

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY, HIP HOP MUSIC AND THE WHITE PERSPECTIVE:
HOW ONE-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF HIP HOP MUSIC
HAS INFLUENCED WHITE RACIAL ATTITUDES

by

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ABSTRACT

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This theoretical study builds from Ben Agger's theory in his 1992 book, *Cultural Studies as Critical Theory*:

The ideological outcomes of the culture industry are in a sense unintended; they emerge in the interplay of authorial, directorial, and audience assumptions about the nature of the world. (Agger 1992:65)

I theorize the effect of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions on the one-dimensional representation of hip hop music and its reflection and reinforcement of Whites' perceptions of Blacks and Black Culture. The reinforcement of Whites' historically negative racial attitudes emerge unintended through a complex cycle of assumptions between the director (culture industry), the author (hip hop artist), and the audience (White consumers).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The culture industry's cycle of assumptions is the interaction between the director (culture industry), the author (hip hop artist), and the audience (White consumer). Together the three combine to create ideological outcomes that reflect and reinforce historically negative White racial attitudes. Interrogating all three aspects of the cycle assists in understanding the complexities of the culture industry's racial representations and White racial attitudes as well as understanding the role of each agent in the re-cycling of negative images that reinforce negative perceptions. The culture industry would not yield as much influence over racial perceptions if the hip hop artists did not accept the demands of the culture industry and reflect negative images of Blackness through hip hop music. However, the artists and the culture industry would not continue to perpetuate negative images of Blackness through hip hop music if the White audience (not only Whites, see Ibrahim 1999) did not accept the representations as authentic Blackness. In order to understand the dynamics of the cycle of assumptions we need to investigate the historical nature of White racial attitudes and the way those attitudes have been recoded in contemporary America. We must tie these negative racial assumptions of the White audience to the production and performance of commodified "authentic" Blackness through hip hop music. Then we can connect the performance and production of commodified hip hop music to the reinforcement of Whites' historically negative racial attitudes.

1.1 Historically Negative White Racial Attitudes

Although The United States of America was founded on principles of equality and natural rights and laws, these principles excluded African slaves who were understood to be biologically inferior (Sears, Sidanius, Bobo 2000, Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, Krysan 1997). The concept of biological inferiority was accepted by White Americans long after the 13th

Constitutional Amendment freed the slaves in 1865, the 14th Amendment granted Blacks full citizenship in 1868, and after the 15th Amendment gave Black males the right to vote (Sears, etal 2000). These amendments were intended to extend some measure of equality to Blacks but the narrow interpretation of the courts kept the amendments from granting any form of equality (Sears, etal 2000). During the Jim Crow era, the equality offered by the courts came in the form of “separate but equal” and the theory of Social Darwinism gave further justification to the belief that Blacks were biologically inferior to Whites (Schuman, etal 1997).

Up until at least the 1940s, segregation, discrimination, and openly verbalized prejudice toward minorities of all kinds were entirely acceptable throughout much of the United States (Schuman, etal 1997).

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the intellectual climate began to change as America entered World War II to fight the Nazi racism. During this period scientists, biologists, social scientists, and psychologists began to abandon the notion of biological inferiority (Schuman, etal 1997).

In the 1997 book, *Racial Attitudes in America*, Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krystan, break down the last sixty years of American racial history into four periods: prelude to civil rights politics, 1930-1954; the modern civil rights movement, 1954-1965; the unfinished civil rights agenda, 1965-1979; and retrenchment and reaction, 1980-1997. By defining these four periods, they illustrate the way in which racial attitudes have shifted over the past 60 years from overt forms of abuse and segregation to more subtle forms of racism such as voting against policies that foster equality. Leonie Huddy and Stanley Feldman assess contemporary racism by separating racist behaviors and attitudes into two categories of overt prejudice; “negative feelings toward blacks and a belief that blacks are inherently inferior to Whites,” and new racism; “subtle racial prejudice conveyed through white opposition to black demands and resentment at their special treatment” (Huddy and Feldman 2009:425).

David Sears, Jim Sidanius, and Lawrence Bobo, further illustrate the change in the manifestation of White racial attitudes in their 2000 book, *Racialized Politics: The Debate About Racism in America*. They refer to Symbolic Racism Theory to explain how Whites justify

negative racial attitudes when it is no longer socially acceptable to use racial slurs, or deny seating to a person of color. The four main tenants of Symbolic Racism Theory are: “Blacks are no longer especially handicapped by racial discrimination; they still do not conform to traditional American values, particularly the work ethic, as well as obedience to authority, and impulse control; they continue to make illegitimate demands for special treatment; and they continue to receive undeserved special treatment from government and special elites” (Sears, etal 2000:77). As Whites’ racial attitudes have shifted from overt racism to symbolic racism, racial discrimination has been coded under the guise of individualism, and “...Whites now emphasize individual rights and individual achievement as the touchstone of success in the United States. In doing so, white Americans ignore the disadvantaged starting point that blacks face as a group” (Schuman, etal 1997:292). This viewpoint allows Whites a neutral justification for opposing policies that assist the Black community and continues the tradition of historic White racism by blaming Blacks themselves for their social inequality.

In short, prejudice today is preoccupied with matters of moral character. At its center are two complementary contentions: that blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that, with the connivance of the government, they take what they have not earned. Today, we say, prejudice is expressed primarily in the language of individualism; today individualism is part of racism (Sears, etal 2000:61).

Blaming the inequality between Blacks and Whites on moral character is a codified extension of the biological inferiority theory that was accepted up through the 1940s.

The belief that blacks do not work as hard as they should, or as hard as Whites, has been a central racial stereotype since the early days of slavery... Whites have long resented blacks’ demands for better treatment, but these demands are now perceived as demands for special rather than equal treatment (Sears, etal 2000:77).

The coding of racial prejudices in the “American Ideals” of hard work and individualism, denies that “a history of discrimination and oppression created a huge black underclass, and the technological and economic revolutions have combined to ensure it a permanent status... The black underclass falls behind the larger society in every conceivable respect” (Wilson 1980:27).

This new racism or symbolic racism plays out in the culture industry's cycle of assumptions, as the culture industry reflect and produce, hip hop artists perform , and white audience accept and purchase historically negative Black Representations through one-dimensional hip hop music.

1.2 Hip Hop Music

Hip Hop music (also referred to as rap music) emerged as an extension of disco, Jamaican "Dub", rock, and R&B, while rapping emerged from MC's who would talk over the music as DJ's fused the various music genres for the crowd to dance (George 1998). Hip hop music developed as a local, underground, alternative to the mainstream with a message which confronted urban poverty, racism, and a growing sense of economic abandonment in Black inner city neighborhoods (Rose 1994, George 1998). Although not exclusively a Black movement, the hip hop culture gave many young Blacks an avenue to create a new space in which they could communicate and express the frustrations and hopes specific to the Black community (Rose 1994). As hip hop spread from the streets of New York City to cities across America, it began to take on the local identity of the artists and their communities.

Hip hop music has become a highly contested art form as it has climbed to the top of the popular music charts and influenced various areas of culture from education to advertising (Kitwana 2002, Carter 2006, Ibrahim 1999, Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Following its popularity, critics of hip hop music have credited it for the destruction of the Black community, gang and drug related violence, demeaning of women, and the overall destruction of America's values (Rose 2008). Towards the end of the 1990's, hip hop music became increasingly associated with its negative manifestations, particularly "gangsta rap," but also highly misogynistic, materialistic, violent, and hyper-sexual lyrics and images. Hip Hop's multiple dimensions of politics, religion, comedy, social commentary, urban story telling, and social critique became underrepresented in mass media, as the commodities of gangster, ghetto, violence, drug dealer, and misogyny were thought to attract a wealthy, suburban, white, teenage audience. The culture industry's intentional one-dimensional representation of hip hop music, for the

purpose of attracting White consumers, plays on historically negative assumptions of the Black culture. This positioning of hip hop music created an economic environment which necessitated rappers adopt the commoditized negative images, which continued the cycle of one-dimensionalization. As hip hop artists continued to play the roles defined for them by the culture industry by representing negative images through hip hop music, Whites continued to accept the negative images and lyrics as authentic Blackness. The acceptance of these manufactured images and lyrics led the culture industry to increase production of the one-dimensional, negative forms of hip hop music.

1.3 The Culture Industry

Frankfurt School authors such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse extensively critiqued the media's ability to influence the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of consumers. In their 1947 book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer named the combination of radio, print, television, and advertising the "culture industry." They critiqued the culture industry's power to create false consciousness and reinforce dominant ideologies, which lead to reproduction of ideology instead of expansion of the mind.

Each single manifestation of the culture industry inescapably reproduces human beings as what the whole has made them. And all its agents, from the producer to the women's organizations, are on alert to ensure that the simple reproduction of mind does not lead on to the expansion of mind. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947:100)

Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry thesis provided a foundation for Herbert Marcuse's 1964 book, *One Dimensional Man*. Marcuse furthered their critique by emphasizing the way the culture industry eliminates the multiple dimensions of reason, identity, and culture. He argued that the one-way mediation of information (mainly through the new medium of television, but also radio, news papers, cinema, and advertising) disrupted the individual's and the culture's ability to discern true needs from false needs. He also argued that the culture industry's influence over all of culture reproduced dominant cultural ideologies in individuals and limited

the expansion of the mind and perspectives, thus rendering the man and culture one-dimensional. When the culture industry apprehended hip hop music, it one-dimensionalized the art and expression to reproduce hegemonic relationships between Whites and Blacks and reproduced historical ideologies of the Black culture as inferior and responsible for their own inequality (Schuman, etal 1997, Sears, etal 2000, Charles and Bobo 2009, Huddy and Feldman 2009, Rose 2008). This representation of hip hop music has damaging effects on the way Whites filter their encounters with Blacks some Whites are unable to distance themselves from the negatively mediated representations that form and reproduce historically negative racial attitudes towards Blacks in America.

Ben Agger agrees in *The Virtual Self* (2004a), that individuals in today's culture are saturated with images and messages. "Selves' psyches are engaged by the culture industries, which induce people to spend hours watching television and Web surfing, consuming advertising images that form identity" (Agger 2004a:107). Todd Gitlin reinforces the effect of the culture industry's influence as he argues that American culture has been saturated by images to the point that it is incapable of making conscious choices and decisions:

Collectively, the main 'effect' of media saturation is that we live – we have no other choice – in societies whose people waste away countless hours watching television, listening to recorded music, playing video games, connecting to the internet, and so on unto the next wave of technologies (Gitlin 2002).

Being saturated with media images that form identity and lull society into a quotidian experience of consumption without critical analysis leads the legitimization of hegemonic boundaries of class, race, and gender forces (Kellner 1995:62). Interrogating the culture industry's positioning of Black images through the co-option of hip hop music is necessary to reveal one source which informs Whites' leaps of abstraction (Senge 2006) when filtering their beliefs about Blacks. Leaps of abstraction are made possible when the culture industry saturates mass media with one-dimensional negative representations of hip hop music and Whites, unable to separate

themselves from the media torrent (Gitlin 2002), accept the images as authentic representations of Blackness and project reproduced negative perceptions onto individual Blacks.

1.4 Commodification of Hip Hop Music

In the same critical view of the Frankfurt School authors, many hip hop intellectuals, Michael Eric Dyson (1996), Patricia Rose (1994, 2008), Todd Boyd (2003), Bakari Kitwana (2002,2005) and Nelson George (1998, 2005), have critiqued the role of the culture industry in distorting hip hop music into a one-dimensional form, commoditized and sold as violent, misogynistic, materialistic, and destructive. The culture industry has limited the representation of hip hop to narrow, negative associations of Blackness, and by “letting commercialized hip hop become a nearly constant caricature of gangstas, pimps, and hoes, we’ve come to equate black poverty with black street life. This denies and silences a wide range of black urban ghetto experiences and points of view which venerates predatory street culture” (Rose 2008:139). These limited caricatures of black poverty reinforce Whites’ negative racial attitudes of the Black culture being inherently dysfunctional and responsible for their own inequality (Schuman, etal 1997, Sears, etal 2000, Charles and Bobo 2009, Huddy and Feldman 2009, Rose 2008, Kitwana 2002). The saturation of these images “produces representations that attempt to induce consent to certain political positions, getting members of the society to see specific ideologies as ‘the way things are’” (Kellner 1995:59). In other words, the saturation of narrow representations of Blacks as gangstas, pimps, and hoes through commercial hip hop, creates an illusion that what is represented is a seamless extension of the Black reality:

The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947:99)

There is a debate centered on where responsibility should be placed for the seamless extension from the one-dimensional representation of hip hop music to the reinforcement of historically negative representations of Blackness. Who is responsible for the negative lyrics, images, and messages of popular rap music? Some outspoken critics like Tucker Gore, Bill

Clinton, Bill Cosby, George H. W. Bush, Bill O'Reilly, C. Delores Tucker, William Bennet, Rev. Calvin Butts, Bob Dole, and Robert H. Bork say that the rappers and individuals in the urban community are responsible (Goldblatt 2005, Whitlock 2007, Sullivan 2003, Ogbar 1999) while others counter that the rappers and young, urban, poor Blacks are caught in the post-industrial, global economy that has left them abandoned to an underground economy which provides the only source of economic opportunity (Kitwana 2002, Best and Kellner 1998, George 2005). Rappers who live within this urban environment represent their stark reality through lyrics and images while the culture industry capitalizes on the media spectacles of gangsta rap and markets it to White youth which it believes to be rap's number one audience (Kitwana 2002). Defending the hip hop artists, scholars Bakari Kitwana, Patricia Rose, and Nelson George call attention to the exploitation of rappers as cogs in the economic machine of the music labels. Those who argue against the individual rappers, accuse them of perpetuating negative behavior such as drug dealing, gang banging, violence, and misogyny through their glorification of those behaviors. Those who argue against the record labels and culture industry argue that the rapper's lyrics, videos, and images are shaped by industry executives according to who the executives perceive to be the audience just as Horkheimer and Adorno predicted and Rose has observed:

Sharp distinctions like those between A and B film, or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers...Everyone is supposed to act spontaneously according to a 'level' determined by indices and to select the category of mass production manufactured for their type. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947:97)

Together, vast consolidation as well as marketing and sales strategies have compounded the narrowing of what we see and hear, and are then used to prove that hip hop's stories are being entirely self-generated from the black community (Rose 2008:143)

Essentially, they argue that in order for the artist to succeed in the mainstream music industry they must adapt to the demands of the record labels, the representations of culture industry,

and the historically negative racial expectations of Whites. Record label executives began to define the primary hip hop audience as white, suburban, wealthy, teenagers who, since 1991, have been estimated to purchase between 60 to 80 percent (a debated statistic) of all hip hop music (Kitwana 2005:82, Sullivan 2003). The record label executives also determined that this white audience was primarily interested in hip hop music which is produced in its one-dimensional negative formats of gangsta rap, misogynistic, materialistic, and violent (Rose 2008). These one-dimensional representations of hip hop music began to be performed as if they were self generated from within the black community (Rose 2008) and performed as authentic representations of the Black culture (Neal 1997, Rose 2008).

Although Whites are not the only audience to accept the one-dimensional representations of hip hop music as authentic representations of Black culture (Ibrahim 1999, Ogbar 1999), the acceptance of the culture industry's negative representations of hip hop music as a authentic Blackness allows whites to hold to historical beliefs of Blacks as biologically inferior (Schuman, etal 1997, Sears, etal 2000), culturally inferior (Sears, etal 2000), and that Blacks are responsible for their inequalities (Charles and Bobo 2009). The acceptance and reinforcement of these ideologies allows Whites to ignore systematic inequalities in American society and the multiple dimensions of the Black community. Denial of these forces leads to new racism (Huddy and Feldman 2009) or symbolic racism which is coded under the ideas that:

Blacks are no longer especially handicapped by racial discrimination; they still do not conform to traditional American values, particularly the work ethic, as well as obedience to authority, and impulse control; they continue to make illegitimate demands for special treatment; and they continue to receive undeserved special treatment from government and special elites (Sears, etal 2000:77).

The culture industry's representation of hip hop music one-dimensionally perpetuates the history of negative racial attitudes "By reflecting images of black people as colorful and violent criminals, drug dealers, and sex fiends... it crowds out other notions of what it means to be

black and reinforces the most powerful racist and sexist images of black people” (Rose 2008:139).

1.5 Thesis Statement

There have been studies of Whites’ involvement and fascination in hip hop (Best & Kellner 1999, Sullivan 2003, Campbell 2004, Kitwana 2005, Calhoun 2005, Watts 2005, Fraley 2009), the Black culture and Hip Hop (Boyd 2003, Dyson 1996, Rose 2004, 2008, Kitwana 2002, George 1998, 2005), the culture industry’s effect on culture and behavior (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947, Marcuse 1964, Kellner 1995, Gitlin 2002, Agger 2002, 2004a, 2004b), and historically negative White racial attitudes (Wilson 1980, Schuman, et al 1997, Sears, et al 2000, Bobo and Charles 2009, Huddy and Feldman 2009). But there has yet to be a study that theorizes Whites’ involvement in hip hop music and its effect on their racial attitudes.

Filling this void in the literature and building on Ben Agger’s theory in his 1992 book,

Cultural Studies as Critical Theory:

The ideological outcomes of the culture industry are in a sense unintended; they emerge in the interplay of authorial, directorial, and audience assumptions about the nature of the world. (Agger 1992:65)

I posit that the culture industry’s one-dimensional representation of hip hop music and its effect on Whites perceptions of Blacks and Black Culture cannot be solely blamed on either the culture industry or the hip hop artists independently. Rather, the ideological outcomes of the culture industry emerge unintended through a complex interaction between the assumptions of the director (culture industry), the author (hip hop artist), and the audience (White consumers). Through what I have named the culture industry’s cycle of assumptions, I theorize how the assumptions of the director, author, and audience combine to create ideological outcomes that reflect and reinforce Whites’ historically negative attitudes towards Blacks.

CHAPTER 2

DIRECTORIAL ASSUMPTIONS

The nature of the culture industry is to remove authorial authority and individuality in order to re-create entertainment based on formulas and marketing analysis that define and categorize the consumer (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947). When the author is removed, art ceases to be created organically and enters into the automation of the directorial assumptions about what the audience desires. Ben Agger addresses the postmodern removal of authorship in his 2004 book, *Speeding Up Fast Capitalism*:

A fast capitalism... removes all traces of authorship, as texts ooze out of their covers and seep into the world itself, appearing to be inert pieces of nature and not rhetorical vehicles of political exhortation.... The lives scripted and depicted for us become our lives as we shop, dress, eat, vote, and talk mimetically, reproducing the lives and discourses of people who appear on our screens (Agger 2004b:40)

Agger explains how in a time of “Fast Capitalism,” the author is removed in favor of mechanized process of cultural creation and audiences allow the authorless images and messages to become ingrained in society as uncontested truth, individuals begin to live lives without understanding the origin of the messages or their meanings. Unable to separate themselves from the scripted reality of the culture industry, individuals move in tandem with dominant ideologies that reinforce unequal social structures based on race, class, and gender. Because the uncontested assumption prevailed that White, wealthy, suburban, teenage boys were the primary consumers of gangsta, violent, ghetto stories; record executives, A&R representatives, video producers, advertisers, movie makers and some hip hop artists themselves began to cater their message to this assumption. When the author is removed, no single person is responsible for the message and the consumer is unable to identify the ideology behind what is being produced. As the consumer continues to accept the packaging and promotion of the

culture industry as truth, they cease to evaluate the truth content, and continue to be swept within the media's torrent of images and sounds. In the case of hip hop music, the assumption that Whites were the primary audience and that they preferred the messages and images of gangsta, misogynistic, violent, and materialistic hip hop music led the culture industry to shape the artists image to fit this consumer profile, which in turn led the artists to assume that they were catering to their audience and thus doing their part to increase record sales.

2.1 The Culture Industry and One-Dimensionalization of Hip Hop Music

Hip hop music has existed, and continues to exist, outside of the mainstream mediated representations in many forms and represents the full extent of Black life. There are hip hop artists that represent middle class, lower class, and upper class mentalities. Artists exist that rap about the reality of violence in urban neighborhoods and others who use gangster caricatures and narratives to exploit the music to sell records. Hip hop music is performed by religious rappers and sinister rappers, political rappers and materialistic rappers, academic rappers and ignorant rappers, romantic rappers and sexist rappers. Essentially hip hop music, when taken in full, represents all aspects of life. The effect of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions, is that it acts upon historically negative racial perceptions and reinforces those perceptions by only allowing a one-dimensional version of hip hop music to define the genre as a whole and projects the negative characteristics of one-dimensional hip hop onto the Black community and individual Blacks.

Recognizing the economic opportunity to use the languages and posturing of this emerging youth culture to make profits and sell products (Neal 1997), the culture industry intensified its commodification of hip-hop music throughout the 1990s. Control of the music, image, and distribution moved from local entrepreneurs to a consolidated network of White-owned multinational businesses:

...What is more important about the shift in hip hop's orientation is not its movement from precommodity to commodity but the shift in control over the scope and direction of the profit making process, out of the hands of local Black

and Hispanic entrepreneurs and into the hands of larger white-owned multinational businesses. (Rose 1994:40)

Hip hop culture, language, style, and attitude was swallowed by the culture industry and transformed into a commodity. "Certainly the commercialization of rap music expanded the definition of hip-hop culture beyond the four elements (graffiti, break dancing, dj-ing, rap music) to include verbal language, body language, attitude, style, and fashion" (Kitwana 2002:8). During the commercialization period of hip hop culture, the artistic elements were de-emphasized while the attitudes, styles, language, and fashions of rap music became major representations of hip hop culture. And when these fashions, attitudes, and verbal language became narrowly associated with the ghetto, gangster, misogynistic, and materialistic images, hip hop music shifted from representation to exploitation.

By reflecting images of black people as colorful and violent criminals, drug dealers, and sex fiends... it crowds out other notions of what it means to be black and reinforces the most powerful racist and sexist images of black people. (Rose 2008:139)

2.2 Two Examples of Culture Industry Manifestations

The multi-dimensional messages of hip hop from the 1980s began to narrow throughout the 1990s based on the assumption that Whites were the primary audience and as Whites accepted the negative images and messages as authentic representations of Black culture. Though many events of the 1990s were used by White America to justify negative racial attitudes, there were two manifestations of the culture industry closely related to hip hop music that occurred as hip hop entered it's era of one-dimensionalization. These manifestations of the culture industry combined to help reinforce Whites acceptance of one-dimensional hip hop music as an authentic representation of a Black culture. The two manifestations were the revelation of Vanilla Ice's fake urban biography and the mainstream popularity of urban gang and ghetto themed movies.

The Dallas Morning News ran an article in 1991 that revealed the suburban upbringing of popular white rapper Vanilla Ice. Vanilla Ice had built his credibility as a rapper on a

manufactured biography of urban street life, but Vanilla Ice's music was discredited as real hip hop because he did not live the authentic urban street life. At the same time as gangster rap was gaining popularity; a "keeping it real" authenticity began to be marked by urban street life (Rose 2008). Although tales of street life were not new, the tales of drug dealing, gang activity, guns, drugs, and female degradation in this new form of hip hop music became the definition of the real urban experience which, for Whites, translated into the real Black experience. More importantly, black artists who rapped about a manufactured gang lifestyle were permitted to represent themselves as authentic in this way.

The "keeping it real" rhetoric is also a cover for perpetuating gross stereotypes about black people - stereotypes that have deep roots in American culture. Commercialized hip hop's distorted and narrow focus on one aspect of black ghetto street life - under the guise of truth telling - exaggerates and perpetuates negative beliefs about black people and obscures elements of life in poor black neighborhoods that contradict these myths (Rose 2008:141).

Vanilla Ice's representation of urban street life was exposed as artificial while west coast rapper Dr. Dre became the figurehead of gangsta rap, although he had not been involved in gang activity (Ro 2007). The difference between Vanilla Ice's lack of authenticity and Dr. Dre's authenticity originates in the audience's assumptions that the ghetto, gangster, and violent messages were in some way inherent for the Black culture which made it believable for Blacks to manufacture stories about street life.

But like Soul music a generation earlier, Hip-Hop was essentialized and sold as the "authentic" distillation of contemporary "Blackness," ...though its value as a mass commodity was predicated on consumer acceptance that Hip-Hop represented an essential "Blackness" that was urban, youthful, and threatening (Neal 1997:129,130).

This period helped solidify the gangster, ghetto, violent, sexist, and materialistic form of hip hop music as the most authentic version of rap music and rap music came to be the mediated representation of authentic Blackness.

From listening to too much commercialized, highly visible hip hop, one could get the impression that life in the ghetto is an

ongoing party of violence and self destruction with “style,” that street culture is an all consuming thing, that poor black folks have created the conditions under which they live (Rose 2008:141).

By defining “real” hip hop as an extension of the ghetto experience and defining the ghetto experience as the Black experience, hip hop music became a representation of the authentic Black experience. This is one manifestation of the culture industry which one-dimensionalized hip hop and reinforced the negative perceptions of Whites towards the Black community. For many Whites, the definition perpetuated by the culture industry’s representation of hip hop music and thus blackness, coincided with the historical beliefs of Whites that the Blacks were genetically inferior, culturally inferior, responsible for their own social and economic situations and inherently dysfunctional (Sears, etal 2000, Schuman, etal 1997, Bobo and Charles 2009, Huddy and Feldman 2009, Rose 2008).

The second example of a culture industry manifestation, which assisted in the one-dimensionalization of hip hop music, was the production and popularity of hip hop associated movies that presented cinematic versions of inner city and the gang lifestyle. *Boyz-N-The-Hood* and *New Jack City* in 1991, *Juice* 1992, *Friday* in 1995, and other movies may not have meant to glorify the ghetto/ gangster lifestyle but when filtered through negative racial perceptions and paired against the backdrop of controversial rap music, these theatrical releases leant credibility to the assumption that what was represented one-dimensionally through gangsta rap was the authentic representation of Black culture thus aiding the reinforcement of historically negative racial perceptions of Whites. Just like hip hop music, these movies actually represented multiple dimensions of the urban Black experience, but when marketed and positioned by the culture industry to cater to the assumptions of the White audience, the movies were read one-dimensionally as authentic representations of the urban Black experience.

When situated within the culture industry’s one-dimensional representation of hip hop music; these culture industry manifestations, the discrediting of Vanilla Ice and the production

and popularity of hip hop associated, urban themed movies, assisted in reinforcing historically negative perceptions of the Black culture.

The commodified representation hip hop music reinforced Whites' historically negative attitudes, as it became a dominant cultural representation of Blackness. As authentic rap became defined by the mediated ghetto, gangster, misogynistic, materialistic and violent images, the mediated images began to be associated with authentic Blackness, and much of White America began filtering their definitions of Blackness through historically negative perceptions perpetuated by the gangster rap persona and would not accept any images outside of these as "Black" (Rose 2008:2). Instead of recognizing upper class, middle class, law abiding, proper English speaking, professional, and scholarly as being Black, many Black individuals of these descriptions were simply labeled as "acting White" or as a sell out (Ogbar 1999). White kids who wore backward hats, spoke with aggression, acted violently, sold drugs, excelled at basketball, and listened to rap music, were labeled as wannabes, wiggers, or as "acting Black" (Kitwana 2005). This authenticating of hip hop music through historically negative characteristics of the Black community led to assumptions on the part of the hip hop artists as the author of hip hop music which influenced their music to recycle the one-dimensionally mediated forms of hip hop music.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORIAL ASSUMPTIONS

The popularity of rap music grew as it gained exposure through music video outlets. In September of 1988, MTV introduced *YO! MTV Raps* and it immediately became the highest rated show on the network. The success of MTV's rap program convinced Black Entertainment Television to develop the program, *Rap City*. By 1992 *The Box*, an interactive music video station in which fans called in to request videos to be played, was being aired in 32 states and gave exposure to videos that the conservative programmers of BET and MTV would not play. Through *The Box*, audiences were exposed and could request controversial videos from groups such as 2 Live Crew, N.W.A., and Public Enemy (Rose 1994, George 1998). These video outlets gave hip hop wider platforms of exposure, including White and Black suburban, urban, and rural teenagers. Increased sales of hip hop music led industry insiders to speculate how a marginalized music form (that many didn't even consider to be music) went from a localized underground movement, to a pop culture phenomenon. Industry executives and rappers themselves began to suggest that the increase in record sales was driven by White teenagers attempting to live out some sort of rebellious fantasy through hip hop music.

By 1989, MTV began playing rap music on a regular basis, and multi-million unit rap sales by the Beastie Boys, Tone Loc, MC Hammer, and Vanilla Ice convinced music industry executives that rap music, for all of its 'Blackness' in attitude, style, speech, music, and thematics, was a substantial success with white teenagers. (Rose 1994:4)

This increase in hip hop sales came at the same time as "Ice-T put the Los Angeles gangsta rap style on the national map, which encouraged the emergence of N.W.A., Ice Cube, Too Short and others" (Rose 1994). As gangsta rap emerged, the assumption continued that not only were

White youth the primary consumers of hip hop music, but they were purchasing it because they preferred gangsta rap.

Hip hop emerged in popular culture with a diverse group of artists, from MC Hammer to TLC, Public Enemy to De La Soul, and 2 Live Crew to Vanilla Ice. The term hard core hip hop was a term designated to separate the “pop” acts like Hammer and Vanilla Ice and middle class acts like De La Soul and Tribe Called Quest from the urban street themed acts like N.W.A, Ice T, and Public Enemy. Hard core rap was not radio friendly and would often deal with urban issues such as politics, drugs, poverty, homelessness, gangs, pregnancy, as well as localized neighborhood themes.

Hard core hip hop in the mid-to late 1980’s was defined as true hip hop as opposed to watered down commercial stuff that was emerging with greater frequency as independent labels buckled under the consolidation of the music industry. With the rise of so-called gangsta rap by the late 1980’s and the early 1990’s, mainstream media outlets began equating “hard-core” with so-called gangsta rap (Kitwana 2005:84).

Hard core rap was de-politicized when it was lumped into the exaggerated category of gangsta rap. When hard core gave way to gangsta rap and Whites were deemed the primary consumers of the gangsta image, the industry concluded the combination of White consumers and gangsta rap was the driving force behind increasing hip hop sales.

3.1 The Dialectic of Hip Hop Expression

Although, the roots of hip hop are grounded in the post-industrial, post-civil rights era; the “hip hop generation” that came of age in the 1980s and 1990s have grown up in a markedly different world. Bakari Kitwana refers to the hip hop generation as those Blacks born between 1965 and 1984 that came of age during the globalization era of the 1980s and 1990s (Kitwana 2002:3).

At the same time, our views of politics, race relations, and racial identity are more likely to have been shaped by Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and/or the Million Man March. Our views about safe sex are more likely to have been influenced by Easy E or Magic Johnson’s public announcements regarding themselves and HIV/AIDS (Kitwana 2002:6).

3.1.1 Hip Hop Music as a Political Expression of Urban Reality

In his 2002 book, *The Hip Hop Generation*, Kitwana cites six socio-political forces that shaped the new Black youth culture's worldviews in contrast to the late 1970s youth culture that birthed hip hop. The hip hop generation's worldview has been shaped by the visibility of Blacks in popular culture, globalization, hypocrisy of a nation that preaches democracy and inclusion but practices segregation, public policy regarding criminal justice, media representation of young blacks, and the high unemployment levels of Black youth in the 1980s and 1990s (Kitwana 2002:9-20). It is within these socio-political forces in which much of the aggressive hip hop message about gangs, drugs, and violence originated. Many of the stories told by N.W.A. Ice-T, Too Short, The Ghetto Boys, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., and many other street and gangster rappers represent a struggle for survival that is highly political.

The 1980s was a period of decline on living conditions and expectations for blacks under conservative administrations who shifted wealth from the poor to the rich, cut back on welfare programs, and neglected the concerns of blacks and the poor. During this period, the standard of living and job possibilities for African-Americans declined and the living conditions in the inner-city ghettos deteriorated with growing crime, drug use, teen pregnancies, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, gangs, and urban violence (Kellner 1995:176).

The reality for many of the hip hop generation is that gun homicide has been the leading cause of death of Black men ages 15-34 since 1969 and for ages 18-24 gun homicide increased 79% between 1980 and 1995 (Kitwana 2002:21). The hopelessness of many young blacks of the hip hop generation is illustrated in the suicide rates: "Once nearly non-existent among young Blacks, suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control, is now the third leading cause of death for Blacks fifteen to twenty-four years..." (Kitwana 2002:21). This statistic is similar to the general population but the between 1980 and 1995 the rate of suicide nearly doubled for Blacks between the ages 15-19 and increased 146% for Black males ages 15-19 (Kitwana 2002:21). The hip hop generation was struck especially hard by the AIDS

epidemic and by 1999 AIDS was the leading cause of death of Black men ages 25-44 and second leading cause of death for Black women of the same age (Kitwana 2002:21). These dire statistics led many like Kitwana to ask:

Why has the response to these monumental issues been so limited? When it comes to public policy and issues specific to Black youth, little happens beyond identifying the problems and discussing them (Kitwana 2002:21).

As the hip hop music has become one of the dominant representations of Black America, its popular mediated forms have represented a narrow slice of the African-American experience, which includes the historical beliefs of the black community as criminal, lazy, violent, materialistic, and misogynistic. Through the dominance of the culture industry, only the rappers that continue to represent this narrow version of Black experience are considered authentic, allowing White society to solidify its hegemonic ideals that the Black community itself is responsible for the devastating statistics concerning parts of Black America.

The belief that blacks do not work as hard as they should, or as hard as whites, has been a central racial stereotype since the early days of slavery... Whites have long resented blacks' demands for better treatment, but these demands are now perceived as demands for special rather than equal treatment (Sears, etal 2000:77).

So a possible answer to Kitwana's questions, is that society, submerged within the media torrent, experience the negatively represented images as a seamless extension of reality (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947) and uncritically allow the representations to reinforce their belief that Blacks are responsible for their own dire predicaments.

3.1.2 Hip Hop Music as an Expression of Directorial and Audience Assumptions

Although some hip hop music continues to represent the disenfranchised voice of post-industrial urban America, it has also come to represent the capitalist ideals of profits over substance, fiction over fact, and cultural exploitation over cultural representation. Caught within the web of directorial influence, audience assumptions, and the desire to sell records, the mass mediated version of hip hop music narrowly represents a small percentage of Black America with images of gang activity, drug dealing, pimping, misogyny, hyper sexuality, and materialism.

With the culture industry's assumption that this is the image that the White audience will buy, and the White Audience filtering their perceptions of hip hop music through historically negative representations of black authenticity; many rappers are forced to succumb to the pressures of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions. And, by continuing to produce and perpetuate these images, many popular rap artists solidify negative perceptions of Whites, reinforcing the record company's desire to continue to reproduce these images.

The interpretation of the message of most rap music must be nestled within the culture industry's cycle of assumptions. Because, "rap music is often a meaning machine that demands interpretation, that multiplies meaning, signification, and political messages (Kellner 1995:187)," hip hop music and rappers must be understood within the socio-political conditions, culture industry representations, and the historically negative assumptions of White Americans towards Black America. When attempting to understand the assumptions of the author (hip hop artist), it is necessary to take into account the socio-political context of the message, the personal desire for success and money, the assumptions and shaping of the director (culture industry), and the assumptions and consumption trends of the audience (in this case White consumers).

3.2 The Assumption that Whites are Hip Hop's Primary Audience

Since 1992, it has been regularly reported by various sources from Public Enemy's Chuck D, music magazines and executives, to hip hop scholars like Patricia Rose that whites purchase anywhere from 60-80% of all rap music (Kitwana 2002, Rose 2008). Although, the theory that Whites are the main consumers of hip hop music and more importantly of the violent gangster version is commonly accepted, Bakari Kitwana challenges the Whites as primary consumer thesis in his 2005 book, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*. Kitwana claims that this thesis stems from a 1991 article by David Samuels published in the *New Republic* entitled, "The Rap on Rap: the Black Music that Isn't Either." Although Samuels never claimed a percentage, his claim that Whites accounted for the majority of hip hop's consumers and has continually been reiterated since that article. Kitwana states that the percentage of Whites as hip hop

consumers consistently ranges from 60 to 80 percent, but “search high and low and you would be hard pressed to find a source for it” (Kitwana 2005:83). Kitwana cites three main sources of the Whites as primary hip hop consumer theory; Record label executives in the late 1980’s, Soundscan in 1991, and the Sounddata surveys in 1992. These three sources began making the conclusion that Whites were the primary consumers without hard evidence to support it. However, after the thesis caught on, it began to be reiterated in magazines, books, television, and within the music industry. Referring to the Neilson-Soundscan surveys, Kitwana says:

...although the company prides itself on being able to obtain demographic data of hip-hop sales in a given area, none of the searches or data they compile specify race, nor do they target suburban versus rural neighborhoods. Rather Soundscan breaks data down into categories such as “high-income” and “low-income” areas, not in terms of black and white, suburban or urban (Kitwana 2005:87).

A soundscan spokesperson concurs: “A variety of conclusions can be drawn depending on how they are looking at the data, but any conclusions reached about white kids and black kids, suburban and urban involves a fair amount of conjecture.” (Kitwana 2005:87,88)

This counter argument concerning the legitimacy of the Whites as primary audience is crucial in the exploration of the interaction between director, author, and audience. Whether or not Whites are the primary audience is not as important as the perception that Whites are hip hop’s primary audience. Because Whites have been accepted as the primary audience of hip hop music, the culture industry has shaped the images and messages of hip hop music to fit what they believe Whites’ will accept and purchase as an authentic representation of the Black culture.

CHAPTER 4

AUDIENCE ASSUMPTIONS

At every part of the cycle of assumptions, the culture industry inserts itself to mediate the relationship between the artists and the audience. However, the audience gives feedback to both the artist and the culture industry through its consumption. The theory of a capitalist society is that individuals exchange goods on an open market and producers meet individual's wants and needs. This is where the culture industry inserts itself to convert the free market to a mediated market, which creates false consciousness and induces consumption of false needs. The modern and post-modern society of capitalism demands expanding markets and increased consumption that can only be maintained through the creation of false needs and the development of false consciousness (Agger 2004b). But, as Marcuse emphasized, the true nature of the culture industry is not that it thrusts itself upon the individual but that it develops false consciousness within the individual. The culture industry increases consumption by rapturing individuals into a quotidian immersion inside the media torrent in which "they don't experience culture as a series of arguments, borne of texts. Instead, culture inheres in the world, as solid and nature like as buildings and glaciers" (Agger 2004b:41). Caught in the media torrent and experiencing the cultural texts as fixed truths, false needs and false consciousness moves from imposed ideological arguments to internalized beliefs and self-imposed creation of false needs (Agger 2004a:99). When Whites internalize the culture industry's negative racial ideology presented in the form one-dimensional hip hop music and accept the representations as fixed truths inherent to the Black culture, the ideology changes from imposed arguments to internally accepted beliefs about the fixed nature of the world. Accepting these narrow representations of hip hop music as fixed truths about the Black culture deepens the one-dimensionalization of hip hop music which deepens Whites historically negative perceptions of

Blacks. In this way the audience's assumptions are equally responsible for the negative representations of Blacks in popular hip hop music as the audience works in conjunction with the culture industry accepting the negatively mediated representations of hip hop music and de-authorizing the hip hop texts to rewrite the meaning of multi-dimensional music one-dimensionally.

4.1 The De-authoring of Hip Hop's Cultural Texts

The de-authoring of cultural texts by the culture industry disarms individuals from the tools they need to decipher and read the images and sounds that they are bombarded daily with and, "... few of us devote ourselves to the study of images.... We don't fix them like fully developed photographs or inspect them for multiple meanings. We dwell in them, not on them" (Gitlin 2002:126). This is where we must start when theorizing the assumptions of the audience and its role in the one-dimensional representation of hip hop music. As Whites filter the meaning of hip hop music through historically negative perceptions of the Black community, hip hop music becomes defined by its negative aspects and the multiple dimensions of the Black experience are marginalized or recognized as an exception. So, although the highest selling hip hop artists according to the RIAA Top Selling Artist List (www.riaa.com, accessed 11-16-2009), represent a diverse set of artists and groups such as: Tupac (37.5 million records sold); Eminem (27 million); Jay-Z (26 million); Outkast, TLC, and Beastie Boys (22 million); Nelly (21 million); Notorious B.I.G. (17 million); MC Hammer (16 million); DMX (14 million), L.L. Cool J, Bone Thugs 'N Harmony, and Snoop Dog (12.5 million); Will Smith and Ludacris (12 million); and 50 Cent (11 million records sold); the prevailing theme in hip hop music is that gangsta rap has come to define the entire genre of hip hop music (Rose 2004, 2008, George 2005, Kitwana 2002). This list also excludes top selling rap/rock act such as Kid Rock (21 million), Linkin Park (19 million), and Korn and Limp Bizkit (16.5 million), which utilize key elements of hip hop music but performed as hard rock are not accepted as true hip hop music. The interaction between director, author, and audience is complex and acts to reinforce negative boundaries. So in the

case of hip hop music, although there are multiple dimensions of the music that exist inside and outside of the mainstream, the production and reading of hip hop one-dimensionally through historically negative racial perceptions de-authorizes the music and excludes the messages that do not fit into the narrow definition of hip hop music in mass culture. Most of the top selling artists create music about multiple dimensions of life, the assumptions of culture industry the audience combine to de-authorize the messages of hip hop music. Only those message that fit the culture industry's one-dimensional production of hip hop are accepted by the audience as authentic versions of hip hop and authentic representations of the Black experience.

...The hyper-gangsta-ization of the music and imagery directly parallels hip hop's sales ascendance into the mainstream record and radio industry... This grab bag of street criminal figures soon became the most powerful and, to some, the most 'authentic' spokesman for hip hop and, then, for Black youth generally (Rose 2008:3).

Just as Bakari Kitwana argues against the assumption that Whites are the primary consumers of hip hop music, I think it is necessary to challenge the notion that gangsta rap is the most dominant form of hip hop music. Reading charts of the top selling hip hop albums of all time (Table 4.1) illustrates that gangsta rap is one of many styles of hip hop music that is produced and consumed. The themes that extend from gangsta rap do represent a portion of Black America but the same themes also represent parts of upper, middle, and lower class White America, Latin America, Irish America, and other ethnicities and nationalities that deal with the themes of power, money, sex, greed, violence, and poverty. But the culture industry and the audience's acceptance of gangsta rap as the primary form of hip hop music denies the multi-dimensionality of hip hop music and the Black community.

Table 4.1 Top Selling Rap/Hip Hop Albums of All Time

Year	Style	Artist	Album Title	Records Sold in Millions
1986	Alternative/ Pop	BEASTIE BOYS	LICENSED TO ILL	9
1990	Pop	HAMMER	PLEASE HAMMER DON'T HURT 'EM	10
1990	Pop	VANILLA ICE	TO THE EXTREME	7
1993	Pop	SALT 'N PEPA	VERY NECESSARY	5
1994	Pop	TLC	CRAZYSEXYCOOL	11
1996	Gangsta	2 PAC	ALL EYEZ ON ME	9
1996	Pop	SOUNDTRACK	SPACE JAM	6
1996	Conscious/ Alternative	FUGEES	THE SCORE	6
1997	Street/ Hard Core	NOTORIOUS B.I.G.	LIFE AFTER DEATH	10
1997	Pop	SMITH, WILL	BIG WILLIE STYLE	9
1997	Pop	DIDDY, P. AND THE FAMILY	NO WAY OUT	7
1998	Gangsta	2 PAC	GREATEST HITS	9
1998	Conscious/ Alternative	HILL, LAURYN	THE MISEDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL	8
1998	Street/ Hard Core	JAY-Z	HARD KNOCK LIFE, VOLUME 2	5

Table 4.1 Continued

1999	Gangsta	DR. DRE	DR. DRE 2001	6
1999	Street/ Hard Core	DMX	...AND THEN THERE WAS X	5
2000	Hard Core/ Pop/ Street	EMINEM	THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP	9
2000	Pop	NELLY	COUNTRY GRAMMAR	9
2001	Gangsta	50 CENT	GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'	6
2002	Pop	NELLY	NELLYVILLE	6
2002	Hard Core/ Pop/ Street	EMINEM	THE EMINEM SHOW	8
2003	Alternative/Pop	OUTKAST	SPEAKERBOXXX / THE LOVE BELOW	11
2004	Gangsta	50 CENT	THE MASSACRE	5
<p>Source: Recording Industry Association of America, Top 100 albums (http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?resultpage=1&table=tblTop100&action=) Accessed online 11-16-09</p>				

Of the twenty-three all time top selling hip hop albums, five albums by 2 Pac, Dr. Dre, and 50 Cent are considered gangsta rap while Notorious B.I.G, Jay-Z, Eminem, and DMX are considered “street” rappers and employ gangsta themes in their music. Nine of the top selling albums, TLC - *Crazy Sexy Cool*, Hammer - *Please Hammer Don't 'Em*, Nelly – *Country Grammar* and *Nellyville*, Will Smith – *Big Willie Style*, P Diddy and The Family – *No Way Out*, Vanilla Ice – *To The Extreme*, *The Space Jam Soundtrack*, Salt 'N Peppa – *Very Necessary* would be considered pop rap. The four remaining albums by Lauryn Hill, The Fugees, Outkast, and Beastie Boys are considered conscious or alternative hip hop. To understand the dynamics of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions, chart 4-1 must be read dialectically for multiple

meanings in the same way hip hop music should be read. There are two ways to read this chart and the perspective of the reader or the audience determines its interpretation. Although only five of the albums would be considered gangsta rap, all of the albums except *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* contain themes of violence, misogyny, hyper sexuality and materialism. The other way to understand this chart is to interrogate the full content of these albums, which contain negative material but also contain lyrics that express themes of love, struggle, depression, politics, feminism, and empowerment. The de-authoring of the music by the production of the culture industry and the interpretation of the audience renders hip hop music one-dimensional and limits the acceptance of authentic hip hop music to the negative manifestations of violent, misogynistic, materialistic, and gangsta themes.

By limiting the definition of hip hop music to gangsta, violent, misogynistic, and materialistic; the culture industry's cycle of assumptions diminishes the contribution of hip hop music which represents multi-dimensional, positive, educated, empowering, uplifting, and political, messages and images. The interaction between the director, author, and audience combine to create a reading of hip hop music through its negative manifestations which leads the author and director to produce more music one-dimensionally to reflect the negative images that fit within historically negative assumptions of the audience. This is the process of de-authorizing the hip hop texts and asserting the audience over the author when it come to interpreting the meaning of hip hop music.

4.2 The Hierarchy of Reader Over Writer: Audience over Author

The post-civil rights generation of White America has contributed to the increase in racial equality but has also held onto negative racial perceptions, which play out in public policy, schooling, and housing. Masked with humanitarian principles of inclusion and equality, the latent negative perceptions of Whites towards Blacks continue to reinforce historical exclusion and inequality as Lawrence Bobo and Camille Charles point out in the 2009 article, "Race in the American Mind: From the Moynihan Report to the Obama Candidacy:"

While a majority of whites in the twenty-first century embrace racial equality in principle and believe in increasing the human capital characteristics of disadvantaged groups, their increasing inclination to blame blacks themselves (or Latinos) for their disadvantaged status results in what we call an *implementation gap*: whites are increasingly unwilling to support public policies such as affirmative action that they believe offer unfair advantages to a group of people they believe are unwilling to help themselves (Bobo and Charles 2009:249).

Hip hop music, when filtered through the latent and explicit negative racial perceptions, loses its political power as an agent of negation, empowerment, and multi-dimensional representation of the Black experience. Many of the artists who are commonly referred to as gangsta or street rappers with negative messages, can be read dialectically depending on the audiences predetermined perspective of racial stereotypes. Tupac Shakur reflects on this dilemma in the movie *Tupac: Resurrection*:

There's a bad part because the kids see that and they mimic you. That's the part I haven't figured out yet... To me it's like, when I sing, "I live the thug life baby I'm hopeless,"... I'm doing it for the kid that really does live the thug life and feels like it is hopeless. So... when I say it like that it's to reach him. You understand? And even if when I reach him it-it-it make it look glorious to the guy that doesn't live that life. I-I mean, I can't help it, it's a fact, you know... I think I am being responsible, but it's hard (Quoted in Rose 2008:133)

Tupac is attempting to communicate that his message is up for interpretation, and depending on the subject position of the audience, the message can be re-interpreted and re-written with unlimited messages. What Tupac is trying to come to grips with is the Derridean notion that reading is a form of writing, or with music, that listening is a form of writing. "One of Derrida's most important points is that reading writes.... Derrida privileges reading because he notices that reading is a literary version in its own right, potentially even a text if it is published or posted" (Agger 2004b:23). For a youth growing up in a gang, drug, and violence infested neighborhood, Tupac's words may mean hope and help guide them away from the "thug life." For other youth growing up in similar situations, Tupac's descriptions of the "thug life" may seem enticing and lead them into a lifestyle of destruction. Whites who listen to Tupac have the ability

to filter Tupac's message in different ways as well. Whites who are aware and sympathetic to the struggle of post-industrial urban poverty may read Tupac's lyrics politically and his message may lead them to push for legislation that promotes equality and inclusion. But, for other Whites who are immersed in the culture industry's cycle of assumptions, they may interpret Tupac's stories as evidence of the inherent dysfunction of the Black community and even blame Tupac and members of the urban Black community for their own predicament.

Unfortunately, this real racial progress is juxtaposed with clear and convincing evidence of persisting racial tensions: a substantial portion of the white population still holds negative stereotypes of blacks and other minorities, and whites and minority groups have decidedly different views about the persistence of racial discrimination as well as the causes of racial inequality in American society. These trends no doubt contribute to the persistence of feelings of social distance between whites and racial minority groups, in addition to feelings of alienation among blacks, Latinos, and Asians (Bobo and Charles 2009:246).

The audience's (White consumers) racial assumptions are both a cause of hip hop's one-dimensionalization and an effect of the culture industry's one-dimensional representation of hip hop music. There are three points to emphasize when considering the White audience's role in the culture industry's cycle of assumptions; the de-authoring of texts by the culture industry, the filtering of images through historically negative perception of Black culture, and the postmodern hierarchy of reader over writer (or in this case, the listener over writer) and how the filtering of mediated images through negative racial perceptions re-writes the intended meaning of the author within culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The assumptions of the director, author, and audience operate concurrently to create the culture industry's cycle of assumptions. Each assumes knowledge of the world from its subject position and makes decisions consciously and unconsciously from that position. When the culture industry apprehended hip hop music, it did so in the capitalist tradition of determining what is profitable and then mechanized the process to reproduce the music according to its market research. As information began to flow outside of the urban neighborhood boundaries and into the homes of youth across the nation, the commodified styles, language, and attitude of the mediated music began to be projected across culture one-dimensionally while the multi-dimensional forms of hip hop were forced to the margins of the genre and underrepresented in popular culture. The narrow representations of Black life that contained high levels of violence, misogyny, laziness, hyper sexuality, gang lifestyle, drug use and drug sales began to be interpreted as an authentic representation of Black life. Filtering these images through the historically negative racial attitudes, Whites easily accepted one-dimensional representations of hip hop music as authentic representations of Blacks because they fit easily into the historical representations of Blacks in America. With Whites presumed to be the primary audience of hip hop music, the culture industry fit hip hop music into the mechanized form that reiterated the negative perceptions of Blacks. As hip hop artists began to reproduce and, in some circumstances, glamorize these images they gave more substance to the perception that Blacks were not getting ahead in the post-industrial America because they lacked the moral temperament and work ethic to get ahead and "... at the center of prejudice today is a deeply felt resentment that blacks choose to live in ways that repudiate individualistic virtues, abiding commitments to hard work, discipline, and self-sacrifice" (Sears, etal 2000:60). As illustrated in

chapter one, these racial attitudes have always persisted in America, but the public visibility of one-dimensional hip hop music continued to reinforce Whites' negative racial attitudes. Especially as society has moved into a period of "fast capitalism" and the post-modern nature of communication has removed traces of authorial responsibility leaving citizens trapped within the media torrent unable to discern reality from mediated fiction.

This one-dimensional representation has serious consequences for White and Black racial relationships because it allows Whites to justify their beliefs that Blacks have the same opportunity to achieve the American dream as Whites and denies any structural racism that inhibits Blacks from actualizing the elusive American dream.

These factors, when taken together, create a web that looks something like this: We support policies that destroy Black communities, and communities with great instability often experience more violence. Then, we rely on long standing racist perceptions of Black men as more violent, fear them more, and then treat them with more violence in response, which results in both more violence and more incarceration. Next, because we associate these men with violence, the stories they tell about violence are perceived as 'authentic Black expression,' which activates a familiar kind of racial voyeurism and expands the market for their particular stories of crime and violence, which, in turn confirms the perception that Black men are more violent. This creates economic opportunity for performing and celebrating violent storytelling. Round and round we go. (Rose 2008:55)

Being caught in the grasps of the culture industry's ever present messages and images, many Whites are unable to separate themselves from the recycled ideology and rely on pre-formed racial attitudes. When they see and hear violence, drugs, gangs, pimps, hoes, sexism, and materialism represented in mass mediated hip hop music they equate them to the images that they see in the news, movies, and television programs of poverty, broken schools, teenage pregnancy, crack, AIDS, and incarceration rates and justify their beliefs that the Black culture itself is responsible for the issues: "Whites saw evidence of black failure everywhere-crime, poverty, unemployment, welfare, the explosion of violence and rioting in cities-and they blamed it on defect of temperament and character" (Sears, etal 2000:61).

Each agent of the cycle of assumptions plays an equal role in the reinforcement of Whites' historically negative racial attitudes. The culture industry projects small fragments of truth as the full truth, hip hop artists have taken advantage of the opportunity to make profits, and Whites believe the mediate, narrow, and negative messages to be authentic representations of the Black culture. The problem is that we still live within a society of racial, economic, and political inequality. There are factors that hold some Blacks back from partaking in the individualistic ideals of American capitalism. As long as the narrow representations of Black culture continues to be produced by the director (culture industry), exaggerated by the author (hip hop artists), and accepted as truth by the audience (white consumers), the historical perceptions of the Black community being responsible for its own inequalities will continue to be recycled throughout American culture and Whites' will continue to justify their resistance of programs that foster equality and inclusion thus continuing to weave racial, economic, and political inequalities into the fabric of American culture.

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