



2004

Ghetto feminism: neo-black feminism for the black hip-hop generation(s)

Chyann L. Oliver
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Recommended Citation

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GHETTO FEMINISM: NEO-BLACK FEMINISM FOR THE BLACK HIP-HOP
GENERATION(S)

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Senior Scholars Program

COLBY COLLEGE
2004

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ABSTRACT

"Ghetto Feminism: Neo-Black Feminism for the Black Hip-Hop Generation(s)" is a feminism that addresses the simultaneity of race, sex, and class oppressions that subjugate black people of the hip-hop generation who reside in the urban ghetto or ghetto like conditions. It is a feminism that deconstructs the hypersexualized, racialized and classist representations of black people in hip-hop culture. The goal of this feminism or feminist thought is to raise the black hip-hop generationer's critical consciousness in order to encourage resistance to distorted images of themselves. Continuing with the tradition of multivocality or heteroglossia*, Ghetto Feminism uses poetry, scholarly essays, and prose to create a "speakerly text" that can speak to all people, but most importantly the people that this project is written for: the hip-hop generation(s). In six chapters divided into three parts the essays and poems critique and deconstruct the representation of commercialized hip-hop culture and monolithic mass-produced rap, the hypersexualized, colonized black female body, and the pathologized black male sexual predator. Ghetto Feminism is another voice

* In the translated text The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian literary theorist introduces the concept of heteroglossia and multivocality in texts.

among many that seeks to help the black hip-hop generation(s) reclaim their culture, communities and identities.

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SHOUTOUTS

Many people have played an instrumental role in the development of this project; these individuals have been there during the conception of this fledgling intellectual and her ghetto feminist thought; they helped produce a ghetto feminist insurgent black intellectual. To keep with the tradition of hip-hop culture I have to give "shout outs" to acknowledge these nurturers, supporters, and believers of my dreams and me. To my fam in pvd: Ma, Earl, Channing, and Granny, my endless inspiration, we did it and to all those people who said we couldn't, fuck em; the Hamricks, Henleys, Maynards, Morrisises, Fayanjoulas and Bakers, thanks for always being there; my mentors Gene Booth and James Vincent thank you for the encouragement; SPDC and RICHR thank you for the opportunities to foster the drive and determination; Ms. Neidz for helping me write; Mr. Cartier for introducing me to my voice, which was poetry; My girl Betty thank you for keeping it real I hope we forever keep in touch; and Dr. Heacock and the Butler Hospital Partial Program Staff would I be here without you.

To my Colby fam: Lyn Brown, who helped me formulate my ideas for ghetto feminism; Pam Thoma, my confidant, friend supporter, the one who introduced me to my passion,

because they are smoking the *hydro* or drinking the *hypno* to pretend that they are living the "American Dream" in order to subdue the pervasive *nihilism* in black America. These *nihilistic* behaviors, attitudes and tendencies are aiding in the destruction of a community. But as Lauryn Hill states, "we've got to destroy in order to rebuild," and this is what ghetto feminism seeks to do.

Inspired by Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered/suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, Ghetto feminism is the voices of those colored girls in the urban ghetto or in ghetto like conditions of the hip-hop generation, who are "dark phrases of womanhood / of never havin been a girl." Ghetto Feminism seeks to "sing a black girl's song / [to] bring her out / to know herself / to know you." It seeks to show black girls and women that they are not ghouls or jokes as videos and other commercialized forms of black popular culture portray them. They are not borne into this world to make the world laugh at their mistreatment and dismay. But Ghetto Feminism seeks to remember not only the black woman's fragmented body, but also the black man's fragmented body, and the severed black comm(unity). It seeks to deconstruct and not pathologize these highly racialized, sexualized and classist representations of black men and women of this particular

feminism; Margaret McFadden, my kindred spirit, amazing role model and greatest intellectual and human being I have ever met who always "keeps it real"; Cedric Bryant, who always taught me that every word has meaning so one should use them economically, I have no words to define or describe how wonderful a professor and tutor you have been helping me perfect the articulation from thought to paper; Mark Tappan, who has gone out of his way to help me accomplish my dreams and goals; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, whom I will always be grateful for helping get me through that rough sophomore year, thank you for watching over me and praying for me then and now; Jan Munroe and Joan Lietzer, I don't think I could've gotten through the Colby experience without you, thank you for helping me learn and understand myself; My family in Personnel and the Stantons, you are a god-send; my friends who have never judged me, betrayed me and accepted me for who I am, but especially Donte Tate, Javanese Hailey, Lee Rankin, and Shapel Mallard who have believed in me, loved me and cared for me in my time of need, you have been my encouragement listening to my poems, developing thoughts, and essays; Christina Terrell, Erin Hill, the SOBHU crew, EVE, and Poets Rest, thanks for the good times, good laughs and memories. To my one and only, Tamika Gambrell, thank you

for getting to know Chyann beyond her façade, I thank you for loving me and, God permitting I hope it will be this way forever.

To bell hooks, Michael Eric Dyson, Cornel West, Kevin Powell, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Johnetta B. Cole, Patricia Hill Collins, Michele Wallace, Alice Walker, Joan Morgan, Ntozake Shange, Sarah Jones, Bikari Kitwana, Todd Boyd, and other black public intellectuals and scholars who have shown me that there is a place for people like me, thank you endlessly.

To save the best for last, my Supreme Being, thank you for being my Alpha and Omega. I worship you and not religion because you have listened to my fears and dreams making them all possible. You have gotten me through the depths of despair and have saved me from death multiple times. You have taught me that I have a purpose in life and with you my path will be straight to carry out my predestined fate. Thank you for blessing me with a disease that has at often times been debilitating but has given me insight and creativity to develop such a unique project.

And before I forget, to all ya'll haters, "fuck ya'll get a job, you got too much times on your hands, fuck a dime," I'm a senior scholar holler. Thank you, for without you I would never have anyone to prove wrong because as the

greatest ghetto prophet says: "people fear what they can't understand, hate what they can't conquer, guess that's just the fury of man. So you can hate me now, cause I won't stop now, cause I can't stop now, so you can hate me now."

I luv,

Chyann "muff" Oliver, Ph.D to be

religion
making
debate
times
with you
predestine

"Ghetto Feminist"

I am a ghetto feminist
I ain't one of those middle-class white girls
from suburbia
Walkin and talkin
about equal wages
When I am half of their equal
I am a part of that 3rd wave movement
Cuz this feminist shit goes through stages

I ain't about burnin my bra
Cuz in my life, I need a 'lil wonder
Under certain circumstances
Instead, I burn my Timbs and Tommy
I burn the records that disrespect me
I burn all, well some, of my hoochie gear,
But
I am sincere about this movement
I wanna break free of these **Manacles**
That have captured me
I wanna immerse myself in a truth that enraptures me

I am a ghetto feminist
A reaction to the production of white capitalism
And the consumption of black miseducation
And fictitious emancipation
Which constructs the
Commencement of incarceration

I am a ghetto feminist
Informed about my people and our struggle
Worried about surviving eugenics
Cuz racism is no longer generic like it used to be
The plan is to get all us colored folk dismissed
Before we can resist you
But remember 9-1 1
Has shown you
What you **white** boys
in **blue**
have done
to spill
our **red** blood
Which one is patriotism?

My theoretical rhetoric
Is from observing my people

Using a street dialect
Is how we can connect

As a ghetto feminist
I address issues my sistas face
Concerning my bruthas who abuse us
And misuse us in their videos
Cuz we are their tools
Helping become their hos
Or their whores
Shit, it is their duty to do us
Bcuz we are their chores
They lose all of their direction
With the onset of an erection
And the image of their reflection
From their platinum guides them
To sell out even more
And then who is the whore?

I am a ghetto feminist
A sista
Dually educated
Highly venerated
Even with my finger pointin
My neck snappin
Hand on my hip
And mouth yappin away
I am a ghetto feminist
As Womanist and as ghetto as I can be

INTROCUCTION WHOSE FEMINISM IS THIS?

Ghetto Feminism: Neo Black Feminism for the Black Hip-Hop Generation(s),^{*} is a feminism that addresses the intersectionality of oppressions, such as racism, sexism, and classism, among other oppressions, that are inextricably linked together to subjugate and subordinate black women, men, and children of the hip-hop generation(s) who reside in the ghetto or ghetto-like conditions. The hip-hop generation, or the post-civil rights generation, is the generation that Bikari Kitwana refers to as the individuals born between the years of 1965-1984. These individuals are the first to grow up without a prominent black leader, instead, they came of age with hip-hop culture, which was a culture of resistance and reclamation of communities that were ravaged by the federal government's good intentions.

Since people of the African Diaspora create and dominate hip-hop culture, and more specifically, rap music, hip-hop has been recognized as a culture and a music that is expressive of the black experience in not only the ghetto, but also in America. Rap music began as an art form that narrates and imitates life. However, once rap became

^{*} I use the word generations as opposed to generation to refer to multiple generations of blacks that continue to come of age in the eras of hip-hop culture, which continues to expand and evolve.

commercialized and the voice of egregious violence against women, men, and children; recreational consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs; and the conspicuous consumption of luxury cars, haute couture clothes, platinum and diamond jewelry, and expensive tennis shoes, which became the formula for "making it" while faking it, the culture and the art form became an exploited form. The commercialized music and culture became the dominant voice and anything or anyone that deviated from this norm and did not follow the formula was not and is not heard. They are rendered silent much like the women, men and children who are disrespected by the commercialized rappers that they worship who "made it" by "selling out" their community and people.

The former ghetto griot or urban preacher is now the voice of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, which creates a commercialized art, which portrays this new lifestyle of the ghetto and famous that most fellow black urbanites or blacks in similar conditions imitate. The result of this imitation is a bunch of "hood rich," "ghetto fabulous" "niggas" and "bitches" who "live in the video" or "in da club" where everyone has sex and can not make love

* I use the phrase "live in the video," a phrase that I created, to define or explain this phenomenon where blacks in the urban ghetto and ghetto like areas emulate the lifestyle that "hood rich" rappers portray in the rap videos. This glorification of "ghetto fabulous living" confines black people to the physical ghetto and the mental ghetto.

because they are smoking the *hydro* or drinking the *hypno* to pretend that they are living the "American Dream" in order to subdue the pervasive *nihilism* in black America. These *nihilistic* behaviors, attitudes and tendencies are aiding in the destruction of a community. But as Lauryn Hill states, "we've got to destroy in order to rebuild," and this is what ghetto feminism seeks to do.

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generation(s). It seeks to foster some type of "gender talk," between black men and women, which Johnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall discuss, that could help fuse the severed comm(unity).

I use the term Ghetto Feminism as opposed to hip-hop feminism because I do not agree with the self-proclaimed hip-hop feminist Joan Morgan, who in her book, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks it Down*, claims to create a feminism that "fucks with the grays." She creates a feminism in which black women who are a part of hip-hop culture and love rap can check black men on their sexism and misogyny, which, in fact, she enacts. However, in the end of her hip-hop feminist declaration, she chastises Ms. Chicken for taking all of the good black men away from the good black women like herself because the good black men sow their oats with these licentious chickens. Morgan condemns Ms. Chicken instead of her "chickenhead" like behavior or the power relations which cause Ms. Chicken to behave in such a manner. In her letter to Ms. Chicken Joan berates this particular "ho" and leaves her in hoedom, while she derides her with fellow good black men; Morgan does nothing to help her fellow sister. Morgan simply confines black women to this neo-black virgin/whore dichotomy, that I call the "good black woman"/"chickenhead"

dichotomy, that solidifies the patriarchal structure in which black male patriarchs continue to subordinate black women who are busy competing with one another for approval from black males. Ghetto Feminism acknowledges that there are licentious men and women who are affected by buying into racist, sexist, and classist representations of themselves, but it does not seek to outcast them but to foster true solidarity and help uplift "chickenheads" and "niggas" who are weak structures.

Ghetto Feminism is heavily influenced by other feminist theorists such as bell hooks, whom I cite multiple times in this project, in addition to other black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Alice Walker, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Johnetta B. Cole, and Michele Wallace who have also helped construct this ghetto feminist thought. However, Ghetto Feminist thought is also shaped by "comrades in the struggle" such as Michael Eric Dyson, Kevin Powell, Bikari Kitwana, and Cornel West. These scholars and public intellectuals have taught me to try to "talk back" and "speak in tongues," which is what I try to do with a dialogic text of scholarly essays, prose, and poetry.

This project is constructed of three parts, all entitled: whose...is this? I pose the question of the

possession of the culture, "pussy," and "nigga" because black culture, community and identity has often been taken away from us and instead we are fed mass-produced images and representations of ourselves. I use the term "pussy" to refer to women because black women are fragmented pieces of a person whose bodies are often colonized. I use the word "nigga" to refer to the black male because the representation of black males is thought of as an image that black males control, this "realest nigga" persona, but much like the black woman, the nigga is a distorted representation serving as a "nigger" for "daddy."

Within each part, there are two chapters. Part one, Whose Culture is This?, contains chapter one, "(Dis) (Re)membering the Ghetto: From Multivocality to the Myth of the Monolith," which gives a background about the origins of hip hop culture and rap music and how it has become commercialized. The second chapter of part one is "'Eating the Other': White Consumption of the Underclass A La Carte," which addresses white suburban kids consuming the distorted images of black people in hip-hop culture. In Part two, Whose Pussy is This?, chapter three "This Bridge Called My Pussy," discusses the derogatory use of the word "pussy" in rap lyrics that black men use to colonize and possess black women, their sexuality, and their commodified

vaginas. In chapter four, "Venus: The Black Beauty/Booty Myth" I address the lyrical fragmentation and commodification of the black female buttocks that is analogous to the European's fragmentation and commodification of the "Hottentot Venus." In the final part, *Whose Nigga is This?*, I discuss the stereotypical, highly sexualized images of black males in rap lyrics that confine them to being nothing more than pathological sexual predators, in chapter five, "Phallacy of the Patriarch." Finally, in chapter six, "'Killing Me Softly' The Remix: R. Kelly," I focus on the sexist and misogynistic messages that the crooner disseminates and why black people as a whole continue to purchase his music.

In addition to the essays, there are ten poems that introduce each section and chapter. The poems are a way to "talk back" to the texts, and to show the multivocality of the project that comes out of and is about the culture that consisted of heteroglossic speech. Concluding each chapter is a requiem or a poem and song about the death of the culture and its women and men who all commit suicide to free themselves from these distorted representations that commercialization has helped produce. With the aid of the poems and requiems, the project seeks to reach multiple audiences, most importantly my fellow urbanites and hip-hop

generationers because I am one voice of many that shall
resonate for all to hear until change is made.

"What is Black Culture, Culture Black?: Rebel"

What is Black culture
Culture black
Hip-hop was progressive
But mass production is holding us back
We regressing to oppression
Cause we undressing the soul
Cloaking the spirit with platinum and designer clothes

Jacob the jeweler has frost and bound your wrists
Designer shackles link you together so you can't resist
Chain you down to your Coach
That transports you to the project block
Or the auction block
Where the buyers flock

to watch
you
shake it fast
in your Double G's,
in your Louis V's
in your Nikes
in your wheat trees
in those name brands that brand your ass
while you on the platform getting them to spend that cash

for buyers who watch the specimen
gyrate and grind their hips
voyeuristically rape her with rap that covers her lips
silences her and whispers in her ear: "Shush shorty don't
be scared, don't be afeard,
just promise that you won't tell
we're using you to bear more seeds that will sell
our products that will improve your living and make you
well"

so her belly swells
just like the ocean that brought us here
And in nine months she produces *Trojans*
That could've prevented the sowing of the seeds
But she breeds the soldiers
That feed off her breasts that they use to make CREAM
But even those who are lactose intolerant
Still consume
They imbibe
The white man's creed

Where all it takes now
Is 50 cent to attain the dream

Who's left to sew the seams
To mend her womb that Nas zooms in
But Dr. Dre can't cause he ain't an OBGYN

So now we got loose women
A ghetto girl's rite of passage is a part of the tradition
Little girls that grow up to be chickens
With little boys who are taught to prey
Like Jay-hova who tells them to hunt these pigeons
break their legs
To get them in the missionary position
To shoot and fire until they complete the mission
Where a pussy becomes the ignition of an expedition
It may take one key but everybody can ride
Even the scrub on the passengers side
Who ask her if they can come inside her hotel
Where R. Kelly and Cassidy tell hos:

"Girl you wanna come to my hotel
Baby I don't care if you are 14,
I'm feelin the way you carry yourself girl
And I wanna get with you cause you a preteen,
So if you wanna come to my hotel
I ain't gonna ask for ID,
we're having an after school party,
Checkin out six in the morning"

Little boys that try to get "their grown man on"
By singing sweet nothings
Cause little girls mean nothing to them
Maybe they can be a wifey
Just an accessory
From the project menagerie
Words can't set them free
Cause they serve to confine
Even the realest niggas
Can't get from behind
The 18 bars
The same ones that Reagan had begun to put them in
Then George Bush
Then George Bush
Then Pepsi
Then Crack
Then Coke

Then Hypno
Then Hydro
Then Reebok
Then Nike
Via-com(mericalization)
And on the Channel that is so clear
We hear
That niggas got big dicks
To rape black chicks
And are rewarded to put us in our places
Remind us that we are the underclass
And no matter how much money
We will never pass
Cause green is not white
There's not enough ice to frost our skin
So we need to shed it to reclaim our kin
Bring the culture black
Bring the love black
Bring the heart black
Bring the art black
We can make it the ending
We can make a new start
So fuck what these corporations want us to sell
In order to get to heaven we've got to escape from hell
So rebel
Rebel
Rebel
Rebel
Repent
The day is far too spent
Rebel
Or are you satisfied
Are you satisfied
Rebel

"Signifying Culture"

In this world
Prophets now profit
From prophecies
The future is foreseen by the elite
Or hind
Sights
Along with their heights
Set way above faren
Using their three hundred and sixty *degress*
To scorch us
Leaving us in a world that is already barren

Now we look to rappers for salvation
Cuz the elite
With their
Million dollar educations
Can't help us
Unless we are branded with:
In God We Trust

Now we are left to suffice
In a world where HOVA's crosses of ice
That he paid for thrice
Are to soothe and heal these burns
As we yearn to discern
From this fantasy
And reality TeeV
Where this devolution will be televised
As we sit and watch our demise
With the stars in our eyes
On B.E.T

But we can't *BET* on "Bobby Jones'" Gospel Hour
Cuz he doesn't have the power to set us free
From corporate globalization
And conglomeration
Or the exploitation of colored folks
And those that can't afford pauperization

And this is the *change* that we slaved for
The *change* that we paid for
This makes no sense
Cause we converted it into *tokens*
That take us on a ride
Where ideologies collide

Instead of coalesce
So now as a people we just digress
In the name of success
Where culture is capitalized
Instead of cultivated
Its equated with money
In this land of milk and honey
This shit is funny

You know
Like a
A modern day minstrel show
With niggas in black faces
Actors take your places
In the projects
In the clubs
Your bentley on dubs

Bitches shake your ass
Niggas hold up your glass
And sip on some *Hypnotic*
Smoke your *philly* filled with *chronic*
And get all demonic
R. Kelly's calling all 14 year old girls get all erotic
And move your body like a snake ma
For fake niggas
Who rhyme about pulling triggers
Just to earn six figures

Celebrate your predetermined fate
The .scripted lives
You all imitate
Emulate
Poverty and homicide
That is commodified
And rape and misogyny that is exoticized
Cause this is culture diversified
These are black people commercialized
This is black culture bastardized
This is culture black infantilized
This is signified as black culture
Let's rewrite these lines

CHAPTER ONE
(DIS) (RE)MEMBERING THE GHETTO: FROM MULTIVOCALITY TO THE
MYTH OF THE MONOLITH

Rap, hip-hop's cultural art form, began as a form of resistance to ghettoization and nihilism, as well as a reclamation of space and identity through multivocality, but it has become co-opted by commercialized rap. The media presents this commercialized form of rap as a monolithic art form instead of a subgenre. As a consequence of this co-optation, the selected margin(alized) have become the center. The center's voice, instead, is suppressed, and silenced only allowed to speak in and with the cultural colonizer's dominant, native tongue that seeks to further dismember hip-hop culture and its comm(unity).

The urban ghetto, the concrete jungle, the place of crime, poverty, drugs, AIDS, and joblessness, the site of the detonation of the nuclear black family, which houses and breeds the realest "niggas" and "bitches," is courtesy of the federal government. Using the guise of suburbanization, ghettoization was a project, much like the housing projects that poor Blacks and Latinos were temporarily supposed to reside in. It was a project whose goal was to isolate, concentrate and then eliminate the social maladies of the day: the poor Blacks and Latinos,

the welfare queens, the free-basers, the uneducated, in essence, all of the socially inept and disabled.

The first stage of suburbanization began with President Herbert Hoover, in 1931. In the President's National Conference of Home Building and Home Ownership, President Hoover proposed a plan which would increase home ownership for families by the following: decreasing the cost of home construction, providing lower interest rates for home seekers, proving long-term mortgages that were amortized, as well as providing housing for low-income families.¹ Even after his reign as president, the vision for decentralization continued with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal "alphabet soup" legislation.

The FDR administration is responsible for passing legislation, which would change the face of home mortgaging and financing. The Home Owners Loan Corporation, more commonly referred to as the HOLC, erected in 1933, was initiated to prevent the foreclosure of homes. What this corporation is well known for is its system of appraisal, which rated the security of neighborhoods by number, color, and letter. The first security grade was designated as one, green, and A. The first grade was almost always a WASP neighborhood, which was considered a good place to live.

¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 191-195.

The second security grade was designated as two, blue, and B, which was characterized as a still desirable neighborhood. The third security grade was designated as three, yellow, and C, referred to as an area that was "definitely declining." And, finally, the fourth security grade, was designated a four, red, and D, which was usually an all black or mixed area with immigrants who were poor. The inhabitants in the designated red areas were ineligible to receive home loans to prevent foreclosure simply because the red areas were a high investment risk. The exclusion of these poor blacks and immigrants from receiving loans was popularly known as "redlining."²

Similarly, in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) continued to pursue the goals of the FDR administration by continuing with the process of home appraisal determining the eligibility for those individuals seeking homes. In comparison with the HOLC, the FHA used a system of appraisal to prohibit poor blacks and poor immigrants from obtaining loans to prevent foreclosure. The FHA is well known for its "restrictive covenants" between the FHA and mortgage companies, which excluded blacks from moving from the impoverished areas into more "livable" areas that were predominately white.

² Jackson 196-203.

Likewise, projects such as the Urban Renewal also referred to as "Slum Removal," which was really "Negro Removal" as David Hilfiker notes, continued to further this project of isolation and exclusion.³ This renewal or removal was a two-part construction: The Wagner Act of 1937 and the Housing Act of 1949. The first act destroyed the dilapidated homes⁴ and the second act provided "temporary" housing for the remnants of the ghetto. Other governmental projects such as Eisenhower's Interstate Highway Program beginning in 1956, which constructed highways through the heart of the city, bisecting or segregating the poor areas from the less poor, furthered the isolation and concentration of poverty.⁵ As the ghetto waxed and waned during the various presidential administrations, it reached its nadir during the Reagan/Bush era of "Trickle Down" economics, New Federalism, the strict enforcement of Law and Order, and a "return to normalcy" or pious morality.⁶ The Reagan era can be summed up by its overt racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, nativism, and xenophobia.

³ David Hilfiker, M.D., Urban Injustice: How Ghettos Happen (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002) 7.

⁴ for every ten homes destroyed one unit of housing was erected to house the former inhabitants of the destroyed homes; Hilfiker 7.

⁵ Hilfiker 8.

⁶ Herman Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995) 14-50.

The result of this federally sponsored ghettoization was joblessness, which is characterized as the disappearance of work in urban ghettos because of the lower rental property and a less threatening environment in the suburbs. The disappearance of work was also a result of cheaper labor abroad as well as the disappearance of workers in the formal labor market. The other results of ghettoization were concentration of poverty because of joblessness and individuals with a decreasing sense of self-efficacy, or a desire to believe that their efforts to change the structural impediments or their social conditions is futile.⁷

These impoverished blacks who reside in the dilapidated urban ghettos that produce a culture of ineptness, and moral and social decay are the individuals below the class line. "These people" have no chance or ability to ascend the social ladder, thus, they will never attain the "American Dream."⁸ The so-called "underclass" are people pathologized by liberals and conservatives alike. The "underclass" have succumb to *nihilism*.

Prolific writer, philosopher and social critic Cornel West defines *nihilism* as not only economic despair or

⁷ William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World of the Urban Poor (New York: Vintage Books, 1996) 44-144.

⁸ Wilson 176.

deprivation and political disenfranchisement, but also "psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair [that is] so widespread in black America."⁹ Although this debilitating disease cannot be cured, and even when treated the symptoms can reoccur, "there is a chance for conversion-a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle."¹⁰ These symptoms cannot be treated with rhetoric either from the liberal structuralists or the conservative behaviorists, but both in order to eradicate the white supremacist ideological laden institutions, as well as the suicidal behavior, which is a consequence of the historical and current structural impediments that the conservatives pathologize. These symptoms can be treated and prevented by attacking the sense of self-worthlessness and self-loathing in black America.¹¹

However, the "underclass" has tried to treat or cure the symptoms of *nihilism* by self-medicating with heroine, crack, 40s, or by homicide, most commonly fratricide committed by other black males. There were other ghettoites who tried to nurse, suppress, or alleviate symptoms by

⁹ Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992) 38.

¹⁰ West 43.

¹¹ West 37-47.

creating a culture that would reclaim their identities and space. They attempted to re-member their land through graph art, breaking, djing, and rapping. It was through the art form rap that the voice for those marginalized who reside , or heart of the city was heard. According to scholar and social critique Michael Eric Dyson, "rap music is a profoundly oral culture that exhibits the quest for literacy that has impelled the African American community forward since its inception, certainly since its pilgrimage here on American soil." The progenitors of rap music—Gil Scot-Heron and the Last Poets, which gave birth to the old-school rappers Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel, and the Furious Five, Kool DJ Herc, Kurtis Blow, Afrika Bambaataa, Sugar Hill Gang among others—used the black homilectic, or preaching tradition, and the African-American canonical tradition of signifyin'.¹² These ghetto poets discussed their plight, but they also made songs that were less about social consciousness.

After the first wave of rap, the second wave of rap emerged, it consisted of political rappers such as Public

¹² Michael Eric Dyson, Reflecting Black: African American Cultural Tradition, American Culture, 9 vol. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 16-18; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Introduction to the Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism," African American Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. Winston Napier (New York: NYU Press, 2000) 345-346. Henry Louis Gates defines signifyin' as a trope of revision and repetition. In rap music, the trope of the "Speakerly Text," which is a process of mimesis and diegesis, or imitation and narration, is used.

Enemy and Chuck D, KRS One, NWA, and ICE-T. But, rappers such as NWA and ICE-T were deemed "gangsta rappers" because of their explicit lyrics about life in the ghetto, which consists of police brutality, drug use, "black on black violence," sexism, misogyny, alcoholism, etc. Gangsta Rap which was a name given to this so-called genre of music by the opponents of rap because, unlike rappers such as Chuck D and KRS One and other contemporaries alike, they spoke in the first person instead of speaking in the third person as their other contemporaries had done.

But the "gangsta rap" that was heavily opposed by conservatives such as William Bennett, liberals such as Tipper Gore, and a Black Civil Rights Generationer, was very profitable. This genre was fueled by white dollars; white children from the suburbs consumed this music. White conservatives feared that white children would begin behaving like the underclass, they were not concerned about the plight that black people were facing. However, the corporations began to pick up on this new, fresh and hot commodity, and thus the music became less real, less political, and more commercial. What is currently referred to as rap is this obsession with getting that paper to purchase, hos, cars, bling-bling, trips, and an exit out of the ghetto, living an "in da club" mentality where

Courvoisier is passed, *Crystal* is poppin, and *Hennessey* and *Hypnotiq* is sipped. This restrictive mentality, where the phillies, chronic, or dro, whichever name is preferred, crack, cocaine, and ex is distributed to put a black face on the *Lifesyle's of the Rich and Famous*. With this commercialized and commodity driven genre and generation respectively, other more progressive voices of rap are silenced and the master's tools are using their words to further the construction of a pseudo-monolithic art form. This digressive co-optation of progressive rap is simply another structural impediment to hinder the underclass, confining them to their physical and mental ghetto of spiritual death, despair, and lovelessness that black Americans try and are trying to deconstruct and rebuild with life, hope, and love.

Rap music, which was a voice of the people; a voice of the disenfranchised, abandoned, isolated, enslaved and subordinated, and ghettoized, a voice of the victims of suburbanization, was a voice used to discuss the injustices inflicted upon the urban dwellers. This music, which was a part of the culture, a means to reclaim space and reappropriate identity, was colonized by the dominant and transformed into a music that is dominated by gross materialism which severs a community and its people. Even

though the CREAM¹³ was a way to attain the American Dream, the ghetto adage, "more money, more problems" holds true. The more money that this monolith makes from its exodus from the ghetto, the less the ghetto and its inhabitants are re-membered.

¹³ Term used by the Wutang Clan to discuss how money influences the world. The acronyms stand for Cash Rules Everything Around Me.

"Bon Apetit"

Attention: you lily-white suburbanites
Upper middle-class wanna-be urbanites
Loosen up your du-rags and cornrows
Cuz they are too tight
Cuz I want you to comprehend
How you emulators offend
My people by consuming our plight

Listen Up: you blonde-hair, blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon
Phat Farm, Timberland, RocaWear wearing faction
Ebonics speaking, Realist Nigga, tryna be down acting
You Muthafuckas consume our culture cuz you are just
reacting

To your conservative upbringing
You think you live the life we singing
Clinging onto a culture cause you wanna rebel
So you buy what us dumb ass niggas wanna sell

Out for that fictitious White American Dream
Cuz these Sambos continue to smile on the screen
As long as we continue to live by the creed of the CREAM
Getting that paper that comes by the ream

The *underclass* is selling hotter than pussy
You can get it at a discount or full price
Purchase the whole pie or just take a slice

Get it at *Wal-Mart* or *K-Mart*

Buy it retail
Buy it wholesale

At *Neiman Marcus*
Nordstrom's
Macy's
Or at *Bloomingdales*

Buy it at a boutique
Cause every body wants to wear that ghetto chic

That underclass couture
So get it while it is hot
And while we sellin it
"Big Pimpin" it

Like we whores

Attention you crackers: Eat it up
We are a real delectable delight
A ghetto delicacy
A delicioso
Assorted chocolate fantasy
Put some hot sauce and Paprika on us
And enjoy your poverty exotica
But don't regurgitate
Savor the nigger flavor
A la Carte
Don't worry we pay for it

So eat all that you can eat
Enjoy the meal served by your house nigger
Bon Apetit

CHAPTER TWO
"EATING THE OTHER": WHITE CONSUMPTION OF THE UNDERCLASS A
LA CARTE

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," so every middle to upper-class white boy and girl in America who don in ghetto-fabulous chic-cornrows, du-rags, Timberlands, RocaWear, name-plate bamboo earrings, Jordans, Air Force Ones, and M.A.C. lip glass-reciting the lyrics of Nelly, Nas, Biggie, Pac, Jay-Z, 50 and Kim-speaking the urban vernacular better than most black people-must demonstrate how much they truly appreciate and admire black people and hip-hop culture. With the Double H Nation's exodus from the boogie down Bronx to the bourgeois 'burbs and beyond came the commodification, mass-production, and commercialization of a once marginalized genre and art form. Hip-hop culture and rap music has blown up, exploding

* This essay expounds on the discussion of white consumption of black culture that bell hooks addresses in her essay, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance, in Black Looks: Race and Representation. This essay focuses specifically and primarily on white middle to upper-class suburban youth and Corporate America, which is predominately affluent white men, instead of other racial and ethnic peoples of various socio-economic backgrounds, because collectively on the macro level these groups do not have the political and economic power to oppress and dominate, whereas affluent white Americans do. This is not to say that every affluent white person has or will oppress and dominate, but in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture, which is founded on the principles of exploitation and domination in order to garner affluence, it is likely that the affluence was attained through some type of exploitation of a subordinate group. Although some racial and ethnic minorities consume black culture in a similar way that white people have, and may view black people as inferior, there is no history of these racial and ethnic minorities exploiting and dominating black people through political and economic spheres in a manner that middle to upper-class white people have. Hence the focus on middle to upper class white consumption of black culture.

and leaving its debris in the urban ghetto where it once resided. Hip hop has left some of its current ghettoites or inhabitants of the ghetto to desire a life of poverty exotica or ghetto fabulous chic that leads black youth to buy into conspicuous consumption, hypersexualization of black men and women, sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, exploitation—all of the things that are rooted in the white American Dream—resulting in the production of a bunch of Neo Sambos, Mammies, Matriarchs, Jezebels, Toms, Coons, and Bucks in the modern day minstrel show that White America so willingly and happily loves to consume.¹

White America, be it corporations and suburban youth, love consuming black culture or love "eating the other" regardless of how expensive the price because black people

¹ In Suzan-Lori Parks play "In The Blood," in Scene 6: The Reverend on the Rock, Reverend D gives a "sermon" to "congregation member" Hester La Negrita about his financial assistance and support to the poor, but not the domestic poor, or local poor, but a foreign "exotic" poor. This type of poor or poverty is justifiable because it is not self-inflicted. The Reverend desires a poverty that looks good for the television, which makes the reverend shine because if he helps the acceptable, pitiful poor, he is viewed as a respectable man of the cloth who practices the gospel he preaches. I use this term in this chapter because black people in the urban ghetto are foreign to many white people or the voyeurs who watch the representations of black people on the news or in rap videos. Some black people of the urban ghetto desire a type of glorified poverty that is acceptable for the television or radio because it becomes ghetto-fabulous chic. To the voyeur, this type of poverty that is portrayed in television programs is a respectable type of poverty because these blacks are doing something about their positions instead of complaining and wallowing in their poverty. These impoverished people adapt some form of dominant culture, which in this case is conspicuous consumption, which symbolizes wealth, yet they are still in their respectable places: below the dominant culture, which makes their poverty acceptable. This neo type of poverty is a hybridity of blackness and whiteness, which in itself is exotic.

pay for it. According to bell hooks, White supremacist capitalist patriarchy, is the intersectionality of White supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy. These systems of domination act in simultaneity to subordinate and subjugate. Capitalism, which supposedly intends to make hip-hop transnational, in actuality seeks to commodify and subordinate black people in the same way that slavery did. Greg Tate notes the following:

It is my belief that capitalism's original commodity fetish was the African auctioned here as slaves, whose reduction from subjects to abstracted objects has made them seem larger than life and less than human at the same time. It is for this reason that the Black body, and subsequently Black culture, has become a hungered-after taboo item and a nightmarish bugbear in the badlands of the American racial imagination.²

Although White America may appear to embrace "blackness" and hip-hop culture by using urban vernacular, wearing traditional hairstyles, and donning ghetto garb in the burbs and in the boardroom, it simply urges Black people to wear black face for a little "paper"³ in order to entertain White America while simultaneously maintaining white supremacy.

² Greg Tate, ed., "Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects," Everything but The Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture, ed. Greg Tate (New York: Harlem Moon, 2003) 4.

³ In the urban vernacular paper is defined as money

The hip-hop art form known as rap, which in its initial stages was presumed to be a short-lived novelty, gained its popularity through cable television, and more specifically music videos on MTV. Rap music rapidly became a huge sensation among middle and upper class white youth because of their ability to afford the new and expensive cable television. Black youth in impoverished neighborhoods, the same 'hood where rap originated, could not afford such pricey amenities. Shows such as *Yo! MTV Raps*, which was presented as an authentic, real black show that catered to rap's progenitors, was watched and consumed primarily by suburban youth.⁴

As cable television became more affordable and accessible to all socio-economic classes, rap also became more accessible and increasingly popular, and corporate America soon began to catch on to this profitable trend.⁵ After the only rap show *Yo! MTV Raps* concluded, MTV included rap into its regular programming, and in the 90s added shows such as *TRL*, or *Total Request Live*, a daily music countdown show, in which rap music dominates, as well as *Direct Effect*, which centers on rap music and hip-hop culture. BET, or Black Entertainment Television, which was

⁴ Murray Foreman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, 2002) 240-247.

⁵ Foreman 213-225.

once a channel that had a plethora of black music, ranging from R&B to Jazz, now centers on rap music with shows such as *106 and Park*, which is a daily music countdown, and *Rap City: The Bassment*, which focuses on rap music and hip-hop culture in its raw and realest essence. Both shows are somewhat similar in format to the shows on MTV—most likely because *Viacom* now owns all of the music channels. As a consequence, rap has burgeoned into a commercialized commodity that is now even more appealing to suburban white youth and ravenous corporate CEOs.

At present, mass culture is bombarded by rap music and hip-hop culture but in a more popish and commercialized form. One could blame this commercialization and mass production of an art form, which began as a voice for the marginalized, on the "American Dream" or the "American Ethos," which is based on individualism and free-market capitalism, or exploitation of the marginalized in order to prosper. Now everywhere one goes rap music and hip-hop culture is present. Soft-drink companies, such as *Pepsi*, *Coke* and *Dr. Pepper*; phone companies, such as *Verizon*; fast food companies, such as *McDonalds* and *Burger King*; and sneaker companies, such as *Nike* and *Reebok* all use rap music and hip-hop culture to sell their products.

Although women are assumed to be the ultimate consumers and are often the target group of corporate America, youth, both female and male, are also a huge market for major corporations. Thus, rap music and hip-hop culture's fresh, unique and cool image made the blandest items for consumption more appealing and appetizing for youthful consumers who wanted to "fit in" or "be down" with the current trends. It is not surprising that most of rap and hip-hop culture's aficionados are adolescents, teens and young adults, who are mostly white.

According to prolific thinker and cultural critic bell hooks, white people consume the culture of the "other," or black people, because it is assumed by white people that black people are able to experience pleasure, whereas white people have an inability to experience pleasure, thus by consuming blackness, white people will be capable of experiencing pleasure. She attests:

It is within the commercial realm of advertising that the drama of Otherness finds expression. Encounters with Otherness are clearly marked as more exciting, more intense, and more threatening. The lure is the combination of pleasure and danger. In the cultural marketplace the Other is coded as having the capacity to be more alive, as holding the secret that will allow those who venture and dare to break with the cultural anhedonia (defined in Sam Keen's *The Passionate Life* as 'insensitivity to pleasure,

the incapacity for experiencing happiness') and experience sensual and spiritual renewal.⁶

By using black people, rap music, and hip-hop culture, corporate America plays on this so-called white lack of pleasure that essentially all black people possess. If corporate America brings blackness to the "boring" white world, white people will be cured of their pleasure-less lives.

However, this so-called appreciation for blackness, which depicts black people as more human and, in some instances superior to white people, is a disguise for the perpetuation of racist white supremacist thinking, which categorizes black people as primordial beings who are wild and free, capable of experiencing the natural "primitive" pleasures that the superior civilized white people lack. Since the rap game is predominately male dominated, black males are regarded as the individuals who possess this natural inclination to experience pleasure as hooks notes:

Black youth culture comes to stand for the outer limits of 'outness.' The commercial nexus exploits the culture's desire (expressed by whites and blacks) to inscribe blackness as 'primitive' sign, as wildness, and with it the suggestion that black people have secret access to intense pleasure, particularly pleasures of the body. It is the young black male body that is seen as epitomizing the promise of wildness, of

⁶ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 26.

unlimited physical prowess and unbridled eroticism. It was this black body that was most 'desired' for its labor in slavery, and it is this body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed. Rather than a sign of pleasure in daily life outside the realm of consumption, the young black male body is represented most graphically as the body in pain.⁷

Because there is such a large demand for commodified blackness—the black male body and the culture, as well as a desire to emulate blackness that the black male exhibits—there has been an increasing number of suburban white boys who try to imitate the well-liked, street-credible thug outcast. These duplicators who go by the moniker *wigga*, try to relate to black Americans by rejecting their own conservative white upbringing that limits their ability to experience the pleasure which they desperately. They consume the rap videos, CD's and magazines under the naïve assumption that they can become cool. They truly believe that they are down with the "realist niggas." They think that they can empathize with the hood life because they too know what it is like to experience deprivation, albeit their lack of pleasure, and the black male's lack of power and agency.

⁷ hooks 34.

Consequently, these suburban youth believe that they can "be down" and participate in intra-cultural rituals, such as using the word *nigga* to refer to their black male peers in the same manner that black males do. Regardless of the cultural political debates about the usage of a politically charged word, white people still do not have the intra-racial/cultural authority to use such a word. Even though it is a term that has been reappropriated (according to some) and revised and used as a term of endearment acknowledging a male comrade as opposed to its former racially derogatory meaning, white people still do not have access to utilize the word. But as Michael Eric Dyson attests

In part, [when any white person uses the term *nigga*] that is the unavoidable consequence of making art in an age of international capitalism, multinational corporations, and global technology. The easiest choice might seem to be to simply stop using a term over which we can exercise little control in America, much less the world. Such a choice, however denies crucial dimension of the racial struggles—for self-determination, for self-identification, for self-expression—that all black communities have historically waged, struggles that show up in the music we have produced.⁸

To echo Dyson, black usage of the word should not be banned because of the commercialization and transnationalization

⁸ Michael Eric Dyson, Holler if you Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur (New York: Basic Civitas, 2001) 148-149.

of a culture that is overly consumed. Just because a consumer of another culture may listen to rap, purchase the magazines, wear the gear, emulate the dance, and can comprehend the urban vernacular, there are certain things in the culture that are forbidden to whites. Black people should not have to discontinue using a word that is a part of their conceptualization and construction of their identity.

Not only has the mass-production and commercialization of a culture, art and people created a problem of linguistics, but also created a problem of racial representation and cultural authenticity. The *real niggas* and *real bitches* of the hip-hop generation and beyond have consumed the American Dream crafted by white males, which is based on the principles of conspicuous material consumption. It is unfortunate that black people of all classes, more specifically, the underclass, and rappers from the underclass, emulate gross materialism that is illustrated in *Town and Country*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and other white elitist magazines. However, The underclass has created a hybrid culture of ghetto-fabulous chic or hood chic that is a composite of both worlds.

Consequently, black rappers will do anything to make that paper or CREAM to live the hood rich life, and it

becomes problematic because these rappers "sell out" for the money and "buy into" the racist perceptions of blackness, in which black people are primitive beings who want to walk and talk like the civilized white Tarzan. These *realest niggas and bitches* try to walk and talk like middle to upper class white people by acquiring the same material possessions, or talking about their affluence, while simultaneously maintaining their hood authenticity. Regardless of the material acquisitions and affluence the underclass attains, they still are perceived as inferior to whites and are simply viewed as modern-day Sambos: minstrel entertainment for white consumers.

Henceforth, white people, i.e., suburban youth and corporate CEOs desire to emulate and embrace a form of blackness and hip-hop culture because it is temporary yet instant gratification and they do not have to bear the burden of being black to experience such pleasurable fulfillment. These white consumers "eat the other" not because they appreciate blackness but because it keeps black people in their respective place, below whites because white colonization and capitalization of a culture is rooted in the maintenance of the racial and economical hierarchy.

As bell hooks eloquently contends:

Within cultural debates about race and difference, mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference. The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.⁹

The commercialization of the culture of the underclass, also known as, hip-hop culture, is consumed by suburban youth and corporate America because it is a way of experiencing satisfaction and amusement through the interaction with the other. They consume blackness and black culture because it is a covert yet appetizing and patronizing way of maintaining the *status quo*.

⁹ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 26.

"Where is the Love?": A Requiem for Hip-Hop Culture (the fire)"

"I look at my environment
And wonder where the fire went
What happened to everything we used to be
I hear so many cry for help
Searching outside of themselves
Now I know that its strength is within me"
-Lauryn Hill

Where's the fire
the desire to keep moving on
It's slowly burning
and I'm still yearning
for things to start turning
in the right direction
because my perception of us is changing
and we're rearranging
our goals

Where's the fire
the desire to stand on higher ground
It can't be found
because we're lost at our own cost
Lost
in the struggle of attaining material possessions
as if it benefits succession
yet we have this obsession
when we are our own oppression
which leads us into secession

Where's the fire
the desire that we had to
inspire
but now we conspire
against us
Where is Chuck D
and Public Enemy
who were supposed to free us from this
genocide
homicide
suicide
we're committing and permitting against us

Where's the fire
the desire to attain and retain our goals

But we disdain in vain
we have slain our own
This is insane
what are we trying to maintain

Where's the *fire*
the desire to ignite the flames
Now you can't tame them because they're out of control
And your death can't console them

The *fire* has died
drenched from the tears that it has cried
saturated with the blood that it has shed
Yes
the *fire*
the *fire* has killed itself
the *fire* is dead

Where is the *fire*?
Where is the love?

"Whose Pussy Is This?"

Whose Pussy Is This?

Now I have to ask this question

Cuz you mothafuckas keep disrespectin' my shit

In every line that your lame asses spit

I'm forced to hear about my pussy

That is always on sale

A hot retail item

wrapped in plastic

for \$12.99

And this shit is drastic

Bcuz everyone thinks they too have ownership of something
that belongs to me

And I do not agree with this

I wanna break free from this lyrical prison

that I currently live in

I hear every common nigga and their respective hos and
bitches

chantin'

That they're down with *OPP*

When that last P, which is my pussy

Belongs to me

But none of you care about my feelings

Cuz you keep dealing me the same bullshit lines

Committing the same sexist crimes against me

You all want to label our pussies' pet names

Bcuz you want to restrain us

You think that just bcuz you can beat up the *oochie*

Or *attack my chocha by pinning me down on your sofa*

Roughly sexin' me after I've consumed some Hennessey

That the contents within my panties

That I have freely given up

So you are *livin' it up*

Have your name inscribed inside of them

And although some of us may abide by your rules

By allowing you to:

Thug us

Fuck us

Love us

Then leave us

Cause you don't fucking need us

Not all of us are fools

Some of us have reclaimed the pussy
As we now croon to the ever so popular tune:

My neck

My back

My pussy and my crack

Which is now the anthem or the ode to a liberated pussy

Bcuz it is not what our pussies can do for you

But what you or

we

can do for our pussies

It is not about our coochie

That we so freely give up for Gucci

Or the lucci

Just because some of us may stroke the male ego

But letting you stroke us

movin and groovin to your melodic misogyny

We all ain't puttin the pussy up as a hot commodity

I am like Ntozake's lady in green

I scream about repossessing my shit

Cause I am going on a woman's trip and I need my stuff

And I've had enuf of you possessing it

Whose pussy is this?

I ask this question one more time

Nigga, you can keep the "bitches" and the "hos"

But this pussy

is

mine

"This Bridge Called My Pussy"

This bridge
Was created for the connection of two bodies
An erection
That you now seem to fill with yours
It was constructed
As a form of synthesis
That you now sever
With your phallacy
Of a member
You like to fill the gaps
By fucking (w)holes
Using this pussy as a bridge in your songs
You wanna holler
About the size of your dick
How thick
How slick
And how quick you can stick it to us
You've gotten tired of using our backs to trample on
So now you stampede on down to the delta
Swelter in the sweat and heat that we emit
During our reconstruction
Of your deconstruction of our bridges
You wanna retreat to the motherland
That connects continents that you divide
With your tool
But go and erect another fool
My brutha
Cause mules will no longer hold your weight
You have no access to this bridge
It has closed its gates

CHAPTER THREE "THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY PUSSY"

An African-American proverb states that you must "praise the bridge that carries you over." You must give thanks to those individuals who have provided support, solidarity, and guidance for individuals traveling along a path of the unknown. During many social movements for civil rights, African-American women have served as the bridges that carried the race over the turbulent times. "If it wasn't for the women" to help carry the race and sustain it, who knows where African-Americans would be today.

However, the post-civil rights, hip-hop generation has forgotten the importance of the old adage. African-American men of the hip-hop generation especially are not only using African-American women's backs as bridges to walk on, but also their vaginas. Male rappers and rap groups such as Naughty by Nature and QB's Finest, and female rapper, Missy Elliot are now using black women's "pussies" as bridges and refrains in their songs. These misogynistic lyrics denigrate black women, denounce their being, and render

* Although in Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins initiates a discussion on black female sexuality in rap music in her Chapter on "The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood," there is still not a significant amount of research compiled on the usage of the word "pussy" in rap lyrics as a mechanism of domination and a form of hypersexualization of black female sexuality. In this essay, I attempt to construct a critical analysis of rap lyrics, with the few old and new essays on black female sexuality, in order to further the dialogue about such an important topic in hip-hop culture.

them hypersexualized hoochies and hos that are objects and property of black males.

In rap music, today the black female body is one of the most frequently discussed topics in rhymes. Whether it is the butt or the breasts, African-American women are dismembered into pieces of a person. Their body parts are often objectified and sexualized. The black female vagina, derogatorily called the "pussy," is one body part that is overly exploited and exoticized in rap lyrics. The pussy has come to be representative of the black female. The black woman is the equivalent of what her pussy is. The black woman is the equivalent to heterosexual sex and subordination.

The rap group Naughty by Nature created their popular pussy tune "OPP", or "Other People's Property," also known as "Other People's Pussy,"¹ in which men and women sing in favor of having sexual relations with a person who is in a committed relationship. Although this song discusses men and women's sexual organs as the property of another male or female, the song is widely known and remembered for men having sex with women who "belong" to other men. This is illustrated in the following lyrics:

Its OPP time, other people's what you get it /

¹ Alonzo Westbrook, Hip Hoptionary: The Dictionary of Hip Hop Terminology (New York: Harlem Moon, 2002) 103.

There's no room for relationships there's just
room to hit it / How many brothers out there know
just what I'm getting at / Who thinks it's wrong
'cos I'm splitting and co-hittin' at / Well if
you do, that's OPP and you're not down with it /
But if you don't here's your membership / You
down with OPP (yeah you now me) / You down with
OPP (every last homie).²

From these lines, it is obvious that this song encourages black men to claim black women's pussies as property that can be shared and colonized regardless of a woman's consent or approval. As long as the "homies," or male peers condone "OPP" then women become their pussies that are copious and expendable.

The song also suggests that women and men should practice polygamy. However, the women who are partaking in the communal heterosexual politics of "OPP"—having sexual intercourse with multiple men—are viewed as promiscuous and are thus branded with the licentious label of hoochie or ho.³ "In its punishing hypocrisy, hip-hop at once deplores and craves the exuded, paraded sexuality of the 'ho'. As it is with most masculine cultures, many males in hip-hop seek promiscuous sex while resenting the women with whom they

² "OPP" Naughty By Nature Song Lyrics, Song Lyrics, 22 September 2003
<http://www.thesonglyrics.com/n_song_lyrics/naughtybynature_lyric1.html
>.

³ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 83.

share it.”⁴ Consequently, the very same men, who are engaging in “OPP” with the women, denigrate the women and demonize their sexuality.

In a similar fashion, QB’s Finest, featuring the usually insightful rapper Nas, claims black women and their pussies as territory that is only to be captured, colonized, and possessed by men. As one member of the group flows:

Yeah what up ma, / take a look you hypnotized /
on how my long dick stretch your insides / for
real ma, with your thick lips and thick thighs /
stroke both holes, and pass it to Nas / or pass
it to Naish, or pass it to Jung / or pass it to
Horse, then that ass gettin tossed / fuck a
hustler book, penthouse or blacktale.⁵

To the rapper and the audience, the black woman becomes her vagina. She becomes a hole, much like her sexuality that is represented as a void that is often colonized and filled by a male presence.⁶ Her pussy becomes an “it,” an object that is communal and replaceable. Her pussy inextricably connects her to her sexuality and sex, making her overly sexual much like the women represented in pornographic

⁴ Michael Eric Dyson. Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur (New York: Basic Civitas, 2001) 186.

⁵ “Oochie Wally” QB’s Finest, Lyrics Cafe, 22 September 2003 <<http://www.lyricscafe.com/q/qbfinest/qbfinest6.htm?lyricscafe=91a819f2b38d44e1c54f4b9143fc2e59>>.

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 123.

magazines like *Penthouse* and *Blacktail*. She becomes an object that is owned, used and later discarded.

It is appropriate that all women, and especially black women, would object to such sexist, obscene, and abusive behavior, but the chorus of the song is actually recited by a woman. In an all too hypnotizing chant, she sings:

He really really really fucked my coochie / He
really really really turned me out / He really
really really got to gut me / He really really
made me scream and shout / He really taught me
how to work my body / He really taught me how to
do it with my mouth / He really really tried to
hurt me hurt me / I really love his thug and
gansta style.⁷

The young black woman reciting these lyrics more than acquiesces to such degrading conceptions of black women. She supports the male domination of her vagina and the renaming of her coochie. She exemplifies a sense of gratitude and pays allegiance to the black men who teach her how to become a ho. It is questionable, however, whether or not she is aware of the violence against her when she sings of being hurt, or if she sings the praises of being "sexed"⁸ so good that it hurts. Regardless, she still loves the ruggedness and brashness of the thug that mistreats her.

⁷ "Oochie Wally" QB's Finest, Lyrics Cafe, 22 September 2003
<<http://www.lyricscafe.com/q/qbfinest/qbfinest6.htm?lyricscafe=91a819f2b38d44elc54f4b9143fc2e59>>.

⁸ Sexed is a verb used in the black urban vernacular that is defined as having good sexual relations.

Likewise, the full-figured female phenomenon, Missy Elliot, known for her innovative beats and transgressive lyrical stylings, embraces a masculinist conception of black female sexuality. In her song "Pussycat," which is about females using the physical act of sex to maintain a monogamous relationship, Missy does little to alter the dominant sexist/racist view of black female sexuality. Instead, she adopts the notions of the black female as an object of male control that is used to hypersexualize black women, turning them into nymphomaniac hos. She recites:

Its all for the love / But there is more things
to keep a man satisfied / And I know the remedy
just to cure him from / Cheating even if he tried
hey / Pussy don't fail me now / I gotta turn this
nigga out / So he don't want nobody else / But me
and only me.⁹

In both the verse and chorus, Missy makes the pussy an object of male domination versus the subject of female control, especially when she is calling on her pussy to prevent her man from leaving her. In the aforementioned line, the pussy becomes the primary focus of male pleasure where a woman's gratification is secondary. Missy's sexual needs are never being met because she is deeply immersed in her desires to make her "nigga" happy so he will not abandon her.

⁹ "Pussycat" Missy Misdemeanor Elliot lyrics, Let's Sing It, 22 September 2003 <<http://www.letsingit.com/missy-misdemeanor-elliott-pussycat-v29fc3m.html>>.

Although Missy uses the vagina as a form of "erotic power" that all women possess and use to enable creation of all forms, the pussy is not all that powerful.¹⁰ Because men recognize the power of the erotic, they manipulate it, colonize it, and rename it pussy. Men provide women with a false sense of power, which makes women dependent on men, rather than independent and self-reliant, thus there is no true liberation, reappropriation, or sexual agency. It is power that may provide a means to an end, such as material things or another woman's man, but it is a power that is constructed within the edifice of domination, which confines women. In fact, the pussy Missy evokes in her song is powerless. The pussy exerts no true power because her "nigga" could find another pussy to satisfy his sexual voraciousness. The pussy is plentiful and thus disposable.

Because Missy urges women to reclaim their pussies and use sex to empower women to get what they want from men, it is all too appealing to assume that this song is feminist and female empowering, but it is a false conception of feminism and liberation much like the irony of Nola's liberated pussy in the film "She's Gotta Have it." In a critique of Spike Lee's film about female sexual

¹⁰ Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1984) 53-59.

liberation, cultural critic bell hooks contests the so-called sexual liberation of the lead character Nola. She attests:

Nola, though desiring subject, acts on the assumption that heterosexual female sexual assertion has legitimacy primarily as a gesture of reward or as a means by which men can be manipulated and controlled by women (what is vulgarly called 'pussy power'). Men do not have to objectify Nola's sexuality because she objectifies it. In so doing, her character becomes the projection of a stereotypical sexist notion of a sexually assertive woman—she is not in fact liberated.¹¹

Similar to Nola, Missy is not a liberated woman, but becomes a hypersexualized hoochie and ho who willingly performs sexual favors to satisfy her man's urges. The man with whom she is engaging in such, free sexual relations controls her pussy and sexuality; thus, there is no liberation.

As poet Sonia Sanchez notes, "Hip-hop [read: commercialized rap music] reflects the intent of the entire culture: to reduce black female sexuality to its crudest, most stereotypical common denominator." It reduces black female sexuality to sexual promiscuity or "hoedom." She notes that at present rap music attempts to "'asphyxiate our daughters in a state of undress, and convince them that

¹¹ bell hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (Boston: South End Press, 1989) 136.

they're hos.'" ¹² Black women are convinced that they are hos because of the colonization of their "pussies" which are used to serve and satisfy male desire.

Male rap groups, such as Naughty By Nature and QB's Finest, declare the black woman's "pussy" an object that is used for purposes of sexual gratification which then renders the black woman sexually immoral and a participant in depraved sexual relations. Female rapper Missy Elliot attempts to alter such biased notions of black female sexuality by using the pussy as a form of erotic power to gain domination over men. However, Missy's quest for "pussy power," pussy empowerment, or pussy liberation is never attained because she actively participates in the subjugation of her pussy; she allows men to dominate her sexuality and is thus never liberated from hoedom.

¹² Sonia Sanchez quoted in Michael Eric Dyson. Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur (New York: Basic Civitas, 2001) 187.

"Venus"

"Color me exotic
Exploit my erotic
And call it beauty."

"A psychotic splendor
Where you render me
An object of fascination
Mental masturbation
A lascivious temptation
For your delight."

"A white world's imported consumption
A black world's exported production
Of a contorted conception of aesthetic
A Derivation from 'primitive' genetics."

"Dissection from voyeuristic eyes
Where connection of continents relies
On the shared contemptuous adoration
Of the fragmentation
of my black female behind
Where the world derides me
Yet gives me a false sense of pride
In my money maker
Apple bottom
Booty shaker
Bootylicious
Fatty Banger
And they call me Venus."

"Invoking me from display in museums
To conjure me up and place me in videos
As one of your big booty hos
And they call me Venus."

"For I am beauty dismembered
never remembered as a woman
but as a mythologized render of beauty
and they call me Venus."

CHAPTER FIVE
VENUS: THE BLACK BEAUTY/BOOTY MYTH

Throughout American history society and culture have been influenced by European ideals. From politics to aesthetics, the United States has mirrored its mother continent. Where Europe has viewed Africans as deviant, vile, and base others,¹ the United States has shared this same view as illustrated through its past and present treatment of people of the African Diaspora. In terms of aesthetics especially, Europeans have viewed Africans as repelling, abnormal, and animalistic because they did not share the same physical attributes as Europeans.² For instance, Beverly Guy-Sheftall notes the following:

Before the arrival of the British, however, little was known about the San, Khoikhoi, and Xhosa, who were erroneously and pejoratively renamed Bushmen, Hottentots, and Kafirs. Travelers' tales revealed their peculiar physical attributes, which were intended to disassociate them from the human species.³

By renaming African tribes and associating various African people as inhuman and almost animal like, the British were declaring that Africans were different and inferior to whites. Thus, all characteristics associated with

¹ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "'The Body Politic': Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination," Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2002) 17.

² Guy-Sheftall 17.

³ Guy Sheftall 17.

Africanness or blackness were the foil to whiteness and, therefore, unacceptable.

Similarly, the United States has shared this notion that the ideal and superior standards of beauty were possessed by European and white peoples. Since white Americans are the dominant group, whiteness and the physical characteristics associated with this group are deemed normal and beautiful. And all racial and ethnic groups, and most especially, black women, who aspire to be normal and beautiful, are expected to emulate, unsuccessfully, this group. If they do not, however, they are ridiculed for being aesthetically unappealing and are consequently "othered" or outcast.⁴

Because African-American women live in "a white supremacist society, a society that is everywhere everyday of [their] lives urging [them] to hate blackness and [themselves],"⁵ they are presumed ugly and subordinate because of their darker pigmentation, broad noses, big lips, big butts, and kinky hair. In contrast to this pervasive message, during the Black Power movements of the sixties, blacks affirmed their beauty and superiority to

⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 88-90.

⁵ bell hooks, Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery (Boston: South End Press, 1993) 80.

white people and rejected white beauty norms. According to the social critic, bell hooks, African Americans felt:

the need to decolonize [their] minds and imaginations. Expos[e] the myriad ways white supremacy had assaulted [their] self-concept and [their] self-esteem, militant leaders of black liberation struggle demanded that black folks see [themselves] differently--see self-love as a radical political agenda. That meant establishing a politics of representation which would both critique and integrate ideals of personal beauty and desirability informed by racist standards and put in place progressive standards, a system of valuation that would embrace a diversity of black looks.⁶

By reappropriating blackness and beauty, African-Americans during the 1960s black power social movements redefined new beauty ideals and helped alleviate some of the psychic distress experienced by many black people, especially black women.

This new cultural rhetoric of "black is beautiful" is affirmative yet insidious. All types of cultural media, ranging from the cinema to the radio, show African-Americans embracing and professing their self-love and adoration for their heritage. Currently, in the media Black women are bombarded with messages of high cultural esteem; they are inundated with positive representations of their healthy womanly bodies. For example, African-American women are often regarded as beautiful yet exotic creatures that are admired for their full lips, kinky hair, and sepia skin, but especially admired for their "fat asses" about

⁶ hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism (New York: Henry Holt, 1995) 119.

which many black men lyricize. The "black is beautiful" slogan of the sixties has now evolved into the "black is bootyfull" mantra, where black women's beauty is determined by the fullness of their butts. This new slogan is ubiquitous in hip-hop culture, especially in rap and R&B music, videos, and magazines.⁷

According to Sirena J. Riley, "many [rap and R&B] songs have been written paying homage [to the black butt], however objectifying [it and black women]."⁸ Songs such as "Baby Got Back" by Sir Mix-A-Lot, "Back That Ass Up" by Juvenile, "Shake Ya Ass" by Mystikal, "Feelin' on Yo Booty" by R. Kelly, and "Pull Over" by Trina featuring Trick Daddy, are all rap and R&B songs that appear to embrace black beauty and femininity by rejecting white beauty norms. But these songs actually fragment the African-American woman, colonize, exploit, objectify, and commodify her body in much the same voyeuristic way that the European showcasing of the "Hottentot Venus" and pornography have done.

During the 1990s, Sir Mix-A-Lot created the most well-known "fatty-banger"⁹ song, "Baby Got Back," which paved the way for the plethora of booty anthems today. In this song Sir Mix-A-Lot attempts to deconstruct the conceptions of

⁷ Sirena J. Riley, "The Black Beauty Myth," Colonize This: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism ed. Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman (New York: Seal Press, 2002) 357-369.

⁸ Riley 365.

⁹ A fatty-banger is another name for a butt that is usually made in reference to a female.

white beauty as the ideal by reconstructing a new beauty norm rooted in blackness. For instance, in his introduction to the song, two white girls converse about the size of a black woman's butt stating:

Oh my god Becky, look at her butt, / It is so big. *scoff* / She looks like one of those rap guys girlfriends. / But y'know, who understands those rap guys? / They only talk to her, because she looks like a total prostitute, kay? / I mean, her butt, is just so big. *scoff*/ I can't believe it's just so round / it's like out there, / I mean - gross. Look! / She's just so...black!¹⁰

Clearly, the two white girls, who are discussing the black woman's butt, share white supremacist views on beauty. Both women think the black woman's butt is too large and thus too offensive because her butt takes up too much space. Since black women are inferior to white women they are not supposed to consume space—doing so would make them seem superior to white women. Also, the black woman's big butt would make her appear to be a prostitute because black women are mythologized as the antithesis of white feminine piety and chastity.¹¹

In Sir Mix-A-Lot's first verse he professes his reverence for the black butt. He exclaims:

I like big butts and I can not lie / You other brothers can't deny / That when a girl walks in with an itty bitty [waist] / And a round thing in your face / You get sprung, / Wanna pull up tough

¹⁰ "Baby Got Back," Sir Mix-A-Lot Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003 <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sirmixalot/babygotback.html>>.

¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 132.

/ 'Cause you notice that butt was stuffed / Deep
in the jeans she's wearing / I'm hooked and I
can't stop staring / Oh Baby, I wanna get wit'cha
/ And take your picture / My homeboys tried to
warn me / But that butt you got makes me so
horny.¹²

From these lyrics one can see that Sir Mix-A-Lot affirms his affinity for the black butt, but he also lyrically fragments the black woman into pieces. She becomes an ass separate from herself that he desires to colonize through sex, exploits, and objectifies during his voyeuristic gaze over her arousing hypersexualized body. Once a slave who was "'a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands divided from her womb and vagina,'" ¹³ the black woman of today is still a fragmented commodity. As Patricia Hill Collins observes, "Current portrayals of black women in popular culture--reducing women to butts [as Sir Mix-A-Lot does]--works to reinscribe these commodified body parts."¹⁴

Nevertheless, this voyeuristic behavior that severs, colonizes, exploits, and commodifies the black female body is not limited to rap and R&B music, nor did it originate in these genres. In fact, the obsession with the black buttocks dates back to the 19th century with the "Hottentot Venus." The "Hottentot Venus," Saartjie Baartman, who was

¹² "Baby Got Back," Sir Mix-A-Lot Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sirmixalot/babygotback.html>>.

¹³ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 133

¹⁴ Collins 133.

born in South Africa and later taken to London and Paris, was put on display for profit, and paraded around like an animal because she exhibited traits of steatopygia, or a large protrusion of the buttocks. Although her large protruding buttocks were considered normal to her tribe, they were regarded as abnormal to European people.¹⁵ Consequently, Baartman was mocked, degraded, and molested by those intrigued by her repulsive beauty. And when she died, her dismembered body parts were preserved and put on display at the *Musee de l'Homme* in Paris.¹⁶

Saartjie Baartman's barely clothed body entertained audiences of all types and "was used as a pornographic object similar to how women are represented in contemporary pornography. She was reduced to her sexual parts, and these parts came to represent a dominant icon applied to Black women throughout the nineteenth century."¹⁷ The dominant icon is still applicable to women in the 20th and 21st century. Because rap and R&B music have become increasingly pornographic in scope, with their explicit lyrics, magazines and videos, they too continue to reduce black women to their sexual parts.

¹⁵ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "'The Body Politic': Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination," Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2002) 17.

¹⁶ Guy-Sheftall 17.

¹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 137.

"The pornographic treatment of the bodies of enslaved African women and of women like Sarah Bartman has since developed into a full-scale industry."¹⁸ Some recent rap music has become a part of that full-scale industry. For example, "Back That Ass Up" by Juvenile mirrors pornography with the following descriptive lyrics:

Girl, you looks good, won't you back that [ass] up / You'se a find motherfucker, won't you back that [ass] up / You got a stupid ass yeah, make me laugh yeah / Make a nigga wanna grab that, autograph that / I'm sweatin in the drawers yeah, hard and long yeah / Wanna walk it like a dog yeah, break you off yeah / Get-mine you gon' get yours yeah, that for sure yeah.¹⁹

In these lines, Juvenile acknowledges and appreciates the beauty of the woman, who is most likely black, but he becomes sexually excited by the way that this woman looks. He wants to have sex with her as if she were a dog in heat: ready to have sex whenever there is an urge. He desires to mark his territory by wanting to autograph her butt. He tells her that she must submit to his demands and much like pornography, she will submit to his demands because he can use or threaten to use his penis to get what he wants. He will use his penis to colonize her separated, exploited, objectified and commodified ass.

¹⁸ Collins 137.

¹⁹ "Back That Azz Up," Juvenile Lyrics, Lyrics Domain, 8 September 2003 <<http://www.lyricsdomain.com/lyrics/13033>>.

The lyrics of Mystikal are similar to Juvenile.

Mystikal recites:

I'm buyin if you got nice curves for your iceberg
/ Drinkin here acting like it's gonna do
something to me/ Hope this indecent proposal make
you do something with me / Fuck a dollar girl
pick up fifty / And fuck that coward girl you
need a real nigga / Off top a nigga about hurtin
shit / Bend over hoe show me what you workin with
/ Shake ya ass / But watch ya self / shake ya ass
/ show me what you workin with.²⁰

As Patricia Hill Collins observes, "in contemporary pornography women are objectified through being portrayed as pieces of meat, as sexual animals awaiting conquest"²¹ which is why Mystikal wants to "hurt" the black woman he is speaking about. He fragments, exploits, objectifies, and commodifies her ass, by telling her to shake it for a price, but he is also warning her to watch her self because of what may happen to her when he becomes aroused. The black woman in the song becomes prey that is vulnerable to be conquered because of the shape and size of her buttocks.

Likewise, in Suzan-Lori Parks' dramatic yet comedic interpretation of the life of the "Hottentot Venus," the Mother-Showman behaves much like Juvenile and Mystikal do in their songs. In an exchange with the Venus, she states,

²⁰ "Shake Ya Ass," Mystikal Lyrics, R lyrics, 8 September 2003 <<http://www.rlyrics.com/M%5Cmystikal/SHAKEYAASS.asp>>.

²¹ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 135.

"WHAT A BLACKSIDE! OOOH LA LA! / STEP IN! / STEP IN STEP IN STEP IN! / (Rest) / (Rest) / Dry as a bone today / (Rest) / Dance or something." The Venus responds, "Dance?" The Mother-Showman exclaims, "Dance. Go on Girl and the other uglies you all too. / I'll clap time. / DANCE!"²² The Mother-Showman fragments, colonizes, exploits, objectifies, and commodifies the Venus' buttocks by turning her body into the entertainment for an audience in the same way that "Back That Ass Up," and "Shake Ya Ass" do. In all three instances the black woman's butt becomes a deity that all must be in awe of and worship.

However, the worshiping of the ass does not end with rap music nor with the Mother-Showman; it extends to another genre of African-American music: R&B. R&B music, or rhythm and blues as it is formally called, is music that is widely known for its soft, slow, sensual, melodic beats and love-laced lyrics. It is filled with ballads about life, love and loss but has changed over the years. One can now hear how R&B music at present is influenced by hip-hop culture. The ballads are infused with fast, hard-hitting rap beats and some of rap music's explicit sexual content.

R. Kelly, one of the most popular balladeers, is known for his lewd, raunchy lyrics. In his ode to the black booty

²² Suzan Lori-Parks, Venus (New York: Theatre Communications Group,

he croons, "as I walk you to the dance floor / We begin to dance slow / Put your arms around me / I'm feelin' on your booty."²³ R. Kelly fragments the black woman by using his hands to manipulate and control a piece of her body. He exploits and objectifies her ass by centering on this one physical attribute when he sings, "The way you back it up on me baby / God have mercy."²⁴ He asks God to have mercy on him because he is sexually aroused by her gyrating and does not know what illicit things her body will cause him to do. He also commodifies her body in the following: "Now your body's got me feelin' like spending."²⁵ He feels like spending his money on her to purchase her ass because of how good it looks to him. Much in the way "Baartman was used to epitomize an overabundant sexuality that according to Sander Gilman, 'serve[d] as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century,'"²⁶ the black woman R. Kelly alludes to in his song serves as the central image for black female sexuality throughout the twenty-first century.

As prolific feminist theorist bell hooks attests

1997) 44.

²³ "Feelin' On Yo Booty," R. Kelly Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003 <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rkelly/feelinonyobooty.html>>.

²⁴ "Feelin' On Yo Booty"

²⁵ "Feelin' On Yo Booty"

²⁶ Jacqueline E. Brady, "Pumping Iron with Resistance: Carla Dunlap's Victorious Body," Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-

When calling attention to the body in a manner inviting the gaze to mutilate black female bodies yet again, to focus solely on the 'butt,' contemporary celebrations of this part of the anatomy do not successfully subvert sexist/racist representations.²⁷

Even when black women are the ones celebrating and embracing their full womanish figures, they too border on participating in the severance, exploitation, objectification and commodification of their asses. Female Rapper Trina, for example, trespasses such finite boundaries with her song "Pull Over" featuring male rapper Trick Daddy.

In the introduction to the song, Trick Daddy is in a car with friends watching a woman pass by. This woman apparently has large buttocks so he comments to his friend, "What that bitch got all that ass for? Man pull that hoe over that bitch gotta get a ticket."²⁸ He later sings, "Whoop! Whoop! / Pull over that ass is too fat."²⁹ Trick Daddy is taken off-guard by the large protruding buttocks of this black woman and as a consequence he thinks it is a crime to have such a voluptuous body that tempts men, thus the woman should be apprehended and fined for her beauty.

Representations by African American Women ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson (Piscataway: Rutgers, 2001) 263.

²⁷ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 64.

²⁸ "Pull Over," Trina Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/trina/pullover.html>>.

It is clear from the aforementioned example that Trick Daddy objectifies and glorifies the black female ass in a way that fractures the black woman into pieces. But, this fragmentation is further complicated when Trina, the female rapper recites similar lyrics. Trina states, "Dumps in the truck / thighs like what? / Ain't nann hoe got more booty in the butt / Sisgo made that song when he seen me in a / THONG! TH-THONG! THONG! THONG!"³⁰ In this stanza, Trina is declaring that she is proud of her "thick"³¹ body and that songs about the black derriere were written in response to and in praise of her physique. She simply tells black women to be proud of their God-given bodies. Further, she appears to be challenging male notions of black female beauty and sexuality as a black female rapper.³²

On the contrary, it appears that Trina is participating in her own sexist oppression that fragments, exploits, objectifies and commodifies her ass. Trina has simply internalized these sexist lyrics about her body. She raps, "I got a fat ass and I know how to tote it / You wanna fuck? / Twenty g's for the nut / Keys to the mansion.

²⁹ "Pull Over"

³⁰ "Pull Over"

³¹ "Thick" is an adjective used in the black urban vernacular to describe a curvaceous womanly body. This adjective can be used to refer to women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

³² Tricia Rose, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994) 166.

Keys to the truck / What? Y'all know what's up / Ain't nann
hoe got more booty in the [butt]."³³ As Michael Eric Dyson
contends:

Praising the rump, while certainly praiseworthy
on some scores, is not a feminist or particularly
liberating gesture in itself, though it might be
if it figured in a larger scheme to tell the
complete story of black female identity. Instead,
the degraded black female body is revictimized
when it is eyed primarily to satisfy the male
appetite.³⁴

This is not to say that Trina has been victimized to the
point that she is unable to recognize what and why she is
saying these things, but she is actively living up to these
false representations of who she is as a black woman. She
is embracing her status as a "ho," or a whore who has a
price tag on her ass and vagina.

As Johnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall argue:

The message that young women's bodies can be
purchased cheaply on the open market is a grim,
modern-day reminder of slavery. In some ways,
Black women are still on the auction block! What
makes this scenario so devastating, however, is
that it is our own men, the young ones to whom
our future will soon be entrusted, who are
frequently doing the bidding and buying this
century. And much too often our young women are
selling themselves, metaphorically speaking, in a

³³ "Pull Over," Trina Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/trina/pullover.html>>.

³⁴ Michael Eric Dyson, Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur
(New York: Basic Civitas, 2001) 187.

desperate and misguided search for love and 'security'.³⁵

Trina who appears to be "representin' for [her] girls with the fat back[s]"³⁶ is actually misrepresenting them. She willingly embraces self-deceiving politics of sexual commodification that places black women on the auction block in an attempt to be purchased for a false sense of security that is rooted in domination and control.

"It is no mystery to most black women that [they] have internalized racist/sexist notions of beauty that lead many of [them] to think [they] are ugly."³⁷ History provides vivid examples of notions of African and black inferiority. From subjugation to segregation, women and men of African-descent have been dehumanized and viewed as unattractive and subordinate creatures because of their darker hues, coarser hair, and fuller lips, and buttocks. Post segregation during the 1960s black power and black aesthetics movements was when black people adopted a self-love and affirmative doctrine rooted in blackness. This black cultural rhetoric altered dominant standards of

³⁵ Johnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African-American Communities (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003) 199.

³⁶ "Pull Over," Trina Lyrics, AZ lyrics, 8 September 2003 <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/trina/pullover.html>>.

³⁷ bell hooks, Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery (Boston: South End Press, 1993) 84.

beauty that saturated the popular media, promoting messages of "black is beautiful."

Today in rap and R&B music the physical attributes of black women, especially, are discussed with reverence and in some instances irreverence because of explicit sexualized lyrics that fragment the black female body to further colonize, exploit, objectify and commodify the black female buttocks. The lyrics of Sir Mix-A-Lot, Mystikal, Juvenile, and R. Kelly embrace black femininity, but in an objectifying manner that parallels how the "Hottentot Venus" was historically paraded for display, and how the objectification and exploitation of black women pervades pornography today. Trina, however, attempts to reappropriate black male notions of black feminine beauty and sexuality by adopting the "black is bootyful" adage which ultimately only perpetuates the racist/sexist notions of black femininity and hinders the eradication of dominant notions of black femininity.

"Where is the Love?": A Requiem for the Black Woman"

She was my sista
My mother
My aunt
My girl
My cousin
Who had dozens of obscenities shouted at her
Because supposedly she was deserving of it all

She was the video-ho
She was the flyy-girl from around the way
She was the chickenhead
The rat
The pigeon
The ho that was in search of her mother's garden

She was that down ass chick
She was that ghetto queen
That teen mama with all her damn drama
And unnecessary attitude
Rude as all hell

She was that project chick that bragged about suckin
A multiplicity of dick
She was that nymph-ho trick
That treated her nigga
Who bragged about hittin her coke bottle figure

She was my bitch
Ironically
She was simply and purely pussy
That we all loved to
Beat up
Eat up
And turn out
Talk about with our friends
Share with our men
And compare to other girlfriends
And this shit didn't end
Until now

She was ghettoized
Romanticized
Commercialized
And sold

By
To
And for
Her peeps
And
Young, trendy suburbanites (read as: mostly white)
Who'd exclaim that they aren't racists
But they'd consumer her (as they are consumers)
But we produced her in mass production
Cause our fucking of her
Created this reproduction of a tarnished replica

And now she's gone
And I am left to mourn

*Rain drops from skies
Like tears
Oh
And I want you to be
Right here with me too
Stand by me
Said I can't help but be selfish baby
Cause I don't want to be alone*

I never got a chance to apologize for all the shit I put
you through
Black woman
I couldn't love me
So I didn't know how to love you
I guess I led you to terminate your life
Severed you with my tongue that served as a knife
I knew you were more than pussy, ass and material objects
But all I knew was how to disrespect and neglect you
A love lost
And now I'm left to wonder
If I could ever fully express my admiration
But now you're gone
Just a mere figment of my imagination

"Endangered Species"

Black males are facing a problem today
They are on the verge of "extinction"
Just like gorillas in the mist
There is no distinction
Both are simians
Primitive beings
seeing
no civilized way
of living
to stay alive
just living to survive
in the jungle
swingin from the trees
or smoking them to remain at ease
copulating and transmitting disease
or at least that what it says on the news and
National Geographic Magazine
because they are incapable of comprehending information
they have no education
just primordial cognition
so they need to be confined
until they develop more of a human mind
so they are detained
left to dream about walking and talking like
a cultured infallible Tarazan
Just wishing they could be like man
a dream that will never be
sheer misery
mimicry
so they are left with rage
institutionalized in a myriad of ways
suffocating from their ignorance
and drowning in their feces
ultimately becoming an endangered species

"'Magic Stick'"

I've been bestowed with a gift
Blessed with a treasure
Measure
Twelve inches to a yard of never ending
Pleasure

I can do magic with my wand
I can do tricks
With my stick
Beat it up
Skeet it up
Cause I'm no man I'm just dick

I stroke deep in waters
Navigating with my tool
I've got phallic power to help me rule

I'm an animal a black stallion
To satisfy a nympho ho
Constrict pussy with my python
Cause I'm the Mandingo

I am a brave heart
QB's finest warrior
I attack the oochie
Beat up coochie
Cause my stick can't love

I'm like a genie
Where any wish is granted
I can guarantee infinite perfection
I am an erection
that's everlasting
I keep flabbergasting
Those who doubt my ability
I'm adroit, possessing finesse and agility
You can exploit my virility
Cause I'm an object
I have no civility
I know no humility

I have an affinity for bangin' big booty black bitches
Poppin cherries with the curl that lay behind my fly
I'm the mass produced product
That consumers wanna buy

As long as I get my paper

White supremacist capitalist patriarchy produces and
consumes this phallacy

The myth of the macho

Who will it for daddy

CHAPTER FIVE THE PHALLACY OF THE PATRIARCH

In the October 2003 issue of the widely read and favored hip-hop magazine *Vibe*, the eccentrically inventive rap duo Outkast is featured in a sexually suggestive photo spread. In this photo Andre 3000 and Big Boi are in a room filled with a harem of naked, ebony complected beauties who serve as props. These overly sexualized, fetishized women stand erect holding cherries the size of beach balls, covering their genital area. With the coquettish "fuck me" look in their eyes, they gaze intently at the two. Big Boi, with a devious and satisfying smirk on his face, grabs a cherry of his choice, squeezes it, and saturates his hand and arm with its juice.

It is obvious what the Outkast illustration is saying because it is nothing original. In fact, it is one of many hypersexualized images and messages of and about the black woman and the black man. It is a ubiquitous portrayal of the black man that has become normalized in this culture.

According to the popular media, the black man is the "Mandingo Warrior." He is his big, black, erect dick. He is a "cherry popping" fuck machine whose sole purpose is to conquer as much "pussy" as possible. And these images are omnipresent because the mass culture is bombarded with

these racist/sexist images of the hypersexual deviant. The mass culture is bombarded with such images because there is an obsession with the black male phallus.

This obsession with the black male phallus is one that is rooted in a deep-seated apprehension of the black male and his phallic member. Historically, white men have feared the black male penis because of its potential to threaten the chastity of white womanhood. There was this trepidation that the black male would encroach upon and colonize the white man's territory and domain, which was the white woman. As a consequence, the black male was castrated and lynched. He was emasculated and effeminized because the entity that differentiated him from his female counterpart was his phallus, and without it he was no longer a man.¹

The emasculation of the black male, during slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, led to the search for black masculinity and manhood in the 1960s and 1970s Black Power Movement. Black men were on a sojourn looking for their masculine identity. Leaders, such as Eldridge Cleaver, author of *Soul on Ice*, in which he candidly discusses his attempts to reclaim his manhood by raping black women as practice for raping white women in order to get back at the white man, defined his manhood in terms of his phallus.

¹ Michele Wallace, The Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (New York: Warner Books, 1978) 50-126.

Cleaver, along with other emasculated black males, internalized the racist conceptions of black masculinity, and used their dicks to emulate a hegemonic masculinity that was rooted in white patriarchy.² For the black males of this era, the dick was a tool used to construct a black masculinity; it planted its seeds in white patriarchy to produce a black man.

The internalized racist images of the black man and his dick prevail today. Much like the explicit Outkast photograph are rappers who use their dicks to construct three types of patriarchal black men. There is the stud, or sexual gratifier, who uses his penis to satisfy the women he has sex with; the P.I.M.P., who sexually exploits women for personal gain; and the animal, who acts like a savage, dehumanized beast to conquer women. These internally racist/sexist rappers use their penises to create and emulate three types of representations of loveless patriarchs who "do it for daddy."

The stud or the sexual gratifier is the first type of phallocentric patriarch that is illustrated in rap lyrics. Much of the mass-produced, commercialized rap music depicts the common black male and the black male rapper, not as

² bell hooks, Salvation: Black People and Love (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 135-137.

men, but as objects, as virile bucks who can sexually stimulate and fulfill any sexual fantasy.

During the summer of 2003, the stud became an exalted figure with the notorious Lil Kim and 50-cent song, "Magic Stick," which discusses the sexual dexterity and finesse of the black male and female. In the chorus of the song 50 cacophonously sings:

I got the magic stick /
I know if I can hit once, I can hit twice /
I hit the baddest chicks /
Shorty don't believe me, then come with me
tonight/ And I'll show you maaagic/
(What? What?) Maaagic / I got the magic stick³

50 possesses this magic wand, this mystical object that can perform fantastical tasks. This special wand that he is bestowed with not only provides him with the opportunity to have trysts with women of a higher caliber, but also is extremely powerful and supernatural, which allows him to maintain an erection to satiate any woman's sexual appetite. 50's magic stick, his big black mythological and majestic dick sets him apart from the white man, because he is superhuman, an almighty man, almost God-like because of his phallic power.

In the first verse, 50 continues to boast about his virility and adroitness, he brags:

³ "Magic Stick" Lil Kim Lyrics, Lyrics on Demand, 3 November 2003
<<http://www.lyricsondemand.com/lilkim/magicsticklyrics.html>>.

I have you up early in the mornin, moanin /
Back shot, proper or low can't stop us /
Been a fiend for it since Rakim made hits /
Get the position down pat, then there's the
switch / I'll rock the boat, I'll work the middle
I skeet it up, straight beat it up⁴

In these lines 50 brags about his exaggerated sexual abilities. He is a virile buck, who is capable of stimulating any woman's libido, especially a black woman's, which is allegedly abnormal because she is a freak, a nymph-ho, a sexual deviant who needs sex all of the time. The notorious K.I.M exhibits some of the hedonistic behaviors of the licentious black wench. She replies to 50:

I got the magic clit /
I'm on fire, lick once, I get licked twice /
I am the baddest chick /
Shorty you don't believe me, then come with me
tonight / And I'll show you maaagic /
(What? What?) Maaagic, uh-huh uh-huh /
I got the magic clit⁵

She possesses the magic clitoris that allows her to orgasm multiple times from the slightest form of stimulation. In fact, her magic clitoris, which is characteristic of black women, constantly needs stimulation to satisfy her sexual urges. The black male stud is the only man that can quench the black woman's sexual fire because he too is a sexual deviant who is a fiend for women. He is always erect, ready and willing to fuck, a sexual predator who cannot control

⁴ "Magic Stick"

⁵ "Magic Stick"

his sexual urges. "The black male [is] preoccupied with his role as a lover and sexual partner." The black male, like the black female is represented as a hypersexual beast, a descendent of the lascivious Africans who are "beset by an unrestrained lustfulness."⁶

The comedic rapper Ludacris recites similar lyrics about his sexual voraciousness. In his song "What's Your Fantasy," with female rapper Shawna, he raps about satisfying a woman's desires, regardless of how wild or unrealistic the fantasies are. He contends:

I wanna get you in the bath tub /
with the candles lit you give it up till they go
out/or we can do it on stage of the Ludacris
concert/cause you know I got sold out /
or red carpet dick just roll out /
go 'head and scream you can't hold out /
we can do it in the pouring rain /
runnin the train when it's hot or cold out /
how 'bout in the library on top of books /
but you can't be too loud /
you wanna make a brother beg for it /
give me TLC cause you know I be too proud /
we can do it in the white house /
tryna make them turn the lights out /
champaign with my campaign let me do the damn
thing / what's my name, what's my name, what's my
name / a sauna, Jacuzzi /
in the back row at the movie /
you can scratch my back and rule me /
you can push me or just pull me /
on hay in the middle of the barn (woo) rose
pedals on the silk sheets uh /
eating fresh fruits sweep your woman right off of
her feet⁷

⁶ Robert Staples, Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society (San Francisco: Black Scholar Press, 1982) 13-14.

⁷ "What's Your Fantasy" Ludacris Lyrics, AZ Lyrics, 3 November 2003

Ludacris, differing to 50, has an element of romanticism in his lyrics, when he discusses the usage of candles and rose petals to set the mood for his rendezvous with his women. However, Ludacris is not a romantic. He is not sensual or erotic because he is a stud, an inhuman sex machine, incapable of exhibiting true human like qualities of romanticism and eroticism. He is simply his phallus; he can only gratify a woman with his penis, and he cannot truly gratify her with love-like qualities.

The stud's sexuality is exploited because he is being used to have sex in public places, such as a concert hall, or library because black sexuality is animalistic, a spectacle for voyeurs to enjoy. The stud's body is devalued because his body is not his, it is an instrument for pleasure that can be contorted and subjected to discomfort as long as he gets his job done. The stud in rap lyrics is much like the black male in pornography because as Alice Walker notes, "'in pornography the black man is portrayed as being capable of fucking anything...even a piece of shit. He is defined solely by the size, readiness and unselectivity of his cock.'"⁸

<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/whatsyourfantasy.html>>.

⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 141.

Although it appears that Black men are reclaiming, reappropriating and exerting their own form of masculinity in a white supremacist patriarchal society, they are actually "acting in complicity with the status quo, [because] many black people have passively absorbed narrow representations of black masculinity, [thus they] perpetuat[e] stereotypes, myths, and [offer] one-dimensional accounts."⁹ The stud is one such stereotype, myth and one-dimensional account of black masculinity that is perpetuated by black male rappers, and the P.I.M.P is another.

Currently in commercialized hip-hop culture, the pimp is exalted as an idealized and idolized patriarch. Black male rappers, 50 cent and Ludacris pay homage and pledge allegiance to such a sacred being.

In "P.I.M.P," 50, exerting his masculinity recites:

I don't know what you heard about me /
But a bitch can't get a dollar out of me /
No Cadillac, no perms, you can't see /
That I'm a motherfucking P-I-M-P.¹⁰

50 exclaims that he is a pimp, a modern one who does not resemble the pimps of an earlier decade. The only similarity that he has with the pimps that came before him

⁹ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End, 1992) 89.

¹⁰ "P.I.M.P" 50 Cent Lyrics, Lyrics On Demand, 3 November 2003
<<http://www.lyricsondemand.com/0/50centlyrics/pimplyrics.html>>.

is his belief about women being inferior to men and who are only used as property, which he cannot and will not financially support.

50 continues his tirade about bitches and hos by discussing how he exploits these women and benefits from their immoral lifestyle. He contends to the other men how worthless and expendable these women are, encouraging the men to treat the women like disposable commodities. He contends

I told you fools before, I stay with the tools /
I keep a Benz, some rims, and some jewels /
I holla at a hoe till I got a bitch confused
She got on Payless, me I got on gator shoes /
I'm shopping for chinchillas, in the summer they
cheaper / Man this hoe you can have her, when I'm
done I ain't gone keep her.¹¹

In this verse, 50 demonstrates a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal masculinity because he behaves like a pathological black male who must resort to deviant forms of behavior in order to assert his manhood. He is a consumer, a materialistic man, who lives a lush life at the expense of the women he prostitutes. His women have nothing because they are inferior to him due to his possession of the penis. Since he has an organ that dominates the commodified vagina, which makes the vagina commodifiable, he has the power to rule as a patriarch.

¹¹ "P.I.M.P"

Similarly, Ludacris raps about being a big dick patriarch, a new type of pimp who has "hos in different area codes" because he is well endowed. In "Area Codes" he rhymes:

Too much green, too much fun /
I bang cock in Bangkok
Can't stop, I /
Turn and hit the same spot /
Think not, I'm the thrilla in Manilla, /
Schlong /
In Hong Kong
Pimp em like [bishop], magic Don Juan
Man after Henny with a /
Coke and a smile /
I just pick up the motherfucking phone and dial /
I got my condoms in a big-ass-sack /
I'm [slangin] this dick like a New Jack.¹²

Ludacris makes his "green" by pimping women in different locations, but he also uses these women for his own recreational purposes. He becomes the "man" because of how much "pussy" he can get and how well he can sex the women in these different locales. Like the stud, his penis is a mythologized figure; his big dick is what garners him power as a patriarch. He becomes a full-fledged patriarch whose masculinity is "rooted in physical domination and possession of women," which embodies a phallocentric masculinity.¹³

¹² "Area Codes" Ludacris Lyrics, Lyrics On Demand, 3 November 2003
<<http://www.lyricsondemand.com/1/ludacrislyrics/areacodeslyrics.html>>.

¹³ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End, 1992) 94.

The third type of phallocentric patriarch that is constructed in rap lyrics is the animal. This representation of the black male, much like the stud and P.I.M.P, has its foundations in white supremacist conceptions of black masculinity. The black male has never really been considered a human being, let alone a man, thus he has often had to prove that he was both. However, in order for the black male rapper to prove that he is a man, he has to dehumanize himself, thus perpetuating the animalistic stereotypes.

Black male rapper Horse from rap group QB's Finest internalizes and disseminates such racist beliefs about black males being animals. In "Oochie Wally" Horse flows:

When it comes to sex I'm similar to the thriller
in Manilla / Bitches call me Horse the pussy
filler / I fuck a big boned or slim chick /
Beat that pussy up real quick then send home the
bitch.¹⁴

In this song about objectification of the vagina, the black male is depicted as an animal, a horse, a huge dick that fucks "chicks," or animals relentlessly. He is a beast that has no human characteristics, which would allow him to care for the women that he has sex with. Similar to the P.I.M.P,

¹⁴ "Oochie Wally" QB's Finest, Lyrics Café, 22 September 2003
<<http://www.lyricscafe.com/q/qbfinest/qbfinest6.htm?lyricscafe=91a819f2b3d44e1c54f4b9143fc2e59>>.

he is a "thriller in Manilla" who only wants to conquer the women he has sexual intercourse with.

Not only does Horse refer to his dick as a horse, but also as a snake, a devilish and sinful serpent. He sings: "I pull out my python, I hit it while my wife's gone / Long dick the bitch all night, I'll make her pussy sing this song."¹⁵ Although he refers to himself as an animal, nevertheless, he is still a man, because white supremacist patriarchy will only allow him to be a man, a patriarch who is nevertheless, subordinate to white men. The only group that the black male can subordinate is women, and more specifically black women, and it is his ability to dominate with his penis, which makes him a patriarch.

Besides their phalluses, black male patriarchs share a commonality; it is a shared sentiment of lovelessness. None of the three patriarchs are able to love because they are preoccupied with domination and the acquisition of material possessions. Rappers 50 cent and Horse rap about beating up pussy with their "magic stick" and penis, respectively, because they can only fuck, they can only dominate. Domination in the form of sexual subjugation and consumerist capitalism do not enable or generate love;

¹⁵ "Oochie Wally"

these forms of domination are not rooted in a love ethic.¹⁶ These patriarchs continue to perpetuate and perpetrate a cycle of hatred and greed in this culture.

As Barbara Ransby and Tracye Matthews note:

In essence, some rappers embrace a political vision that uncritically accepts and internalizes the dominant society's narrow and patriarchal definition of manhood, and then defines liberation as the extent to which black men meet those criteria: the acquisition of money, violent military conquest, and the successful subjugation of women as domestic sexual servants. This is ultimately, not a revolutionary praxis, but an assimilationist one dressed up in black face.¹⁷

This quotation echoes the aforementioned statement. The political vision that Ransby and Matthews refer to is a political vision that supposedly contests white supremacist notions of black masculinity and emasculation of black males. However, the three types of patriarchs who delineate this phallogentric patriarchal black manhood uphold white supremacist capitalist conceptions of masculinity, which black men buy into. The three types of patriarchs do not reject or challenge these white supremacist conceptions; they just go along with them.

¹⁶ bell hooks, Salvation: Black People and Love (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 128-153.

¹⁷ Barbara Ransby and Tracye Matthews, "Black Popular Culture and the Transcendence of Patriarchal Illusions" Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought ed. Beverly Guy-sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995) 533.

A majority of the more popular and commercial Black male rappers "do it for daddy"; they portray a masculinity that aims to please white males.¹⁸ The stud, P.I.M.P and animal are all acceptable caricatures of the black male because they uphold white supremacist ideals and thus will never be challenged by the predominately white corporations that produce and disseminate these distorted representations. Because white males dominate mass communication, black males are left to accommodate and satisfy the tastes and desires of white males in order to make money that would allow them to attain the glorified "American Dream" of gross materialism, thus they are left to disseminate racist and white supremacist images of themselves.

In addition, these black male rappers "do it for daddy" not only by acting and rehearsing their scripted roles as insufficient black patriarchs, or caricatures of men, but also by trying to be better than daddy; they try to "out dominate" and "over dominate" the ultimate dominator: daddy, and the dominated respectively. These black male rappers are not mirroring white patriarchy, but they are going beyond this type of "normative," "natural" patriarchy. In a sense, these rappers are reclaiming

¹⁸ bell hooks, Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies (New York: Routledge, 1996) 83-90.

patriarchy in a more egregious form of domination over black women. These men are revising the paradigm or archetype of patriarchy into an even larger form of dominance. However, these males fail in their attempts to out dominate the dominant group and "do it for daddy" because these black males become pathologized and feared by the dominant group, which leads to the rationalization and justification for the physical and symbolic forms of castration and incarceration of the black male by the dominant. Thus, black males continue to participate in this vicious cycle, which keeps them captive until they realize that they have to challenge and change the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal system, instead of trying to work within it with the hope of making it work for them.

The obsession and fear of the black penis led to physical and symbolic forms of castration that served to regulate black masculinity and protect white women. It also served to emasculate and effeminize the black male leaders of the Black Power Movement to overcompensate for their loss. The black male leaders of the Black Power Movement viewed their phalluses as powerful tools that would grant them the masculinity they were deprived of. This masculinity that was centered on the phallus persists into

the present day, in which rappers boast about the size of their penises and how it operates. This phallocentric masculinity creates three types of patriarchs: the stud, the P.I.M.P and the animal who perpetuate racist/sexist beliefs about black masculinity.

"'Killing Me Softly'"

Strumming my pain with his fingers
Singing my life with his words
Killing me softly with his song
Killing me softly
With his song
Telling my whole life with his words
Killing me softly
With his song

His song
Has played me
But not with the dexterity
Of guitar strumming
So I cry from the pain that's ensued
My wail is cacophonous to the melodic humming
That once was rhythm and blues
His fingers are now used
To feel on my booty
Manipulate my beauty
Turning me into one of his serpents to charm
Where my venom is used to harm me
Poison: a big butt and a smile
A vile being
So I am a prisoner
Concubine
One in a million of his harem of hos
Loose, legs wide open
Mouth tightly closed
Cause I have constricted myself
In order to protect him
Moving to his beat
Losing myself in rhythm
Becoming a slave
Or learning to behave
Like one
Hypnotized
Mesmerized
Like the young girls he seduces
And then charms with his snake
A fake
Balladeer
Who reminds me of a rapist
Using my ignition
To make a new rendition
Of a love song

That Nigga's gone wrong
Killing me softly

CHAPTER SIX
"KILLING ME SOFTLY," THE REMIX: R. KELLY

"What is R&B without the R?" Well, simply B for bullshit. The "self-proclaimed 'pied-piper'" of R&B, R. Kelly, asks the aforementioned question in his popular summer 2003 hit "Thoia Thong." This question that the R poses, in fact, is not a question, but an arrogant assertion, in which he contends that he is R&B music and without him, R&B would not exist. The R, who has risen from his meager beginnings in the early 90s as a smooth singing, sexually driven, soulful crooner with his band Public Announcement, has become an accomplished and well-established contemporary R&B artist, with major thug, yet refined sex appeal. The R's success is a consequence of his highly marketable and commercial contemporary R&B sound and persona, which are both a hybrid of old-school R&B and commercialized rap music. This fusion of R&B's sensualized sexuality and commercialized rap's egregious hypersexualization, misogyny, sexism, and materialism, is the same infused formula that the R has used to construct his dualistic persona. This dualistic persona makes the R famous and simultaneously infamous for his candid ballads about love and passion and his raw sexual avidity.

The R's declaration of narcissism, not only has led him to believe that he made R&B what it is at present, but also has led him to believe that his success provides him with the access to anything and everything that he desires to attain and conquer. And currently, the "pied-piper" of R&B is accused of living up to his make-believe moniker. The R has been accused of acting on his desires and longing for underage girls and luring them into his "Chocolate Factory," with his most popular tool, his pipe, and his Willy Wonka like appeal. Regardless of the R's alleged fascination and accusations of copulation with little girls—including his former 15 year-old wife and protégé, the late Aaliyah—the R has used his lyrical genius, or ingenuity, not only to show black men, black women, and black people how to love and express that love and spirituality, as his R&B predecessors have done; but also to show black men how to do the following: exploit and objectify black women, fetishize women of various "exotic" "third-world," colonized nations, disrespect and demonize black women for not giving up sex for material goods, while implicitly urging men to take sex from the "loose" women when they do not give up the "pussy." Based on these three examples of blatantly glamorized portrayal of misogyny and

sexism, fans and supporter's of the R, especially black fans, should be critical of his lyrical content, the messages he is disseminating, and the persona that he is selling to consumers, who validate his vanity, which leaves the R to believe that without the him, the only thing left is B, which is bullshit.

"I've got an idea of what women want to hear and also what men want to tell their women. And I don't believe in doing a ballad that just talks about love," says the R in his October 2003 interview, entitled, "I'm a Good Person," with contributing writer for Blender magazine, Jonathan Gold.¹ The R's conception of what black women desire to hear from their black men, and what black men wish to tell their black women, is how much they want to objectify these women, as they would objectify an automobile, and how these women should rejoice about their objectification. Also, the R, the self-appointed voice of the people of the African Diaspora, articulates how black men like to fetishize and consume women of African descent like an exotic fruit cocktail, and in turn these women should aspire to be fetishized-or in the R's eyes-revered. Last, the R, the voice of instruction, coaches black men to regulate and control black women's sexuality, through serenading, while concurrently covertly, yet overtly, urging women of the African Diaspora to feel compelled to exchange sexual

¹ Jonathan Gold, "I'm a Good Person," Blender October. 2003:74.

favors for material objects, and if they do not comply, then they should accept the consequences of their ingratitude, insincerity, and disloyalty to their men of the African Diaspora.

First, *R.Kelly*, the R's second album as a solo artist, is filled with brazen sexuality, yet it is still soulful, and sensual, depending on the listener of course. As with much of R&B music, artists walk a fine line of acceptability and offensiveness, and R. Kelly, who has teetered along that line, crossed it with many songs. In particular, his song on the *R. Kelly* album, entitled, "You Remind Me of Something." The R. sings:

You remind me of something
I just can't think of what it is
You remind me of my jeep, I wanna ride it
Something like my sound, I wanna pump it
Girl you look just like my cars, I wanna wax it
And something like my bank account
I wanna spend it, baby²

From watching the video to this song, in which all of the women in the video are black, it is unambiguous that R. Kelly is referring to black women in this song. By referring to any woman, and especially black women, or women of the African Diaspora, as cars or as a material object, that he can ride, and wax, is not a song that

² "You Remind Me of Something," R Kelly Lyrics, AZ Lyrics, 30 November 2003

<<http://www.azlyrics.com/youremindmeofsomething.html>>.

venerates women. If anything the song reinforces images of black women serving as objects to ride, such as mules. As anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston noted, "black women are the mules of the world." All black women or women of the African Diaspora are looked at in awe, yet are expected to bear all of the burden. In this instance, the burden is being viewed as an inhuman object that is placed on display for its "beauty."

There is an element of care for this car or woman expressed by maintaining the object through waxing; however, his idea of waxing, is what black men and women of the urban ghetto refer to as "waxing that ass," or sexing a woman so good. There is nothing wrong with having sex, or making love to women and desiring to sexually gratify women, but in the context of the song, it can be argued that he views black women as objects that are only good for sex.

The R continues to compose songs about the analogous relationship between automobiles and women, in "Ignition Remix," on his most recent album *Chocolate Factory*, he states how he will stick his key in a woman's ignition. The R, as he refers to himself on *Chocolate Factory* album, transgresses the boundaries of tasteful and acceptable, and distasteful and unacceptable. In his very popular song,

"Snake Remix," which is a remix of the song "Snake," appearing on the sexually explicit and derogatory album, *Chocolate Factory*, The R merges the two genres of contemporary R&B and "urban" music, which features a collaboration with rappers Big Tigger, from BET's, *Rap City: The Bassment*, and Cam'Ron. Because The R attempts to merge the two genres of black music and to appeal to two generations of black people, R. Kelly has assumed this role as the thug of R&B: a misogynistic, exploitative, materialistic balladeer.

In the first verse of *Snake Remix*, he croons:

Come on move your body like a snake ma /
Shake until it wanna break ma /
Come on and, let me see you go low ma /
Bring it back and let it go ma /
I love the way you move your chocha /
Makes me wanna get to know ya /
We gonna pop open a bottle of the [Hypnotiq]
no more time waste[d]let's get this party started
/ Track so strong it's like it's bionic /
So funky it's like somebody farted
Poppin it like a string on a guitar /
Superstar you know who you are /
Body smoking like a Cuban cigar /
[You're] the mama and I'm the dada
These honeys in America /
Shake ass like they from Africa
That's why [I'm] always up in the club /
V.I.P. with thugs and liquor³

On so many levels, this particular song is very problematic because it operates within this racialized sexist lens,

³ "Snake Remix," R Kelly Lyrics, AZ Lyrics, 30 November 2003
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/snakeremix.html>>.

which views women of the African Diaspora as dehumanized overly sexual *things*. Through this lens, women of the African Diaspora are distorted representations of women. They are serpents that are as devious and duplicitous as the Jezebel, or the Hottentot Venus, who gyrate their hips and ass for "all the world to see." They are desired for shaking and showing their *chochas*, or "pussies," which are the objects they use to gain admiration, affection, and interest from men of the African Diaspora.

It is debatable that The R's distorted perception of these women is due to his over consumption of *Hypnotiq*—a popular hard alcoholic beverage—however, with or without an intoxicating beverage, the R continues to imbibe the racist and sexist portrayals of women of the African Diaspora; he is consistent in his objectification of women. He even goes as far as transforming objectification into fetishization, as he does by perpetuating the stereotype that African women—referred to as a monolithic group—are hypersexual, uncivilized, corporeal, and animalistic. Also, the female descendents of these sexually unrestrained women resemble their foreign (read: exotic) foremother's of the African Diaspora, through their provocative dancing. This "whore-like," or "unlady-like" behavior is alluring and desirable

by the black male voyeurs who fetishize these spectacles of women.

To continue with this disturbing yet "bangin" song—because of its beat-rapper, Big Tigger further exoticizes and fetishizes women of the African-Diaspora. He raps, "Move your body like a snake ma / wait ma / the [Hypnotq] bringin our your exotic nature."⁴ He urges the women to consume alcohol to become uninhibited to get in touch with their more sexual side, which renders them vulnerable to victimization. Big Tigger implicitly urges the women to embrace their "feminine beauty" (read: booty) and sexuality because he appreciates their physical attributes. Moreover, because women are "naturally" jealous of other women that men find attractive, the desired women should disregard the envy and continue to appeal to men. For instance, he rhymes, "twenty five out of a dime is what I rate ya / never mind them other girls (you know they gonna hate ya)."⁵ This is problematic because women of all racial and ethnic groups, and especially women of the African descent, are unable to establish a bond and forge solidarity to resist patriarchy and sexism because they are in constant competition with other women for male approval and validation.

⁴ "Snake Remix"

⁵ "Snake Remix"

In a few lines later, "Big Tig" recites, "Turnin you on by nibblin on your ear like Ty-son."⁶ Now, this phrase alone can be interpreted in myriad ways. This statement can be read as his desire to arouse his sexual partner, and/or conquest. However, it could also be read as a reference to violence, as in Mike Tyson biting off Evander Holyfield's ear. More specifically, the aforementioned statement, when put into context, can be read as a form of gendered violence, or violence against women, and this particular reference to Tyson could also refer to his former conviction for sexual violence. These readings could be outlandish, but are necessary to ponder.

R. Kelly, uses his smoothness and suaveness to subtly serenade women into performing sexual favors to reciprocate for lavish dinners, jewelry, clothing, casual conversation, in other words, monetary loss and time spent. In his song "Don't You Say No," from the *TP-2.com* album, he expresses his discontent with performing "chivalrous" tasks without some form of "equal compensation." He cries in a sweet melodic way: "I been doing these things for you / now what you gon' do for me? / I ain't trying to spend no cash if you ain't spending that ass, no."⁷ In these lines not only

⁶ "Snake Remix"

⁷ "Don't You Say No," R. Kelly Lyrics, 30 November 2003
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/dontyousayno.html>>.

does he commodify black women's fragmented bodies, or barter his material goods for their bodies; but also, attempts to control their sexuality. He controls their sexuality by confining them to rigid gender norms. It is almost as if he urges the women to act more like "virgins," which are admired for their pure beauty and are revered because they are untouchable; yet he desires these women to be like "whores" who have no qualms with casual sex for pay; however, he desires to chastise the women whom he views as "whores" because they will not give up the "coochie." In essence, he robs the women of their sexual agency.

R. Kelly continues with his disenchantment with his inability to be compensated for his services because he feels he is entitled to a woman (read: pussy). It is in the chorus of the song that he sings: "Don't you say no tonight (don't) / Don't you say no tonight (don't you say no babe) / Don't you say no tonight (mmm) / Don't you say no tonight (cause I'm ready to go)."⁸ If one were to listen to the song and how well he belts out this tune, the perfect cadence, and the sensual background music, one could miss the message that he sends. In a very clever yet subtle way, Kelly uses melody and harmony to disguise his implicit

⁸ "Don't You Say No"

message: a woman better not say no to his sexual advances because she is the cause of his arousal. Since he paid for her dinner and other extravagant items, he expects and anticipates sexual remuneration. The problem is that he urges black women to comply with his sexual demands, a woman of African descent must answer in the affirmative. However, if a she does not answer in the affirmative, or does not even acquiesce to his demands, then it is perceived that she is not acting in accordance with the patriarchal law, thus she can be physically coerced into sexual remuneration and she would bear the burden. The rape would be her fault because the black man is entitled to her body; it is his inalienable right as a man. Therefore, he is not at fault, he is just being and doing as a man.

The most disturbing thing about this song is that the perception of sexual entitlement/sexual remuneration is one that many men share, specifically, men of the African Diaspora. Many black men within the hip-hop generation truly live by these perceptions or rather creeds of sexual entitlement/sexual remuneration, whether it is forcibly or without coercion. Hip-Hop culture, expert and critic Bikari Kitwana addresses this in the following passage:

The objectification of women may not be unique to [the hip hop generation], or to Black men. However, it has become more chronic among hip-hop

generation men. Too many young black men are open, brash, and adamant in voicing patriarchal and oppressive views toward women. Not only do they believe these views; they swear and live by them.⁹

In many of The R's popular songs, he sings about the objectification of women, and his fans—most of whom are men and women of the hip-hop generation—often do not view his lyrics as offensive or sexist/misogynistic because sexism and misogyny are normalized in not only dominant culture, but also Black culture, and most egregiously in hip-hop culture. Sexism, misogyny, and other forms of violence against women are masqueraded as “normal” gender interactions, or loving behavior because it is in a ballad, when in actuality it is the same old sexist shit in a black voice.

On the contrary, the R has another side to him that many fans of old-school R&B like to see and hear. This is the kind, caring, charismatic/spiritual R. Kelly. This particular persona is different from the “pied-piper”/pedophile/sexual predator persona, and the R/nymphomaniac, egotistical/narcissistic persona, which could possibly be the same persona. This foil character sings and writes inspirational songs such as the popular Billboard hits: “I Believe I Can Fly,” and “You Are Not

⁹ Bikari Kitwana, The Hip Hop Generation: You Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002) 103.

Alone." One of his most recent inspirational love songs for 2003/2004, "Step in the Name of Love," ironically comes from what appears to be his sexual confessions album, *Chocolate Factory*. This song, unarguably, is a very uplifting tune, with a music video that compliments and accentuates the beauty of the song. From listening to the song and observing the video, it is obvious that R. Kelly is attempting to appeal to an older audience, or an older generation, which could possibly explain why the lyrics are free of vulgarity, sexism, misogyny, and the incessant references to pussy, ass, cash, cars, ice and *Hypno*. Kelly sings in the most endearing way:

Many lovers have come /
And many lovers have gone /
Similar to an old fashion song /
A thousand years from now /
We'll be still putting it down my baby
You can change the frame /
But the picture remains the same /
Similar to the sun after the rain /
Thousand years from now /
We'll be still putting it down my baby¹⁰

The song reads like a beautiful love poem or ballad. The only inference that can be made from these lyrics is how much he admires, respects, adores and reveres his significant other. He continues to urge his listeners and those who are in love or respect some type of loving bond,

¹⁰ "Step in the Name of Love," R Kelly Lyrics, AZ Lyrics, 30 November 2003 <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/stepinthenameoflove.html>>.

or even monogamy, to "step in the name of love," "clap in the name of love," and "snap in the name of love," because love is something that all should relish.¹¹

Similarly, in his other love song off of the overly sexual yet sensual R. Kelly album, the R. Kelly persona reemerges from the "sex fiend" shell, and he sings about a pure and spiritual love for his significant other. He sings: "A religious love for you baby / Every night I pray / That Heaven will send you back to me / Baby you're all I ever needed / Religious love for ya baby / Every night I pray / That someday I'll have you for my wife / Baby you are my life / please believe me."¹² This song alone could make the R's most skeptical and usually disgusted listeners and critics appreciate his portrayal of deepness and sincerity for a Supreme love.

However, R. Kelly constructs two personas both of which are caricatures of black men. The problem with these scripted roles is that the listeners or audience are often unable to discern between fantasy and reality. The more thuggish, "rap persona" that the R. portrays makes more money. Thus, it is more marketable and in turn more profitable for him to portray himself as a "pussy bandit,"

¹¹ "Step in the Name of Love"

¹² "Religious Love," R Kelly Lyrics, AZ Lyrics, 30 November 2003 <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/religiouslove.html>>.

"sex-fiend," materialistic, alcoholic, weed-smoking "nigga" from the hood trying to "keep it real." This stereotypical portrayal or caricature of black men is another type of a *phallacious* patriarch that continues to be pathologized by dominant culture. Since, the R appears to be "keeping it real" and singing or providing an autobiographical account of what life and gender relations are like in the hood, young men of the African Diaspora are more apt to follow his lead because the R can seduce or pull women even with his brash style. Consequently these men continue to pathologize the "abnormal" gender relations between men and women of the African Diaspora.

Interestingly enough, R. Kelly's sexual appeal, talent, and affluence have garnered him support and fame from black women. The R, the more thuggish representation of R. Kelly, has garnered him support and fame from black men of the hip-hop generation, but ironically, even more support and fame from black women of the hip-hop generation. Because of his popularity among women of the hip-hop generation, especially those born in the 1980s, The R. has found himself in the news for allegations of having coercive sex with a minor and filming the act, as well as other forms of pedophilia and statutory rape, and has been charged with 33 counts of child pornography.

Although he has not been proven guilty, many men and women of the African Diaspora have dismissed the allegations as racist/white supremacist rhetoric that is used to keep the black man down. Many people of the African Diaspora continue to purchase his music, and many black women and men believe that the girls who allegedly engaged in sexual activity with Robert Kelly were not coerced and were gold diggers trying to set Robert Kelly up to get his money. This may well be true, but the simple fact that men and women of the African Diaspora, for the second or third¹³ time support hierarchal gender dynamics, suggests that they cannot see or comprehend possible misogyny, sexism, patriarchy, and sexual coercion which in and of itself, is severely disturbing and immobilizing for the black community and the hip-hop generation. Hip-Hop critic Kevin Powell speaks to this phenomenon in the passage below:

Or what of the R. Kelly matter, where it has been rumored for years that the R&B crooner has had a thing for female minors, yet we, men and women, still support him—as evidenced earlier this year when his latest album, *Chocolate Factory*, bumped the hottest rapper in America, 50 Cent, from the top of the Billboard pop charts. Not only have I heard a number of Black men say that they watched the infamous videotape allegedly showing Kelly

¹³ During the Mike Tyson and Desiree Washington sexual assault case, as well as the Tupac sexual assault cases, many black men and women alike took the side of both males ultimately blaming the black women for participating in the white supremacist conspiracy to keep the black man down, when the women knew what the men expected, or they were just "hos" trying to get paid.

engaging in sex with a child, but these Black men saw nothing wrong with it, and some even suggested that "She must have wanted it" or "Well, she looked grown," which says, to me, in the main, that we have become so warped by our own powerlessness, our self-hatreds, our hatreds of Black women, that we will rationalize any sickening behavior that one from our ranks does because we feel it is our birthright as men to have the sexual favors of women, of girls, even if it means taking it forcibly.¹⁴

Powell, who is a Black man, clearly and powerfully articulates his disgust for such disregard and disdain for black women.

Despite Powell's disdain, black women continue to make similar comments as the comments that the "bruthas" articulated to Powell. StarChyld, a black woman replied to the Vibe magazine online article by Shanel Odum, entitled "The Chocolate Facts." In this online forum, StarChyld writes:

WHAT CAN WE SAY? THE MAN IS MUSIC. THERE ISN'T ONE PERSON OUT THERE WHO HASN'T BOBBED THEIR HEAD TO THE 'IGNITION (REMIX)' OR TRIED TO MOVE THEIR BODY LIKE A 'SNAKE.' YES, STATUTORY RAPE IS WRONG, BUT WE MUST NOT LET R. KELLY'S PRIVATE LIFE OVERSHADOW THE VALUE OF HIS CRAFT. HE IS A MUSICIAN FIRST. IF WE WERE FANS BEFORE, WE CANNOT ALLOW A BIT OF CONTROVERSY SWAY US. IN THIS CASE, HYPOCRISY SHOULD NOT BE AN OPTION. I, AS A WOMAN AND AS A MUSICIAN, WILL NOT BE THE SLIGHTEST BIT UPSET IF HE IS ACQUITED. THEN IT'LL BE TIME FOR AMERICA TO CONTINUE TO PAY THE 'PIED PIPER.'¹⁵

¹⁴ Kevin Powell, Who's Gonna Take The Weight: Manhood, Race, and Power in America (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003) 123.

¹⁵ StarChyld, e-mail to the forum discussion, 6 Aug. 2003.

StarChyld's comment, although disturbing, is quite common among many black women. Many black women and men will continue to support The R's music because they believe that he is a great musician, or a lyrical genius. But, if The R, is acclaimed a lyrical genius, and his lyrics clearly objectify and degrade black women, why do black men and women consider him to be a lyrical genius and support his music that overtly portrays women and men in a negative way? What is ingenious about egregious objectification and abhorrence for black women? Why is the R able to knock 50 off of the top of the charts with his overt sexism and misogyny? There are four possible reasons why the R has become the R in R&B.

First, as previously mentioned, R. Kelly has risen to success because many consumers, especially the black consumers, male and female, only consume the representations of R. Kelly that they want to consume, and they discard the other more negative representations that R. Kelly displays. It is as if this particular group of consumers has cultural amnesia or selective cognition, in which they forget the raunchy, sexually explicit, sexist R, and remember the debonair crooner who wails about love woes.

Second, the men and women of African descent view R. Kelly or whatever moniker he uses at the moment, as a persona that he portrays. He is acting as a thug, or "pied-piper" because he desires to do so, whether it is for money or for entertainment purposes. These individuals who use this type of logic to rationalize their indulgence of his music, believe that they can discern between the reality and the fantasy; they realize that the R, what he represents and what he is singing about is not real and it is not Robert Kelly. These listeners simply like his beats and are not looking at the R as a role model or an NAACP image award nominee.

Third, there are the consumers who are supporters of the R because they do not want to be thought of as "haters" who try to knock the man who is just trying to get his hustle on, or simply trying to get that paper as a black man in this unjust racist world. The negative messages about black women that the "pied-piper" conveys to his audience, which he is profiting from, are not contestable because he is simply voicing widely held beliefs about black women. Since he is singing about the popular beliefs about black women in not only black culture, but also mainstream culture, there is no problem with him getting paid for telling the truth.

Fourth, women of African descent continue to purchase R. Kelly's packaged sexism because they do not believe that the R refers to them; they believe he refers to the "video-ho" who behave like hoochies or promiscuous women. This is the same type of rationale that female supporters of the misogynistic commercial rap use to explain why they are not offended when rappers call women bitches in their lyrics. In Bikari Kitwana's *The Hip Hop Generation*, he discusses this type of rationalization. He writes:

Without a pause, the hip-hop generationer explained why it didn't bother her that rappers referred to women as 'bitches' and 'hos.' Setting aside the historical weight of such words, she expressed her ambivalence to this name-calling: 'I don't think there's anything wrong with it. Some women act like that and deserve to be checked. I know I'm not a bitch or a ho, so I don't care 'cause I know they ain't talking to me'¹⁶

What is bothersome about this young black woman's statement is the fact that many black women and black men of the hip hop generation truly subscribe to such beliefs that there are different types of black women. These women who act like the good black girls, the "wifeys," like the young woman above, not only disassociate themselves from those unruly women who get out of line and need to get checked, but also create a virgin/whore dichotomy in which black men

¹⁶ Bikari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: You Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002) 85-86.

and women punish the whore, or the bitch, chickenhead, ho, etc., for being antithetical to the wifey, or good black girl. For black women especially, this dichotomizing and rigid binary thinking further divides black women, encourages competition for black male approval, making it virtually impossible for black women to establish solidarity to define themselves in a more dynamic manner.

But as hip hop cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson notes, this type of virgin/whore dichotomy, or wifey/chickenhead dichotomy, is in and of itself a false dichotomy. He refers to this dichotomy as the bitch/ho nexus. He notes: "If women give sex easily, they're "ho's." If they don't their "bitches."¹⁷ This rigid conceptualization of black femininity renders women as animals, objects of desire, or chaste **girls** who are revered for their piety but simultaneously disdained for their inability to be objects of desire. Either way all black women and girls are subjected to castigation and are all viewed as inferior women and can be vilified as such. Hence the notion that one can successfully operate within this binary is false.

Regardless, of whether the R is guilty or innocent, he uses this "scandal," for lack of a better word, to sell

¹⁷ Michael Eric Dyson, Holler if You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur (New York: Basic Civitas, 2001) 186.

more records, win more music awards, and even an image award nomination from the NAACP. Robert Kelly, R. Kelly, the R, the "pied-piper," the "lesbian R&B thug," how ever he refers to himself or presents himself, he disseminates harmful perilous messages about women of the African Diaspora and men of the African Diaspora and their prescribed racialized gender roles. As a black entertainer, who is also regarded as a role model for girls, boys, men and women of the hip-hop generation, and generation X, he teaches boys and men that it is acceptable to objectify, sexually exploit, and vilify girls and women of the African Diaspora. And he tells these girls and women to accept the abuse and misconduct and embrace it because it will never change. Although he sings about loving relationships that may appear to be idealistic, he rarely composes these songs, and these songs are not as popular as his more raunchy tunes. As a consequence, people of the African Diaspora continue to consume distorted images of them as they embrace the rampant sexism and misogyny, which renders them powerless and pathological.

"Where is the love?": A Requiem for the Black Man"

I am thuh Voice on thuh Tee V and I am here to announce that Black Man with Hypnotq thuh absolutely last living Negro man in thuh whole entire known world-is dead.

I am Prunes and Prisms and I am here to tell you that Timberlands bear strange fruit, blood on thuh leaves and blood at thuh root, assorted chocolate bodies swingin to thuh tempo of thuh breeze, strange fruit hangin from those poplar trees.

I am thuh Voice on thuh Tee V and I am here to announce that this is thuh death of thuh last black man in thuh whole entire world. Yesterday tuhday, next summer, tuhmore, just a moment uhgoh dieded thuh last black man in thuh whole entire world. Uh! Oh. Don't be uhlarmed. Don't be afeared. It was painless. Uh painless passin.

I am Prunes and Prisms and I am here to tell you that Timberlands bear strange fruit, blood on thuh leaves and blood at thuh root, assorted chocolate bodies swingin to thuh tempo of thuh breeze, strange fruit hangin from those poplar trees.

I am thuh Voice on thuh Tee V and I am here to tell you that thuh Black Man with Hypnotq drank himself to death. He wuz found hangin from thuh Timberland with a platinum necklace. But don't be afeared it was painless.

I am Prunes and Prisms and I am here to tell you that Timberlands bear strange fruit, blood on thuh leaves and blood at thuh root, assorted chocolate bodies swingin to thuh tempo of thuh breeze, strange fruit hangin from those poplar trees.

I am thuh Black Woman with Crystal and I am here to mourn thuh death of thuh last black man in thuh whole entire known world, thuh Black Man with Hypnotq

He was thuh last of thuh endangered species
Once a fine specimen
But then thuh kulture got thuh best of him
He bcame one of thuh assorted chocolates imported from R.
Kellys factory
A mass produced delight
Who lost sight of himself

Bcuz he drank too much
And sold out for thuh material wealth

His vision and dreams bcame distorted
Bcuz he resorted to over-consumption
Of himself and gross materialism
He thought it wuz thuh way to hip hop imperialism
But white people colonized thuh marginalized
And capitalized them making them mainstream
And then thuh Black Man had dreams
Of being not only a ball player
But a lyricist who bcame all about thuh CREAM

Then he bcame a Sambo
With a smile that would bling
Pimped by thuh record companies to sing
about his ice
And thuh size of his penis
Thuh bitches he would fuck
And then he wuz acclaimed a lyrical genius
And now he's gone

It's a shame that he took his life
He had so much potential
We all knew how influential he wuz
Except he didn't know
He wuz idolized and idealized
By whites and other colored folk
But he wuz on display as an overplayed joke

Tryin to b a real nigga
Tryin to b a bizness man
Tryin to b but neva could b
So he drank himself to death
And ended up wrapped snuggly around thuh Timberland in his
Pretty platinum neck-lace

He couldn't take it anymore
Tired of being a whore
For the world
So he took his life
In a lyrical lynching
To b free from
Thuh chattel slavery

And all I can do is mourn
My world is torn from me

Bcuz although he mistreated me
He wuz my brutha, My luva
My friend
He wuz misguided
And his luv wuz unrequited
So now he's gone
And all I can do as thuh forlorn is say

*These are lies
It's not real
This is more than I can feel
This is wrong now you're gone
I've tried hard to carry on
If you could've seen how I've been
Then you know how much you mean*

To me

AFTERWORD
"WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"

We as the hip-hop generation(s) have a long way to go. No change is going to happen over night. This is a long peregrination where the destination to eradicate the web of oppressions may not happen during our lifetime. The goal is to change perceptions by deconstructing widely held notions about black people. We as black men and women do not have to buy into these mass-produced images of ourselves that teach us how to be men and women. This commercialized culture does not have to be representative of who we are because our identities are not fixed, they are fluid; conversion is possible.

I am not suggesting that we as black people urge to censor rappers, but we do need to hold them accountable for the things that they say and we need to encourage them to develop a sense of critical consciousness that many scholars and public intellectuals talk about. We can hold them accountable by refusing to purchase their music, or by disseminating counter messages and images that deconstruct the messages that commercialized artist present. In addition we can continue to have dialogue with the rappers, hip-hop moguls and the more progressive thinkers.

I realize that as a black woman it is especially difficult for me to enjoy commercialized music and its hot beats once it is deconstructed and revealed as sexist and misogynistic diatribes. However, there is a fine line between compliance and resistance that we as black women walk. It leaves us with another rigid dichotomy that forces us to be either compliant by dancing or resistant by refusing to dance. But there have to be options in between these two ends of the spectrum. I think that once black people, but women especially, are aware of these false representations, they should make the decision on how they want to resist, rebel or transgress. The means of transgression are not exhaustive, nor do I have all of the solutions.

It is important to note that this struggle to resist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy cannot be fought with simply black women alone, or black men who are supposed to also reject being a P.I.M.P., animal, or stud without being viewed as a "fag." Once we as black people create a more civil gender dynamic and restore the love to the community through self-love first, instead of using material objects to make us happy, we can form a coalition with other racial and ethnic groups. We can attack the major record companies who produce, encourage, promote,

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distribute and financially reward these carbon copy artists
and their music which divides the black community. We as
black people can also have other advocates of Ghetto
Feminism or any progressive thought or movement to
eradicate the "matrix of domination."

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