders see as descriptive of the actual nature of those black youth, as criminals, thugs, hustlers, etc. However, perceptions of white listeners of hard-core rock lyrics view them as the victims of a select few in society gone astray, producing satanic, violent, or sexist lyrics. The consequence for rap culture perceived as oppressive is condenmnation, attempts at censorship, and/or outright opposition. Culturalists counter that unique socioeconomicand political factors have created the conditions from which rap music (and heavy metal I would assume) arose and any criticism failing to take these factors into account misrepresents the context of the form.

Consequently, researchers view rap artists and their audience(s) as a victim, an oppressor, or some combination of the two. Moreover, critics have taken widely different starting points regarding criticism. Inconsistent conclusions are subsequently the result of studies using the same methodology and similar data sets. Rap criticism, much in the same vein as many socio-political proscriptions for black America, can look inward at the rap community itself for change, or demand external responses from larger societal institutions, depending on one's view of where responsibility lies.

Again, Rose criticizes the "Stop the Violence" (STV) Movement—which several rap artists joined together and called for a halt to black on black crime—arguing the movement reinforced incorrect stereotypical assumptions about crime. Only by adhering to a focus on the external socioeconomic causes of crime, can rap music maintain its resistive value, Rose argues. Knowingly or not, her position strategically places black youth as the victim of circumstance, unable to overcome the ills of society without

external action from others, irrespective of the cause. Rose's primary reason for taking such an extreme stance is that she fears an effect—reinforcing stereotypes—on non-potential listening audiences if the rap message does not "correctly" resist dominant ideology.

However, Dyson's Culturalist position (and all sociological criticism) says that recognition of culture does not preclude academics taking a proactive role in opposing offensive lyrics. In fact, most academics support the STV movement as one of the most positive acts of social commentary done by rap artists. Responsibility and the types of actions available to rap artists, according to existing criticism, fall on a criteria ranging from being a victim—and only able to acknowledge the crimes of dominant society—to the other extreme, that individuals should be held completely responsible for one's lyrical content, regardless of socioeconomic causes of the condition. Dyson's position resides in the middle- that cultural factors warrant consideration but rap artists retain responsibilityfor their individual behavior—on face, appears quite reasonable.

The failing however, resides in the lack of pragmatism in such a view. Dyson never explains how should Gangsta rap artists take individual responsibility for actions in their community. He hails Ice Cube as Gangsta Rap's Visionary for his political insights, but regarding allegations of sexism, racism, and homophobia says that Cube "misses the mark." Dyson says that Cube is both "brilliant and disturbing," pointing to the clarity of his rhetorical appeal. Dyson assessment of Cube is symptomatic of much Gangsta rap scholarship which identifies the artists as "organic intellectuals" regarding their street-wise descriptions and interpretations, but tow the politically-correct line with regards to the use of "offensive" language.

Herein lies the problem with these "balanced" criticisms of Gangsta rap: they presuppose effects on non-listening audiences while ignoring the rhetorical pragmatism perhaps necessary for communicating with the listening audience. Rap criticism fails to discuss how rap artists can effectively target messages to black urban disenfranchised youth without engaging in the language and rhetorical strategies of the streets. When critics allege "isms" against rap, these are not criticisms eschewing that rap lyrics are causing sexism, violence, homophobia, and racism within the ghetto's of America, but the lyrics are reinforcing belief systems which already exist. However, no one, not politicians, not traditional black leadership, of the academy has offered one pragmatic rhetorical strategy for reaching the gangs, thugs, hustlers, and criminals of black America. Instead, the condemnation, opposition, and avoidance of Gangsta rap artists rhetorical decisions continue without the offering of any alternatives. Academics find it politically expedient to oppose categorically apparent offensive language than to explore the use of that language within a specific context.

This analysis of rap scholarship demonstrates how the same generation gap which exists between black leadership, the black middle class, and inner-city youth, exists as well in academia. Even supporters of the genre offer very backhanded compliments when faced with understanding a language defined very different in mainstream culture. The political-incorrectness issues in Gangsta rap poses fundamental dilemmas for the rap critic. Nevertheless, maybe Gangsta rap artists have a pragmatic rhetoric that while brutally harsh and offensive to a variety of groups in one culture, is perceived in much differently within a different culture. Perhaps the rap focus on "keeping it real" has more to do with creation and maintenance of identification with a target community which

feels abandoned by most and nihilistic, rather than attempts at attracting new listeners by saying offensive words and phrases on an album. Rap artists have always maintained that the youth of the streets are their primary audience, although fully aware that others are "eavesdropping." The problem may be that rap critics are not willing to listen.

Rap as Aesthetic Scholarship

Strengths of Aesthetic Criticism

The study of rap as an art with an aesthetic, which requires appreciation, opens the possibility for re-thinking the focus on lyrical content. The aesthetic nature of the form itself becomes an area for evaluation absence the study of lyrical corn' the aesthetic perspective allows for a richer understanding of the contradictory nature of rap music's form, embracing concepts like taking the old to make something new, for example. Finally, the post-modem aesthetic combines the sociological implications of the lyrical nature of rap with appreciation of formulaic elements to produce what Shusterman calls a "pragmatic aesthetic," the intersection of purpose and art. The development of study on the music's ingenuity through both non-lyrical and lyrical techniques lies at the heart of aesthetic scholarship. Aesthetic criticism focuses at least in part, on how to appreciate and evaluate the aesthetic of rap.

One challenge rap makes to conventional "objective" dichotomies for the evaluation of aesthetic quality, is that art appreciation must occur from a distance, preferably dispassionately. Shusterman posits that "rather than an aesthetic of distanced, disengaged, formalist judgment, rappers urge an aesthetic of deeply embodied participatory involvement, with content as well as form" (628). Potter says that "the

central styles and attitudes which motivate and structure its [hip-hop's] expressions are all about lack of distance, in-your-face immediacy, and shoot-from-the-hip history—all values that academic discourse abhors" (148). Rappers want appreciation in the form of emotional response, often via dancing or shouts. Shusterman says the best rap criterion is akin to Plato's description of "good" poetry, by creating a "divine madness" between performer and audience.

Shusterman prefaces his analysis of rap music by saying that his is not an attempt to privilege intellectual readings of rap music over the impressions of the popular marginalized voices where it is produced and consumed (Rap Remix 152). He is quick to point out that intellectual interpretations of the cultural productiono do not de-legitimize other possible meanings of popular audiences. When responding to Brennan's critique of his essay, Shusterman questions whether intellectuals can "ever" understand the art as urban youth do. The possibilities for other intellectual interpretations are kept open as well, as evidenced by the growing amount of scholarship on the genre.

When Shusterman does address lyrical content in combination with the other aesthetics of the form, he identifies rap lyrics as the creation of a new radical cultural politics. He explores the motives of rappers: to educate; to protest; and to always "know what time it is." American pragmatism, he concludes, aligns itself quite nicely with the tenets of rap music lyrics (626). The new "radical cultural politics," as identified by Shusterman, may best be exemplified by rap music lyrics (628). Shusterman argues that Jameson's "hypothetical" cultural form which "foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture, are found in the aesthetic of rap music. The mythic representations of hip-hop "offers both a critique and an

alternativeworldview" versus dominant ideologies in two ways, articulate Potter (132). Rap music lyrics illuminate hidden assumptions and offers counter-myths to challenge those created by the dominant class.

Weaknesses of Aesthetic Criticism

When discussing lyrical content, postmortem critics generally point to non-Gangsta rap artists to support their contentions of the lyric's role in resistance and tend to avoid Gangstas in those discussions.[3] Although Shusterman, as do other postmortem critics, wants to identify the entirety of the cultural production of rap as creating oppositional resistance, a significant part of the strength of that resistance seems to lie the consistency of the positive social commentary of the lyrical content. Postmodern critics certainly acknowledge the contradictory and often paradoxical nature that lyrics may play in conjunction with other non-lyrical components of the cultural form, but they do little to evaluate the meaning those contradictions have on the totality of the resistance of the form. Non-hard core rap messages brought few contradictions lyrically to rap scholarship, but then Gangsta rap was born.

Shusterman examines the possibility that rap music is a pragmatic aesthetic cultural form, but his idea of pragmatic rhetoric involves transmissional communication perspectives focusing on lyrical content and positive social messages. Gangsta rap artists are viewed by some as organic intellectuals providing social commentary, but often utilizing vile, harsh lyrics, and graphic, realistic portrayals of ghetto-life not seen by most as very "positive." However, determining a context for pragmatic rhetoric depends

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[3] The two notable exceptions are Ice Cube and Ice-T.

heavily on the audience and is situational, which creates a justification for examining the nature of the rhetorical act between Gangsta rap artists and their audience.

If pragmatism is situation-dependent, and if Gangsta rappers are concerned with identifying with an audience who is exhibiting self-destructive and nihilistic tendencies, the need for being perceived as "real" becomes the most significant factor in gaining an authentic voice with the target audience. "Realness" is the symbol of authenticity for black youth who feel betrayed by their leadership, their country, and their communities, and the rap artist who can most identify with these youth via common life experience offers a voice these youth are most willing to hear. Hence, the challenge for Gangsta rap artists, if they are so motivated, is to find a way to create identification linkages with black urban youth.

Finally, as scholarship and academic interest is growing, the question posed by Potter, "is whether cultural studies really come to praise insurrectionary arts or to bury them" (147)? Shusterman's fear of intellectual imperialism is Potter's concern as well.The catch-22 is that while academics proclaim rappers as organic intellectuals, they proceed to challenge their methods and conclusions that are non-traditional rigorous academic standards. The view from the top versus the view from the bottom is simply different and at many levels perhaps, exclusive. Potter points to an interview between Lipscomb and Positive rap artist KRS-ONE and in the end, the paradigmatic lines are drawn: the middle-class liberal positive worldview juxtaposed against the negative disenfranchised view from the bottom. What Libscomb hails as liberal progressive black achievements, KRS-ONE sees as placating masking the deeply entrenched institutional structures of racism, classism, and sexism that call into question those progressive

advancements. Potter calls for both academics and post-modemists to take a step towards the middle. Theorists by making more of an effort to ground theoretical constructs inreality, and rappers by informing themselves more about history and issues they take to task.

Gangsta Rap as Cultural Symbolism Scholarship

Strengths of Cultural Symbolism Criticism

To find a purposeful aesthetic, one must expand the sociological rap critic's definition of pragmatic beyond "positive social commentary." Scholars identifying Gangsta rap as the work of "organic intellectuals" suggests meaningful purpose do in fact, exist in Gangsta rap. Expanding on the work of Kelley and Potter, who identify some of the rituals and myths utilized in Gangsta rap music, a more useful conception of pragmatic aesthetic rhetoric might be: *an intent to gain a purposeful desired response via the creation of identification with a specific audience utilizing community standards of appreciation.* In other words, our cultural communication approach allows examination of how the community creates and maintains identification, as well as, the purpose or goals, if any, implicit in the rhetoric. The strength of the cultural symbolism approach bridges the gap between rap as art and rap as social commentary, allowing for examination of both the form and the content of rap music.

Kelley's research studies what types of identification exist between Gangsta rap artists and their audience. The historical context of the rituals and myth-making found in Gangsta rap music increase our understanding of the communication exchange. Potter's work goes a step further, acknowledging not only the types of identification, but also the

process by which identification occurs, primarily through signifying via a variety of subversive language strategies.

Building on each perspective—rap as social commentary, art, and cultural symbolism—creates the possibility that rap music can be understood as moving towards apost-modem pragmatic aesthetic, utilizing both content and form. The focus on lyrical meaning within sociological schools of thought, juxtaposed with the challenging of traditional aesthetic standards in new and creative ways, are not exclusive concepts. However, the ability to understand the meaning of lyrics connects to the ability to evaluate lyrics by the standards existing within the culture they create and maintain. The imposition of non-community standards on rap music reinforces the chasm that exists between academic readings of rap music and music reception. The cultural symbolism perspective bridges the other two perspectives and is the only perspective, which creates a consistent explanation for the phenomenon of Gangsta rap, a sub-genre of rap which destroys all previous coherence in the rap music literature.

Weaknesses of Cultural Symbolism Criticism

Identification and interpretation of alternative meanings of allegedly violent,racist, sexist, and/or heterosexist lyrics are certainly a first step towards a richer understanding of rap music, but Kelley and Potter lack a methodological perspective to ultimately assess the implications of the apparent tension in these lyrics. A discussion of what symbols mean within a given culture is not necessarily a discussion of what -standards are created within those meanings, and when those standards breached within aparticular cultural context. Additionally, the cultural symbolism work done to date falls to explain the role

of offensive lyrics in identification within a culture. In sum, Kelley and Potter still fail to take discuss the identified rituals and myths as they relate to the pragmatic aesthetic, for if a purpose does exist, then it must be evaluated as it relates to the allegations of offensiveness.

Chapter 3--Perspectives and Methodology

The majority of rap scholarship has developed in areas outside of the discipline of communication, the notable exception being Dyson. However, communication—usually rhetoric—discussions are integral to almost every analysis of rap music, both implicitly and explicitly. Communication perspectives are critical in the development of all rap scholarship and this study hypothesizes that evolving research in the communication discipline may infonn other discipline's work on rap music. An examination of the literature in communication plots an evolution of inquiry, from a focus solely on transmission perspectives to the possibility for cultural perspectives of communication. The evolution of communication scholarship also suggests the possibility for an ethnic identity approach to communication. This analysis traces that evolution and then discusses ethnic identity theories that develop out of that research. The second segment of chapter two translates the broader notion of cultural communication perspectives into a particular method for examining rap music. Dramatistic criticism utilizing rituals, myths, and social dramas embedded in the rhetoric are justifiable means for understanding culture via communication frameworks.

Moving towards a Cultural Approach to Communication

Traditional research in communication is typically concerned with the transmission of messages. The standard communication model directs that the speaker send a message through a medium to an audience who may have feedback. The focus of study in this perspective is located in the message, in how transmission occurs, and who receives it. The imparting of knowledge from the speaker to the audience and vice-versa, has long been the central core of communication research.

Carey introduces the possibility however, that communication can be viewed from a cultural perspective as well (14). He establishes the linkage between communication and community by broadening the definition of communication to suggest the creation and maintenance of a culture. Therefore, instead of a focus on the intent of the communication or the purpose, the meaning of symbols used in the interaction, i.e., the content of the communication becomes the focus of study. Carey explains:

> If one examines a newspaper under a transmission view of communication, one sees the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge, sometimes *divertissement*, in larger and larger packages over greater distances...A ritualistic view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed ... We recognize, as with religious rituals, that news changes little and yet is intrinsically satisfying; it performs few functions yet is habitually consumed...
>
> Moreover, news is a historic reality. It is a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point of history—in this case by the middle class largely in the eighteen century ...news both forms and reflects a particular "hunger for experience," a desire to do away with the epic, heroic, and traditional in favor of the unique, original, novel, new—news ...
>
> Under a ritual view, then, news is not infon-nation but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it

> exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it. (20-1)

Creating and Maintaining Culture

Hecht, Collier and Ribeau in African American Communication: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Interpretation introduce the possibility for studying how ethnic identity is informed by the culture which is created and maintained by an ethnic group. The focus of study is identity, which Hecht et al. explicate in four locations, defined as frames. The four frames of reference are the identity/personal frame; the enacted frame; the relational frame; and the communal frame (164). While the frames are interrelated and an individual's identity is a composition of the four frames, the communal frame provides the location where scholars can determine if a unique "rhetorical community or culture"exists.

Utilizing Philipsen's model of culture, which defined as conversation, code and community, we can search for the forms of cultural communication associated with the establishment of communal identity creation and maintenance as outlined by Hecht et al. in African American Communication (162). Those forms as identified by Philipsen are *ritual, myth*, and *social drama*. Hecht et al. define these forms:

> The notion of community is fundamental to identity. Identities are located in communual memberships. Philipsen (1987) argues that the function of cultural communication is to provide shared and individual identities. This is accomplished through the creation, affirmation, and enactment of identities. Philipsen (1987) identifies three prominent forms of cultural communication

by which this is accomplished: ritual, myth, and social drama. These forms achieve the functions of uniting groups, coordinating action, and defining boundaries.

Ritual is defined as "a communication form in which there is a structured sequence of symbolic acts, the correct performance of which constitutes homage to a sacred object" (Philipsen, 1987, p. 250). Philipsen provides the example of the "call-response" ritual sequence in African-American churches. As described by Daniel and Smithen-nan (1976), the sequence consisting of a call by a minister and a response by the congregation promotes unity.

Whereas rituals promote unified thoughts and actions through event sequencing, myths work to coordinate action via cohesion of thoughts. Hecht et al. Continue:

> A myth is a symbolic narrative whose function is to bind together the thoughts of a group and promote coordinated social action (Philipsen, 1987). Philipsen cites as an example Hannerz's (1969) study of "street comer myth-making" in which African American males gather to tell stories about successful confrontations with European American society. These myths help create and crystallize community standards and criteria that allow smoother coordination of interaction.

The third cultural form idenitified by "Philipsen (1987) describes social dramas in which group standards are breached and resolved" (Hecht et al. 163). Examples of transgression, in which community roles define and examine, serve to inform and enforce cultural norms.

Hecht et al. conclude that "It is now clear that a primary focus on the communal frame and an understanding of how the communal is interpenetrated with the other frames is going to require rhetorical/critical analyses and ethnographies" (172). Moreover, Hecht et al. indicate that the study of prototypes may help inform "communal conceptions of African-American communication and communicators" (172). Ritual, myth and social drama are the tools this study uses to explicate the meanings and messages of "prototypical" Gangsta rap artists and the culture they create with urban American youth in an effort to understand more fully the communal frame of identity established and maintained in this culture. Hecht et al. argue that African-Americans have rituals, myths and social dramas unique to the culture. If so, then an examination of Gangsta rap music should be able to uncover those dramatistic elements. Burke's dramatistic approach assists in uncovering these elements.

An Understanding of Burke's Dramatism

Brock explains that the process of drainatism as outlined by Burke begins with the elements of hierarchy (185). This is a discussion of authority and power, with a purpose of understanding societal structures. Individuals either accept or reject these structures in the drama of human condition. Acceptance entrenches the hierarchy. However, when rejected, the structure falls, beginning the process of social change begins. "Whenever people reject the traditional hierarchy, they 'fall' and thereby acquire a feeling of guilt" says Brock (185). Guilt occurs for several reasons, one being the mystery of differences in power relationships. In the end, the fallen feel guilty and purify themselves through either mortification (self-sacrifice) or victimage (scape-goating) so they can be redeemed.

themselves through either mortification (self-sacrifice) or victimage (scape-goating) so they can be redeemed. Explication through this process occurs with the structure of the rhetorical tool, identification as Brock explains the process:

> Burke sees identification as an "acting together" that grows out of the ambiguities of substance. People feel that social division and unity simultaneously, division because each person remains unique and unity or consubstantiality" to the extent that the actors share a locus of motives. The speakers, whose attitudes are reflected in their language, will accept some ideas, people and institutions, and reject others; their audiences will to some extent both agree and disagree with them. To the extent that audiences accept and reject the same ideas, people and institutions, that the speakers do, identification occurs. (187)

The popularity of the evolving cultural communication perspective and it's methods not withstanding, application of the perspective to rap music criticism at this point is premature. Employment of a cultural communication perspective is justified given the pragmatic failings of current rap scholarship, arising from the general assumptions of all rap study, including the reliance on transmissional communication perspectives and the problems therein. The focus on transmissional modes of communication creates severe limitations for rap scholarship that this analysis claims, has failed Shustertnan's promise of understanding rap as a pragmatic aesthetic.

Rethinking Transmissional Perspectives of Communication

Popular modes of reception can only be accurate when compared and contrasted to standards of academia of common understandings of meanings are first in place. Cultural perspectives of communication establish what the standards are in a community. Then examination occurs for consistency of application and comparison with broader societal standards and hierarchies. Moreover, instead of academicians assessing rap music lyrical content via analysis of a word or song as defined by the scholar, a cultural communication perspective discovers the meanings of words and phrases within the culture. This is especially true selecting a larger unit of measurement. Examination of how the community plays out societal conflicts through dramatistic analysis facilitates a more accurate academic understanding of whether apparent contradictions do in fact exist, and offers a systematic method for understanding how rap artists resolve perceived conflicts. A cultural communication perspective examines types of message transmissions. However, by discussing the rhetorical elements of message production within the culture, dramatistic analysis creates a different context for examining messages, increasingly the consistency of the analysis.

I explore the possibility of moving away from methods which rely solely on transmissional perspectives on communication and towards an understanding of how creation and maintenance of culture via identification serves to establish the conditions for a purposeful rhetoric. A dramatistic approach then considers how effective the pragmatism is, by examining how the social drama is played out. A cultural perspective transcends the limitations of transmissional approaches but three preconditions are necessary for it to occur. Concerns about the effects of rap music lyrics on potential

listening audiences must take a backseat to the relationship established within rap culture. Moreover, academics must not impose their definitions and standards of criticism on rap culture, without first allowing the culture the right to define its own terms and understanding how community standards are developed, breached, and resolved. Only then will academia be able to garner a better understanding of popular modes of reception and offer criticism that is insightful for understanding the rap community. Finally, a cultural perspective offers academics the opportunity to de-politicize their Criticism by evaluating the consistency and effectiveness of community standards developed for the community, as opposed to a focus on concerns about possible side-effects on other audiences. The challenge for studying cultural communication perspectives lies in the application of a methodology able to embody the dramatistic fon-ns outlined by Phillipsen. Burke offers the rhetorical tools needed to complete the study.

Method

Selected as the starting point for study because of his popularity, Ice Cube has a level of critical political acclaim in conjunction with a large following in the target audience. Simultaneously, Cube receives criticism for many politically incorrect language choices and phrases. Ice Cube's first solo album, Amerikkka's Most Wanted, is analyzed. The album was a top five best seller and Dyson uses the album as justification in part for naming Cube, "Gangsta Rap's Visionary" (172). 1 hypothesize that if the Hecht, Ribeau and Collier's, African-American Cultural Communication theory is correct (that a culture is created and maintained via communication through an unique African-American ethnic identity), then Ice Cube's lyrics should create a shared identification with urban black youth via the use of *rituals, myths, and social dramas*. A Burkean

dramatistic analysis of identification provides a method for extracting an understanding the motives in Ice Cube's rhetoric; including how Cube believes he identifies with his audience, as well as who he perceives his audience to be. Finally, how the social dramas resolve themselves in each song.

The lyrics of each song will be read three times to identify dramatistic elements of the rhetoric: once read to explicate rituals, once for mythologies, and a final reading of each song to identify any social dramas. The next step is to analyze each song and read the text to answer the questions. Then I will create of lists with recurrent terms (the answers to the questions) found in the text and the technique of clustering recurrent terms in extraction of relevant data. Clustering is the statistical "gathering of recurrent ten-ns until the critic begins to sense which are essential—which terms cluster and where." (Brock 187). Given the tendencies identified in past research about both African-American culture and rap music, the study will focus on revealing the rituals, myths, and social dramas discussed below.

Past research done regarding both African-American communication, and more specifically, rap music, suggest several clusters of expectations in this study. Between Hecht et al.'s discussion of black rituals and those discussed in the rap music research by Kelley and Potter, this study expects consistent reappearance of four rituals. Audience cohesion rituals, like the call-and-response sequences; signifying which can be either personal attacks or boasts—often violence—oriented, related to sexual prowess, or related to rap superiority; the need for representing authentic behavior (being real); and acknowledging or involving group participation in the production of the album—are expected outcomes of the study.

Two questions function to identify each of the rituals. The first two questions relate to audience cohesion. "Does the rap artist either rhetorically question the audience for action?" "Does the rap artist, simulate a conversation of which the audience is or call for action?" Signifying-related questions are, "Does the rap artist suggest her or his abilities are superior to others in an endeavor?" "Does the rap artist make denigrating remarks about someone in a challenging fashion?" The authentic behavior questions are, "Does the rap artist suggest that she or he is offering the audience the "correct" information; or is keeping it 'real'?" "Does the rap artist attempt to describe an event or behavior, or use simulations, like a newscast, to authenticate realness?" Finally, regarding group participation, "Does the rap artist acknowledge associates, friends, or the crew?" "Does the rap artist allow perfon-nance by his or her crew on the album?"

Myth making is integrally related to the three major objections to Gangsta rap, revolving around the violence, sexism/homophobia, and racism in Gangsta rap's lyrics. However, Hecht et al. identify that street mythologies are commonplace in parts of African-American culture (163). Therefore, this essay expects three myths to be revealed and associated with each of these criticisms of the music. I expect a gangster/thug mythology to be associated with violent language; a pimp/player mythology expects to be associated with sexist terms; and finally, an outlaw/nigga mythology works in conjunction with racist lyrics. The process for identification is much simpler as the analyzed text yields content for context of the violent, sexist and racist terms. In each case, the question posed is does the ten-n relate to the hypothesized myth?

Finally, the third reading will identify if social dramas exist in the lyrics. Recurring themes should suggest some form of acceptance or rejection of the social structures,

as well as, the pollution in the hierarchy is resolved. If group standards are being breached and then resolved in some fashion then understanding that process would be beneficial for scholars. The phenomenon also offers evidence that a cultural communication model may offer a more consistent method for studying Gangsta rap music, rather than a transmission perspective. Some value system or moral force should reveal itself if social dramas play out. The questions for this reading are, "What is the societal structure being discussed in the song? Does the rap artist accept or reject the societal structure? If rejected, how is the tension resolved?"

The second part of the study focuses on applying the method towards the four Billboard top selling rap albums from 1992-1995. If other successful Gangsta rappers are found to use Ice Cube's rhetorical strategies of rituals, myths, and social dramas, the study might be able to begin to reconcile the irony between the popularity of these Gangsta rappers with the almost universal negative criticism of their lyrical content.

Chapter 4--Ice Cube: A Dramatistic Analysis of Amerikkka's Most Wanted

Chapter four examines the rituals, myths, and social dramas explicated from Ice Cube's Amerikkka's Most Wanted, while chapter five discusses these theoretical concepts as they relate to the leading rap albums from 1993-1995, which happen to all be self-proclaimed "Gangsta's." Explicating the motives underlying Cube's rhetoric allow for a more thorough understanding of the culture created and maintained between Ice Cube and his audience.

Rituals

Hecht et al. identifies the value of *sharing* as a key core symbol to African-American communication style. Rituals in black culture are one method for communicating the identities that promote unity. Rap scholars discuss some ritualistic tendencies particular to rap music. The call and response exemplifies audience cohesion rituals; while signifying, being authentic and group participation—like involving one's crew in rap music production—all demonstrate allegiance to a community. This study finds a high occurrence of ritualistic symbolic acts occurring in popular Gangsta rap music. At least one of the four types of rap rituals are found in all sixteen of Ice Cube's songs on Amerikkka's Most Wanted and at least thirteen of the tracks exhibit three of the four types.

Whether the rap artist is offering the realest news, the realest knowledge, or the realist music, it is critical to the credibility of the artist to demonstrate one's music as something distinct from what the audience can get elsewhere. Simultaneously, the artist's credibility is dependent on the establishment of herself or himself as an authentic part of the community and not ajust outside critic of urban America. Rituals help bridge

the gap between the two polar opposites, offering opportunities to identify with the audience while still rewarding the creativity and verbal mastery inherent in following Rose's quest to create a "style no one else can follow" (38). An examination of the use of rituals by lee Cube may help discover how these perspectives communicate to both academia and popular culture.

Dyson identifies several rhetorical strategies used in lee Cube's production: anger, oral artistry," and his "GangstAfronationalist aesthetic" (Dyson, Between God 272). Our study is concerned with the methods used by Cube in executing these strategies. The results find that Cube produces his anger, oral art, and aesthetic by employing a variety of rituals. Cube offers the most balanced use of the different types of rituals of any artist, although clearly signifying dominates throughout.

Audience Cohesion

Early efforts in rap of demonstrating audience cohesion primarily found roots in the black church. The call-response sequence has historically been a popular style used in preaching. The minister shouts, "Can I get an ainen?" or "Can I get a witness?" The congregation shouts back appropriately, reinforcing the group identification. With early beginnings as a "dancehall" phenomenon, rap music also relied heavily on similar audience participation (Toop 16). Often in battles between M.C.'s (rappers), crowd response determined who won and lost. Rap artists at concerts called for the women to "sccreeaaammm" and the men to make some "noizzzzeeee!" The records themselves would have a live or simulated audience response. As rap moved from dance-oriented too more politically oriented messages, the artist's requests focused on content that is

more meaningful. Public Enemy shouts to the audience, "Don't believe the Hype!" when discussing the media's role in the black community. The questions became more rhetorical in nature, with less of emphasis on a "direct response" by the audience. As we move from the political rap genre to the time of the Gangsta, an analysis of Ice Cube demonstrates how Gangsta's participate with the audience.

My research reveals audience cohesion rituals in nine of the sixteen tracks on Amerikka's Most Wanted (56.25%). Cube communicates this ritual in two ways. First, he demonstratively challenges and rhetorically questions the audience. In "Better off Dead," the first track of the album, Ice Cube walks through a fantasy sequence of his final walk down death row. As the electrocution occurs, the scene cuts to a reporter, who asks the question, "Why is America willing to maintain order, no matter what the cost?" In the subsequent track, "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate," Cube repeatedly ponders what the world would be like if "Nigga's decide to retaliate" and suggests that "laws are made to be broken up. What Nigga's need to do is start loccing up [getting prepared]." In other songs, Cube offers morals to his ghetto fables. He tells a tale of a date in the projects which ends with Cube going to jail because the woman he is picking up lives in a crackhouse, and Cube hence concludes, "Don't fuck with a bitch from the projects." In "Turn Off the Radio," Cube takes a stand against urban contemporary radio stations which refuse to play rap music and tells his audience to stop listening until they "put more hip hop in." Finally, in "Who's the Mack," Cube demonstrates the con game of street life. With the connection made between the nature of the hustling and life on the streets, Cube proceeds to show the theme as analogous to many other facets of everyday existence. After each verse, which reveals a different "hustle," Cube always rhetorically

concludes, "Now ask yourself, Who's the Mack?"

The second and more prominent ritual production is the audience cohesion Cube fosters via simulated conversations. This cohesion employs the ritual in much the same way as the call-response sequence did, differing only by the lack of direct response or the artificial creation of the response. Sometimes the entire song is Cube having a one-way conversation with his audience, where the response is implicit. In "Get off my Dick," Cube speaks directly to male groupies and talks about men having self-esteem and not sucking up to celebrity. ...

> So I dedicate this one to the groupie, and the Charlie, all on my Snoopy. Brothers keep askin' lee Cube, "Yo' when will you bust?" They surround me and make a big fuss. Now I was taught, back on my block, that you don't ride on nobody's jock. For anything they do, fuck him and his crew. Unless, you're getting paid too. I'm not sayin' this to dis each and every fan. Women you can ride, but men be a man. Shake my hand, and make it a firm shake. Say, "what's up Cube," and then break [leave]. 'Cause if you're hanging there, I'm gonna tell ya' loud and clear, "Get off my dick nigga and tell your bitch to come here."

Prior to this verse, rapper Flavor Flav from Public Enemy, does a duet with Cube and at the end, Flav exclaims, "Stay off his dick!" as an introduction to this selection. The audience eavesdrops on a conversation between Cube and his male groupies.

In "Rollin" wit The Lench Mob," Cube justifies his decision to Gangsta rap. The track gives one the impression that he is in an interview, responding to critics of his profession. He contextualizes his decision to portray a Gangsta over images that a-re

more positive:

> Some rappers are heaven sent But "Self-Destruction" don't pay the fuck'n' rent. So you can either sell dope or get your ass a job I'd rather roll with the Lench Mob.

On the other hand, sometimes Cube speaks to a variety of audiences within a song. For example, in the "Nigga Ya Love to Hate," Ice Cube speaks to the white power structure, black urban America, the black middle class, and a group of women he defines as bitches, in various verses.

Whether one-way conversations work as effectively as call-and-response rituals in determining the level of cohesion in the music is somewhat problematic since the gauge of direct audience participation is lost in the former. If a minister asks for an "Amen," and gets little response, one can safely conclude there is probably little audience cohesion. However, the conversations directly relate to the level of "identification" found by the audience in the music. The more the audience relates with the Cubes conversations, the greater level of audience cohesion.

Finally, Cube also creates many two-way conversations within his music as well. Two-way conversations more closely simulate the call-response since the response actually exists, even if simulated. During the chorus of "Nigga Ya Love to Hate," a skeptic challenges Cube for his lack of positivity, "Yo you ain't don' nothin' positive for the brothers. What you gotta say for yourself?" Cube responds, "You don't like how I'm livin', well fuck you."

The most telling example of Cube's use of two-way conversation to create audience cohesion is on the track, "It's a Man World," the next to last track on the album.

After repeated use of the word "bitch" in a variety of contexts throughout the album, Ice Cube then introduces this track. Cube and another man begin by having a conversation:

Cube: Women, they good for nothin'...

Male voice: Wait, wait, wait, Cube. Trip this. We gonna' dedicate this one to the pretty young ladies. You know, the pretty young ladies who wouldn't give us the play before the album came out. This is for you.

A variety of samples regarding the word "bitch"—Including: Rapper Easy-E saying, "Bitch on the gank move"; Richard Pryor saying, "Bitch." A woman saying, "I'm not no bitch"; A man saying, "A Bitch is a beeeeeetch." Richard Pryor saying, "I think you ladies are wonderful." And a variety of other voices saying the word bitch. It ends with a male voice saying, "What did you say about my mother, man?"

Cube begins the song by continuing on his sexist tirade about how women are good only for providing him with sexual pleasure, how boring they are, and how women are only interested in long term relationships. However, in an ironic twist, an interruption...

Cube: Ice Cube won't wait, so give it up cow. After we do it', you can go home now. I'm a brother with a big, long thang...

Woman's Voice: Uh, wait ... What the hell are you talking about?

Cube and male voice: Hookers, hookers. Baby, you know what time it is!

Woman's Voice: First off, let me tell you my name is YoYo. And dowing a girl is a first offense, and that's a no-no. Yo Yo thinks the kitchen

sink should be thrown in. Nigga's be scheming and fiending to stick the bone in [background Cube says "Yep"].

No, YoYo's not a hoe or a whore.

And if that's what you're here for, then exit through the door. There's more to see of me, but, you're blind.

So, women like me are fading brothers in the 9-0 [re: nineties].

Cube: Wait, first of all, how you gonna' come on my record and talk all that shit ... [interrupted]

YoYo: I'm trying to say that all women are superior over men.

Cube: Yea, yea, yea...

YoYo: How you gonna 'rule the world, when you're broke as a joke?

Cube: With your county check, baby...

Both conversations in the passage work towards audience cohesion, funneling two audiences (men and women) towards a final endpoint. When Cube and his male friend signify about the women that did not give them the time of they before the album, many men in the target audience could identify with being turned down by a woman who perceives herself to be "out of his league." Consequently, the derogatory treatment of women via signifying is taken and (mis)taken by many in the audience. On the other hand, the introduction of YoYo into this decidedly sexist signifying barrage against women produces a response from the audience as the tenor of the song inunediate changes. The decision by Cube to play out the sexual politics in a dialogue forum creates cohesion by allowing all parties a stake in the discussion, or someone to root for. Finally, the decision by Cube to not only give YoYo's arguments credibility, but ultimately to

clarify and redefine his position on women within the context of the song, has strong implications for audience response as well. Efforts to garner audience cohesion have advanced beyond the call-and-response sequence, but Ice Cube demonstrates a variety of rituals, which serve a similar purpose.

Group Participation

The crew has long been the heart and soul of the hip-hop community. In chapter two, Potter calls this the resolve of the collective and he identifies that rap music has no singular author, but is inherently a communal project. If that collective consciousness exists, one should see it revealed as a ritual of rap.

Ice Cube identifies himself as part of "The Lench Mob," his crew. On eleven of the sixteen tracks (68.75%), he either acknowledges the crew (shouts out) or actually has the crew perform in the production. Three tracks in particular, "Rollin Wit the Lench Mob," "The Bomb," and "It's a Man's World," all exemplify the importance of crew identity. On these tracks, Cube has his crew perform, and although the crew signifies most of the time, a higher purpose reveals itself in each selection.

"Rollin Wit the Lench Mob" serves two functions: to establish the Mob's superiority as the best rap crew; and to allow Cube a chance to express the crew's nature. The Lench Mob expresses an alternative to the street life or working a small wage job. At the same time, the Mob boasts rap superiority due to its ability to impart information to its listeners. The Lench Mob is "taking a nine to your mind all the motherfucking time! " says one verse. The song ends with a voice saying, "Fuck that, Cube, I'm not going back to jail. I'm rolling wit' the Lench Mob!"

The "Bomb" is Ice Cube's showpiece of style mastery. In this song, he and the Lench Mob employ a variety of stylistic techniques, vivid language images, and changes in rate of delivery, in a discussion of the power that the lyrical "Bomb" has over all. Cube describes a verbal battle royal, with opponents left speechless. During the chorus, when a potential foe begins with "Yo Cube, Watch out motherfucker," his words are interrupted by a deafening bomb denotation. Cube's crew then moves aggressively into the next verse exclaiming, "I got many, many styles. Why don't you take a pick?" One of the other members of the Lench Mob then enters and summarizes, "Let me tell you something about the Lench Mob homey. We do our motherfucking job hoe, and we on the tip of getting crazy paid. So I want to give another shout out to my boy, I-C-E. [Another voice] Let them battle with the twelve inch." Cube uses the final cut on the album as advertising for his crew, announcing the soon-to-be coming of his crew, even though this is Cube's first solo effort. The Lench Mob releases their first album a year later.

It's a Man's World" has ritualistic value as a two-way conversation, but it is equally significant when discussing crew production. The decision to give "equal time" to the opposite sex, in the face of much negative publicity for his language choices (bitches and hoes). Whether one agrees with his language choices, the decision of Gangsta rappers to include women as part of their "crew" and part of album production, where omission would probably not be missed by critics, creates a counter-symbol that requires discussion. lee Cube positions YoYo as an equal member of the Lench Mob, although membership clearly has different standards for women. Cube states that for women to "Roll wit the Lench Mob" they ca not be a "ho." Women must separate sex

from business, implying that some women use sex to acquire possessions, a standard never discussed for the men of the Lench Mob. However disempowering a concept, one must still recognize the significance of allowing the discourse and giving YoYo voice as a crew member, exemplifying Rose's notion of dialogic criticism via a conversation of which the audience is privy.

Ice Cube and his "crew," enjoy a synergistic relationship. The Lench Mob is something that Cube is a part of that others want to be a part of, speaking to the enticement of group identification for urban black America, for human beings. Cube receives status from being part of the Lench Mob, retaining his individuality. Cube is also able to give create a variety of contexts to speak his voice, something he could not do as well as a solo act. The crew benefits as well—receiving the opportunity to show case their talents before the release of their efforts—whether individually or as a group. The public gets free advertising of the Lench Mob's and YoYo's upcoming album. The communal aspects of rap music production evident, as displayed in this analysis via rituals.

Being Real

When rap artist KRS-one is asked, "So, you're a philosopher?" He replies, "I'm a philosopher, I think very deeply. In four seconds, a teacher is about to speak." Chuck- D of Public Enemy identifies rap music as "Black America's CNN." These examples illustrate that being real has not always been exclusively associated with ghetto street realism. But the advent of Gangsta rap and the increasing hardcore sounds of the street have equated being real with one's knowledge and loyalty of the streets in urban

America. Critical acclaim of Ice Cube generally focuses on his insightful street perspectives (Dyson Between God 273).

The questions posed for realness in this study relate to whether the artists say they authentic or interpretation of the lyric's actions or behaviors. The study found being real rituals in 50% in the selections of Ice Cube. Verbal identification of knowledge and use of dramatistic settings are the two methods for identifying realness found in the music of Cube.

At times, Cube simply tells his audience that he has the infon-nation and the audience needs to listen. Usually, this "boast" occurs in the context of him trying to relate "serious" information to his audience. This technique is prominently used in the "Nigga Ya Love to Hate" and "Amerikka's Most Wanted" are both selections where Cube is informing his audience of the state of race relations in America from his perspective. In the "Nigga Ya Love to Hate," Ice Cube notices that white America, "wants to sweep a nigga like me under the rug." Because he is "kickin' shit called street knowledge. Why more nigga's in the pen than in college?" Cube fears retaliation for his insights and says, "Because of that line I may be your cellmate. That's from the nigga ya love to hate." Later, Cube recognizes that his ability to proficiently "talk shit" is another reason he is the "nigga ya love to hate." "We have them afraid of the funky shit," he retorts. Cube concludes that he does not want to "hear that shit about role models. It ain't wise to chastise and preach, just open the minds of each."

In "Amerikka's Most Wanted," Cube intersperses signifying with commentary about the ghetto, the cops, and America's double standards when dealing with crime. After exclaiming that Ice Cube has got the 4-1-1 [the information taken from the phone

number for directory assistance], he signifies on his abilities as a criminal and discusses the frustration of police who cannot catch him. But then, Cube reveals that his criminal mentality is the "American way" as he claims that most cops are on the take and if he gets caught, he will just pay them off. The final verse the most insightful as Cube addresses the double standard of white America's "fear of crime":

> Word. But who the fuck is Herb?
>
> It's time to take a trip to the suburbs.
>
> And let them see a nigga invasion.
>
> Point blank. Caught a Caucasian.
>
> Cock the hammer, then crack a smile.
>
> Take me to your house, pal.
>
> Got to the house, my pockets got fat see,
>
> Cracked the safe, got the money and the jewelry.
>
> Three weeks later, I'm at the P-A-D,
>
> Had a little fly ass bitch with me.
>
> Sittin' in the den, Yo' it couldn't be,
>
> "What up G," saw my face on T.V.

Cube walks out his apartment, immediately arrested by Federal agents standing outside. He ponders his decision to move his crime spree to the suburbs and concludes, "I think back when I was robbing my own kind, the police didn't pay it no mind. But when I started robbing the white folks, now I'm in the pen with a soap-on-a-rope. I've said it before and I still taunt it, every motherfucker with a color is most wanted!" Cube displays both direct and indirect appeals to authenticity through his language choices and

his storytelling.

The creation of authentic events is a second method Cube demonstrates being real. The songs "Better Off Dead," "Turn Off the Radio," "The Drive-By," and for enhancing authenticity: conversations, "Endangered Species" utilize three techniques news reports, and dramatic settings. "Better Off Dead" stages a conversation between a I prison guard and the prisoner heading towards the electric chair, then ends the track with a news reporter questioning killing as a way of maintaining order.

In "Turn Off the Radio," Ice Cube creates the fantasy setting of a urban contemporary radio air personality who refuses to play rap music. The rest of the song intertwines the boycotting response of rap followers objecting to radio's omission with the radio air personality's bombardment of Gangsta rap. A scene from "Do the Right Thing" introduces the song. Ice Cube says, "A message to the Oreo cookie; here's what they think about you." The clip from "Do the Right Thing" delivers a litany of racial epithets in classic trash-talking style, concluding with "Go the fuck back to Africa" repeated three times. Cube retorts, "Think about it, you fuckin' sellout!" Then the dial of a radio is sifting through the static in search of a station:

> Radio D.J.: Here we go with station 103.787. We'll be listening to. We won't be listening to Ice Cube, Amerikkka's Most Wanted, because that's bullshit. Get that shit outta' here. Straight R&B, straight R&B, straight R&B."
>
> Voice: Where's the motherfucking plug at, I'm about to disconnect his ass!

Another voice - Turn off that motherfucking radio!

Cube: [music and rap begins]-

Turn on that radio! Take a listen. What ya' missing

Personally, I'm sick of the ass kissin'

What I'm kickin' to you won't get in rotation, no where in the nation.

Program directors and DeeJays ignore me,

Cause I simply say fuck top forty,

And top twenty and top ten,

Until they put more hip-hop in...

Ice Cube charges that black radio is running from reality by not playing the music of the streets. He continues:

Turn it to the radio

Listen for a minute,

Yo' G' stick a fuckin' tape in it.

Cause all the radio do is dangle,

That R&B love triangle.

Now if you out there kickin' it with the brothers,

You don't care about lovers.

You want to hear a young nigga on the mike, going buck wild [crazy],

Throwing and flowing, and showing new style.

That's where I'm coming from,

Reality. That's what they running from.

If you're down with Ice Cube, let me know that you know.

Turn off the radio!

Realness is again contextualized as part of the reason one should listen to Ice Cube, as well as, the creation of a real-life event, even if exaggerated and simulated, to make his point.[4]

The "Drive-by" graphically simulates the real thing with Cube opening machine gun fire on someone he does not like. The setting is disturbingly real. Afterwards, a news reporter sadly notes the lack of interest in the event. "Outside the South Central area, few cared about the violence, because it didn't affect them," he said. Another news segment occurs in "Endangered Species," a song which describes the condition of the black urban male in America. The news anchor begins:

> At the bottom of our news tonight, there's been a new animal aimed at falling off the face of our Earth. Yes, young black teenagers are reported to be the oldest, and the newest, creatures added to the Endangered Species List. As of now, no efforts have been made to preserve the blacks. When asked why, a top, top law official adds, "Because they make good game hunting."

Again, despite the literal exaggeration of the facts, Cube communicates a serious point. The use of the news report adds to the dramatic effect. Being real rituals are not about a search for the "Truth" as much as they foster group identification with the target audience. If young, black urban teenagers connect with being described as an "Endangered Species," the authenticity of the ritual is highly effective.

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[4] Interestinaly, several early gangsta rap albums sold well on the Billboard charts without the benefit of any airplay (Toop). An amazing feat in this day and time

Signifying

In the literature, trash talking, boasting, playing the dozens, and toasting, are ritualistic games based on a concept called signifying. Potter's definition of signifying depends on the ability for one to create intentional mis-direction depends on the ability for one to create intentional mis-direction by confusing the literal and the figurative. The intent of the act, according to Potter, is to create a hidden communication, which offers solidarity for the listener, while found non-threatening to non-listeners because all they hear is reinforcement of common stereotypes. Through invocation of signifying, Gates argues that it can either operate as a form of praise or as satire and denigration. For purposes of this examination, signifying as praise and as satire or denigration will be called "positive signifying" and "negative signifying," respectively.

For example, a common trash-talking challenge heard on basketball courts and playgrounds across the country is the phrase, "You can't guard me!" To take this sentence literally would be a (mis)-taking of it's meaning. A literal interpretation of the rules would certainly suggest that a defender could guard the opponent. Rather, the connotation of the claim is that "I'm so much better than you, I can score anytime. You're wasting your time guarding me." In addition, while it is certainly possible that the sentence taken literally—could mean the defense has too many players on the court—the likelier probability is that a signifying ritual has occurred. This section examines the methods Cube uses when he invokes signifying. There is no discussion in this study about which ritual (trash-talking, toasting, playing the dozens etc.) Cube is engaging in at any particular time, since the value of identifying when a rap artist is signifying and what the possible meanings are is more integral to understanding the communicative act.

Cube signifies on a variety of topics, ranging from violence to capitalism to women and even former President George Bush. An analysis of Ice Cube's signifying discovers metaphors and similes as one rhetorical device and the use of slang via homonymic devices as a second method for signifying ritual production. While the first two methods are consistent with Potter's explanation of vernacular-based forms of signifying, there is a third method Potter fails to discuss directly. The primary method of signification by lee Cube is to make a claim that sounds very literal, although illogical. The key to this signification is that in a larger context, a figurative interpretation of the statement makes more sense. Although Cube signifies in almost every verse on the album, a few examples sufficiently illustrate the process.

Metaphors/Similes

Much of the rhetorical strategy of Ice Cube employs a variety of comparisons, especially when Cube is in positive signifying mode. Cube often compares his political and lyrical skills to invulnerable beings. In "Amerikkka's Most Wanted," Cube exclaims, "I'm not a renegade or a rebel, I'm a nigga with an "S" so get the kryptomite." Implicit in the Cube's lyrics, is that he is a Supemigga, so indestructible that his enemies need to search for the magic substance to destroy him. Visualizing the subject as something, more than human is how one often boasts about one's abilities. Cube again explores his power by comparing his strength versus those who speak out against the power of his crew, Da Lench Mob. He says, "I ought to cuff 'em like a brand new pair of Levi's," and that he should "roll 'da motherfuckers up like a fat, ass joint." His metaphorical power lies in his ability to create comparisons that make his superiority awe inspiring as

compared with his opponents.

Finally, employment of metaphors is not restricted to just Cube's lyrical content. In "It's a Man's World," female rap artist YoYo challenges Cube's demeaning conception of a woman's value by noting that the "kitchen sink should be thrown in," recognizing in metaphorical material terms, the value of woman having to interact with sexist men.

Creation and/or Invoking of Slang via Homonymic Devices

Redefinition of words is at the heart of Potter's discussion of rap music as a spectacular cultural exchange with emphasizes guerrilla-tactics on the dominant vernacular. Cube's rhetoric embraces this concept and forces the audience to re-contextualize the meaning of words as they fit into his dictionary of slang. When Cube signifies that "I'm the Nigga you Love to Hate" on an album entitled Amerikkka's Most Wanted, Cube redefines America to represent white supremacy and the word "nigger," a common terminology of those supremacists, is empowering in this context. The hate arises from the power that the "Supemigga" owns. Cube creates slang by redefining America, while also invoking multiple definitions of the word "nigger," having disempowering connotations for one audience, although empowering for another.

When Cube says, "I sweat 'em like Sweathogs," he metaphorically signifies on a group of students from the seventies sitcom "Welcome Back Kotter." The meaning of the term in this context redefines the idea of "sweating" someone, or to pursue or harass them. In that context, Sweathogs is a convenient homonymic connection that provides a magnifier for the "sweating" that is taking place. Everybody is, "Going crazy for a

quarter," according to Cube. However, quarter represents money and is not a literal interpretation. The figurative use of quarter however, does invoke the meaning that people are acting out over a relatively insignificant issue.

One Cube retort is that "nigga's" should, "Raise hell and bell and sag, but be down with your flag." Remembering Kelley's contention that often rap artists aim to redirect the focus of violent, self-destructive tendencies within urban black America, these seemingly meaningless phrase works towards that end. Cube's revolutionary suggestion that black youth should not lose their energy to fight, but should remember who the "enemy" is and not hurt others like themselves. The flag figuratively represents the black community. Cube is constantly invoking a play on words, forcing the audience to reach back into the slang of the community for understanding, and sometimes creating new slang for the community. In either case, redefinition and recontextualization is a method for rap's production of signifying.

Contextual Figurative Logic

One significant area of difference between Potter's discussion of signifying and the results of this research is that while Potter grounds the majority of hip-hop signifying in homonymic forms to deny the denotative while producing new connotative meanings of words and phrases, this study found that the trick of signifying most employed by Ice Cube is often a product of the most literal of interpretations. When Cube cries out, "Get your ass ready for the lynchin" or "If I see another brother on a video trying to outdance each other, I'm gonna tell "T" to pass the powder," there is no rhetorical homonymic fon-n employed to provide the alternative meaning. The key to understanding that Cube

speaks of a verbal "lynchin'," or that he only metaphorically speaks of shooting the next video dancer, is held in the reception of context. The illogical nature of Cube literally committing these violence acts is juxtaposed against the possibility of a figurative reception where Cube speaks metaphorically to make his point. Listeners who recognize that Cube repeatedly acknowledges that one of his strongest rhetorical skills is "talkin' shit," probably do not assume Cube's lyrics as literal, although the force of his lyrics by using violent comparisons is direct, graphic, and illustrates his ability to speak to the issue at hand.

Now one can question the "justification" for Cube's rhetorical decision, but part of that decision may be a goal of "authenticity" with a target audience who can relate to the violence of which Cube speaks. As Potter illustrates, any discussion of violence by a rap artist, considers the relationship to the violences being committed against socio-economically-disadvantaged urban youth. The reception of that violence as literal or figurative probably depends on whether one views the rap artist and her or his audience, as the victim or the oppressor.

In a "Gangsta's fairytale," Cube creates a world where the assumptions of the classic fairytale are challenged and recast within the world and life experiences of those living in the ghetto. Popular fairytale figures are explicated from their fantasy worlds and dropped into the mythology of the inner city black experience. Within the song however, verses which could be (mis-)taken literally but make little sense offer the opportunity for humor to those who figuratively can relate to the conditions which Cube indirectly addresses. The song begins, "Once upon the time in the black part of the city..." A child enters asking Cube to stop ignoring the kids. Cube then tells the kids to "come sit on the

lap of I-C-E and let me tell you a little story or two."

Throughout the story, Cube takes Jack, Jill, Cinderella, the three little pigs, and many others, and creates a street fable. The pigs for example, are cruising looking for "the wolf to kill," but instead, they find Humpty, another one of their enemies. Killing Humpty begins a gang war. Juxtaposed with these very real portrayals of the streets are Cubes comedic efforts at using fairytale characters in his narrative. A literal interpretation of the efforts is almost impossible, unless someone is unfamiliar with the lives of the aforementioned characters. Lifting any particular verse, a literal criticism could point to sexism, racism, violence, and/or heterosexism in the lyrical content, although the meaning of those charges would be difficult to decipher given the context of the rhetorical event. On the other hand, a more figurative reception allows for an understanding of the parallels being drawn between those who embrace the fantasy world of fairytales and the gritty, hard-nosed reality of the streets via some hard-core "trash-talking" or "talking shit." Listeners can laugh at the paradoxical situations while Cube maintains authenticity during his criticism by positively signifying on life in the ghetto. The difference between the competing interpretations are whether Cube's perceived as a victim of oppression or as an oppressor. Again, that perspective dictates the tone of the criticism.

Signifying functions as a ritual when a community views the communication act from the same perspective. The identification created in signification functions the same for any ritual. Audience cohesion, signifying, being authentic, and group participation within the Gangsta rap culture all operate on the common assumption that enactment of these various rituals promote unity via creation and maintenance of identification. Cube

uses all four of these rituals, although he provides some departures from past approaches in rap music regarding execution. For example, gone are the days of the traditional call-and-response, as the one- and two-way conversations are the methods of choice for Ice Cube. But the effect is still the same, to promote a common identity between Cube and his audience through the use of spectacular vernaculars embraced by a variety of ritualistic performances.

Cube privileges rituals which promote identification via authenticity and uses that label of "being real" to impart knowledge on his audience. Authenticity rituals take several fon-ns from Cube showing his superior creative abilities, to acknowledging his existence as a "nigga" from the streets, to utilizing the scenes and sounds of the streets in his portrayals. Some songs serve entirely as efforts at authenticity, while others focus on Cube's brand of social commentary.

Finally, it is important to guard against underestimating of the symbolic communal value of group participation rituals. Cube repeatedly points to the importance of his crew, in terms of his existence, the production of the album, and his responsibility to his "community." Discussion of his crew throughout the album and his rhetorical decision for their participation helps Cube to define who he is and values he wants portrayed through his music. In Amerikkka's Most Wanted, Cube uses a variety of rituals, which create and maintain identification with his audience while promoting many of the values he wants reinforced in his message.

Myths

Myths function to symbolically create and maintain what community standards are within a culture. An analysis of lee Cube's rhetorical strategies relating to mythology

finds that he employs the three hypothesized narratives: the gangsta/thug; the pimp/player/hustler; and the outlaw/nigga mythology in various degrees. As expected, the study identified allegedly violent, sexist, and racist terms in association with enactment of these myths. Cube does not always identify himself as a participant in a mythology, although he clearly proclaims himself as a nigga repeatedly throughout the album. These lines are not distinct as overlap exists between the mythologies, but some important distinctions can be drawn between the three types.

Kelley and Potter discuss these myths as they relate to the African-American experience, both in terms of language choices and in terms of culture, each concluding that the myths have been created as a response to oppression, although each arguably is oppressive in nature. Kelley and Potter argue the need to contextualize the employment of each mythology, and both selectively defend a deeper understanding of the use of these myths. The study explicates Ice Cube's use of the three mythologies and attempts to contextualize their employment via the decisions to invoke allegedly violent, sexist, heterosexist, and racist lyrics.

Gangsta/Thug

Gangsta mythology for Ice Cube envelops his broader discussion of his persona as a "nigga." Although there is some interchangeable use of the two terms, there are some differences of degree, especially when Cube talks about other "Gangstas." Generally, Cube's invocation of Gangsta mythology relates to violence as it relates to explanations of how black America gets caught up in the gangsta culture. The outlaw/nigga myth develops out of more power-oriented discussions, especially in relation to fighting back

against the dominant society.

In "Once Upon a Time in the Projects," a date turns into a visit to jail for Cube, as the rap artist wams of a variety of dangers when associating in low-income Federal Housing projects. The adventure begins with Cube meeting his date's gang-banging, younger brother, the pot-smoking mother who answers the door by requiring a pass-word, and the baby in the house who smells like "he took a shit in his little draw's [underwear]." By the time, Cube realizes that crack-cocaine is in the house, and the police are busting down the door. "Officer, you're making a big mistake," cries Cube. "Tell that bullshit to thejudge," replies the officer. Although Cube does not directly invoke the Gangsta/Thug mythology, he discusses the dangers of the lifestyle, and even more poignantly, the risk of association.

As discussed in rituals, "Turn Off the Radio" is a protest against radio executives unwilling to play rap music. In several stanzas, Cube implies that violent actions be taken against these radio stations. "I'm going to tell T-Bone to pass the powder," says Cube, if black radio keeps focusing on Rhythm and Blues. Kelley identifies on the track, "Amerikkka's Most Wanted," that Cube draws a relationship between American capitalism and gangsterism (130). "It's the American way. I'm a G-A-N-G-S-T-A" exclaims Cube. Cube's violent protest against urban radio is an extension of that connection. The violent signifying could be taken literally as Potter's logic of moral panics suggests, but the contextual figurative logic of a title that fosters the non-violent chant of "Turn Off the Radio" might suggest otherwise.

Finally, in "Rollin' Wit the Lench Mob," Cube offers a historical, socioeconomic perspective to his decision to become a "Gangsta rapper" as opposed to his other life's

chances. If you are from the ghetto, your choices are to "sell dope, get a job. I'd rather role wit the Lench Mob." Cube contextualizes the gangsterism of the Lench Mob versus other more positive rap artists, noting that "Some rappers are heaven sent, but 'Self-Destruction' don't pay the fucking rent." For Cube, gangsterism is one of the few options left to poor, urban America, primarily due to his beliefs that America operates via a gangster mentality.

Pimp/Player/Hustler

Subtle distinctions differentiate the pimp from the player, from the hustler and all three mythologies are direct descendents of the blaxploitation arts genre of the early seventies. The pimp mythology revolves around the ability of a person (usually male) to protect and control the lives of others (usually female) who sell sex for a living. The player's control does not revolve as much around a business proposition, but rather his or her ability to manipulate others (usually the opposite sex) into fulfilling the player's wishes. Finally, the hustler defrauds anyone and everyone who will allow it. The results favor two discussions, one around the pimp/player mythology and one around the hustler.

Two songs are representative the pimp/player mythology. In "I'm Only Out for One thing," Cube boasts of his sexual abilities and exclaims that his needs are simple: "the pussy, the money, the mike, and I'm straight." Cube and Public Enemy rap artist, Flavor Flav, describe a world where they are desirable to women, providing graphic descriptions of their sexual exploits in several situations. Cube portrays himself as a 64nice guy" in an effort to have sex with a woman he has just met. Then after seducing her and she asks if he will call, he retorts, "a bitch or a hoe, after I ball ya'. Naw, I'm just

playing but I still feel the same. A nigga like Ice Cube is only out for one thang." The moral is that the two artists want sex without commitment.

As discussed earlier, "Get off my Dick and Tell Your Bitch to Come Here" is a narrative about male groupies and how Cube believes that men should not fawn over celebrity. However, the double standard Cube imposes is that women are more than welcomed to become "groupies," with the promise that sexual exploits are part of the "prize." Cube concludes by telling the men to "get off his dick and tell your bitch to come here." Implicit in this discussion is that Cube is not opposed to using his celebrity in his sexual exploits. Cube generally has little interest in the pimp/player mythology, although there is one other song where he brings together the mythologies of the hustler and the pimp/player.

Cube emphasizes the role of the hustler more directly than the pimp/player. In the selection, "You Can't Fade Me," Cube sees the hustler in a woman with whom he had a one-night stand. As the neighborhood "hussey," the woman declares that Ice Cube is the father of her love child. Cube goes through the stages of grief, which include possible violent, graphic solutions. Cube queries, "What I need to do is kick the bitch in the tummy ... Naw that's murder one, it's premeditated." Upon the announcement, Cube declares that he cannot be faded (hustled) when the baby is born and looks like his "next door neighborhood." With the results of the blood test in and Cube declared not to be the father, Cube considers violent retaliation, but ultimately decides to do nothing but exclaim that he cannot be faded.

In the second song, "What they hittin' foe?" Cube takes on the persona of a hustler competing with other "hustlers" in an unfriendly game of craps. Signifying on his

dice-playing abilities, Cube begins to win big as others proceed to drop from the game. Envy and jealously ensue as Cube observes that, "Broke motherfuckers, they make the best crooks." Plotting and scheming begins as the losers ponder a way to jump Cube for his winnings. But Cube is far to smart for that, being prepared by having his "gatt" handy if any problems arise. In lee Cubes morality, "bad" hustlers plot revenge on their opponents, "good" hustlers take losing in stride, and the best hustlers, like Cube, just win.

The final example of the pimp/player/hustler mythology embraces all three figures. In "Who's the Mack?" Cube identifies the relationship of the hustling "game": to the sexual politics of dating; to a hustler's decision to scam, as well as those who allow themselves to be scammed; and finally to acknowledge how the "game" is not restricted to the streets or dating situations. Cube informs the audience that he is "giving them the facts," empowering his listeners to recognize when the "game" is on. The introduction is a series of chants, "Straight gangsta mack" followed by a first stanza which explores the relationship between a pimp and a woman who falls for his "game."

Who's the mack? is it some brother in a big hat
Thinking he can get any bitch with a good rap?
Rolling in a fucked-up Lincoln
Leaning to the side
So it looks like he's sinking
Into that leopard interior
This nigga thinks every girl's inferior
To his tongue, get a dumb bitch sprung

As she's selling more butt

Don't even get a cut of the money

His name is Sonny

And he know the play

And hope to od thet he don't find a runaway

That's looking to become a star

He'll have your ass in and out of every car

With every on and Rick, sucking every john's dick

Come short of the money, get your ass kicked

You don't like it but you still call him hunk

Last night the nigga put yo' ass in the trunk

You wanna leave but Sonny started talking fast

And it make you wanna go and sell more ass

He's getting rich, you his bitch and it's like that

Now ask yourself

Who's the mack?

The second verse studies the game of a person who appears homeless, but in Cube's mind is just a hustler, taking advantage of the generosity of others for purposes unfamiliar to those making the charitable contributions.

Who's the mack?

It is that fool that wanna pump the gas

Give you a sad story and you give him cash?

He starts macking and macking and you sucking

Quick to say I'm down on my luck

And you give a dollar or a quarter and he's on his way

Then you see his sorry ass the next day

Are you the one getting played like a sucka?

Or do you say, "Get a job, motherfucker"?

Every day, the story gets better

He's wearing dirty pants and a funky-assed sweater

He claims he wants to get something to eat

But every day you find yourself getting beat

He gets your money and you run across the street

don't look both ways 'cause he's in a daze

And almost get his ass hit for the crack

Now ask yourself

Who's the mack?

In the third verse, we find the player, courting a woman by "talking shit," even when the woman is well aware of the temporality of his intentions.

Who's the Mack?

Is it that nigga in that club asking

Have you ever been in a hot tub?

I know the game so i watch it unfold

When i see the boy pinned to your earlobe

He's talking shit and you crack a smile

When he tell you that he can go buck wild

For a girl like you and make it feel good

you know it's drama but it sound real good

He started dragging and hopefully he can start tagging

The pussy so he can keep bragging

He say, "I'm'a leave baby, can you go with me?"

The pussy so he can keep bragging

ou wanna do it but you feeling like a H-O-E

You grab his hand, you leave and it's over

'Cause the nigga ain't nothing but a rover

Ya knew the game and you still ended up on your back

Now ask yourself

Who's the Mack?

The relationship between the three gr'fters of the song is made apparent in the final verse, where Cube imparts to his audience, the knowledge needed to recognize participants of the game and suggests that one must take responsibility for succumbing to the game.

Macking is the game and everybody's playing

And as long as you believe what they saying

Consider them a M.A.C.K. and with no delay

They are gonna get all the play

But when it comes to me, save the drama for your momma

It's Ice Cube and you know that I'm a

Mack in my own right

When it comes to rhyme and rap 'cause all i do is kick facts

Unlike Iceberg Slinim and all of them be claimin'be P.I.M.P.

No, I'm not going out that way

I'm just a straight up N I double G A

Next time U get over on a fool

And you did the shit like real smooth

Thank Ice Cube for giving up the facts

And ask yourself

Who's the Mack?

Cube's decision to denounce the player/pimp/hustler mythology by recasting a counter mythology, the "nigga," is important for a variety of reasons. Cube's hustle or game is his ability to "kick facts" and trumps the importance of running a game on women, as he compares his type of "mack" to that of legendary blaxploitation pimp, Iceberg Slim. Ultimately he credits, in advance, the hustlers listening to these lyrics for their next conquest—even taking credit for it. However, this signification is deceiving as Cube's purpose is to rest responsibility on the "victims" to understand the "game" and resist its illusionary lure. Although Cube engages in allegedly sexist language choices throughout the album, he takes the challenge of fighting certain types of "oppression" very seriously. The next section discusses the counter-mythology that Cube chooses to embrace, that of the "N-1-G-G-A."

Outlaw/Nigga

Kelley and Potter document the mythology of the outlaw in the last chapter. Potter details the romance with the outlaw of the dominant culture, unless the outlaw is the black male, who is criminalized. Furthermore, the redefinition by black youth culture of the word "nigga" functions in part as a substitute for "outlaw." The result is a signifying masterpiece of trickery, as Cube reinforces himself as embodying negative conceptions of "nigger," while providing an alternative interpretation for his listening audience. Amerikkka's Most Wanted is the culmination of such an effort.

The opening track on the album, "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate," sets the table for Cube's dualistic approach to creation of his symbolic identify. As discussed in the section on rituals, Cube speaks to a variety of audiences through his identity, which numbers both friends and foes alike. The mythology of a "Supemigga" whose sole purpose is to "kick facts" also relayed in "Who's the Mack"; challenging other blacks with self-destructive tendencies to fight back against the "other"; and providing a symbol of superiority via power, creativity, and lyrical prowess. Cube's role as a nigga is to educate by way of street knowledge, and his persona as another "nigger" allows him the authenticity to speak to an audience alienated by black leadership perceived to be "outsiders" and no longer part of the struggle of black, urban youth. However, no matter how much Cube discusses his invincibility through the power of his weapons, cunning, or lyrics, signs of a reality check are just around the comer.

The irony for Cube as he speaks to multiple audiences is his challenge to white America on the title track, "Amerikkka's Most Wanted." After a verse or two exploring his exploits as a criminal within urban America, he questions the paradox when he moves

his spree to the suburbs. Cube recognizes the limitations of the nigga mythology as a revolution strategy of violent, outlaw rebellion, and although he boasts repeatedly, he reconstructs his trash talking in a very insightful and realistic portrayal of his perception of race relations.

While many of the songs on the album define the culture embraced by the nigga mythology, the track "Endangered Species" how Cube uses myth-making to coordinate social action. With a performance by Public Enemy's revolutionary rap artist, Chuck D., Cube embarks on a vicious narrative detailing the state of the black male in America. After the newscast introduction discussing the black male as an endangered species, Cube (iescrines nis reasons tor being a nigga in touay - s society, including one's relationship to the police:

> Peace. Haha don't make me laugh!
>
> All I hear is muthafucker's talkin'sucotash
>
> Liv'n' large, tellin'me to get out the gang
>
> I'm a niggga, gotta live by the trigger
>
> How the fuck do you figure
>
> That I can say peace and the gunshots won't cease
>
> Every cop killin'goes ignored
>
> They just send another nigga to the morgue
>
> My boys gone—they can't give a fuck about us
>
> They rather catch us with guns and white powder
>
> If I was home, they'd probably be front of me

Since I'm young, they consider me the enemy

They'll kill ten of me to get the job correct

To serve, protect, and break a nigga's neck

Cuz I'm the one with a trunk of funk

And 'Fuck tha Police' in the tape deck

You should listen to me cuz there's more to see

Call my neighborhood a ghetto cuz it houses minorities

The other color don't know you can run but not hide

These are tales from the darkside...

The first verse suggests that Cube's resistance to the police, as a "nigga" puts him at additional risk. Nevertheless, at the beginning of each verse, Cube seems to justify his decision to be a "nigga" to others in the black community. In the first verse, he challenges those who want him to denounce his gang-affiliation and shout cries of peace, while verse two draws comparisons between the fight for freedom in Africa and domest' instability. Cube again uses the first person to describe the condition of black urban youth:

You wanna free Africa, I stare at yuh

Cuz we ain't got it too good in America

I can't fuck with them overseas

My homeboy died over keys of cocaine

It was plain and simple

The 9mm went <pop> to the temple

<pop pop pop> was the sound I put the bitch down

And ran to the schoolyard bathroom

Looked in the trash can, yo it had room

So I ducked my ass in it for a minute

Covered with trash I had the layback

Mad as fuck thinkin' about the payback

Tonight the crew had a little fun

I went home and cut the barrel off my shotgun

It's gettin critical *1 stole a five point o

There they go—drive real slow

I yelled out'ice Cube sucka'

Shot gun kicked- and murder muthafuckers

I told you last album, when I got a sawed off, bodies are hard off

Its a shame, that niggas die young

But to the light side it don't matter none

It'll be a drive by homicide

But to me its just another tale from the darkside...

Finally, Ice Cube gives way to Chuck D, who signifies the insignificance of the plight of poor, urban youth, to the dominant society, specifically targeting the black middle class, who Chuck D. charges as separating black urban youth by labeling them "niggers" and not part of the utopian black community.

Standing in the middle of war

The middle we flex

When we die, they won't make check

Ebony can't see to the darkside

The term they apply to us is a nigga

Call it what you want, cuz I'm comin' from the coroner

Same applies with a PhD

Who'z black - don't wanna role - sells his soul

Watch his head go rollin'

Who the fuck are they foolin'?

The condition of the young, urban, black male in combination with the lack of concern by all other segments of society, is justification for Cube's decision to employ the outlaw/nigga-'mythology.

If effectiveness of myth making as defined by Phillipsen, is one's ability to promote coordinated social action and proscribe community standards within a culture, then Ice Cube's development of mythologies is wildly successful. Cube employs each of the hypothesized myths in a variety of ways: sometimes recontextualizing them as he does indirectly with the player/pimp/hustler mythology; sometimes educating about them as he does with the gangsta/thug narratives; and sometimes defining them as his views, as he does with the myth of the nigga/outlaw.

Cube views the gangsta/thug myth important in understanding the relationships between behavior in the "ghetto" as compared and contrasted to those of the dominant society. Hecht, Ribeau and Collier note the importance for understanding one's existence is that the impact of competiting identities are assessed. In other words, black urban

youth need to understand their behaviors as influenced not only by their socioeconomic status or ethnic identity, but also as a product of the influence of the dominant society on their lives. Moreover, establishment of this relationship is a necessary first step in understanding the context of one's identity. Black urban youth are not uniquely criminals, or uniquely nilihistic, nor uniquely different from the rest of society. Finally, recognition of where the real "enemies" lie, is a precondition to changing the self-destructive tendencies within this community.

Recasting the pimp/player/hustler from a predator on other human beings, usually from within one's community, to a predator of knowledge whose sole purpose is to devour information and spread it throughout the community, is an extremely positive use of authenticity. Cube never directly rejects or condemns others who choose the more negative aspirations of this myth (sometimes even indirectly supporting the myth), but clearly offers a "positive" alternative to participation in the mythology.

Finally, his decision to embrace the outlaw/nigga mythology recasts the negative image of the black youth represented as a "nigga" and empowers both the terminology and the concept in the spirit of the "baaadman narratives" of the sixties. Fostering a positive nationalistic, revolutionary construction to an audience wrought with nihistic, self-destructive tendencies, offers a real avenue for communication with the target audience, and the possibility for social change. The decision to not condemn the target audience, but rather, reconstruct a worldview that is compatible with their current paradigm, offers authenticity at levels that current leadership is incapable of acquiring, as it zealously strives to condemn the Gangsta rap culture, and does little to understand it.

Social Dramas

Rituals promote identification within a culture, while myths provide an understanding of the expectations, rules, and norms of a conununity. The third and final piece of the cultural communication pie relies on an understanding of how breached community standards are resolved. Rap music lyrics offer the possibility of exploring how these social dramas play out.

Burke's dramatism uses in this part of the examination to determine power relationships within a hierarchy, with the purpose of understanding societal structures. Table I describes the nature of the hierarchy, whether or not the hierarchy is accepted or rejected. If rejected (pollution), then the study investigates how redemption occurs: through either mortification or victimage. In an effort to reduce the repetition of re-describing the songs on the album, especially given that almost all discussions occur at some level, this section will simply report the results of each analysis. An analysis provides conclusions after table 1.

Social Drama's in Amerikkka's Most Wanted
Table 1

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
Better off Dead	Death Row execution	Reject		Saying "Fuck all ya" at death/"Why is America willing to maintain order, no matter what the cost?"
The Nigga You Love to Hate.	Various groups dislike I.C.—he is powerful and speaks the truth	Reject	Mobilization through education	Whites should fear retaliation/violent response justified
Amerikka's Most Wanted	Boasts about his superior criminal abilities/takes activity to suburbs	Reject		Whites target blacks who threaten them
What they hittin' Foe?	Cube has superior gaming abilities	Reject	Implications of being better than others	Others plot violent response.

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
You Can't Fade Me	Cube has superior gaming abilities	Reject	A level of reluctance acceptance had Cube been father	Cube too smart to be scammed/violence justified but not logical
JD's Gafflin	Theft of trucks at McDonald's	Accept		
Once Upon a Time in the Projects	Date turns into a visit to jail for being in a crackhouse	Reject	Pleads with officer	Challenges date to tell truth/concludes that one should avoid women from projects
Turn Off the Radio	Radio executives won't play rap music	Reject		Boycott/violence justified against exec's
Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside)	Criticism of I.C. lifestyle as a "nigga" in a gang	Reject		Justifies by nature of conditions: police relations/lifechances
A Gangsta's Fairytale	Traditional fairytales don't serve ghetto kids well	Reject	Offers ghetto realism versions of life for fairytale celebrities	
I'm Only Out for One Thang	Assumption that others want relationships	Reject	Cube's interest in women is purely sexual	
Get Off My Dick and Tell Yo Bitch to Come Here	Groupies are a part of celebrity	Accept/Reject	Women groupies are okay	Male groupies are less than a man for giving way to celebrity.
The Drive-By	Description of a drive-by shooting	Accept		
Rollin' Wit the Lench Mob	I.C. shouldn't do negative "Gangsta rap" music	Reject		Conditions make option justified—sell drugs, get a job or roll with L.M.
Who's the Mack?	A variety of people are being hustled in their everyday existence	Reject	Individuals must take responsibility for educating themselves	Identification of relationship of street hustling to dominant societal hustling
It's a Man's World	Women have little value to men	Reject	Cube self-sacrifices that he is wrong	YoYo challenges male conceptions of women
The Bomb	All rap artists are same	Reject		Others are inferior to the technical skill of the L.M.

Discussion

The human condition behaves through actions that allow a dramatistic perspective through a study of verbal symbols to discover the motives, which underlie rhetorical strategies. Cube challenges his audience to understand his perspective of life, and how he

makes decisions based on the actions and values of others. The rap artist provides a rationale for his audience to pay special attention to him and his crew; to consider adopting some changes in lifestyle to improve their condition; and to consider a variety of values and the implications of decisions not grounded in those values. The next section analyzes the motives in Ice Cube's lyrics, categorizing them by the controversial areas of social commentary scholarship: authenticity issues, community issues, gender/sexuality issues, race relation issues, and violence issues.

On Authenticity

1. Ice Cube is just another "nigga."

Cube repeatedly demonstrates that he is part of the "hood," "ghetto," and "street" culture of which he speaks. He plays craps with his homies ("What they hittin' foe"), tells stories of dates in the projects that went awry (Once Upon a Time in the Projects), and makes the mistake of embarking on a sexist tirade with a talented, angry black woman, YoYo ("It's a Man's World"). The ability for Cube to persuade his primary target audience, urban youth, is fundamentally premised on his ability to sell himself as a part of them, and not like the others, who just point fingers and criticism from the outside. The standards for rhetorical authenticity are defined within the rap community, as the culture ultimately decides "who is real."

2. Ice Cube is more than just another "nigga."

The dualism Cube requires in his persuasive appeal necessitates that he offer unique reasons for urban youth to listen to his message, while simultaneously convincing the audience that he is just like them. The individualism needed to gain credibility

creates tension while juxtaposed with the need for communal identification. The rap community's solution to this dilemma allows for the creation of "a style that no one else can follow" as one of the rules for evaluation of the best rap. Cube boasts about a variety of topics: his rhetorical skills ("talkin shit" in 'the Nigga Ya Love to Hate"), his abilities as a top-notch criminal ("Amerikkka's Most Wanted"), his ability to please women ("I'm only out for one thang"), and his ability to educate through street knowledge ("Who's the Mack"; "Nigga Ya Love to Hate"; "The Bomb"). His ability to boast is never tempered by the need to be like the others, because of the rules of the game created within the community, which facilitate the dualism.

On Inner-City Community

3. Although life's conditions inevitably lead to destruction, never give in and fight back.

The introduction to the album, when Cube is being walked to the electric chair and is asked, "Any last words?" Cube's response, "Fuck all ya!" This brief exchange sets the tone and philosophy of the entire album. No matter how hopeless the situation may seem, Cube's value system demands that one go out with resistance.

4. Images of dominant society are inapplicable for poor, urban America.

In "Gangsta's Fairytale," Cube suggests that the reality for urban youth as demonstrated in images of narratives vastly differs from dominant society. Cube creates a counter-mythology of fantasies that humorously play on the drama of streets. Subtle references are made throughout the album comparing salient issues of dominant society to those with life-conditions that Cube addresses. In "Nigga You Love to Hate," Cube is asked, "Did you like the Bi-centennial?" He responds, "About as much as I like to watch

Arsenio." Cube's retort is a lesson in diversity, signifying that the interests of one culture may not be akin to those in another.

5. Trust and loyalty are community standards.

The need for community-defined values, even within a society perceived to be is just as important. Cube recognizes within the nihilistic and hedonistic by outsiders, framework of some odd situations, that addressing the morality of his community is important. For example, the need for gamblers to play with honor, and respect others when they lose is a direct implication of the narrative, "What they Hittin' Foe?" Cube's personal tale of a woman who wrongly claims that he is the father of her child, is verbally abused and tormented for attempted to "-run a game" on him. This story is indicative of a community-based morality that says, "running a game is an accepted way of life," but the consequences for getting caught are severe and one who takes that risk, should do so consciously. At the point Cube loses "respect" for the woman trying to scam him, he feels justified in any action taken against her as an act of retaliation for her "crime."

6. Some "nigga's" deserve respect.

Cube seems to have a default respect for nigga's. He acknowledges that nigga's are involved in a variety of endeavors, many of which he does not personally agree with. In "Who's the Mack?" he credits hustlers, who "get over like real smooth" and even takes some credit for giving them information, although he clearly says his personal choice is not to hustle. In the "Nigga You Love to Hate," Cube is quick to point out that he views his role as educational and not one which requires condemnation. He says, "And don't give me that shit about role models. It ain't wise to chastise and preach, just open the eyes of each."

7. Some "nigga's" do not deserve respect.

Where Cube draws the line of default respect, is after violation of his community's code of conduct. Nigga's who attempt to cheat him, deceive him, violate him, and get caught, lose his respect. Whether it is the sore losers in the dice game ("What they Hittin' Foe?"), the radio executives who refuse to play rap music ("Turn Off the Radio"), or the police trying to advance their careers at his expense ("Endangered Species"), Cube views these as justifications for losing respect. For Cube, at the point respect is lost, self-defense is justified. Sometimes that entails violence, either literally or rhetorically; deception, or revenge. When someone in the community violates the code, the normal conduct of the streets becomes acceptable behavior.

<u>On Gender/Sexuality</u>

8. Men and women should be treated differently because of sexual politics, although women can choose to be treated the same as men.

Cube views significant communication differences between men and women. In "It's a Man's World," Cube says that he cannot tolerate spending long periods with women. He exclaims, "Drink a beer with 'em? No way. Cause I can only tolerate them for about an hour everyday." Cube's justification for women's primary value to men being sexual, is that the sexual politics between men and women destroy a communication dynamic that he is comfortable with. In "Rollin Wit the Lench Mob," Cube creates the possibility that women can create a world where they can be treated, "like men," but to do so requires a dismissal of their sexuality. He discusses his relationship with YoYo, the lone female member of the Lench Mob, his crew:

If you know a female that is rollin' with the Lench Mob,

watch her step.

Cause the gait is kept in her purse.

Like my homegirl YoYo.

You gotta be down and you can't be a hoe, no.

Cause if you are, I'll be the first one to bust you out,

After my crew, I'll be the first one to rush you out.

Get the picture, a bitch will get the eighty-six,

If she wants to try and mix, Business and pleasure

Make up your own mind, you gotta be a hoe on your own time.

Cube views his friendships akin to a business proposition and demands that women who want to be a part of his association renounce the pleasure of sexual politics for the business of being a part of the Lench mob.

9. Some women deserve respect.

Implicit in Ice Cube's view of human beings is that respect must be earned. How earned respect differs between women and men, although the ultimate goal is when the behaviors of men and/or women fit within his code of association. He implies at several points in the album that his mother has earned his respect, and directly acknowledges that YoYo, held in the highest respect, deferring to her worldview at the end of "It's a Man's World." Additionally, Cube outlines the criteria as discussed in the last section, for other women to gain his respect.

10. Some women does not deserve respect.

Women that violate Cube's code of association disown their right to be respected in his worldview. The women who attempted to falsely accuse him of being the father of his child in "You Can't Fade Me," loses respect. A women who mixes business and pleasure by using the "lure" of sex as a way to advance loses Cube's respect. A woman, who fails to mention that she has put her date in eminent danger by not informing him that he was standing in a crack house, loses Cube's respect.

At the point that Cube loses respect for a woman, the punishment of the streets becomes justified. He justifies use of the term bitch as he does in "Once Upon a Time in the Projects." He j'ustifies violence against women as he does in "You Can't Fade Me." Finally, he justifies using this disrespected woman for sex as he does in "Rollin' Wit the Lench Mob." For Cube, the primary community standard in male/female relations is respect, and once that is lost, civility is lost as well.

11. Women and gay men are generally physically weaker than men.

The use of the ten-ns "bitch," "hoe" and "punk" are primarily used as gendered terms throughout the album to describe weak men. In numerous songs ("What They Hittin' Foe?" and "A Gangsta's Fairytale" for example), Cube describes men in sexist and heterosexist terms because they lose his respect for violating community values. Kelley discusses this phenomenon in his research.

<u>On Race Relations</u>

12. White society controls the conditions by which poor, urban Americans exist.

Whether discussing the graphic details of a death row execution ("Better Off Dead"), the ability of the White America to stop his crime spree when it moves to the

suburbs ("Amerikkka's Most Wanted"), or his detailed discussion of police relations with black men ("Endangered Species"), Cube understands the dynamics of power in institutional society. He recognizes that decisions are made by powers that directly effect inner-city America, and that currently there is little coordinated response from black, urban America with regards to opposing the structures and institutions which wield such clout.

13. White society is threatened by and retaliates to powerful and educated "nigga's."

Cube does offer the possibility for a more structured response from urban dwellers. For example, in the "Nigga Ya Love to Hate," Cube ponders the future "niggas decide to retaliate." He questions whether business radio executives would be more receptive to playing rap music, if hoards of folks turned off their radio ("Turn Off the Radio").

Throughout the album, Cube acknowledges the fear that he personally can cast in the dominant society. His ability to "kick the facts" and "open the eyes of each" is threatening. His ability to keep a weapon, even after whites pass tough new gun legislation since his "shit wasn't registered any fuckin' way" ("Nigga You Love to Hate"). His ability to "pay off the cops" if he is caught implying that the system can be beaten, is threatening. The Lench Mob's ability to "jack them nigga's for them Nissan trucks, right in the drive thru" at McDonald's, is threatening. Cube finds a variety of ways to fight back against a system he views as oppressive and unjust.

However, Cube recognizes that whites have the institutional power to counter any act of aggression. He knows that law enforcement stops boasting about his criminal activity, when it reaches the suburbs ("Amerikkka's Most Wanted"). He considers the

hopelessness of convincing a police officer that he "didn't know it was a crack house" ("Once Upon a Time in the Projects"), and he certainly understands that cops can kill, rob, torment, and harass his kind in an effort to advance their career.

14. White mainstream society does not care about/respect poor, urban America.

While not a direct statement on the albu'm, the underlying assumption that white society is responsible for the condition of urban America is repeatedly implied. When Cube discusses interactions with institutional power, he repeatedly points out that no one cares about his voice or his feelings. Usually these run-ins on the albums are with police officers ("Once Upon a Time"; "Endangered Species"), but in "The Nigga You Love to Hate," Cube talks more generally about attitudes in white America. Finally, the discussion of where crime is acceptable in "Amerikkka's Most Wanted," is a direct commentary on his belief that no one in power cares about poor, urban America. The same is true in the newscast prior to "Endangered Species," where Cube identifies that "no one one cared because the violence did not personally effect them."

15. The black middle class does not understand the condition of inner-city urban America.

On several occasions, Cube responds to the "charges" of the black middle class, often a target audience on the album. Usually, the black middle class is inquiring about Cube's behavior, asking why he engages in crime, in gangs, and will not support more mainstream approaches to social change. Cube is asked on the first song on the album, "The Nigga You Love to Hate" why he "ain't doing nothing positive for the black community?" His initial response is "If you don't like how I'm living, then fuck you!" However, over the course of the album he details his position. He discusses blacks that

are more interested in "freeing Africa" when conditions are not so good in America. He explains why he participates in gang and criminal activities, and why he feels that the black middle class has abandoned the cause of the inner city in their flight to the suburbs.

16. Values of dominant society are same as values of poor, urban America.

"Who's the Mack" demonstrates Cube's belief that the value systems which dominant society lives by and oppresses others by, is identical to the lack of values that many claim fail to exist in nihilistic urban America. George Bush is a "hustler," no different from Iceberg Slim. Cube sees the hustle in capitalism, in our form of democracy, and in how the institutions of the dominant society interact with others. Implicit is the notion that leaming to identify the hustle, understand the hustle, and resisting the hustle, is critical for personal advancement in society.

On Violence

17. Violence is an accepted part of inner-city life.

The rhetorical of violence Cube invokes continuously accepts violence as part of the way of life on the streets of urban America. Violence is a desensitized construct in the "hood" and Cube acknowledges, accepts, and participates in its promotion. However, as Potter argues, Cube does not only view the violent actions of urban Americans, he connects the acts of violence committed by the dominant society on this community. For example, Cube's discussion of police and black youth relations in "Endangered Species" speaks to blacks often being the target of violence.

18. Violence is a expected community response when community standards are breached.

Violence is always a morally acceptable option when the code of the streets—as identified by Cube throughout the album—is violated. Lying, deceit, acts of aggression, all ustifies a violent response in-kind in Cube's worldview. Beginning with a default mode of respect, Cube's rhetoric demonstrably articulates that a lost of respect, justifies the accepted response of the streets. The underlying assumption throughout Cube's rhetoric is that a violent response is always justified in self-defense, and violating one's respect is the ultimate form

While Cube always accepts violence as an optional response to a situation, many of his lyrics suggest that violence is a poor decision, primarily due to the potential consequences, not due to any moral imperative, When he is charged with fathering an illegitimate child, he considers "kick[ing] the bitch in the tummy," but decides that the consequence of being charged with premeditated murder was too high a cost. At the same time, Cube often promotes a violent response in extremely illogical situations as when he threatens white America with the ultimate drive-by. Cube says that he is going to open fire from his drop-top Brougham and "see who drops—the police, the media, the suckers that went pop." Later in the song, Cube's threat is that he is "psycho" and unwilling, perhaps unable, to make rational decisions, the "bitch-killer, cop-killer." Simultaneously in the same verse, Cube claims that he is feared because he can "talk shit" and "drop common sense [educate]." Implicit in Cube's rhetoric is that the combination of the oppositional attributes is the foundation for his claim as the "Nigga You Love to Hate."

The post-modem critics are correct in arguing that rap music, and specifically Gangsta rap is wrought with apparent contradictions and tensions. But to assume that no further meaning can be deciphered from these lyrics is erroneous. Understanding the purpose of a language choice, the motives underlying the verse, and what, if any, are other possibilities for interpretation, are all critical for scholarship to further it's understanding of rap music. As hypothesized, Cube's rhetorical strategies are aimed at a variety of purposes: creation and maintenance of identification with his audience via rituals; promotion of coordinated social action and established codes of conduct within the rap culture via myths; ana finally, describing and interpreting how those community standards are violated and what resolution occurs when this occurs.

Cube's voice is complex and to understand his message is to recognize his motivation. He utilizes rituals to improve cohesion with his audience; demands acknowledgement of those who support him and he supports in production of his cultural product; takes care to remain authentic to his primary audience; and engages in the process of signifying to help "create a style no one else can follow" as well as forcing those who receive his music to choose between literal and figurative meanings in his message. Identification and authenticity require Cube to sometimes send symbols that have tension with his message, but Cube's use of signifying—especially when he is proclaiming mastery of "talkin' shit" and "droppin' knowledge"—fosters creative methods of challenging those assumptions even within the context of the same album. So the violent, racist, sexist, and heterosexist charges, of which Cube is accused, not evaluated in isolation of his direct countersymbols to "ism's" he allegedly reinforces. Finally, Cube forces receivers of his message to work at understanding his message.

Whether through signifying rhetorical strategies like: homonymic connections; metaphors; or contextual figurative logic, or just the imposition of street slang, Cube creates a security system of meanings. If you are unable to decode the system and set off the alarm, you run the risk of wholly misinterpreting what Cube has to say.

Chapter 5--Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and 2Pac

In 1993, 1994, and 1995, the top-selling rap music album was a Gangsta rap artist; with each album achieving one of the top five R&B albums in that given year. This chapter reveals via dramatistic analysis, the rituals, myths, and social dramas of Dr. Dre's, The Chronic, Snoop Doggy Dogg's, Doggystyle, and 2Pac Shakur's, It's Me against the World. A general overview of the findings is first discussed, followed by more specific discussion of each album's results.

General Observations

Ice Cube demonstrated a high frequency of ritualistic activity over the course of the album. Ritual occurrence remains constant throughout examination of the other albums as well as with each album having multiple rituals in the majority of its songs. This examination does not count the number of times a ritual occurs within a song, but rather, whether each ritual is present in a particular song.

An inverse relationship between signifying and being real rituals is another general observation of the study. 2Pac's album has the least amount of signifying (33.3%), but occurrences of being real in each song. All of the others have very high degrees of signifying, with varying degrees of being real. Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Snoop Doggy Dogg all demonstrate being real occurrences in about 75% of their songs, while signifying is present in every song. In most instances, rap artist lyrics consciously choose between more real-life descriptive rituals against more farcical signifying, like those toasting or boasting about sexual prowess or lyrical competency.

However, the coding of violent signifying complicates the equation, sometimes resembling descriptions at "being real," especially when the rap artist is

predominately using authentic rituals and less s gnifying. The more a rap artist provides an autobiographical lyrical experience, the more difficult to differentiate when signifying occurs. For example, 2Pac's Me Against the Word describes when he was shot in 1994 and his threats of retaliation which pose interesting decisions for coding. Ultimately, the line of difference is drawn at descriptive versus proscriptive. The retaliation is still a threat, and as such the meaning is unclear, the content coded as violent signifying. The act of the shooting however describes a real-life event in the artist's life and thus demonstrates authenticity.

The majority of signifying can be classified along a continuum from "serious" to non-serious." Remarks about lyrical excellence (often violent in content but with clear references to lyrical violence) and sexual exploits are often light-hearted and less intense. On the other hand, violent signifying stemming from personal life experiences depict a larger realism and intensity. Just as Potter recognizes that non-listeners often mistake signifying in literal ways, this essay contends that as the stories become more personal, the more difficult it is to determine the literalness of the meaning, whether a follower of the music or not. The contextual figurative logic that worked in the analysis of Ice Cube is complicated when the stories become more personal. Why would one assume necessarily that 2Pac is not serious about his threats of retaliation, given in real life he has recently been shot and charges other rap artists with the shooting? Critics must first address the ievei of' reaiism depicted in the storytelling and determine the seriousness ot verbal threats before making other assessments about the lyrics. Failure to do so further facilitates the mistaking of meaning.

As Ice Cube gravitated towards endorsement and development of a particular mythology, so did each of the other rap artists. Both Dr. Dre and Snoop embrace the "G" persona, an "old school" Gangsta that confon-ns more closely to the pimp/player mythology than to the gangsta/thug mythology. 2Pac centers his discussion around living the "thug-life," where he emphasizes not a particular gang or affiliation, but rather, a mentality of a group that 2Pac turned to where he found "love" when he had felt he had no where else to turn. Each mythology incorporates bits and pieces from all the mythologies, but each is distinct in that they focus on a particular aspect of the myth. The increasing personalization of the rituals also influenced the direction of myth making in the music. For example, the myth building of 2Pac is difficult to ground given the focus on real-life personal experiences. In other words, where Cube used real life experiences as a starting point for formulating elaborate myths, 2Pac's rhetorical strategies are more firmly rooted in reality and the myths are less exaggerated than Cube's vision of attacking white America. in a drive-by. Dr. Dre and Snoop fall somewhere in between, focusing some on exaggerated signifying and myths, but also some attempts at more realistic portrayals of life experiences in Compton, California.

Dre and Snoop rely on a fairly consistent worldview portrayed in their drama's, as "G's" displaying their power in a variety of situations, often by finding an enemy and attacking her or him. 2Pac plays out a different social drama's in a many contexts, often focusing on the reasons, which explain his nature and why he makes the choices, he makes. bui similar to ice Cube, a discussion of the motives underlying the dramatic context of the other artist's work, uncovers a pattern of assumptions that often appear to lie in contradiction. Unlike Cube's work, sometimes those apparent tensions do not find

resolution quite as easily over the course of the album. The following analysis of the rituals of each album, myths, and social drama attempts to ground these observations with warrants for the claims.

Dr. Dre's The Chronic and Snoop Doggy Dogg's Doggystyle

Ice Cube and Dr. Dre were a part of one of rap's early Gangsta groups, "Niggaz Wit Attitude" (NWA). Cube left the group after two successful albums with NWA, allegedly over financial concerns. Dre left as well, citing similar concerns, although his departure was marked by an incident where he had to threaten the group's founder, Eazy-E, with a baseball bat, to be released from his contract. Whereas Cube primarily wrote for NWA, Dre produced most of the music, originally a DJ by trade. While Dre occasionally rapped on NWA projects, he did so sparingly. On his first solo project, while he does a significant amount of lyrical work, he still envisions his primary role as a producer (comparing himself to Quincy Jones in terms of album production style). To that end, he invites many others to perform lyrically on his album. One of those performers is Snoop Doggy Dogg, whose first solo album, Doggystyle, is produced by Dr. Dre. The result is that both albums are very similar in content, and given they are performed by primarily the same personnel, less than a year apart, this study hypothesized that the dramatistic analysis of each would be quite similar. The results bear this out.

Dre's first solo effort, The Chronic, reached #2 on Billboard's year-end R&B charts. The Chronic refers to a type of marijuana, very potent and exclusively grown in Califomia—the "bomb" according to Dr. Dre. Dre is direct about pot's role in the culture of inner-city youth and raps often about the "party" as a centerpiece of existence in the

ghetto. But the hidden symbolism is Dre's use of The Chronic to represent his musical "skillz." He uses content of his lyrics in large part to gain authenticity with his target skillz." He uses content of his lyrics in large part to gain authenticity with his target audience.

Stylistically, there are a couple of significant differences between Cube and Dre. Narrative stories throughout an entire song represent a large amount of work on the Amerikkka's Most Wanted album, however, Dr. Dre often addresses a variety of topics over the course of a particular song. Nonetheless, themes are evident over the course of the album. One of the most significant themes for Dre, apparent in almost every song, is a signifying retaliation response against others who Dre feels has disrespected him in a variety of contexts.

A year later, Snoop unveiled his first solo project produced by Dre, Doggystyle. The album landed at number one on Billboard's R&B charts in 1994 and sold several million copies. Given that The Chronic and Doggystyle use the same personnel and are only a year apart in production, the following discussion is primarily of The Chronic. The results section cites Doggystyle when salient similarities and/or distinctions occur between the two productions. While the album emphasizes very similar concepts as The Chronic, Snoop's solo effort does spend more time on the sexual politics between men and women.

Rituals

Musical and lyrical signifying is present in almost the entirety of Dre's album. in many ways, Dre uses his signifying boasts as proof of cohesion, instead of Cube's

methods of audience cohesion, rhetorical questions, and conversations. Dre stresses throughout that he brings better "beats" and music than all the rest. Dre knows and acknowledges repeatedly that the best, sell the most, and consequently, make the most 6 4ends" (money). Dre's production is replete with examples of group participation, as Snoop Doggy Dogg performs on ten of the sixteen tracks, and some group perfon-nance ritual occurs on all but one of the sixteen tracks (93.75%). Snoop claims lyrical supremacy in his signifying as well. On the other hand, only 12.5% of the tracks show evidence at audience cohesion via rhetorical question. Pglgystyle has group participation on every track and limits audience cohesion efforts to 37.5% of the total production.

Audience Cohesion

While there are several conversations on Dre's album, only two selections create cohesion through rhetorical questioning of the audience. "The day that Niggaz took Over" begins by announcing:

> If you ain't down for the Africans here in the United States. Period. Point_blank. If you ain't down for the ones that's suffering in South Africa from_ apartheid and shit. Then damn it, you need to step your punk-ass to the side_ and let us brothers and us Africans step in and put some foot in that ass...
>
> Chorus: Break 'em off something (repeated several times)
>
> Chorus: I've got my finger on the trigger. Some nigga's wonder why, but_ living in the city is do-or-die.

A rap talking about the mentality of folks during the L.A. riots is heard in the background, followed by a newscast describing the riots. The chorus repeats, The

question asked is "How many niggas are ready to move? Yea, what you wanna do?" A sample of KRS-one says, "Got myself an ozzie and my brother a nine." Yet another in sample addressing the Rodney King verdict says, "That's what they told us today, ' other words, you're still a slave. No matter how much money you got, you still ain't shit." The song proceeds to discuss a very different vision of the conflict in L.A. Dre speaks positively of the communion between different gang affiliations and how blacks came together during to fight the system. The narrative continues, implying the success of fighting the system through Robin Hood types of crime and violence.

The other example of rhetorical questioning occurs in, "Lil Ghetto Boy," where Dre describes life in the streets for a young person growing up in the street life. After Snoop offers an example of an eighteen year-old in prison on a murder charge, thinking through the implications for his life, the refrain begins. Ultimately the question for the audience is, "Lil'ghetto boy. Playing in the ghetto streets. What'cha gonna do when you grow up, and have to face responsibility?" In the second verse, a young gangsta recently out ofjail decides to resume his money-making strategies on the streets. After" ganking" (stealing) a boy for his ends (money), he is fatally shocked to see the young gangster response by pulling out a weapon and opening fire. Before the chorus, he resigns, "I guess that's what I get (for trying) to jack those little homies for their bread." The final verse acknowledges why the young gangsta's make the choices they do, but suggests they consider the implications of their actions, and take responsibility for those actions.

Both Dre and Snoop use conversations as a ritualistic technique to achieve audience cohesion. The introduction to Snoop's album entitled, "Bath-tube" begins with Snoop and a woman relaxing in a bathtub. A few of Snoop's friends unexpectedly drop

by when Snoop infon-ns G-dog that he is considering getting out of the rap game. "I'm about ready to give this shit up man, with motherfuckin law after me, punk-ass bitches, sucka-ass niggaz. I can't take this shit no more dogg" cries Snoop. G-dogg forcefully responds:

> What? Man you wanna get out the game, come on man.
>
> You can smoke a pound of bud everyday.
>
> You got a big screen TV. Man, you wanna give all this up?
>
> You got the dopest shit out on the streets!
>
> Nigga, is you crazy? That's the American Dream nigga!
>
> Well, ain't it?

The audience identifies with G-dog's insight when he says to Snoop that no matter how difficult his life as a rap artist may seem given his tribulations, the reality is that he is living the life to which others aspire. Dre and Snoop utilize conversations to contextualize their lives, offer insights into their perspectives, and provide humorous and dramatic introductions into the next selection.

Group Participation

Dre and Snoop entertain a large quantity of performers on these two productions. Dre acknowledges fifteen rap artists for performing on his album, and Snoop on all his tracks save two. The plethora of artists influences the production in several ways. First, a large amount of variety is in the album, regardless of musical context or creativity of lyrics. Additionally, Dre as a producer and owner of Death Row records is cultivating new talent by using his own celebrity status. Two songs on the "Chronic" and one on cc

"Doggystyle" illustrate this concept.

In "Lyrical Gangbang," Dre invites rappers: Kurupt, R13X, Rage, Snoop, and D.O.C. to speak of their prowess on the mike. The rest of the song is a signifying to Death Row records and how any attempt to challenge Death Row's lyrical homocide. The song weaves in and out of violent references that at times have direct references to rhyming battles and at other times does not. In the following track, "High-Powered," Dre introduces each artist and signifies on their abilities. A second Dre production, "Stranded on Death Row," uses the same Death Row artists—in addition to Bushwick Bill, with signifying on Death Row artists as the topic of choice. The metaphor of being stranded on death row facilitates a violent comparison to the power of the artist's lyrics:

> Yes..yo..I'm in da house now for sure...
>
> Because I wanna talk about the hearts of men ...
>
> Who knows what evil lurks within them.
>
> But let's take a travel down the blindside...
>
> And see what we find down this path ... called ...
>
> Stranded on Death Row,
>
> So duck when i swing my shit.
>
> I get rugged like Rawhead Rex,
>
> Wrecked with fat tracks that fit
>
> The gansgta type, what I recite's kinda lethal.
>
> Niggaz know the flow that I kick, there's no equal.
>
> I murder a nigger, yo,

And maybe because of the tone they kicks

When I grips the mike,

And kick shit niggaz can't fuck wit.

Bushwick Bill's ability to flow in and out of the metaphor, even when some of the verses appear nonsensical, is critical to the "flow" of the lyrical content, one of the styles which "no one else can follow." The negative connotations of being stranded on death row are repositioned as strength and power in one's ability to murder opposing rappers via signifying on the Death Row label.

Signifying

The most popular songs on Dre and Snoop's chart-topping albums are signifying tales, exacting revenge on those who "broke the code," or simple boasts establishing Dre and Snoop as the preeminent rap artists of the day. The introduction, "The Chronic (Intro)" is almost a negative "dedication" to Easy-E and NWA's former manager, where Snoop graphically signifies in similar fashion. The introduction devotes the album to the "niggaz that was down from day one." Nevertheless, after a quick signifying boast about Death Row, the remainder of the track challenges others who want to test Death Row. Snoop issues a challenge before going into a sexual tirade about Eazy-E. He points out that the Death Row crew is protected by "Niggaz wit' big dicks, AK's, and 187 skillz. So if you must test us, then we can handle it in the streetz. Fuck making records."

The second track, "Fuck Wit Dre Day," is a response record to several rap artist's that Dre has had prior run-in's with. The first victim, "Easy-E," is attacked over issues relating to the formation of NWA and the side-deal business arrangements that Easy set

up apart from the group. Dre. uses the full range of signifying mechanisms employing similes and metaphors like, "Your dick on 'hard' from fucking your own dogs." He uses homonymic connections like, "Stompin' on the EZ-est streets that you can walk on," and contextual figurative logical statements like, "Used to be my hommie; Used to be my ace, Now I want to slap the taste out-cha mouth.

The majority of insults relate to sexual imagery. Fucking over your friends or being fucked as an act of weakness for example is repeatedly used throughout the song. Gay sexual acts are also represent "weakness" and are used often in these battles. In the second verse, Snoop attacks East Coast rap artist Tim Dogg, who has made several tirades against West Coast rap artists, using sex taunts, framed in a "people as dogs" metaphor, as his primary weapon:

> The sounds of a dog brings me to another day.
>
> Play with my bone would you Timmy!?!
>
> It seems like you're good_ for making jokes about your Jimmy
>
> [penis].
>
> Well here's a Jimmy joke about your momma
>
> That you might not like;
>
> I heard she was a Frisco Dike!
>
> But fuck your momma.
>
> I'm talking about you and me--
>
> Toe to toe
>
> Tim M-U-T

Your bark was loud,

But your bite wasn't vicious.

And them rhymes your were kicking

Were quite booty-licious.

You get with Doggy Dogg—

"Oh is he crazy"

With your mamma and your daddy hollerin',

"Baby."

So what that let you know?

That if you fuck with Dre, Nigga,

You fuckin'with Death Row!

And I ain't even swingin' them things.

I'm hollerin' " 1-8-7 "

With my dick in your mouth, Bitch!

Again, use of gendered and heterosexist terminology is used to define Tim-Dog as less than a man. Finally, the dog metaphor is important as it develops as Snoop's persona. Signifying on his person as a dog, Snoop continues a mythology grounded in the music of funkateer George Clinton, whose song, "Atomic Dog," was a black party anthem from the late seventies until today. Clinton's metaphor recast dogs as the animal who chased the "cat," referring to woman. The cat reference is grounded in the gendered association of cat to pussy, with men as the dog. Snoop's crew is the Dogg Pound, who later releases a solo project, and in Snoop's first solo video, "What's My Name," the characters transfon-n between people and dogs over the course of the song.

Snoop defines his character in the track on his album, "What's My Name," where He reveals his rhetorical power through signification, introducing his presence as a solo artist:

> From the depths of the sea, back to the block
>
> Snoop Doggy Dogg, Funky, yes but of the Doc
>
> Went solo on that ass, but it's still the same
>
> Long Beach is the spot where I served my cane
>
> Follow me, follow me, follow me, follow me, but don't lose your grip
>
> Nine-trizzay's the yizzear for me to fuck up shit
>
> So I ain't holdin nuttin back
>
> And motherfucker I got five on the twenty sack
>
> It's like that and as a matter of fact [rat-tat-tat-tat]
>
> Cuz I never hesitate to put a nigga on his back
>
> [Yeah, so peep out the manuscript
>
> You see that it's a must we drop gangsta shit]
>
> What's my motherfuckin name?

Snoop's creation of a "style no one else can follow" is grounded in homonymic connections as he uses a variety of word devices to take (create) and mistake meanings. For example, he has created a "pig-latin" language structure by introducing "z's" into words, as above in "Nine-trizzay's the yizzear for me to fuck up shit." Another rhetorical device utilized by Snoop is repetition over the course of an album, even multiple albums. Several phrases and verses are repeated on a variety of songs, creating stronger identification. Snoop also tinkers with pronunciation of words to create easily

recognizable pop street culture. "Beeeeeeetcyh," "I don't love 'dem hoes," or "It's like that and it's a matter ot'fact" are just a tbw phrases often repeated by Snoop followers.

Finally, all of the signifying on these two albums is not negative. "Nuttin' But a "G" Thang" is a positive boast record that shows off the lyrical skills of Dre and Snoop discussing topics ranging from using contraception during sex to the ride you embark on as a result of the "dope" lyrics and beats. Snoop proclaims that he is, "Gettin' funky on the mike like an old batch o' collard greens!"

Being Real

Dre and Snoop symbolize realness by emphasizing the less serious nature of the streets: the party, the escape. While these artists certainly speak to the dangers of street life, Dre and Snoop recognize that much of the camaraderie in the hood, occurs in social settings. Dre's, "Let Me Ride" and Snoop's, "Gin and Juice," reveal their penchant for discussing realness in the context of "a day in the hood."

Snoop discusses the late nightlife of a rhyme artist in "Gin and Juice." The mellow chorus says, "Rollin down the street, smokin indo, sippin on gin and juice. Laid back. With my mind on my money and my money on my mind." Snoop details a tradition of any party with relatively poor folks—whether in the hood or undergraduates at the University of Kentucky; acknowledging that:

> Now, that, I got me some Seagram's gin
>
> Everybody got they cups, but they ain't chipped in
>
> Now this types of shit, happens all the time
>
> You got to get yours but fool I gotta get mine

Everything is fine when you listenin to the D-0-G

I got the cultivating music that be captivating he

who listens, to the words that I speak

As I take me a drink to the middle of the street

Although Dre and Snoop do not focus on the harder edge of "realness," they certainly incorporate the possibilities of conflict into their discussions. In "Let Me Ride," Dre talks about a day spent riding in his '64 Chevy, and talks about the ever present possibility of someone trying to "jack" him. He talks about how envy and the gangbang mentality create a dangerous environment, even for those not participating in the gang lifestyle. For Dre, he must always be prepared and superior to stay alive, even when he's relaxing. The concerns over safety, the motivations of others, and Dre's resolve, are integrated into a blend of lyrical signifying which identifies the realness of a rap artist trying to exist in the streets:

check this out

The sun went down when 1 hit Slausson

on my way to the strip

Now I'm just flossin

check in my rear-view

'cuz Niggaz they will do

jack moves

black fools

'cuz i smack fools

Try to set me up for a two-eleven

Fuck around and get caught up in a one-eight-seven

but i don't represent no gangbang

some Niggaz like lynchin'

but i just watch them hang

so on, and so-on

Why don't you let me roll on

I remember back in the dayz when I used to have to get my stroll on

Didn't nobody wanna speak

now everybody peepin' out they windows

when they hear me beatin' up the streets

is it dre?

is it Dre?

that's what they say

every single motherfuckin day

yo, but i ain't trippin' i'm just kickin' it

while my deez keep spinnin' and these hoes keep grinin'

For Dre and Snoop, the reality of being a celebrity but still having a desire to associate with the street-life so much a part of their existence produces an authenticity that can be communicated. This symbolism has the similar effect that Cube was striving for: making the artist appear the same, but yet different from the audience. In Snoop's "Serial Killa," the Dogg Pound also raps about the challenge of celebrity and the possibility that jealously and envy produce vengeful "niggaz." The crew signifies that any

effort at taking on the Pound is akin to committing suicide.

Myths

Dre and Snoop heavily rely on the gangsta mythology, and often refer to the "G." An "O.G." is an original gangsta, respected for his or "tier length of time "in the game," and they describe their music as the beginning of the "G-funk" era. Dre and Snoop strongly ground the "G" in the gangsta/pimp/player/hustler/nigga mythology of the blaxploitation genre of the seventies. As did Cube, the three different mythologies are invoked at various times, but the distinctions within songs are less distinct. Consequently, I disscuss the rhetorical use of the "G" and the implications for the other types of mythologies.

Dre embraces a gangsta mythology, in part, due to the necessity of his celebrity. As discussed previously in rituals, Dre's celebrity and desire to continue to associate in the "hood" creates an ironic situation. In a "Nigga witta Gun," Dre outlines the reasons his celebrity forces him to carry a weapon.

> 44 reasons come to mind
>
> Why you muthafuckin'brothas hard to find.
>
> He be walkin' on the streets and fuckin' with mine.
>
> Stupid punk can't fuck with a mastermind.
>
> See 1 never take a step on a Compton block
>
> Or LA without the AK ready to pop.
>
> 'Cause them punk muthafuckas in black and white
>
> Ain't the only muthafuckas I gots to fight.

I think it's better to retellin' the facts than cuffed up

And jacked and fucked up.

What you niggas lookin at? You do in...

Goddanm, 'cause it's the city.

And for a youth to survive a nigga gotta be a gangster.

And I'm a nigga you can't remove.

Dre argues that the gangsta persona is justified for anyone black youth living in urban America. The jealously and envy of other "niggaz" is countered in the mythology by the raw power of Dre's weaponry and his cunning. Further development of the argument is found in the introduction to Dre's "Rat- ta-tat-tat" begins with the "voice of reason" challenging the gangsta mythology. A voice says, "you really don't understand do you? Hey man, don't you knowin order for us to make this thing work, we gotta get rid of the pimps, and the pushers, and then start all over again clean..." The response is short but decisive, "Niggaz is you Crazy!" Dre and Snoop then embark on various examples demonstrating the need for a gangsta mentality in the streets.

In Doggystyle's "Murder Was the Case" employs the myth making of the "G" to illustrate a fantasy narrative for those choosing the gangsta lifestyle. In the introduction, Snoop is gunned down by some jealous homies in a random act of violence. The narrative begins with Snoop praying and making a deal to "save his life":

As I look up at the sky

My mind starts trippin, a tear drops my eye

My body temperature falls

I'm shakin and they breakin tryin to save the Dogg

Pumpin on my chest and I'm screamin

I stop breathin, damn I see deamons

Dear God, I wonder can ya save me

I can't die -Boo—Boo's bout to nave my baby

I think it's too late for prayin, hold up

A voice spoke to me and it slowly started sayin

"Bring your lifestyle to me I'll make it better"

How long will I live?

"Eternal life and forever"

And will I be, the G that I was?

"I'll make your life better than you can imagine or even dreamed of

So relax your soul, let me take control

Close your eyes my son"

My eyes are closed

Snoop makes a miraculous recovery and the consideration on the deal has begun. In verse two, the rebirth of Snoop is complete, along with the promise of a better life, but the voice from the first verse wams Snoop not to get overzealous. The voice reminds Snoop, "Just remember who changed your mind. 'Cuz when you start set-trippin', that ass mine." Greed gets the best of Snoop, he admits, as he strives for more, more, more. The last verse details Snoop's trip to prison and his subsequent untimely violent death, a direct result of his violation of the agreement. The moral of the fable is about greed and remembering one's priorities.

In "Gz and Hustlers," Snoop sends a tribute out to those living the gangsta lifestyle, primarily signifying on his abilities as a rap artist. The introduction begins with a teacher asking his students what they want to be when they grow up. The first two students respond, "a police officer" and "a fireman," to which the teacher responds are good professions. Finally, the teacher calls on the boy in the back with the french braids, Snoop. His response, "I wanna be a motherfuckin hustla, ya better ask somebody."

The "G" divides the world into niggaz and bitches, often used repeatedly throughout the lyrics, and "real niggaz" don't care about a bitch, according to Snoop in "Gzs Up, Hoes Down." Snoop's mythology of the "G" as an old school gangsta of the seventies certainly includes the persona of the "pimp" at times where at others, he seems to create an equality between "bitches and niggaz." For example, he repeatedly claims that he does not "love 'dem hoes" and that "bitches ain't shit." Often the context of the discussion however, relates to the street rules of pimping. In a scene based on the blaxploitation movie, "The Mack," Snoop is speaking to a woman, who walks away when another man starts yelling. Snoop replies, "You know the name of the game, your bitch chose me. Nigga, we can handle this like some gentlemen or we can get into some gangsta shit." The introduction of "Gzs up, hoes down" ends with Snoop shooting the other pimp who continues to challenge the rapper.

Conversely, Snoop also tributes his peeps (people) in "For All My Niggaz and My Bitches," where his lyrics treat the two groups very similarity. The chorus refrains, "To all my niggaz and my bitches and my bitches and my niggaz, raise your motherfuckin hands in the air! And if you don't give a shit, like we don't give a shit, keep your motherfuckin hands in the air!" Snoop sings verses targeted to both males and females,

including raps from male and female members of the Dogg Pound, reminding them to "peep [see] the murderous styles and the poetical techniques."

Dre and Snoop's use the "G" mythology indirectly, to tribute the musical acts and style of the blaxploitation era. In "Doggy Dogg World," the musical group, THE Dramatics, sing the chorus. The video calls on many of the actors and actresses of the genre, and Snoop portrays a "big ol' pimp." The owner of the small nightclub introduces Snoop and the Dramatics as "having something old and new for your asses." Signification of the historical of the blaxploitation era occurs repeatedly in the music of Dre and Snoop.

Snoop and Dre make limited use of the revolutionary nigga as constructed by Ice Cube. In "The Day the Niggaz Took Over," Dre speaks of the events in Los Angeles, as a response to the Rodney King verdict, and visualizes a world where niggaz successfully mobilized and fought back against the system. The song exclaims, "Me not out for peace, me not Rodney King. Me gun goes click, me gun goes bing." Dre describes how the verdict made him feel, explains the dynamics which began the riot, and notes that the riots are only the beginning if niggaz mobilize.

Social Dramas

Examination of the social drama aspects in Dre's and Snoop's music requires further understanding since they are less mono-thematic than Cube. A song may have verses which cover a variety of topics, similar to Cubes, Amerrikkka's Most Wanted. However, as in the case with Cube, an overriding theme can be discerned from the lyrics. Dre and Snoop often tell narratives in the first person, and in some songs like "Lil Ghetto

Boy," they move in and out of the first person. Creation of a narrative that sounds like the artists are talking about themselves is challenged in the chorus, which shows the lyrics are rhetorically questioning the decisions of ghetto street youth.

Social Drama's in The Chronic and Doggystyle
Table 2

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
The Chronic (Intro)	Dedication to friends; challenge to foes who have betrayed/attacked Dre	Friends are accepted; foes rejected	Undying Loyalty for friends	Death and harassment to foes
Fuck Wit Dre Day	Dedication to friends; challenge to foes who have betrayed/attacked	Friends are accepted; foes rejected	Undying Loyalty for friends	Death and harassment to foes
Let Me Ride	Foes challenge Dre. Supremacy of Dre. as raper, gangsta and sexual being	Accepted/Rejected	Others (male/fremale) want to hang (ride) with Dre because he's so great	Only fools challenge Dre. He will win.
The Day that Naggax took Over	Structure oppresses black America. Who is ready to take action?	Complicity to condiiton is rejected	Coming together of oppressed to fight the system equals success.	Blames whites for condiiton. Also blames those complicit through inaction. Purification through justification of riot actions in response to injustice.
Nuttin' but a G Thang	Snoop and Dre are the "best" in a variety of contexts.	It is rejected by some that Snoop/Dre are the best. Being the best means constant challenges that must be responded to.	Snoop and Dre must constantly demonstrate their superiority to fend off foes.	Others are "weak"
Deez Nuts	Snoop and Dre (and Dogg Pound) signify that they are the best in variety of contexts.	Rejection	Testicles used as symbol of power. Warning to those wanting to challenge Dre. and his posse.	You can't challenge Dre. Chorus repeats: "I can't be faded, I'm a nigga from the mutherfuckin' streets."

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
Lil Ghetto Boy	Condiitons and life in the ghetto for a child and the harsh realities of becoming an adult.	Acceptance of those conditions, although rejection is pondered and discussed via iron/satire.	Purification lies in the recognition of the fait accompli of the Lil ghetto boy's life to the game.	
A Nigga with a Gun	Disagreements handled through display of violence. Gun is ultimate power in streets.	Acceptance that one must fight to survive. Others trying to earn respect through the challenge. Reject: those who talk but don't act.	Others differentiate between those who act and those who talk about action.	
Ra Tat Tat Tat	Death Row are murderers. Betrayal, dishonestly results in violence	Rejection		No hesitation to use violence as solution to problems.
The $20 Sack Pyramid	A gameshow in the "hood". Satires a variety of issues.	Accept. A gameshow made for the enjoyment of those living the Gangsta/Drug lifestyle.		
Lyrical Gangbang	Superiority of Death Row. Threat to those wanting to challenge DR.	Reject	Challenging DR is futile.	
High-Powered	Many speaking against Dre/Gangsta Rap	Rejection	DR will responded: lyrically or violently	
The Doctor's Office	Dre having sex in his "doctor's office" Patients in line to have sex with him.	Accepted that all the women want Dre sexually.		
Stranded on Death Row	DR are best lyrically. Metaphors of violence to rapping. Threat to challengers.	Rejection. Stranded is ironic. Only the best are "stranded" on DR.	Dre and his crew are lyrically superior to others. DR rap artists are "lyrical murderers" condemned to DR	
The Chronic Roach	Use of chronic is part of daily life. Metaphor confuses pot with lyrics.	Accepted. Lyrics are the chronic. Assumed that the chronic is the best dope and Dre's lyrics are the		

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
		chronic.		
Bitches Ain't Shit	Sexual acts are a "bitches" purpose. "Bitches" will betray "niggaz". Will use sex as weapon	Accept/Reject. Narratives told about several sexual episodes.	Don't get angry when betrayed. Reaons to not love "dem hoes." Better to not care. Don't get emotional.	
Bathtub	Snoop considers leaving the game.	Accept. Friend convinces him that game is the "American Dream."		
G Funk Into	Life of a "Dogg" Analogy of a "nigga" with a dog.	Accept. A dog's life is a good one.		
Gin & Juice	Party at Snoop's house Narrative about "house" parties.	Accept. Lifestyle is sex, pot and drinking Gin and Juice.		
Tha Shiznit	Discusses past life as a "G", robbing and crime, and current life, as a rapper. Some may underestimate Snoop.	Reject.	Others want to hang with Snoop because he is the best.	Snoop still tough. Foes will be destroyed.
Lodi Dodi	Tribute (remake) of old rap song. Narrative fairy-tale.	Accept. Invokes signifying of several song lyrics, melodies, in a street narrative about crackheads.		
Murder Was the Case	Snoop given 2nd chance at life and betrays his spiritual promise to reform.	Reject.	Narrative about ultimate demise when Snoop betrays his spiritual conselor.	
Serial Killa	Gang banging and violence is a part of life for a real "G" Many challenge the Dogg Pound	Accept.	Taking on DP is a "suicide".	
Who Am I	Describes the essence of the Snoop. Narrative about his life and lyrical "skillz"	Accept. Others can't challenge Snoop.		
For All My Niggaz	Dogg	Accept/Reject.	Challenge Death	

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
and My Bitches	Pound/Snoop are the best.	Wave your hands if you are one of Snoop's niggaz or bitches.	row is fatal.	
Ain't No Fun	"Bitches" should be shared throughout the "crew." Dogg Pound doesn't care about women.	Accept/Reject.	If your "easy", then you can't be respected and consequently a "bitch" or "ho". Role of women is sex. Should not be paid.	
Doggy Dogg World	Snoop tribute to old school. Sings with Dramatics. Others stealing Snoop's style.	Tribute of older artists is accepted. Challenges to Snoop is rejected.		Others need to recognize it's a Dog-eat-Dog world and Snoop is biggest Dogg.
Gz and Hustlers	Some choose to live street-life. Tribute to hustlers and Gs.	Accept.	Snoop is best.	
18 Pump Pump	Community rules. When violated, are settled in violence.	Reject	Snoop and crew will settle disputes through violence.	

On Authenticity

1. Dre and Snoop are more than just "niggaz," but lifestyle choices force sameness.

Dre and Snoop talk about their ability to hang out in the hood, while readily recognizing how status sets them apart from the community in which they participate. Repeated acknowledgements of how jealously and envy force the rap artists to stay prepared for conflict at all times, reinforce notions of exception. The rappers acknowledge their ability to live by the "street code" equally as well as their ability to make "dope raps." While the rappers identify similarities, Snoop and Dre are quick to point out that they are superior at the street life, deterring challengers from perceiving that the celebrities are not tough enough to handle the harsh realities of the ghetto. And even when Snoop is just relaxing with friends, he still identifies that his celebrity makes

him a little different. In "Gin and Juice" for example, he ponders the drinking situation where he alone purchases the alcohol, but yet, everyone brings a cup and is eager to drink. He accepts this role, but signifies on it.

2. Signifying challenges gain authenticity.

Snoop and Dre talk trash in a non-serious, yet serious way. The object of the verbal assault is usually targeted for a particular reason, often relating to real life occurrences in the lives of the artists. Yet, much of the barrage is exaggerated and humorous, although offensive to many. Gendered accounts of the target as weak, via sexist or homophobic language choices are the primary tool of attack. Dre's contract problems with Eazy-E, evoked the song, "Fuck Wit Dre Day," where Dre retaliates with numerous insults ranging from his inability to fight and consequently to protect himself, to repeated identifications of Eazy with gay lifestyles and cultures.

Attacks such as these via signifying, invoke the subject in a satirical way, but serve notice to the public that Dre is willing to publicly challenge opponents. At the same time, Dre offers proof that he has "styles that no one else can follow," which in and of themselves, promote authenticity to the audience. Additional authenticity is proclaimed by challenges to take the conflict beyond the lyrical stage, or "to the streets." In "The Chronic (Intro)," Snoop says that, "so if its a must you test us, we can handle in the streets nigga. Fuck makin' records!"

3. First person narratives create authenticity.

Given that signifying is premised on the mistaking of meaning, narratives developed in the first person create further chaos in understanding, but more importantly,

create a unique identification with the audience actually involved in the stories being told in the narratives. If the young street "G's" referred to by Dre and Snoop in "Lil Ghetto Boy," identify with the characters played by the artists, a higher level of being real has been established with that community. And if that identification is established, the rappers have a higher probability of communicating the message in the chorus, a rhetorical question of the consequences of living the gangsta lifestyle.

On Community Issues

4. Roles defined by seventies sub-genre of movies called "Blaxploitation."

Dre and Snoop's vision of the "hood" revolves their myth-making and reverent signifying of the pimp and hustler culture of the seventies. Sampling movie lines from blaxploitation films, enactment of pimp narratives, and recasting the gangsta persona as part of the "old school" culture, Snoop and Dre idolize these roles of street mythology. As previously discussed, "Doggy Dogg World" is a tribute to the culture, and much of Dre and Snoop's music superimposes the "G" into present day situations. The gangsterism values of the seventies are brought into the nineties.

5. Crime, violence justified by lack of material wealth.

"The Day Niggaz took Over" reveals Dre's position on the violence in Los Angeles. A violent response was justified for more reasons than just the verdict, and he defends the criminal activity of the riots as a direct result of the life chances offered for socioeconomic disadvantaged youth living in the inner-city. Again telling the story in the first person, Dre describes the anger and frustration he felt as the events unfolded offering rationalizations for why the robbing and violence occurred.

Narratives told in the first person like "Lil Ghetto Boy" and "Murder was the case" make subtle social statements about the consequences of engaging in the life of a "G." Neither song admonishes youth for living the street lifestyle, but is quick to point out the negative consequences of such endeavors, although acceptance of the destiny for youth as a result of the institutionalized nature of the structure seems implicit in the lyrics.

6. Marijuana use accepted and defended throughout albums.

With a marjuana plant on the front cover, and with an album entitled, The Chronic (a form of pot), both Dre and Snoop repeatedly identify and glorify smoking marijuana. Although harder drugs are treated much differently throughout the albums—accepted as a way of making money, but discussed as having many negative consequences—Dre and Snoop positively signify on marijuana as part of the culture in the streets. References to chronic, blunts (smoking pot in a cigar), joints (marijuana rolled in cigarette papers), and other pot-smoking devices (bongs, for example), occur throughout the album.

On Gender/Sexuality Issues

7. Participation of the "Lady of Rage" in Dogg Pound.

As Ice Cube introduced Yo-Yo as part of his crew, Snoop is quick to introduce the "Lady of Rage" as part of his entourage, "the Dogg Pound." She is the first rap artists who sings on the album in the "G Funk-intro." Rage also raps several times on Dre's production as part of his Death Row label. Although Dre and Snoop repeatedly call women "bitches" and "ho's," no similar references are made to the female rap artist, nor at any point does her treatment seem exclusionary from the other rap artists on the Death

Row label or the Dogg Pound crew.

8. Men generally are referred to as "niggaz" and women are "bitches."

The apparent sexism of Dre and Snoop's rap lyrics are undeniable. However, without contextualizing the lyrics in reference to other language choices, the charges seem somewhat superficial. For example, the artists consistently refer to men as niggaz, without offering the empowered version of a nigga that Cube articulates. In other words, the sexism issues may revolve around Snoop and Dre's use of bitch and ho as they are juxtaposed with the use of the word nigga. If nigga is not used as an empowering term, does the role of self-deprecation impact assessments of male/female relations in the Snoop and Dre world?

The prime example of this comparison may occur in Snoop's song titled, "All My Niggaz and My Bitches," which is a positive signifying tribute to his people (his crew, his listeners). The entire Dogg Pound raps on the record, with the lyrics signifying on a variety of topics, ranging from how others cannot "step to" the rap artists to supremacy in lyrical abilities to smoking a joint. Rage challenges anyone tough enough to handle her talents on the microphone:

> Check it out, it's Rage, ready for the breakdown
>
> Take down, when it comes to the mic I'm puttin' my weight down
>
> And that's 175 pounds of beef
>
> Beatin yo' ass down to the concrete
>
> Fool, act like ya know
>
> I'm stranded on Death Row, with no where to go, so

What's a girl to do

Take out a crew, or two, a few, what you wanna do?

Rage's challenge is echoed throughout the song, but the verses have little to do with the chorus, other than to identify the Dogg Pound's supremacy over others. At one point, a voice says, "niggaz don't understand how we kick the flow" and as discussed before that verse concludes that we should, "Peep the murderous styles and the poetical techniques." The tribute, "To All My Niggaz and My Bitches" implies that those who "don't give a fuck" can be associated symbolically with the crew.

As far as gender relations in the song go, the terms nigga and bitch seem to apply to everyone, without much rationale as to context. Rap artist Kurupt identifies himself as a nigga that other nigga's cannot see, also telling anyone who approaches him that he will, "grab my strap then clear the comer, beeeeecth!" His associate, Daz, challenges niggaz who profess to be "Dogg's" and are "the shit" (the best), but in actuality are steadily "bitchin like hogs." He refers to these niggaz as "bitches" who must get "dick"? Clearly, the term bitch is juxtaposed in a power relationship with the stronger nigga, which gives dominates exchanges of sexual acts. But the gendered, power relationship is inverted when inherent in the discussion is that Rage is referred to as a "real niggaz" while men are referred to as "bitches." Although the context situates any women that the rap artists have sexual relations with as bitches, as well as weak men, the self-deprecation tendencies of the male rap artists to call themselves "niggaz," creates a hierarchy of subjugation. Whites are privileged to black males and selected black women (familial members, women rap artists), who are privileged to black women that male rap artists view as sexual beings. A stair step of oppressive behavior is created and attempting to

understand this phenomenon by excluding discussion of the top steps leaves any analysis lacking. While one could argue that lee Cube's empowerment view of "nigga" changes the staircase with black men on top, Snoop and Dre's use of the term does not attempt to empower the language. They continue to separate themselves as better niggaz than others, but little is done to attempt and empower a class of niggaz. The impact of self-deprecation perhaps, is that oppression by victims of oppression allows unique space for transformation and understanding in ways ignored in research on domination to date.

9.Use of "bitch" restricted to all men discussions.

What's interesting about the introduction to Dre's selection, "Deez Nutz," is how Snoop—who is having a conversation with a woman we presume is dating sexually—calls her a beeeeeeeteyh (bitch) while the phone is ringing, but does not use the name when speaking with her directly. Moreover, Rage is never referred to as a bitch, although she is referred to as a nigga. This selective engagement of apparent sexist language may connotate guilt, or perhaps Snoop and Dre recognize that the language choices are unacceptable in certain contexts, which opposes the constant theme that they "don't give a fuck" about what others think or feel.

On Race Relations

10. Little discussion of whites or race issues.

Snoop and Dre rarely discuss race issues directly in their lyrics, although the lone exception is Dr. Dre's "The Day Niggaz Took Over" when he relates his frustrations with conditions in Los Angeles and the Rodney King verdict. Generally, the omission contrasts with Cube's decision to focus directly on race relations in his lyrics. The

Burkean analysis concludes that this omission is tacitly acceptance of the way things are, focusing instead on social activities within the culture and socioeconomic conditions afforded people in the inner-city. Even the preponderance of signifying done by the rappers, fails to juxtapose their boasts with the broader white world, instead focusing on superiority and activities within the "hood." Cube on the other hand, often brought the two worlds together, through analogy and via direct confrontation. The decision to ignore white society implies a decision that the community lacks importance in the world of Snoop and Dre, even though their albums sell in large part to white teenage surburban youiti.

On Violence

11. Signifying violence lies at the heart of the lyrical content.

Identification with gangsterism as a violent world of guns, drive-bys, murder, and mayhem, best describes the stage that Snoop and Dre rely on for their dramatistic setting. Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest captures the lyrical reality embedded in the artist's discussion of celebrity, sexual relations, and lyrical supremacy. The majority of the rap album defends the "murderous styles and poetic techniques" as a "style no one else can follow," employing a consistent analogy to the violence of the America's ghettos. However, Snoop and Dre utilize the first person narrative and the violent context to describe a variety of situations and choices within the life of a young "G." The acceptance of violence as a normal condition within these lifestyle tests the civility of most human beings, but attempting to understand the nature it seems a precondition before one can consider methods for improving the conditions which gave rise to these

attitudes in the first place.

The dilemma posed by signifying as identified by Gates and Potter is exacerbated within this context, given the overwhelming consistency of the violent metaphors in describing every part of the gangster rappers existence. However, attempts at understanding the diverse messages uncovered in those lyrics reveals a commitment to some pedagogy, value imposition, and community standards, far removed from the dramatic setting employed by the artists.

12. Acceptance of violent nature of condition/Some visions of being victimized.

An occurring theme in the two albums is the notion that the life of a "G" is short and to live by the sword is to die by the sword." Clearly, Snoop and Dre begin to recognize the risks associated with the lifestyle and sometimes relate dream sequences of their own demise, even within the context of their boasts of street cleverness and power. The visions suggest a fear of the world in which they describe, while pointing towards a nihislitic belife that escaping from that world is not an option, even as one achieves celebrity. In "Murder Was the Case," Snoop uses the first person narrative to describe how gangsters fall prey to greed and ultimately, it leads to their demise. Dre identifies the failure of the "Lil Ghetto Boy" to find his way out of the ghetto, given the life chances he with which he beings.

The vision of social change inherent in Ice Cube's lyrics is lacking in an analysis of Snoop and Dre, who are more fatalistic in their approach to the life and conditions of the ghetto. These artists choose to accept the conditions rejected by Ice Cube, and subsequently discuss their life in the here and now, offering little possibility for transcending that lifestyle. Even in Dre's ray of hope, "The Day Niggaz Took Over," he

only discusses short term gains, like stealing a television or VCR, falling well short of Ice Cube's aspirations of changing the nature of society.

However, while generally accepting conditions of violence, Snoop and Dre often invoke their skillz of the streets, whether in a lyrical context or a realistic violent situation, to combat the randomness of their environment. Portraying themselves as superior niggaz with superior skillz, throughout most of their productions, Snoop and Dre convey a message that superior niggaz can be successful in their day-to-day street life existence. The ability to "win" against the conditions of the streets reifies the message that street existence can be dominated or control. In 1995, however, 2Pac challenges that notion of superiority.

2Pac's Me against the World

2Pac's Me against the World starkly contrasts from the earlier works analyzed, taking some rhetorical elements from Cube, Snoop, and Dre, but developing an album with more of a "day in the life" flavor to it. He speaks to his past, present, and future, in what appears to focus less on rituals like signifying and more on the realness of his day to day existence. His mythology envelopes not a revolutionary "nigga" like Cube, or the historical context of the Cube and Dre's, "G," but rather on his rather recent life as a "thug." He describes the real life social dramas in his life, and attempts to philosophize on his existence.

Rituals

Two types of rituals comprise the majority found in Me against the World, establishing audience cohesion via the use of rhetorical questions and conversations, and

descriptions of being real, discussing real events in his life. Unlike the other albums, 2Pac rarely refers to a particular crew, although several rap artist accompany him on various production tracks. Additionally, relative little signifying occurs on the album, and almost none at the beginning. The signifying that does occur is similar to Dre's confrontations with Easy-E and Luke from Two Live Crew, relating to real life occurrences. Generally, the difference is tone as 2Pac fails to exaggerate his signifying in tone, employing more subtle, albeit negative and disturbing, portrayals of others. He does occasionally signify in reverence, to his mother for example, but most of his raps are introspective and descriptive.) When denigrating others, the difference between 2Pac's raps, is that he continually focuses on the explanation for the denigration, and less on the denigration itself, giving reason to code phrases as "being real" as opposed to 44 signifying." Subsequently, the discussion of results emphasizes the two predominate rituals, audience cohesion and being real.

Audience Cohesion

2Pac develops audience cohesion primarily via the use of conversation and in part, through rhetorical questioning in his refrains. For example, he rhetorical ponders the meaning of his life in "If I die 2night." With a heavy emphasis on alliteration to help create 2Pac's, "style no one else can follow," he travels down a road of staccato length phrases, each offering a semblance of meaning, and each portraying a snapshot of his existence. The song begins with a sample demonstratively saying, "A coward dies a thousand deaths, A soldier dies but once." 2Pac begins:

They say pussy and paper is poetry power and pistols

Plottin on murderin motherfuckers 'fore they get you

Picturin pitiful punk niggaz coppin pleas

Puffin weed as I position myself to clock G's

My enemies scatter in suicidal situations

Never to witness the wicked shit that they was facin

Pockets is packed with presidents, pursue your riches

Evadin the playa hatin tricks, while hittin switches

Bitches is bad-mouth, cause ballin motherfuckers is bold

But y'all some hoes, the game should be sewed

I'm sick of psychotic society somebody save me

Addicted to drama so even mama couldn't raise me.

Even the preacher and all my teachers couldn't reach me

I run in the streets and puffin weed wit my peeps

I'm duckin the cop, I hit the weed as I'm clutchin my glock

Niggaz is hot when I hit the block, what if I die tonight

The song violently signifies on 2Pac's enemies and the continuing lifestyle he faces in having opponents. His existence as a "thug" is reduced to three issues: making money, having sex, and violence. 2Pac then embarks for the first time, on two common themes of the album, offering an explanation of why he has become what he is, as well as how he copes with the condition of his life. Finally, 2Pac continually questions throughout the album what does the future hold for a person like himself, often offering spiritual references. For example, "If I die 2nite" reveals in the third verse that 2Pac pursues the possibility for an afterlife given his lifestyle. He says, "Pray to the heavens

three-fifty-sevens to the sky. And I hope I'm forgiven for Thug Livin when I die. I wonder if heaven got a ghetto for Thug niggaz. A stress free life and a spot for drug dealers." Ultimately, we recognize that the conversation 2Pac has is in part, with himself as he tries to both understand and relate his existence on earth. He concludes by asking others not to grieve for him when he dies:

> Pistol whippin these simps, for bein petrified and lame
> Disrespectin the game, prayin for punishment and pain
> Goin insane, never die, live eternal, who shall I fear?
> Don't shed a tear for me nigga I ain't happy hear
> I hope they bury me and send me to my rest
> Headlines readin MURDERED TO DEATH, my last breath
> Take a look picture a crook on his last stand
> Motherfuckers don't understand, if I die tonight

2Pac recognizes that he often disrespects the "game" and subsequently he will pay for it, with his life. Examining the "insanity" of his actions, 2Pac reiterates his readiness to meet an early demise and desire to escape from his nihilistic existence. The rhetorical reality for 2Pac is that his death just will not be significant, and living 'ust is not worth the trouble.

In "Dear Mama," 2Pac writes a letter to his mother in the chorus, apparently from jail, while the verses contextualize their relationship. The chorus is simply 2Pac saying, "Dear Mama, You are appreciated." In the first verse, 2Pac looks back historically with a newfound appreciation, on his relationship with his mother:

When I was young me and my Mama had beef

Seventeen years old. Kicked out on the streets.

Though back at the time, I never thought I'd see her face.

Ain't a woman alive that could take my matna@s place.

Suspended from School. Seared ta go home. I was a fool.

With the Big Boyz, breakin'all the rules.

Had tears with my baby sister. Over the

Years we was poorer than the other little kids.

And even though we had different Daddy's, the same drama.

When things went wrong we'd blame Mama.

I reminisce on the stress I caused. It was hell.

Huggin' on my Mama from a jail cell.

And who'd think in elementary?

Heeey! I see the penitentiary!

One day, runnin' from the police... That's Right...

Mama catched me, put a whoopin' to my back side.

And even as a crack fiend, Mama,

You always was a black queen, Mama.

I finally understand,

For a woman it ain't easy tryin 'ta raise a man.

You always was committed.

A poor single mother on welfare... Tell me how ya did it.

There's no way I can pay ya back,

But the plan is ta show ya that I understand.

You are appreciated.

The third verse concludes 2Pac's tribute in which he salutes his mother for her efforts, and offers her a ray of hope with regards to her life and his.

Pour Out Some Liquor and I reminisce. 'Cause through the drama

I can always depend on my Mama.

And when it seems that I'm hopeless,

You say the words that can git me back in focus.

When I was sick as a little kid,

To keep me happy there's no limit to the things ya did.

And all my childhood memories

Are full of all the sweet things ya did for me.

And even though I act craaazy,

I gotta thank the Lord that cha made me.

There are no words that can express how I feel.

Ya never kept a secret, always stayed real.

And I appreciated how ya raised me.

And all the extra love that cha gave me.

I wish I could take the pain away.

If you can make it through the night there's a brighter day.

Everything will be alright if ya hold on.

It's a struggle everyday, gotta roll on.

And there's no way I can pay ya back.

But my plan is ta show ya that I understand.

You are appreciated.

2Pac's promise to his mother is simple, to show her that he "understands." The conversation creates a high level of audience cohesion by creating a conversation in a relationship that anyone can relate to at some level, especially in the predominately single-parent homes of urban black America. 2Pac utilizes his experiences and his thoughts, of his relationships in the creation of audience cohesion rituals, grounded in a descriptive reality which has as it's foundation, increasing understanding.

Being Real

First person narratives and newscasts are the primary tools 2Pac uses in establishing his "realness" to his audience. 2Pac's narratives are descriptive of his lifestyle as a "thug," providing detailed accounts of his existence, while the newscasts, primarily used in the introduction of the album, relate the spectacular experiences 2Pac has encountered in recent history.

The album begins with a series of newscasts describing events within 2Pac's life since 1994. In real life, 2Pac was shot six times in a recording studio, and charged with a variety of crimes, including the alleged shooting of two police officers (a case which was dropped) and his conviction on a sexual harassment case. Each are topics that 2Pac repeatedly addresses in the production. Over a slow rhythmic beat, a reporter notes that at "12:25 AM Wednesday, 2Pac was on his way to a Times Square building to an eighth

floor studio to record an album with another rapper. But in the lobby, 2Pac was shot six times, including two graze wounds to the head. 2Pac's lawyers said the attack appeared to be a set-up." A flurry of similar newscasts follow, discussing 2Pac's decision to leave the hospital against doctor's orders (he reenters a different hospital with higher levels of security), and the dismissal of assault charges for allegedly shooting two undercover police officers.

Cube, Dre, and Snoop tell some stories in the first person, which helps to establish authenticity. However, 2Pac's consistent use of first person narratives provides the feel that the entire production is an autobiography. From "If I Die 2nite" to Me against the World to "So Many Tears" (the first three tracks on the production, for example), every record consistently identifies 2Pac's life directly. Several songs are not first person narratives directly, but even when he discourages youth from street life ("Young Niggaz"), or his when he asks a woman that he is interested in, "Can U Get Away" from her relationship with an abusive partner, 2Pac utilizes first person conversations with the object of' the discussion. Other rhetorical styles not withstanding, the result is a very personal, intimate production uncovering the thoughts and emotions of a "thug.

Myths

The complexity and contradiction of 2Pac's existence is realized in his development of his primary mythology, the life of a thug. Over the course of an album, 2Pac reveals himself in a variety of ways, from killing another person without premonition, to showing concern with a woman being beaten by her boyfriend, to the paranoia surrounding about his very existence. It is impossible on this album to

encompass all the components that 2Pac says encompasses the nature of the thug, without reference to each and every song on the production. However, several themes begin to reveal themselves. Explanations of why society produces thugs and a vision of the future for a thug, are described in 2Pac's myth-building.

The nature of a thug as defined by 2Pac, rests on three considerations: the lack of love in the home, the perceived lack of opportunity, and the desensitization of youth to violence. Each condition creates the motivation for youth to explore finding fulfillment in the gang style culture of a thug. In the second verse of "Dear Mama," 2Pac describes his relationship, or lack thereof, with his father and again addresses his reasons for engaging in the lifestyle he calls, "thug life":

> Now ain't nobody tell us it was fair.
>
> No love from my Daddy' cause the coward wasn't there.
>
> He passed away and I didn't cry cause my anger
>
> Wouldn't let me feel for a stranger.
>
> They say I'm wrong and I'm heartless. But all along
>
> I was lookin for a father. He was gone.
>
> I hung around with the Thugs and even though they sold drugs.
>
> They showed a young brother love.

2Pac suggests in "So Many Tears" that the continued misery of his early life resulted in a void that the gang life filled. "Back in Elementary, I thrived on misery. Left me alone, I grew up amongst a dying breed. As my mind couldn't find a place to rest. Until I got that Thug Life planted on my chest," 2Pac rhymes. But love is not the only precondition for creation of the thug mentality, as 2Pac identifies the perceived lack of

opportunity as an additional factor. In "Dear Mama," 2Pac talks about a life of poverty and hustling as a way to economically survive. He speaks proudly of his ability to get out of "the game" and now is able to purchase material items for his loved ones.

Repeatedly, 2Pac identifies the conditions of growing up in a nihilistic environment and articulates the cumulative effect of repeated instances of violence on his psyche. For example, in "Lord Knows," 2Pac isolates one of many recurring themes, that he has witnessed many of his peers, family, and friends fall to community violence. He says, "I lost too many niggas to this gangbangin'. Homie dies in my arms, with his brains hangin'. Fucked up!" In "Me against the World," he appeals to a friend:

Witnessin' killins

Leavin' dead bodies in abandoned buildings

Caries the children

Cause they're illin'

Addicted to killin'

A near appeal from tha cap pealin'

What I'm feetin'

But will they last or be blasted

Hard headed bastard

Maybe he'll listen in his casket

This aftermath

More bodies being buried

I'm losin' my homies in a hurry.

Once entrenched in the lifestyle, 2Pac then discusses the implications of Thug life, identifying paranoia, lack of caring, and fatalism as thematic characteristics of a thug. For 2Pac, there are little positive consequences for Thug life and he consistently challenges youth to go down a different path, although he respectfully recognizes participates of the lifestyle by positively signifying to them and refuses to turn his back on those less fortunate them himself.

More than ready to admit how paranoia is a result of living the thug lifestyle, 2Pac has several verses, which speak to this phenomenon. For 2Pac, paranoia results in a lack of trust for the people around you, the belief that everyone is out to get you, and the realization that "Death is Around the Comer." The most telling example of this mentality in this song occurs in the introduction, when a conversation occurs between a child and his mother. The child asks, "What's wrong with Daddy?" The mother responds, "I know what's wrong with that crazy motherfucker. He's just standing by the goddamn window with that fuckin' AK [an automatic weapon]. You don't work, you don't fuck, you don't, you don't do a goddamn thing." The symbolic reference embodies a picture of Malcolm X, holding the rifle, but with a much different meaning assigned than the standard association, '.]by Any Means Necessary." Enter 2Pac, who then raps about "seeing death around the comer" He knows that he is a target for a number of reasons, but primarily jealously is discusssed. 2Pac recalls his existence and shouts, "In a ball of confusion, I think about my Daddy. Madder than a motherfucker, they never shoulda had me. I guess I seen too many murders, the doctors can't help me."

In the second verse, 2Pac describes his loss of faith in his friends and his girlfriend, calling them phonies and perceiving an ongoing conspiracy around himself.

Ultimately, 2Pac discusses the impact of his death as relatively meaningless. Upon discussing the inevitability of his demise, 2Pac concludes, "And even if I did die young, who cares? All I ever got was mean mugs and cold stares ... I can't give up, although I'm hopeless, I think my mind's gone. All I can do is get my grind on. Death around the comer." The fatalism in "Death Around the Comer" is repeated in verses many, many times, with 2Pac recognizing his demise as a result of his lifestyle. For 2Pac, the paranoia translates into the ability to kill and almost a desire to be killed. The value of life for a thug is minimal, and as a result, the violence continues.

What sets apart the myth building of 2Pac from the other Gangsta's studied in this analysis, is a realistic portrayal of the myth. Whereas lee Cube created the revolutionary nigga, and Snoop and Dre relied on the "G" as an romanticized criminal, in part fantasy and in part reality, 2Pac creates the simple image of a 1990's inner city youth, caught up in the violences of his or her community. Accompanying that realism is a nihilism and fatalism endemic within communities suffering the impacts of black on black crime.

Social Dramas

The social dramas played out in Me against the World are in some ways simpler than the other studied rappers, but simultaneously much more complex. Where lee Cube, Dre, and Snoop, created worlds that were in part predicated on fantasy using a realistic foundation via signifying, 2Pac creates by comparison, modest dramatic settings that subtlety convey experiences of inner-city. In other words, 2Pac's drama lacks the spectacular boasting and signifying vernacular, inherent in the other artist's rhetorical style. Yet, 2Pac's simplicity is contrasted by the depth of his analysis, formulating

complex opinions about the causes and implications of inner-city life for many thousands of today's youth. 2Pac captures the feelings of his generation in ways that Cube, Dre, Snoop approach, but in fact, fail as they always created a rap artist versus audience dichotomy. 2Pac shows some of this separation, but in large part is able to situation himself as part of the community, as one of the niggaz, and not as something superior to that character. The result is an introspective, albeit depressing and disturbing, examination of the mental state of inner city youth. 2Pac's perspective on the following topics requires less interpretation than did the other artists, since the directness of his narrative style makes discovering his views simpler.

Social Drama's in Me against the World

Table 3

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
Intro	News reports detailing events in 2PAC's life	Reject	Description of 2Pac's demise are premature. Battles back from prison, being shot, and general disdainment.	
If I Die 2 Nite	Consideration of what happens if 2Pac dies. Much jealously and envy in world.	Accept. Will fight but recognizes possiblity of meeting demise. Prays about what will happen when he dies.		
Me Against the World	Feelings that everyone is against him.	Reject.		Will fight those against him.
So Many Tears	Prayer about pain from violence in community	Accepts condiiton of his existence and offers introspection about why has happened.		
Temptations	Conversation with woman about having a short	Reject.	Attraction exists but no possibility of long-term	

	Hierarchy Pollution	Accept/Reject	Guilt	
			Mort.	Victimage
	relationship		relationship.	
Young Niggaz	Conversation to gangsta	Accept. Details his memories as a youth		
Heavy in the Game	Conversation to gangsta	Primarily acceptance. Again tries to detail why people get caught up in this lifestyle.		
Lord Knows	Another prayer	Reject. Discusses life chances. Autobiographical.	Trys to relate why his life ended up how it did.	
Dear Mama	Message to mother	Reject.	Tribute to mother and attempt to explain his behavior	
It Ain't Easy	Conversation about the difficulty of life.	Accept.		
Can U Get Away	Effort to persuade a woman to leave her abusive boyfriend.	Reject.	She deserves better, although he is not willing to commit to long-term relationship.	
Old School	Tribute to old rap artists.	Accept.		
Fuck the World	System is out to get all black men.	Reject.		Solution is to say "fuck the world"
Death Around the Corner	Discusses that he is paranolid that others are out to get him.	Accept.	Paranoia is destroying him and all relationships in his life.	
Outlaw	Conversation with 11-year old entering the "game"	Accept/Reject. Accepts the inevitability		Challenges others to wake up and stop this cycle

On Authenticity

An introspection of his existence, without apologies, characterizes the work of 2Pac in Me against the World. Causation is an important theme for 2Pac as he attempts to communicate a message which explains what he has became, how he got that way, and what he thinks and feels about his condition. 2Pac's introspection reveals itself through

several repeated themes: being a rap star, individual failings as a person, gender relationships, and his community role as a thug life survivor. The first two categories will be discussed as part of authenticity, while the other two are more appropriately discussed in the following sections on community and gender relationships. Each of these areas provide authenticity in ways very different from the approaches taken by earlier studied artists, who choose signifying bravado, usually on violence or sexism, as their method of depicting realism.

Whereas Dre and Snoop recognize how their life as a rap star intersect with the dangers of living and associating in the streets, Dre and Snoop's suggest that their superiority as individuals will rue the day. On the other hand, while 2Pac does recognize his celebrity and the jealous responses it will bring, and does occasionally portray amacho infallible image, he consistently reminds himself of the ultimate early demise inherent in the thug lifestyle. 2Pac describes his ability to "kill at will" anyone who challenges him and his lack of fear, but a significant difference from the other Gangstas, in 2Pac's rhetoric is the rationale for his behavior. 2Pac's does not claim an inherent superiority over others, nor that he is the "victor" for killing another. Rather, 2Pa.c consistently notes that he has lost the ability to care, as a result of the cumulative experiences in his life, which precipitates any consequential responses. In "It Ain't Easy," 2Pac explains the hopelessness:

> Lord knows, ain't no love for us ghetto children...
>
> Uhh, It ain't easy, that's my motto
>
> Drinkin' tangeray straight out da bottle...

All the drama got me stressen like I'm hopeless

I can't cope

Me and my homies smokin' roaches

Cuz we broke

Late night hangin' out till the sunrise

Getten high

Watchin' the cops roll by

Uhh, It ain't easy.

Resignation to the belief that opportunities do not exist for "Boys in the Hood," creates a misery which translates in not caring. Much of this is fueled by the cumulative effects discussed previously, watching the violent demise of others, compounded by the socioeconomic conditions of urban life. Creation of a paranoia and nihilism are the result of the self-esteem lacking in these individuals. Later the 2Pac decides to "hit the weed. And proceed to say, fuck all of y'all. Ain't nobody down with me. I'm thuggin'.

Much of Me against the World is written while 2Pac is in jail. In "Fuck the World," he offers insights into how his success failed to remove the scars and meimories of the streets. 2Pac discusses the trial, "When I was comin' up ruff. That wasn't even what you called it. That's why I smoke blunts now and run with alcoholics." Concluding that everyone is out to get him—whites want to see him fall, blacks are jealous of his success as he implies the woman bringing the sexual harassment charges did it for the money--2Pac sings in the chorus, "their tryin' to say that I don't care, I woke up screamin' fuck the world." 2Pac describes his inability to care or the decision to "Fuck the World," the paranoia and recognition of his imminent demise in "Death Around the

Comer," and ultimately, the recognition that even when he dies, the condition we only worsen, as he recognizes the inevitability of creating the next "Outlaw." The chronology of the album speaks to 2Pacs resignation as much of the beginning of the production attempts to identify, understand and resolve the problems within his existence. However, the last three selections: "Fuck the World," "Death Around the Comer," and "Outlaw" sequentially suggest that 2Pac has given up hope and is in preparation for his own demise.

Although 2Pac assesses blame for much of his current condition, he simultaneously identifies his personal testimony of his own failings, which have created the life he leads. Descriptions of himself as paranoid, desensitized by violence, a product of his negative environment. His ability to offer self-introspection runs deep enough that in the tribute to his mother, "Dear Mama," he refers to her as a crack fiend, a very uncommon occurrence given the general reverence for mothers in matriarchial-oriented black families. Further 2Pac recognizes in several songs his inability to have long term relationships, yet as discussed in the section on gender, his conversations with women are most respectful, even when interested in sexual relations. In Me against the World, he recognizes his anger, but is quick to point out that he does not want to make excuses for his situation. In "If I Die 2nite," 2Pac identifies himself as psychotic and begs foi- help, but recognizes his inability to receive it:

> I'm sick of psychotic society, somebody save me
>
> Addicted to drama so even mama couldn't raise me
>
> Even the preacher and all my teachers couldn't reach me

I run in the streets and puffin weed wit my peeps.

The ability for 2Pac to identify problems within his existence is certainly to be met with skepticism by some. Critics will argue that he scapegoats his individual problems on society, and that assess is a failure to "accept responsibility" for his actions. One can easily advance the position that 2Pac's album is a compilation of post-hoc rationalizations after someone has gotten into trouble, and certainly a case can be made. However, the insights offered by 2Pac and his ability to even observe the connections within his life, would be considered valuable had academics observed their behavior. Regardless, 2Pac's approach speaks volumes to issues of authenticity as it differs vastly from the earlier rap artists. Cube, Snoop, and Dre focus their authenticity on their superiority within street culture, a very different, and arguably, less "real" approach than 2Pac. Whatever the reality of responsibility, an large segment of urban youth, and arguably many others, *perceive* the reality that 2Pac addresses, warranting further examination on that basis alone.

On Community Issues

Recognizing how past rap artists have created the opportunity for 2Pac to perform, establishing a spiritual relationship to God, discussing the isolation and alienation of a nihilistic community, and preaching the necessity for socioeconomic disadvantaged youth to escape the cycle of the ghetto, are several communal experiences the artist explores in Me against the World. 2Pac's social commentary on his community identifies a strong commitment for social change, in light of the paranoia and nihilism created within it's borders. For 2Pac and all his fatalism, he still attempts to improve the

conditions of the lives from the young thugs coming after him.

In the tribute song to early, non-gangsta rappers, "Old School," 2Pac recognizes and thanks those who have come before him in appreciation. The refrain says, "'YVhat more can I say? I wouldn't be here today, if the old school hadn't paved the way." Recollecting on the rap songs of his youth, 2Pac systematically shouts out [acknowledges] many of the early rap artists but examination may yield an additional motive as well. 2Pac charged cast coast rap artist, the Notorious B.I.G., as an accomplice in his murder, in part a continuation of the east coast/west coast rap rivalry. The rivalry has generated in intensity with the advent of commercial successful West Coast rap artists, in spite of the origination of the music from New York. In part, 2Pac's tribute sends the signal to many of the rap artists on the east, that his anger is not directed at them, and 2Pac is not interested in a blanket feud with the "other side." The song positively signifies on Brooklyn's culture and samples a variety of rap artists. Of course, 2Pac offers quite a counter-view of community, very similar to the jealously and competition outlined by Dre and Snoop. In several songs, he points to the envy which as precipitated an angry response by 2Pac. As previously discussed, this negative worldview swamps the more positive position in quantity, as 2Pac predominately speaks to those out to "get him."

In part, 2Pac's pessimism explains his lengthy and repetitive discussions of spirituality. 2Pac signifies to Christianity on how God views his actions and whether or not he has the possibility for redemption. "Lord Knows" provides one of many examples where 2Pac speaks to God in an effort to understand his own existence. The song begins with a voice saying, "Danin ... another funeral, another motherfuckin' funeral," and after

a simple chorus which repeats the words "Lord Knows," 2Pac rhymes:

I smoke a blunt to take tha pain out

And if I wasn't high, probably try and blow my brains out

I'm hopeless

They shoulda tried to kill me as a baby

But, not they got me trapped in the ston-n, I'm goin' crazy

Forgive me

They wanna see me in my casket

And if I don't blast I'll be a victim of the bastards

I'm loosing hope, they got me stressen, can the Lord forgive me?

Got tha spirit of a thug in me

Another sip of that drink, this Hennessee got me queaze

Don't wanna hurl, young nigga take it easy

2Pac continues, repeatedly asking the question throughout not only the song, but the album, "Will the Lord forgive me?" He answers the rhetorical question at times, suggesting that hell is waiting for him. In "So Many Tears," 2Pac admits, "I know my destiny is hell, where did I fail? My life is in denial, and when I Die, baptized in Eternal Fire. Shed so many tears." Just as he begins the song saying that being intoxicated keeps him from committing suicide, he ends "Lord Knows" with the same refrain.

Lengthy discussions occur in this analysis regarding 2Pac's identification of the nihilistic effects of continual misery in the ghetto and the isolation and alienation which follow. Recognition that 2Pac does not merely identify his own existence as suffering from this condition, but rather, the environment is a stagnant, on-going one which fails to

show any promise for improvement in the future. Even though 2Pac repeatedly makes efforts to speak the rhetorical of positivity in a world of sadness, at times, the acceptance of a never improving condition is undeniable. 2Pac's negativity about the state of urban America might be compared to author Derrick Bell's And We Are Not Saved, which was "criticized" for not offering any positive solutions, that blacks are doomed to fail at social change whether working within the system or outside of it. The chronology of 2Pac's production shows similar negativism at the margins, both beginning and ending with mostly fatalistic, negative, "I give up" selections. In the last song on the album, "Outlaw," 2Pac has a conversation with his "friend," Ra Ra:

> 2Pac: Hey, you, what the fuck you wanna be when you grow up Ra Ra?
>
> Ra Ra: Nigga, is you stupid, I wanna be a motherfuckin' outlaw!
>
> 2Pac: That's right nigga, hahaha, house'n these ho's, you feel me?
>
> You gotta do that shit, keepen it real nigga or what?
>
> Ra Ra: Keepin' it real!
>
> 2Pac: How old are you nigga?
>
> Ra Ra: I'm I 1.

2Pac accepts that he is an outlaw and after him, more thugs, like Ra Ra, will follow. 2Pac chooses to positively signify to Ra Ra. In the concluding verse of the cassette, 2Pac recognizes that fame, celebrity, and wealth, failed to improve his life chances. From his prison cell, he accepts the reality that conditions have changed, he is confused and destiny is continuation of the same:

> Fuck tha judge, I gotta grudge,

Punk police, niggas run tha streets

It ain't nothin' but muuuuzik

Shit has changed

1995 the games has changed

motherfuckers is actin' real strange

the rules is all rearranged

You got babies lyin' dead in tha streets

These punk police is crooked as me

But all I see

Is motherfuckers actin' less than G's.

Stop bein' a playa-hater

Be an innovator, nigga

Fuck that shit

Don't be no entertainer and a stranger

Be a real motherfucker

Keep it real,

Pack that steel

Cause you know these streets is real deal

Motherfuckers wanna see me in my casket

Jealous, motherfucken bastards

I'll never die,

Thug nigga's multiply

Cause after me is Thug Life baby

Then tha young thugs,

Then tha youngest thug of all, my nigga Ra Ra.

2Pac's nihilistic narrative identifies the non-authenticity surrounding his life, his resignation of his own demise, and recognition that the cycle will continue, but offers little hope for a better day, eerily similar to Bell's pessimism.

However, the difference between Bell and 2Pac, is the latter's dualism. 2Pac continues within the album to offer positive odes suggesting change is possible. "Young Niggaz" is an earlier song dedicated to Robert "yummy" Sanderford (a/k/a Ra Ra), and all the other little young niggas, that 2Pac says, "that's in a rush to be gangstas." After recanting on his life as a young "G," 2Pac then begins a challenge to the youth considering the lifestyle. His challenge to the youth:

> I'm tellin' you, if your young, have your brains and have every limb and all that ... ya'll niggas don't know how good you really do got it.
>
> Motherfuckers need to just calm down and peep what they wanna do for tha rest, before you end your life, before you begin your life, ya dumb nigga.
>
> Now that I'm grown, I got my mind on being something don't wanna be, another statistic out there do'n' nothin' trying to maintain in this dirty game. Keep it real and I will even if it kills me.
>
> My young niggas, break away from these dumb niggas, put down the guns, and have some fun. Nigga the rest will come.

> Figure fame is a fast thang. They're gangbangin' puttin niggas in a casket, murdered for hangin' at tha wrong place at the wrong time. No longer livin' 'cause he threw up tha wrong sign, and everyday I watch tha murder rate increase, and even worse, tha epidemics and diseases. What is the future?
>
> The projects lookin' hopeless there, more and more brothas given' up, they don't care...

2Pac concludes by challenging "young niggas" to go out and do something positive with their lives:

> This goes out to the young thugs, have nots, the little bad motherfuckers from the block. Those niggas that's 13 and 14 and drivin' cadillacs and Benz's and shit, young motherfuckin' hustlers. Stay strong, nigga you could be a fuckin' accountant, not a dope dealer, ya' know what I'm sayin'? Fuck around and be pimpin put here you could be a lawyer niggas gotta get they priorities straight young niggas, little Ra Ra, especially my little cousin.

Finally, 2Pac issues another ode of positively through all the madness at the end of the title track, "Me against the World," where he challenges his audience to "study your lessons" and ask questions. Even in chaos, strive to do your best and "keep your essence" and stay calm under pressure. 2Pac even offers suggestions when things are not going your way, recognizing the need to dream of being in a different situation. He concludes the song with a passionate set of coping strategies for living in the ghetto:

> I know it seems hard sometimes, but uh...

Remember one thing

Through every dark night

There's a bright day after that

So no matter how hard it gets

Stick ya chest out

Keep ya head up

And handle it

Although discussing a variety of community issues, 2Pac's perspective contrasts sharply with the other artists in that, he accepts the condition much more than did Dre or Snoop, and certainly, Ice Cube. 2Pac's resignation to the gravity of the conditions around him, does not prevent his efforts at improving community, but certainly lie in stark contrast to his depressing portrayal of personal life experiences.

On Gender/Sexuality Issues

2Pac's relationship with issues of sexuality is an open book, a somewhat confusing book, but an open one. 2Pac's sits in ajail cell while writing most of these lyrics, convicted of sexually harassing a woman. At the same time, 2Pac writes sensitive and thoughtful rhymes about domestic violence ("Can You Get Away"), the appreciation ot'his mother ("Dear Mama"), and on a later album, a tribute to black women who have to deal with irrational black men ("Keep Your Head Up"). With regards to sexual politics, 2Pac is honest about his lack of ability/interest in having "serious" relationships, tending to emphasis his celebrity as a reason to "play the field." He speaks candidly about his sexual desires in his lyrics, but never in aggressive or denigrating ways.

"Can U Get Away" is a story about 2Pac's romantic interest in a woman who is the object of domestic violence by her current significant other. The conversation prior to the beginning of the song is 2Pac's attempt to ask the woman out for a date. She declines, responding that she's "gotta man." 2Pac persists, even implying that the boyfriend would not be upset if her and 2Pac had lunch. After several refusals, in spite of 2Pac's whining and begging, 2Pac resigns himself that he has been denied but then asks, "What's wrong with your eye? Why you got on glasses?" Throughout the song, which focuses on 2Pac's interest in having a relationship with the woman, references are made to the suspected domestic violence occurring in their home:

All he does is hit ya hard

I tell ya to leave

And you tell me, "Keep my faith in God"

I don't understand

I just wanna bring ya home

I wonder should I leave ya alone

Find a woman of my own

All the homies tell me that you don't deserve it

2Pac addresses his inability to commit to relationship but notes that he is willing to "try" and develop a relationship with this woman. In several other songs, like "Temptation," he repeatedly acknowledges his inability to have a long term relationship, and is content with finding one night stands as a result of his celebrity. But in "Can You Get Away," 2Pac compares the woman to others he has met in the past, and acknowledges how differently he perceives her from other women he has known.

Could it be my destiny to be lonely

And be checkin' for these hoochies that be on me

Cause they phoney

But you was different

Cause I can tell

My life with you would be delicious

The refrain is a woman singing, "So much pressure in the air and I can't get away. I'm not happy here." Again, the contradiction is acknowledged as 2Pac's advances, the source of her "pressure" is juxtaposed with her resignation that she is unhappy in her current relationship. "Dear Mama" discusses a different gender relationship, but 2Pac's decision to write this song to his mother, became a tribute by many in his audience as persons who could relate to this experience. As demonstrated earlier, 2Pac examines his relationship with "Mama" with an appreciation he had not conceptualized previously. In both songs, 2Pac respects the woman he perceives as real, although in "Can You Get Away," he clearly rebukes most women that approach him (with sexual interest) as "phoney."

The phoney women for 2Pac, are interested in him for celebrity and material wealth and not for him as a person, a common theme among Gangsta rap artists. For 2Pac, muc'n ot'his negative epithets against women are directed against this group. Two other women receive the wrath of 2Pac over the course of the album as well, the woman who charged him with harassment, and the prosecuting attorney, also a woman. In "Death Around the Comer," 2Pac assesses the implications of having sexual relations, viewing women who show sexual interest in him as predators for his wealth

How many more jealous ass bitches, comin' for my riches.

Now I gotta stay suspicious when I bone[have sex].

'Cause if I ain't sharp and heartless, them bitches will start shit.

Excuse me, but this is where we part bitch

In "Outlaw," 2Pac recollects on his experiences with the district attorney and the courts noting that he has, "Got no time for tha courts. My only thought is to open fire. Hit the district attorney, but, fuck that bitch, cause she's a lie. Now it's time to expire. I see tha judge, spray the bitch. 'Motherfuckers is crooked!' is what I scream."

2Pac also points to women's complicity in the urban conditions. In "Lord Knows" he says, "it's insane what we did do, witness an evil that these men do, bitches see it too, in fact, they be the reasons niggas get to bleeden." 2Pac even questions the loyalty of his girlfriend, given her condition as he raps in "So Many Tears," "I've been really wanting babies, so I could see a part of me that wasn't always shady. Don't trust my lady, 'cause she 's a product of this poison, I'm hearen noises. Think she's fucken with my boys, can't take no more. I'm fallin' to the floor, beggin' for tha Lord to let me in his door." 2Pac's acknowledgement that women are not merely "victims" taking the brunt of oppressive male actions in urban community, but rather, women's victimization results in extemalization of aggressive behaviors is a perspective rarely mentioned in discussions on Gangsta rap.

On Race Relations

Although he says little in the overall production directly regarding race relations, 2Pac's feelings are less than disinterested on the subject. He points to white America in

large part as the reason for the urban blight and misery he sings about. Additionally, 2Pac accuses some in white America of being jealous of his celebrity and wealth, and consequently, they attempt to bring him down. In "Fuck the World" 2Pac's details his view on the court system after his two trials, and he makes his first specific racial reference:

> Who you callin' rapist?
>
> Ain't that a bitch
>
> You devils are so two faced
>
> Wanna see me locked in chains
>
> Droped in shame
>
> And getten socked by these crooked cops and game
>
> Fuckin' with the young black male
>
> Tryin' ta stack bail
>
> And stay away from the packed jails
>
> Told tha judge I'm in danger
>
> And that's why I had that 45 with one in the chamber

Admitting that he did in fact, shoot the undercover police officer in the acquitted case, over the course of the album, 2Pac consistently discusses the hypocrisy of those who attack and condemn him. He is unable to separate hypocritical actions by the state, usually the cops, and the double standard he perceives against successful, young black males. 2Pac offers further commentary on his time in jail and criticism on his direct experiences with the criminal justice system as he sings in "It ain't easy":

Punk judge

Got a grudge

Can't post no bail

What, do I do, in these county blues

Getting' battered and bruised

By the you know who

And these fakes get the shakin'

When they face me, snakes

Ain't got enough nuts to replace me

Sittin' in this livin' hell

Listenin' to niggas yell

Tryin' to torture to tell

I'm getting' ill

But ain't nobody sayin' much.

Double standards between how black and whites are treated with regards to crime and the judicial/penal system are a major contention for 2Pac, as he identifies the unique targeting of young black males in society.

On Violence

Just as for the other Gangsta rappers analyzed in the study, violence is an accepted part of 2Pac's experience, although his perspective as to how the violence affects him personally differs in degree from lee Cube, Dr. Dre, or Snoop. Whereas all the rap artists acknowledge that the violence needs to stop within their community while complicitly

telling signifying narratives of their superiority in violent situations, only 2Pac takes a realistic and fatalistic vision of how the violence personally affects him. Most Gangsta rap artists create a vision of personal superiority in any competitive endeavor as part of their creation of Rose's, "a style that no one else can follow," whether discussing being the best in rap, sexual politics, or drive-by shootings. However, 2Pac never discusses "rap superiority," rarely discusses sexual politics as a competition among men, and speaks almost exclusively about the mental condition of his community, including his personal state of mind. While 2Pac acknowledges that he will "try" to come out on top, he consistently recognizes his own mortality, offering little complicity that violence--even in the context of using violence to signify something other than literal violence--produces any winners. Examples of 2Pac's description of the world are replete throughout this essay, and clearly the focus of 2Pac's work is to identify that everyone loses in a world of violence, even while he exclaims to his enemies that he is up for that challenge when warranted.

Chapter 6--Discussion

Potter rightly informs that Gangsta rap offers a "spectacular,, cultural clash in today's society. Traditional political and philosophical perspectives challenge an insular form of music from the ghetto, now reaching a broader mainstream audience because of commercialization. Cultural communication perspectives offer alternative insights into understanding the language and rhetorical strategies of Gangsta rap music, facilitating focus on the primary significant relationship between the pre-commercialization target audience—poor, urban youth—and Gangsta rap artists. Communication perspectives, which identify on the creation and maintenance of culture, reform traditional notions of sociological and post-modem criticism by emphasizing their rhetorical relationship. The result of this study forms the basis for the following conclusions.

First, Gangsta rap speaks to a variety of very different audiences simultaneously, primarily via the use of signifying. Second, when efforts to analyze Gangsta rap lyrics fail to identify the various audiences (cultures) engaged in the communicative act, simplistic analysis occurs, usually ignoring Gangsta rap music's primary target audience—poor, inner-city youth (PIY). Third, cultural communication perspectives potentially transcend the limitations of non-cultural perspectives. Fourth, examination of the rhetorical tools employed by Gangsta rap artists suggests that rituals and myths are used in development of social dramas which play out to illustrate the norins and rules within the culture ot poor, urban youth. Fitth, a cultural communication analysis tends to bring together different areas of rap study—rap as social commentary, rap as art, or rap as cultural symbolism—by developing a more consistent, coherent criticism. Sixth, the evolution of Gangsta rap identifies a communication focus away from PIY audiences

toward "other" audiences (primarily white, suburban teenagers). Finally, Gangsta rap does in fact, exemplify the pragmatic aesthetic identified by Shusterman. A more detailed discussion of these conclusions follows.

Gangsta Rap Speaks to a Variety of Audiences Simultaneously

Gangsta rap creates and maintains a culture with a minimum of three audiences. First, the PIY audience which directly experiences and lives the ritual, myths, and social dramas of the Gangsta persona is the target audience, from where Gangsta rap comes and for whom it targets it's message. Second the listening audience of primarily middle class youth, who relate to the lyrics for a variety of reasons. Some, as Samuel's argues, simply use the experience to reinforce stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about the behaviors of rap artists, as well as, justification of their own behaviors. However, other listeners in this audience may vicariously participate in the experiences of inner-city conditions, relating to the rituals, myths, and social dramas. For example, I have personal interaction with many intellectual white youth that listen to Gangsta rap. These youth demonstrate an interest in learning more about the inner-city black condition of urban America, as well as improving the depth of their knowledge about the art form. Several in this audience exist at both the high school and college level, and their numbers are drastically underestimated. Finally, a culture exists between Gangsta rap artists and a non-listening audience who condemns the form because it violates appropriate mainstream standards of conduct, on face. Consequently, an increased understanding is unnecessary, given the genre lacks the possibility of positive social commentary. The media, critics of Gangsta rap, and many academics fall into this category.

As time passes from lee Cube's 1992 album to 2Pac's 1995 work, while commercialization grows, the dominant participants in the Gangsta rap conversation changes. While Cube primarily speaks to "niggaz" about strategies of revolution and coping strategies in their lives, much of 2Pac's album educates and analyzes his nature as a "thug," speaking primarily to a non-thug audience. The implied assumption is that poor, urban youth audience would less likely be his primary audience for this message. Instead, 2Pac's message targets others attempting to listen in on the conversation. Consequently, one impact of commercialization and a greater white audience is recognition by Gangsta rap artists of who is listening. However, 2Pac's rhetorical decision is certainly not mutually exclusive, again due to signification, and the ability of a rap artist to speak simultaneously to multiple audiences. In fact, 2Pac's autobiographical discussions of his lifestyle may offer an education to non-participants in the lifestyle, while offering solidarity to those who are participants in the "thug" lifestyle. 2Pac repeatedly offers direction, support, and guidance to the PIY audience.

Cube's rhetorical strategies are simultaneously visionary and objectionable because they are products of signification. The rhetorical decisions he makes are responded to in different ways by different communities, in part because they are understood differently, but in part because they are understood the same. When Cube suggests "killing someone," the reception of the message will decide how literal or figurative to receive it, how serious or non-serious to receive it, and how han-nful or non-harmful to receive it. Those rhetorical decisions in reception are a product of culture and context, according to the rules of the community. A white, suburban, middle-class teenager will not have the same reception as an eight year-old, inner-city youth that is

considering joining a gang, although many similarities may exist in their two worlds. In Potter's words, the amount of violence(s) committed against each will develop the experiential starting point from where they will relate the message.

Rituals, myths, and social dramas via the lyrical narratives of Ice Cube communicate the rhetoric of this Gangsta rap artist. Cube develops both simple yet complex stories which detail life as a young, black male living in the streets and the challenges facing them. At the same time, Cube periodically informs the broader mainstream community about his person-hood and political ideologies regarding a variety of issues ranging from sex, to empowerment, to race relations. Cube repeatedly signifies, by confusing the literal with the figurative, offering a lyrical content received in several ways. An examination of text which privileges the rituals and myths found in traditional black culture, especially of poor, inner-city youth (PIY), identifies a vastly different meaning in the content thought by many to be predominately racist, violent, sexist, and homophobic. Finally, the dramatism in Cube's music illuminates significant social commentary on a number of issues important to the primary target audience, PIY.

Current Rap Research Fails to Identify the Various Participating Cultures

Criticism of Gangsta rap music and in broader terms rap music, reached an impasse, where much of the early research struggled with evaluations of Gangsta rap and more hardcore lyrical content. Either Gangsta rap's offensive lyrics were outright rejected, or scholar's engaged in a delicate balancing act, often praising the positive potential of rap music's fonn, but arguing that the violent, sexist, homophobic, and racist nature of the Gangsta failed to reach that potential. Cultural scholars attempted to describe the Faison d'6tre of the genre, but condemned the product, i.e. the music. A

couple of cultural symbolism scholars then appeared, identifying the possibility of meaningful messages when one takes into account black cultural rituals and myths, often enhancing the understanding of the language choices. The rhetorical strategies identified by cultural symbolism academics are part of a larger context, invoking the history and experience of Black America. Although explaining parts of the meaning in rap messages still lacked any coherent perspective on the entirety of the musical production. Left unanswered by the cultural symbolism research is how Gangsta rap the rituals and myths of Gangsta rap narratives come together to produce a cultural interaction for critical evaluation. In each approach, the rap "message" is viewed as a transmission of information from the rap artist to her or his audience, and not as a cultural production. Moreover, if the purpose of criticism is insightful understanding, viewing rap music through the lens of transmissional communication perspectives condemns further progressive research on rap music, and specifically, Gangsta rap.

The reason is that transmissional perspectives ignore a substantial part of the culture created and maintained in Gangsta rap lyrics. To ignore the community norms and standards identified in the culture between poor, urban youth and Gangsta rap artists as a part of that culture and consequently the rap artist's rhetorical style, is to condemn scholarship to a superficial and misguided analysis of the music's lyrical meaning.

Cultural Communication Perspectives Transcend Limitations of Current Rap Research

However, criticisms that defer to communication perspectives analyzing the culture created and maintained by rap music, transcend the limitations of current met'nods of inquiry in at least, four ways. First, not imposing standards and non-ns

found beyond the culture do not levy glass ceilings that limit knowledge and understanding. Rather the focus of inquiry centers on the norms developed within the culture, and whether the text describes, breeches, or protects those standards. Dramatistic perspectives assess the motives of the rhetorical act, and whether the act moves pragmatically within cultural codes. In the case of rap, current approaches reject further understanding at the point of "offensiveness," treating the use of violent, racist, sexist, or homophobic rhetoric as an end point for criticism. There is little effort made to consider possibilities that the rhetoric might not be offensive within a given culture, making all criticism of Gangsta rap music inherently negative since the "means" taints any potentially positive product. The standards for determination of offensiveness imposed on the rhetoric come from mainstream academic culture, and are not part of the community where the rhetorical event occurs.

Cultural communication analysis forces recognition that criticism, especially of rap music emphasizing the concept of signifying, is always speaking to multiple audiences simultaneously. Signifying in lyrical content serves to reinforce stereotypical roles by the dominant culture, appeasing them, while also sending communicating messages of empowerment and resistance to the oppressed community, argues Potter. Rap music does not only create and maintain a single culture, but also opens the possibility of a conversation amongst multiple cultures, and only via cultural communication perspectives can understanding occur across communities. Balance in rhetorical discussions about rap music must address the reality of various cultures and the implication on criticism.

When Cube writes "It's a Man's World," filled with repetitive uses of "offensive" language that scholars write off as "sexist," he also creates a conversation that many young women in the black community view as a liberation anthem. YoYo's (the woman rap artist in the song) challenge to the politically correctness of lee Cube's worldview is viewed very differently outside of mainstream or academic culture. Some scholars, like Dyson, are able to see the visionary nature of Ice Cube's rhetorical act, but struggle and often condemn the "non-politically correct" found in mainstream academic circles to be violent, racist, and homophobic. Dyson's ability to critique from both worlds stems from his understanding and experience of multiple cultures. The result is an uneasy praise, grounded in many qualifications. However, Dyson chooses not to critique Ice Cube's work solely within the perspective of one culture or the other, as for him the two are inseparable, both part of his scholarship. Therein lies the question, "Should good criticism separate the cultures or not for evaluation?"

If the purpose of "good" criticism is "understanding," then the answer is a definite, "yes." Only by examining the rules and nonns of each community separate, can insightful understanding of the communication dynamic within the culture occur. Of course, comparison of how the cultures interact produces important social commentary as well, but the richest criticism needs to look at the cultures in a vacuum, then discuss the interaction. When criticism invokes cultural interaction, without a separate analysis, then the dominant culture overwhelms any understanding of the other culture. Basically, the "baby gets thrown out with the bath water." If the critic imposes dominant standards in her or his criticism, it will always usurp the r-ules and standards of the other culture, especially if they are in conflict. If the language is objectionable in the critic's

perspective (always the dominant perspective), it is unlikely that she or he can get past the objection enough to understand a world where that language is not objectionable. The means/end argument makes the distinction. In academic theor-y, often if the means utilize a racist speech or sexist act, this invalidates any end result. Critics can only forego violation of the means/end if they are willing to suspend the imposition of dominant perspectives and look to the cultural perspective. Examination of the culture via it's own rules and norms, creates a different evaluation scheme, which still promises hope for insightful understanding, even if there is tension with more accepted dominant viewpoints.

A second way that cultural communication transcends the limits of current criticism, is that the nature of current criticism also lacks the possibility of understanding the popularity of the albums chosen for this study, other than to dismiss the music buying public as sexist, racist, violent, homophobes who simply are complicit to offensive lyrics, an interpretation arguably true. However, this limited conclusion denies the reality that many targets of the offensiveness are active listeners to the music, calling into question the logic of this assumption. For example, a large portion of the Gangsta rap listening audience is white and/or female and/or gay, etc. Cultural communication perspectives allow the possibility of a new set of community norms for the larger audience, which simply does not perceive the same victimization, or at the least, are comfortable with these forms of victimization. A cultural communication perspective does not need to draw lines between "smart" scholars and the "less intelligent" public. Space is created for alternative and more inclusive interpretations.

A third area where cultural communication perspectives can improve current current criticism is the ability to pursue more holistic interpretations of rap artist work. Small units of measurement in the textual analysis limit current criticism. Hence, current transmissional methods render impossible the ability to resolve many apparent contradictions in the text. The need to evaluate and render text as potentially positive or negative is important if the critic is in pursuit of a *pragmatic* response to the condition of poor urban America. Inconsistencies in the evaluation of rap would not be obsolete, but the method of determining ironies would change, since the standards for criticism would lie within community standards. Imposition of standards from outside the culture ensures numerous apparent contradictions, as well as, making it impossible to resolve inconsistencies amongst different cultures.

The rate of movement in a cultural form that privileges constant lingual dynamism can be mind boggling. One of the limitations of this study is the ability of individuals coding the music to keep up with the language connotations in a form which as Potter notes, lives off of guerilla tactics of subverting the dominant language. As simplistic as it sounds, researchers are best served to have the text read by listeners of the music, or at a minimum, work at understanding the context of new and improved connotations. If efforts at comprehending the variety of language connotations are not made, an artificial glass ceiling is placed on the level of understanding. Interesting studies might include having multiple coders from a variety of rap experience levels, read the text, but at a minimum, academic reception requires someone reading the text that is keeping up with the constant change in the culture's language choices and styles. You would not want an accountant who fails to keep up with the tax changes, or a doctor who

fails to respond to cnanges and research in the medical field. A similar disservice is done by academics who critique rap music but fail to understand the temporal nature of the terminology.

Finally, a fourth consideration for employing cultural communication methods is the failure of transmission perspectives to account for the nature of the culture in terms of identity. The reality that all oppressors in Gangsta rap are simultaneously victims of oppression is an important consideration in locating one's identity. Criticism that isolates and condemns a racist or sexist or violent rhetorical event, without acknowledging the nihilism of the poor, black youth culture, is taking an easy way out and is not very insightful, as anyone can acknowledge the impacts of oppression. Much more difficult is discussion of constructive criticisms that identify pragmatic responses to the totality of the condition within the community. Isolation of sexism or racism without addressing all of the cumulative destruction within the condition provides a superficial analysis offering little possibility for constructive alternatives. Cultural perspectives by definition incorporate a pragmatic response to life's chances, and the nature is defined by the culture, facilitating more possibilities to challenge all of the problems within the community.

Rituals and Myths in Development of Social Dramas Illustrate the Norms within the Poor, Urban Youth Community.

Recurring themes, as identified via Burke's dramatism, begin to illuminate both who the rap artist is talking to, and what she or he is trying to say. For example, although Cube occasionally speaks to middle class Black America and even white America, his primary target of attention is poor, urban youth. He repeatedly talks about revolutionary

strategies or resistance and of surviving the ghetto. Cube educates on the relationship between life in the ghetto and more mainstream lifestyles by demonstrating similarities between the two. Cube's narratives are tales of survival, utilizing formulaic Aristotelian tools of persuasion. He creates and maintains authenticity with his primary audience, often sharing complicity with parts of the same lifestyle that he challenges elsewhere on the album. In other places, Cube invokes rituals and myths of the community to whom he speaks, in an effort to sell the narrative to his audience.

Engaging in ritualistic activities with his audience, Cube creates and maintains identification within Gangsta rap culture by focusing on audience cohesion; group participation; being real; and signifying. Each of these rituals serves to authenticate the life experiences of the rap artist, Ice Cube, within the PIY audience, demonstrating that Cube has an understanding of the cultural rules and norms within the community. Over the course of the album, the rituals play themselves out in a variety of contexts, serving to establish and reinforce Cube's credibility as a participant within the PIY culture. The language strategies Cube employs assist in that authentication as well, as his rap style demonstrates mastery as a guerrilla tactician over the dominant language, which as identified by Potter, is the expectation of participants in hip-hop culture. Motivation and listening of the audience via the establishment of authenticity and credibility are the effects of Cube's ritualistic performances.

Exploration of the myth-making found in PIY culture is demonstrated in Cube's narratives centered around stories of the "streets." Analogies relating to stories of being a finigger," "gangsta," or a "thug" serve again to offer authenticate Cube as someone who understands the life experiences of the PIY, and consequently sets the stage for the

rapper's pedagogy. Cube uses his understanding of street myth-making to offer "insightful" information about both the PTY audience, the dominant society, and the relationship between the two. For Cube, broadening the theoretical application of street myths to issues of dominance, empowerment, and survival, is part of his grand design.

Cube's street knowledge becomes "visionary" when it invokes criticism of larger societal issues via the simplistic myths of the "streets." Defining a "mack" in "Who's the Mack," as something other than a street pimp, forces reexamination of everyday life experiences of the PIY audience. Whether the playboy at the club, the "homeless" con man, or the President, Cube paints a much different picture of the "mack" than the street narrative portrays, although his narrative employs the language of the street pimp. The strength in that reexamination lies in the argumentative coherence of Cube's comparison. If the audience sees and feels the relationship Cube identifies, than the possibility for "learning" has occurred.

Finally, Cube's narratives play out a variety of dramas with varying degrees of social commentary and seriousness. Examination of Cube's rhetoric however finds one common thread throughout, each song does have a purpose. The motives underlying Cube's rhetoric from establishing authenticity to identifying the rules and norms of the culture, to motivational appeals for action by his audience, to an education about life on the streets and transcending the nihilism of the ghetto. Cube strives to "make a point," albeit sometimes subtle, and sometimes direct and powerful. His narratives employ various rhetorical strategies to make the point, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, sometimes through lyrical prowess, sometimes through simple storytelling. Rarely do his songs lack any cohesiveness, as has been the case in come rap music. In some songs, the

goal appears to be authenticity; and in others, education; and in others, energizing motivation. In the end, a textual analysis of Cube's lyrics finds a wealth of commentary that offers a relative profound understanding of the PIY community.

A Cultural Communication Analysis Synthesizes Rap Research

Consideration of the rhetorical strategies used by Ice Cube, and examination of those strategies as used by the most popular Gangsta's of the mid- 1990s challenges the heart of rap criticism over the last decade by creating inconsistencies in many earlier standards of criticism. Whether rap criticism focuses on social commentary, having an artistic aesthetic, or the cultural symbolism of rap, ultimately the traditionally three distinct areas of criticism requires a conversation that assesses the interaction between areas. Prior to the Gangsta, the distinct areas seemed to compliment one another in the evaluation of rap music as a cultural form. The hardcore messages of Gangsta rap called into question many of the theoretical assumptions provided in past criticism about rap music. Movement away from more transmissional communication perspectives towards a cultural communication orientation opens space for understanding an intersection between social commentary, art aesthetic, and cultural symbolism criticism providing a richer understanding of the rap music phenomenon.

Concrete examples demonstrate how cultural communication approaches can change the nature of the criticism with relation to rap music. Let us reintroduce the Ice Cube song, "It's A Man's World" for discussion, a narrative where Ice Cube espouses his rationale why women are inferior to men and female rapper, YoYo, challenges his interpretation. By most traditional social commentary standards, the repeated use of the words "bitch" and "ho," the lack of any direct Afrocentric perspective, and the negative

persona of Ice Cube's character in the song, especially in reference to the value of women, make it unworthy of positive social commentary. Even Rose's more liberal feminist reading that acknowledges the liberating nature of YoYo's character, ultimately concludes that Ice Cube's appearance on YoYo's album demonstrates possession by Cube. We probably can conclude that Rose finds the song disempowering (I 5 1).

Postmodem scholars would find the song both empowering and disempowering without attempting to resolve the tension in the contradiction. Cultural symbolists discuss the rituals of audience cohesion and signifying present in the song and offer a much different commentary, arguing that the disempowering tendencies are part of black identity and culture, but the narrative meaning focusing on the dialogic between Cube and YoYo clearly being resolved in a positive message that women in fact, are equal to men, and offer the same abilities and skills when it comes to rap that men do.

The dramatistic approach goes one step further, identifying the rhetorical strategies of those rituals and myths and relating their importance to the final message, or the social drama. Over the course of the album, "Amerikka's Most Wanted," Cube invokes rituals and myths for the purpose of authentication and identification. His rhetorical strategy of persuasion rests in large part, on being perceived as part of the PIY audience. Attempts to deliver messages about community empowerment, self-worth, gender equality, and race relations, are all couched within a framework of a particular set of life experiences and values. Often that framework, or in dramatistic terms, that stage, is set with a variety of contradictory messages, but all leading to a select number of dramatic endings, almost uniformly positive. "It's a Man's World," the next to last song on the album, is the finalization of a crescendo-like discussion about the politics between

women and men, concluding with an in-your-face challenge where the strong, black woman prevails, even if only by a measure of degree. Rose's analysis is simplistic and does not contextualize the situation. Ice Cube's decision to have a dialogic discussion of the sexual politics in black urban America is exactly what Rose encourages. She criticizes current rap criticism for being too one-dimensional:

> Unfortunately, most discussions of rap's sexual Politics and black women rappers do not account for these real-life complexities. Instead, discussions of women rappers can be divided into two related positions: (1) women rappers are feminist voices who combat sexism in rap; and/or (2) the sexist exclusion or mischaracterization of women's participation in rap music devalues women's significance and must be countered by evidence of women's contributions. (149)

"It's a Man's World" is a complex piece of work, presented as part of a larger complexity, Amerikkka's Most Wanted which debates and illuminates the language choices of male rap artists, while offering a woman rap artist the space to not only counter those charges, but to participate in the male-dominated game at their level. YoYo talks trash, challenges Ice Cube's portrayal of women, and delivers in-your-face technical mastery of the rap "game." Ice Cube slowly gives in, recognizing her skills and the contributions of women. fee Cube's rhetorical decision to utilize "sexist" language as a "prop" for a song that is ultimately liberating, seems no different than similar rhetorical s\ategies of female rapper, Queen Latifah, in "U.N.I.T.Y." Latifah repeatedly uses the words "bitch" and "ho" in a powerful narrative illustrating a very pro-woman message that challenges male use of offensive language. Is Latit@h's use of"'bitch" anct "ho"

disempowering? If so, few intellectuals would feel comfortable "rejecting" her use. If not, then the difference between Latifah and Cube's utilization of sexist language is a matter of degree, and resolution requires complex analysis, as opposed to assumptions that use of terms like "bitch" and "nigger" by male rap artists are ALWAYS if one makes disempowering. The possibility of insightful understanding is heightened the political decision to understand the text via cultural communication perspectives. Evolution of Gangsta rap identifies a Communication Focus away from PIY Audiences

An interesting shift in rhetorical emphasis occurred as we analyzed Ice Cube in 1992 and 2Pac in 1995. Although this study demonstrates that Gangsta rap artists clearly maintain a direct line of communication with inner-city youth, a discernible shift in focus towards other audiences evolves. 2Pac's focus on understanding of his mentality and explanation of his nature sharply contrasts with earlier lyrical content of Ice Cube targeted at the revolutionary possibilities for "niggaz." This suggests that the motives of Gangsta rap artists broadened as their crossover possibilities increased. In other words, as primarily white, suburban youth audiences surpassed in listenership by non- black, inner-city youth, Gangsta rap artists took notice and included other audiences in the dialogue. The art of signifying allows rap artists to speak to both audiences simultaneously, focusing on solidarity for participants in the culture, while serving an educational for non-participants. However, the direct nature of the lyrical content evolves away from speaking directly to poor, black youth, towards a broader audience.

Gangsta Rap does exemplify the Pragmatic Aesthetic Identified by Shusterman.

Shusterma,n ponders the existence of an intersection between the artistic and the scientific, a space he calls the pragmatic aesthetic. Consideration of rap music as a form

exemplifying that aesthetic falls short when introducing Gangsta rap perspectives. Implied in Shusterman's work, is that only rap music having a positive social commentary reaches the potential of having a pragmatic aesthetic. However, cultural communication perspectives opens space for all rap music types finding the pragmatic aesthetic intersection. The pragmatic possibilities identified in this study of Gangsta rap pose new areas for discussion. An explanation of how Gangsta rap manifests pragmatic rhetorical strategies, especially in popularly received musical text, is thoroughly detailed in this study. While Gangsta rap, in an effort to gain authenticity with its primary target audience, is often complicit in the nihilism it intends to combat, a clearly discernible rhetoric away from the negative conditions of urban America exists. In other words, Gangsta rap's promise of pragmatism is a positive incremental rhetoric toward some moral good, that sacrifices some complicity via violent, sexist, homophobic language to gain authenticity with its audience.

The larger question is whether the academic/mainstream culture can find ways to "tolerate" the PIY culture enough to work at understanding it, including spokespersons of Gangsta rap. Let's conclude by revisiting the polarized debate over Gangsta rap and in light of the conclusions of the study, consider the possibility for find ways to work towards improving communication, as well as the condition of alienated urban America. Just as Dyson, Rose and others wear a variety of hats, so do I. Finding ways to live with the reality of being an academic, as well as a participant in the culture of young urban males in America leaves me questioning my role and place in society.

Regardless of the results of this study, there are a variety of reasons that would keep me, as an academic, from ever concluding that the Gangsta rap as a cultural

production could generally culminate in a positive societal outcome. What I know through my academic journey regarding concepts of oppression frames my understanding of Gangsta rap, whether I am wearing my hat as a social critic, a post-modem or aesthetic critic, or a cultural symbolist. The Gangsta rap message is seeped in the same actions and thinking that historically causes domination, that linkage is clear to me. Gangsta rap artists utilization of racist, sexist, or violent means to achieve societal change taints any possible positive result. Ground in the theoretical justification for condemnation of Gangsta messages, reinforcement of negative stereotypes precludes the possibility of solvent alternatives. Any acceptance or tolerance of these behaviors within the community, is simply a by-product of internalized victimization, making the words of oppressed groups who are complicit in supporting Gangsta rap, not very meaningful from an intellectual perspective.

Sociological critics and mainstream society reject most solutions offered if they are not inclusive of all persons. Race-conscious solutions are arguably offer theoretical justification for other "racist" actions, as a color-blind society must look for "inclusive" policies and away from exclusionary ones. Critics of Gangsta rap reject lyrical content, which devalues one group at the expense of promotion of some other positive value. Policies that are not "all-inclusive" only reinforce oppression and ensure possibilities for other forms of domination. So as an academic, I am forced to reject Gangsta rap as a possible tool of empowerment, recognizing its reinforcement of oppressive behaviors, and look for more all-inclusive alternatives.

All Gangsta rap is not good Gangsta rap, and the purpose of all good Gangsta rap is not to send a positive message to the Ply community. The debates emerged within

listening communities, as with any cultural fon-n, as to who was the best, and what defined being the best. However, one thing is sure, early Gangsta rap resonated with the Ply community, and later with a variety of other communities. Messages described the changing conditions of post-industrialized America, or they addressed how folks in the ghetto, coped with those changing conditions. Some Gangsta rap focused on how one can overcome those conditions. Most Gangsta rap albums addressed at some level, all of these areas. Gangsta rap arose out of the conditions of urban America, and the rituals, myths and social dramas already existed within the community. When a member of the PIY community hears a ritual or myth in a Gangsta rap song, she or he is already familiar with the language strategies of the music, as it arose from the PIY culture. Rap messages may also influence PIY culture, but assessment of its influence must consider the larger dynamic occurring within the culture. Ice Cube does not introduce me to trash-talking ritualistic boasts about sexual prowess, but he may create one I find aesthetically pleasing, given my knowledge about what makes a good boast.

Looking and listening from the bottom, I hear and see the critics on the outside looking down at my culture, telling me that my music is bad and has no value. I respond with anger, and tell them that they do not understand. I can not understand how the effects of racist, sexist, and violent language can occur in a community already engulfed by those devastating problems. I can not understand how my music is negative affecting my community, already condemned to nihilistic behaviors and self-destruction. I can not understand how the "haves," standing on the outside of my community, can tell me what is best for my community. I can not understand the need to condemn youth from the within my community, aggressively speaking to others within their community, about

stopping the self-destruction within that community. I can not understand what alternative is being proposed from the outsiders, when I see their meager solutions failing miserably, and when I see those on the outside running from the problems that they in fact created. Finally, I can not understand how rhetoric, absent authenticity, can be effective towards improving nihilistic mindsets.

My tradition from understanding only bottom perspectives to familiarity with those from the top coincides with my introduction into graduate school. My newfound rhetorical training includes a variety of new perspectives, but I noticed two, which I believe, directly inform my conversation from the bottom on the pragmatic aesthetic of Gangsta rap. Aristotle discusses the importance of ethos, in developing effective rhetorical appeals. In public speaking classes, communication professors teach the importance of audience analysis and establishing credibility when attempting to achieved some desired result. Concepts like these suggest a direct relationship to the appeals of Gangsta rap, and the importance shown to authenticity. Being real is an integral part of the rap credo, and in fact, is the focus of much of the content of rap. Representing firealness" as a precondition to persuasion seems entirely consistent with meeting conditions of ethos, as outlined in public speaking pedagogy.

A second area of interest is in the teachings of Mark McPhail, an intercultural rhetorical theorist, whose work focuses on how non-westem religious and philosophical doctrines can inform western epistemology. For McPhail, the notion of "criticism" needs rethinking as classic methods of classification and analysis have proven ineffective for providing solutions to the world's ills. The notion of criticism, or looking for negative difference, reconsiders rhetorical critic decision-making, by simply choosing not to

criticize (32). Synthetic conceptions of criticism offer more insight than more analytic ones. The rhetorical decision to see the glass as half full can supplant current choices to condemn or criticize the glass as "half-empty." A new starting point provides possibilities for new and creative solutions. His work provides the possibility for consideration of positive social messages arising from the hardcore language espoused by Gangstas.

I see in the rhetoric of Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and 2Pac, an incremental positive rhetoric, which at times has at its purpose, creation of authenticity via racist, violent, and sexist language strategies for a community devoid of self-identity and self-worth surviving in a racist, violent, and sexist world. Certainly one can argue that a rhetoric drenched in racism, violence, and sexism could never by itself, move a community away from racism, violence, and sexism, and perhaps the evidence fails to support such an endeavor. However, the evidence also fails to support the utopian notion of an all-inclusive rhetoric, which maintains authenticity and hence, it's pragmatic effectiveness. Why, because "purpose" by definition is exclusive, whether that purpose excludes based on age, income, race, religion, or type of shoes. If my rhetoric speaks to an audience, it necessary is excluding other audiences, and if not, then it is not using very concrete language choices, and consequently not very effective as a tool of social change.

Gangsta rap as rhetoric speaks to a particular audience (PIY) and good Gangsta rap incrementally moves them in a particular direction, by the way of recurring themes or dramas. Cube wants his audience to know they can move from a "nigger" to a "Nigga," and that the condition of being poor and black can be challenged. Dre and Snoop relate coping strategies of the hood, and how rap stardom is not necessarily an escape from life as a black man. 2Pac's persuasion focuses on the reality of his existence as "thug," and

both the physical and psychological impacts of nihilism in urban America. Each artist speaks to a variety of themes on their album, but clearly definable foci are visible on each.

The conclusion of this analysis does not suggest that oppression is good, or that Gangsta rap artists should be praised for lyrical content, which emphasizes violence, misogyny, and racism. Quite the contrary, oppressive language and actions assessed in a vacuum, absent context, are susceptible to misunderstanding between cultures, as this research contends. Critics, who point to a particular language choice and fail to consider the totality of the rhetorical work, are doomed to superficial judgements about the text. Absent the context of culture, evaluations which isolate one "ism" without consideration of all the "isms," creates a utopian standard never to be met by contemporary rhetoricians, whether Gangsta rap artists or black mainstream leadership. The prisoner's dilemma is that the rhetor abandon efforts at authenticity (ethos) with her or his audience, or be judged as complicit in the reinforcement of oppressive actions, which exist within the culture. The escape from the paradox is Shusterman's pragmatic aesthetic, which offers the possibility for assessing incremental social commentary by contrasting the nonns of the culture in question against the rhetoric itself. Rap in general, and specifically, Gangsta rap have escaped the paradox and provide the possibility for persuasion within a particular community, and a heightened awareness to others outside the community. In the end, the academy must make political choices to assist in the social movement or to find concrete alternative solutions, which escape the dilemma. Until then, the schism between black youth and increasingly all youth, and their parents, political and religious leaders, will only increase with no utopian answer in sight.

One note however, regarding the direction of future research. Giving up on non-cultural symbolic perspectives is unwarranted at this point. If sociological and post-modem aesthetic scholars employ the technical concepts discussed above, we have every reason to believe that revisiting those perspectives offers much in production of new and insightful criticism. Combined with the substantive discussion, all theoretical perspectives towards rap music, and particularly Gangsta rap music, promise exciting new evaluations and significance. However, continued reliance on methodological tools of the past can provide only limited utility, because they which ignore cultural implications. We do not need further inquiry to draw conclusions that on face, Gangsta rap lyrics use sexist, racist, and homophobic words to describe the world around them. That point is well documented. The question remains, "Is there or can there by anything else worthy of study in this particular cultural form?" The answer is by nature, a "political" one.

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Abstract

SEARCHING FOR A PRAGMATIC AESTHETIC: THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF GANGSTA RAPPERS—MYTHS, RITUALS, AND DRAMAS OF AN OUTLAW MUSIC

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In a world where impoverished urban black youth are under attack from all political factions, rap music lies at the heart of their cultural epicenter. More specifically, Gangsta rap music has taken center stage, dominating the pop charts, moving from the streets of the ghetto to the homes of white suburbia. Studies of Gangsta rap messages and the politics of reception have facilitated the alienation of many youth from mainstream culture. Critics charge Gaiigsta rap focuses on violent, racist, misogynist lyrics and calls for the censorship, rejection and condemnation of this sub-genre abound. This exploration considers alteniative communication perspectives which emphasize the culture created and maintained by the music via use of the dramatistic rhetorical elements: rituals, myths, and social dramas. Using Burkean methods of identification and exploring Llie elements of hierarchy, this essay analyzes the rap lyrics of four of Billboard's top selling artists: Ice Cube, whom Dyson calls, "Gangsta Rap's Visionary"; Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr. Dre, and 2Pac.

Cultural communication perspectives discover a variety of ritualistic, mythological, and social dramatistic elements, embracing complex thematic messages regarding the identity of ilhe black community. Investigating a diverse set of issues, Gangsta rap artists wrestle with questions of survival in urban America via promotion of narratives steeped in the harsh language of the streets. Through rhetorical strategies of metaphors, similes, contextual figurative logic, rappers engage in ritual and myth-building to develop narratives. In the end, examination of the repetitive themes invoked by Gangsta rap lyrics produces a depth of understanding surpassing more simplistic analysis of offensive language choices. Examination of Gangsta rap lyrics concludes that Gangsta rap epitomizes Sliusterman's pragmatic aesthetic, via gaining authenticity of the target audience (poor, inner-city youth) through identification with the symbols and language embodied in the culture. Scholars interested in understanding the complexities of Gangsta rap, are well-served by choosing not to impose the standards of communitie outside the target audience, but rather to listen to the standards developed and maintained within the cultural being studied. In the case of rap music, the nature of dialogic criticism serves to counter the dis-ernpowering possibilities that negative language offers.

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