

The United Eras of Hip-Hop

**Examining the perception of hip-hop
over the last quarter century**

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The United Eras of Hip-Hop

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ABSTRACT

“The United Eras of Hip-Hop” examines the media perception of hip-hop over the last quarter century – from Run-DMC’s 1984 debut to the end of 2008. “The United Eras of Hip-Hop” also defines 5 concrete 5-year eras in hip-hop while loosely using terms that usually come up in American History: The Revolution Era (1984-1988), The Golden Age Era (1989-1993), The Civil War and Reconstruction Era (1994-1998), The Beef Era (1999-2003), and The Crisis Era (2004-2008). The Revolution Era represented the rise to permanence of hip-hop. The Golden Age Era is recognized as hip-hop at its highest quality. The Civil War and Reconstruction Era marked the geographical battle for supremacy amongst hip-hop. The Beef Era represented great conflict within hip-hop as the most popular trend. The Crisis Era is where hip-hop the question of hip-hop’s relevance was raised and challenged. This thesis intends to be a narrative of mainstream hip-hop music and culture, a partial historical account, and an extended example of how the media can influence both the rise of a phenomenon and the direction of its future. Because of the vast level of the subject, this thesis primarily focuses on American mainstream hip-hop. Paralleling other subjects, such as current events and the National Basketball Association, help to explain just how reflective hip-hop is to the greater society in which we live in.

INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up in Atlantic City in the early 1990s, I had a distant relationship with rap music. My father played oldies around me, and my mother favored smooth jazz and R&B. Both “qualify” as “black music,” but not the same music I could identify with as a 7year old. My parents did not care for rap at all. They could not understand the music for the most part, and disowned most of the people involved. The only exception to this was the Public Enemy album *Fear of a Black Planet* that my father owned. The only time I heard rap music was when I was around my older cousins, one of whom was an aspiring disc jockey (DJ). Based on this fact, I did not care for music too much. It was not until I moved to Philadelphia in January 1997 that I learned to pay attention to music, and by extension, hip-hop. But even then, it was more negative than anything I could get into. 1997 was the year the Notorious B.I.G. was gunned down (only months after his rival Tupac Shakur was gunned down), and the next year I lost my 22 year old cousin to gun violence. In a way, I continued to have only a fleeting interest in hip-hop. I did not have an artist to follow until I heard Jay-Z’s “Hard Knock Life” on the school bus in sixth grade. That was the first song that I made it a point to print off the lyrics while at school, and in a matter of weeks I had memorized the whole song. Yet it still was not until 9th grade that I bought my first album, and even that was not an actual LP (Jay-Z’s *MTV Unplugged*). I did not buy my first

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two albums until 12th grade, when I got Jay-Z's *The Black Album* and OutKast's *Speakerboxxx* on the same day.

So what was it that turned my attention to studying hip-hop? There were five specific events. The first was when I graduated from high school in 2005. My parents gave me an iPod for a graduation gift, which allowed me to be interested in collecting music. The second event was during my freshman year in 2006. I took an African American History course that spring, and at the end of the semester I was involved in a group project on hip-hop. This was the first time that I had to research anything hip-hop related. The third event was during my sophomore year in 2007. There was a hip-hop forum at California University of Pennsylvania on March 1, 2007 that turned my attention to the debate on the role of hip-hop in today's society. The fourth event was the summer of 2007, when I went to the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore for what amounted to another hip-hop conference. Not only was I subjected to several speakers and presentations discussing hip-hop as it relates to community and youth, I also participated in a workshop that had me writing a "posse cut" for social action. This inspired me to not only research more hip-hop music, it also led to the fifth event which took place over the course of my 2007-2008 junior year, the writing, recording, and producing of my musical side project *Self-Titled Album*.

After these events in my own life, I knew I had to address hip-hop in my thesis. This thesis project is intended to examine the "perception" of hip-hop

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over the last quarter century. It is important to understand that hip-hop does not just refer to music. Hip-hop's five pillars are DJs/turntablism, breakdancing, graffiti, beatboxing, and rapping. The music has come to be the cultural representative of hip-hop, while its visible characters are the ones who reflect the mood and direction of the culture. This thesis will not start at the beginning of hip-hop's time ("The Colonial Era of Hip-Hop"); rather, at the point where it had enough legs to walk but not quite run. This thesis will also focus primarily on American hip-hop and the American media. The perception of hip-hop over the last 25 years has turned hip-hop from simply a musical fad to a cultural phenomenon. Hip-hop has been criticized for explicit lyrics and lifestyle, but it is a necessary expression of the issues reflected in these lyrics. Because of this fact, the lyrics and dialogue has been left uncensored. Over the last 25 years, hip-hop has continued to be a reflection of musical culture, taking elements from different time periods and genres of music. My argument is that the media reception and perception of hip-hop over the last 25 years solidifies its status as the most significant movement of its time, and the eras of hip-hop are connected to the current state of hip-hop just as the history of the United States is connected to the state of the country today.

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PART 1: THE REVOLUTION ERA OF HIP-HOP (1984-1988)

Chapter 1: 1984

Wars going on across the sea

Street soldiers killing the elderly

Whatever happened to unity?

It's like that, and that's the way it is

(Run-DMC, "It's Like That," 1984)

The early success of Kurtis Blow, The Sugarhill Gang, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five paved the way for Run-DMC's eponymous 1984 debut album. *Run-DMC* introduced a style of hip-hop that more or less, broke off the disco link that hip-hop had shared in its early days. The single "It's Like That" sold about 250,000 copies for record label Profile compared to only 80,000 copies of "One for the Treble," a "B-boy classic" by Davy DMX distributed in part by Epic (George, 1985). The reason for Run-DMC's success (and Davy DMX's disappointment) was the way in which the two labels promoted the projects. While Epic saw it as just an experiment unworthy of serious attention, Russell Simmons and company promoted Run-DMC like as if they were a major label. "Rock Box," another single from *Run-DMC*, was the first rap video to receive airplay on MTV, a sign of things to come. "Rock Box" was an appropriate video for MTV because of its hard rock sound. Run-DMC's first album is notable not only because of its success (over 500,000 sold), but unlike Blow, The Sugarhill Gang, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, it did *not* mark the zenith of their recording career.

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Chapter 2: 1985

*My radio, believe me, I like it loud
I'm the man with a box that can rock the crowd
Walkin' down the street, to the hardcore beat
While my JVC vibrates the concrete
I'm sorry if you can't understand
But I need a radio inside my hand
Don't mean to offend other citizens
But I kick my volume way past 10
My story is rough, my neighborhood is tough
But I still sport gold, and I'm out to crush
My name is Cool J, I devastate the show
But I couldn't survive without my radio.*

(LL Cool J, "I Can't Live Without My Radio, 1985)

In October 1985, Russell Simmons and Run-DMC were featured in a movie called *Krush Groove*. Like *Style Wars*, *Wild Style*, *Flashdance*, *Beat Street*, *Breakin'*, and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* before it, *Krush Groove* was like a live documentary of the burgeoning presence of hip-hop in the mainstream. Run-DMC's second album *King of Rock* was out in 1985 and the film featured Beastie Boys and LL Cool J, a teenager from Queens who would release his album *Radio* a month after the release of *Krush Groove*. *Radio* was the first album to be released by Simmons' Def Jam label, and it captured the confident young B-boy attitude of LL Cool J, the first major solo rapper. *Radio* allowed LL Cool J to be the first hip-hop act featured on the long-running

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television program *American Bandstand*, performing “I Can’t Live Without My Radio” (CBS Interactive, 2009). While this was a breakthrough for hip-hop, it conveys the fact that there was not a show for hip-hop at the time. That would come in the near future, as hip-hop was starting to command major attention.

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Chapter 3: 1986

*My Adidas, only bring good news
And they are not used as felon shoes
They're black and white, white with black stripe
The ones I like to wear when I rock the mic
On the strength of our famous university
We took the beat from the street and put it on TV
My Adidas are seen on the movie screen
Hollywood knows we're good if you know what I mean*
(Run-DMC, "My Adidas," 1986)

1986 would be the year that hip-hop ceased being a novelty act for good. In the early 1980s, there was still doubt about the sustainability of hip-hop, and therefore, it was easy to write the movement off as a phase that would pass before the 90s. The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks," and Grandmaster Flash's "The Message" all had two things in common: they were those acts' first hits, and they never achieved the same success or attention afterwards. Run-DMC had already released two solid albums (not just singles, albums), thus gaining a following. Their third album, *Raising Hell*, was released in 1986. The album cemented not only Run-DMC's place as legends in hip-hop, it confirmed hip-hop's place amongst the mainstream. As DMC says, "1986 was when Run-DMC really *became* Run-DMC. That's when we really gelled" (Coleman, 2005, p. 395). The collaboration with Aerosmith on "Walk this Way" accomplished several tasks. The primary task is that it "appealed to an emerging crossover audience"

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(Kitwana, 2005, p. 41). MTV played “Walk this Way” heavily, and Run-DMC became only the second musical guests ever on *Saturday Night Live* in October 1986. The first, the Sugarhill Gang-affiliated Funky 4 + 1 More, appeared on the show in February 1981. Not only was that particular season of *SNL* (1980-1981) dreadful as the show recovered from the departure of the original cast from the 1970s, the group did not perform until very late in the show. As a result, the exposure Funky 4 + 1 More received in 1981 was severely limited and is almost forgotten. When Run-DMC appeared on *SNL*, the show was hosted by Malcolm Jamal-Warner of *The Cosby Show* and it was treated as if Run-DMC were indeed the first rappers to appear on the show. “Walk this Way” also revitalized Aerosmith’s career as they had been in a lull for much of the 1980s up until this point. In addition to Run-DMC allowing hip-hop to move into permanent national exposure, the song “Walk this Way” allowed for diversity amongst hip-hop.

It is interesting to note that Run and DMC did not even know about Aerosmith before producer Rick Rubin introduced it to them (Coleman, 2005, p. 401). In the same way that Run-DMC “softened the blow” for white listeners by adding rock elements, Aerosmith’s involvement in the project did the same for black listeners. When three white, Jewish former punk rockers from New York called the Beastie Boys released the Rick Rubin-produced *Licensed to Ill* off the Def Jam label in November 1986, it “immediately became the top-selling hip-hop album of all time, chilling at #1 on the pop charts for seven weeks, and making hip-hop forever safe for the suburbs” (Aaron, 1998). What

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gave the Beastie Boys credibility and acceptance in spite of their skin color was the fact that they were already accomplished musicians, the fact that they did not attempt to misidentify themselves as something they were not (e.g., “acting black”), and the fact that “black rap artists like Run-DMC and Public Enemy shared the stage with the Beastie Boys, and LL Cool J credits them for discovering him” (Hess, 2005, pp. 376-377).

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Chapter 4: 1987

*How could I move the crowd
First of all, ain't no mistakes allowed
Here's the instruction, put it together
It simple ain't it but quite clever
Some of you been trying to write rhymes for years
But weak ideas irritate my ears
Is this the best that you can make?
Cuz if not and you got more, I'll wait
But don't make me wait too long coz I'm a move on
The dancefloor when they put something smooth on
So turn up the bass, it's better when it's loud
Cuz I like to move the crowd*
(Eric B. & Rakim, "Move the Crowd," 1987)

1987 was a landmark year in hip-hop. 1987 would introduce the mainstream to politically and socially conscious lyrics (Public Enemy), gangsta rap on the West Coast (Ice-T), battle rap (Boogie Down Productions, Kool Moe Dee), and 1960s inspired sampling (Eric B. & Rakim).

LL Cool J's follow up album to *Radio* was *Bigger and Deffer*. LL was sitting high as the top solo MC, and he was not shy in letting everyone know about it. In *Bigger and Deffer*'s "I'm Bad," LL boasted, "The best rapper you've heard is LL Cool J" (LL Cool J, "I'm Bad," 1987). This caught the negative attention of most notably Kool Moe Dee, an old school rapper who was making a bit of a comeback since the early 1980s group The Treacherous

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Three broke up. The cover of Kool Moe Dee's 1987 album *How Ya Like Me Now* featured a red Kangol hat (one of LL Cool J's trademarks) being crushed under a Jeep, and the title track was a direct attack at LL Cool J: "I'm bigger and better, forget about *Deffer*" (Kool Moe Dee, "How Ya Like Me Now," 1987). This public dispute was symbolizes the rift between the old school (Kool Moe Dee) and the new school (LL Cool J), much in the same way that an elder would take on his younger counterpart for a lack of respect. That is what this beef boils down to: LL Cool J placing himself amongst the best rappers ever without paying homage to the old school.

While Kool Moe Dee charged LL Cool J with stealing beats, rhyme, and style, a Queensbridge group known as the Juice Crew was accusing LL Cool J of doing the same thing. The Juice Crew, led by Cold Chillin' Records producer Marley Marl, had contended that LL Cool J was a "Beat Biter" ("Beat Biter" being a single released by Juice Crew's MC Shan in 1986). LL Cool J, being a solo artist, had to fend for himself, and *Bigger and Deffer* addressed all of his rhyming adversaries. But he wasn't involved in the Bridge Wars, a territorial beef between the Juice Crew and Boogie Down Productions, led by KRS-One out of the Bronx. The B-side to "Beat Biter" was a song called "The Bridge," and BDP took offense to that track, accusing the Juice Crew of thinking that the birth of hip-hop was in Queensbridge when it was really in the Bronx. In their debut album *Criminal Minded*, KRS-One absolutely tore into the Juice Crew, particularly on songs such as "The Bridge is Over" and "South Bronx":

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“Party people in the place to be, KRS-One attacks
Ya got dropped off MCA cause the rhymes you wrote was wack
So you think that hip-hop had its start out in Queensbridge
If you popped that junk up in the Bronx you might not live”
(Boogie Down Productions, “South Bronx,” 1987)

Besides Boogie Down Productions, there were two more hip-hop acts just starting out that would leave a lasting impact on hip-hop. Public Enemy, led by Chuck D, was a group out of Long Island. Their debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* was released by Def Jam and produced by Rick Rubin. The single “Public Enemy #1” would hint at Chuck D’s fearlessness behind the mic as rap’s political voice: “Known as the poetic, political lyrical son/I’m Public Enemy number one” (Public Enemy, “Public Enemy #1,” 1987). Ice-T’s first album, *Rhyme Pays*, marked his status as a pioneer in not only gangsta rap, but also as a representative of hip-hop on the West Coast. Until Ice-T came out with “6 in the Mornin’,” hip-hop had largely been run out of the East Coast, specifically New York. The first gangsta rap song was by a rapper from Philadelphia named Schoolly D, who released “P.S.K.” in 1985. “6 in the Mornin’” was explicit in both language in content, and the track also refers to the struggle with police, drug money, physical assault of women, murder in the club, and sex; a reality in urban Los Angeles, but one that is usually not presented in raw rhyme form. Both Public Enemy and political rap and Ice-T and the gangsta rap genre would redefine hip-hop in America.

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Through all of these happenings, perhaps the most influential record from 1987 was Eric B. & Rakim's *Paid in Full*. With Eric B. as the DJ and Rakim as the MC, *Paid in Full* is universally recognized as a hip-hop classic. The music is a throwback to the funk and soul of the 1960s, specifically James Brown. Hits such as "I Ain't No Joke," "I Know You Got Soul," "Move the Crowd," "Paid in Full," and "Eric B. Is President" sample several James Brown records. It is said that *Paid in Full* led to "an onslaught of raids on the James Brown sampling archive, a rebirth of pro-scientific lyricism, and a 500 percent rise in purchases of dinosaur-choking gold medallions from Bushwick to Bangkok" (Coleman, 2005, p. 201).

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Chapter 5: 1988

*In the daytime the radio's scared of me
Cause I'm mad, plus I'm the enemy
They can't c'mon and play with me in primetime
'Cause I know the time, plus I'm gettin' mine
I get on the mix late in the night
They know I'm livin' right, so here go the mike, sike
Before I let it go, don't rush my show
You try to reach and grab and get elbowed
Word to herb, yo if you can't swing this
Just a little bit of the taste of the bass for you
As you get up and dance at the LQ
When some deny it, defy if I swing bolos
Then they clear the lane I go solo
The meaning of all of that
Some media is the whack
You believe it's true, it blows me through the roof
Suckers, liars get me a shovel
Some writers I know are damn devils
For them I say don't believe the hype
(Public Enemy, "Don't Believe the Hype," 1988)*

Just as 1984-1985 set up 1986, 1987 set up 1988. 1988 was a very politically oriented year. Ronald Reagan's second term as President of the United States was ending, and as Democrats and Republicans geared up for the 1988 election, many issues were on the conscience of urban America:

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Reaganomics was connected to high black unemployment rates, the War on Drugs/Just Say No campaign was in full effect, violence, imprisonment, teenage pregnancy, and disease. It was like the 1960s all over again, and Chuck D. and Public Enemy took it upon themselves to voice these issues. In 1988's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, Chuck D. addresses myriad issues, and he defines what rap is:

Rap serves as the communication that (black people) don't get for themselves to make them feel good about themselves. Rap is black America's TV station. It gives a whole perspective of what exists and what black life is about. And black life doesn't get the total spectrum of information through anything else. They don't get it through print because kids won't pick up no magazines or no books, really, unless it got pictures of rap stars (Leland, 1988).

The interesting part of Public Enemy's politically charged message was what was developing on the West Coast: N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton*, an exercise in the hardcore gangsta rap that Ice-T brought to the West Coast the year before. Dr. Dre (producer), Ice Cube, MC Ren, and Eazy-E upheld a level of shock value in their lyrics, while brutally describing the conflicts between black youth and law enforcement. The perception of this group is that they were excessively violent and anti-police to a dangerous and threatening level. They, along with Public Enemy, received the negative attention of the FBI: "In 1988 FBI Assistant Director Milt Ahlerich wrote to Ruthless Records criticizing *Straight Outta Compton* for promoting 'violence against and disrespect for the law enforcement officer'" (Ogbar, 2007, p. 152). It would seem as if the politically oriented message of Public Enemy would

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undermine that of gangsta rap on the West Coast. But as Ice-T (who released *Power* in 1988) explains, “Chuck (D.) was a Nationalist position. He was trying to get all black people to understand the problems of the world. I was a ‘hood politician. I wanted people to understand what was going on in the city. He rapped about the president, I rapped about the police” (Coleman, 2005, p. 245).

In 1987, just months after the release of Boogie Down Productions’ *Criminal Minded*, DJ Scott La Rock was murdered; it was the first murder of a hip-hop performer. KRS-One changed up his message on the next Boogie Down Productions album, 1988’s *By All Means Necessary*. Whereas the first BDP album focused on the Bridge Wars, *By All Means Necessary* (the name of which is an allusion to Malcolm X’s statement “By any means necessary”) focused on a socially conscious message, none clearer than “Stop the Violence.”

Besides the social and political tensions, hip-hop was also about to be exposed through greater avenues, just as Chuck D. and Ice-T were taking shots at the radio (especially black radio). 1988 marked the birth of *Yo! MTV Raps*, the first rap show on MTV, and *The Source*, one of the earliest and most successful hip-hop magazines (Watkins, 2005). The Grammys also took notice of hip-hop, as DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince won the first rap Grammy for “Parents Just Don’t Understand.” While the explicit lyrics of N.W.A. and Ice-T garnered much attention, the clean lyrics of The Fresh Prince arguably won

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them not only a Grammy, but the MTV Video Music Award for Best Rap Video.

EPMD also released *Strictly Business*, which featured “You Got’s to Chill.”

EPMD was a group that helped establish the East Coast underground. Also,

1988 marked the debut of 16-year old MC Lyte, one of the first female MCs, in *Lyte as a Rock*.

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PART 2: THE GOLDEN AGE OF HIP-HOP (1989-1993)

Chapter 6: 1989

I break into a lyrical freestyle

Grab the mic, look into the crowd and see smiles

Cause they see a woman standing up on her own two

Sloppy slouching is something I won't do

Some think that we can't flow (can't flow)

Stereotypes, they got to go (got to go)

I'm a mess around and flip the scene into reverse

(With what?) With a little touch of "Ladies First

(Queen Latifah, "Ladies First," 1989)

While Black Nationalism was represented by groups such as Public Enemy, black feminism was being expressed by MC Lyte and Queen Latifah. "Ladies First" came off of Queen Latifah's 1989 debut album *All Hail the Queen* and featured British female rapper Monie Love. In a male-dominated arena at this point, it was refreshing to see women take charge in the rap game: "When I saw the Queen on television rocking a goddess hat, fully clothed, and rhyming, I was mesmerized," (Pride, 2007, p. 103).

1989 also brought forth competition for *Yo! MTV Raps* in the form of BET's *Rap City*. As Chuck D. explains, "(Yo! MTV Raps) forced BET to come out with their own show).

N.W.A.'s Dr. Dre would produce The D.O.C.'s *No One Can Do It Better*. The album featured "It's Funky Enough" and "The Formula." *No One Can Do*

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It Better would help establish Dr. Dre as a premier producer from the West Coast, while The D.O.C.'s lyrical content was influenced by that of East Coast rappers, as profanity is rare on the record. This would be The D.O.C.'s only notable album, as a car accident crushed his larynx.

Another development in 1989 was De La Soul's first album *3 Feet High and Rising*, one of the first progressive, alternative hip-hop albums. Just as hip-hop was being defined by the socially conscious, the political, and the gangsta labels, De La Soul added another subgenre to rap, one that helped further broaden the horizon. De La Soul was not concerned too much about mainstream attention. However, the attention that the hit single "Me Myself and I" garnered along with what was perceived as a "hippie image" actually turned off De La Soul: "We were really sick of all the hype after a while" (Coleman, 2005, p. 150).

In addition to releasing *Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip-hop* with Boogie Down Productions, KRS-One organized the Stop the Violence Movement and released "Self-Destruction." "Self-Destruction" was a posse cut (a rap song with four or more rappers) that featured many of the East Coast's stars: KRS-One, Stetsasonic, Kool Moe Dee, MC Lyte, D-Nice, Ms. Melodie, Doug E. Fresh, Just Ice, Heavy D, and Public Enemy. This show of unity for a cause was an important part of hip-hop's role in social awareness.

Another important posse cut in 1989 was "Back on the Block," the title track from producer Quincy Jones' Grammy-winning masterpiece *Back on the*

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Block. Jones, the man behind Michael Jackson's record breaking albums in the 1980s, "officially welcomes rap music into the pantheon of black musical styles" (Holden, 1989) on "Back on the Block." The song brings together rappers Ice-T, Melle Mel, Big Daddy Kane, and Kool Moe Dee, as well as young R&B star Tevin Campbell and the Andraé Crouch led gospel choir Take 6. At the end of the track, the voice of Jesse Jackson is heard stating that "rap is here to stay." This built upon the cultural significance of that summer's Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing*, a film that depicted the racial tensions in Brooklyn during the summer. Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" was featured prominently in the film.

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Chapter 7: 1990

Peace - don't make me laugh!
All I hear is motherfuckers rappin succotash
Livin large, tellin me to get out the gang
I'm a nigga, gotta live by the trigger
How the fuck do you figure?
that I can say peace and the gunshots will cease?!
Every cop killer goes ignored
They just send another nigga to the morgue
A point scored- they could give a fuck about us
They rather catch us with guns and white powder
If I was old, they'd probably be a friend of me
Since I'm young, they consider me the enemy
They kill ten of me to get the job correct
To serve, protect, and break a niggas neck
Cuz I'm the one with the trunk of funk
And 'Fuck tha Police' in the tape deck
You should listen to me cuz there's more to see
Call my neighborhood a ghetto cuz it houses minorities
The other color don't know you can run but not hide
These are tales from the darkside...

(Ice Cube, "Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside)," 1990)

1990 saw a further uniting of hip-hop across borders. While 1989's Stop the Violence movement saw many prominent East Coast rappers participating in the same anti-violence song, 1990 saw the West Coast do the same thing in

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a single called “We’re All in the Same Gang.” Dr. Dre of the N.W.A. produced the single that featured West Coast rappers King Tee, Body & Soul, Def Jef, Tone-Loc, Above the Law, Ice-T, N.W.A., JJ Fad, Young MC, Digital Underground, Oaktown’s 3.5.7, and MC Hammer. This group was dubbed the West Coast Rap All-Stars, and the main difference between them and the Stop the Violence Movement was that the West Coast Rap All-Stars openly addressed who they were and why the violence needs to stop. Ice-T and N.W.A. in particular added credibility to the track because they spoke of their violent backgrounds and why it should stop.

By 1990, Ice Cube had broken up with N.W.A. and was set to release his first solo album, *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted*. An interesting development in Ice Cube’s album is that he sought out the Bomb Squad to produce his album; the Bomb Squad being Public Enemy’s in-house production team. This further illustrates the unity within hip-hop at the turn of the decade. While the West Coast and East Coast had gathered their best against anti-violence, Ice Cube, the gangsta rapper from South Central Los Angeles, called upon Chuck D. (the political voice of rap from the East Coast) and his people to make *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted*. What resulted was a platinum album that “addresses several social maladies, including institutionalized racism in law enforcement and sexual irresponsibility” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 115).

On the East Coast, Public Enemy was still representing their message with *Fear of a Black Planet*, while Boogie Down Productions released

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Edutainment. LL Cool J also released his most important record, *Mama Said Knock You Out*, which featured “Mama Said Knock You Out” and “Around the Way Girl.” Off the heels of Queen Latifah and MC Lyte came Salt-N-Pepa’s third album *Blacks’ Magic*, which featured “Let’s Talk about Sex,” a song that advocated open communication of what had been a taboo talking point. The song samples the Staple Singers’ 1972 song “I’ll Take You There” while demonstrating “women taking an active stance on sexual matters” (Pride, 2007, p. 159). Just as De La Soul helped introduce alternative hip-hop in 1989, A Tribe Called Quest released *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* in 1990, another building block of alternative hip-hop along with Brand Nubian’s *One for All*.

Further growth of hip-hop’s mass appeal led to two new shows on network television in 1990: NBC’s *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and FOX’s *In Living Color*. *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* was the first show starring a rapper (Will Smith). The show was about a young man from Philadelphia moving in with his rich relatives on the West Coast. It is worth mentioning that one of the executive producers of the show was Quincy Jones.

In Living Color was a sketch-comedy/variety show that was an answer to NBC’s *Saturday Night Live*. By 1990, *SNL* had an all white cast since 1986 (the last two black members being Danitra Vance and Damon Wayans). *In Living Color* was created by Keenan Ivory Wayans and his brother Damon, and it became hip-hop’s own sketch-comedy show. The hip-hop influences

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on the show were obvious as soon as the opening montage appeared: the cast members “tagging” the screen in paint, the theme song by Heavy D and the Boys, the house DJ, and the Fly Girls dancing troupe. The original cast featured Keenan Ivory Wayans, his brother Damon, his sister Kim, and James (Jim) Carrey, Kelly Coffield, Kim Coles, Tommy Davidson, David Alan Grier, and T’Keyah “Crystal” Keymah. That’s seven black cast members and two white cast members; five males and four females. Compare that to the 1989-1990 cast of *Saturday Night Live*: eleven white cast members (three of whom are female) and no black cast members. It appears that *SNL* got *In Living Color*’s message when Chris Rock joined the cast for the 1990-1991 season of *SNL*.

It was in 1990 that “pop rap” started to cause a rift. 1990 was the year that MC Hammer became a star, as his album *Please, Hammer, Don’t Hurt ‘Em* was eventually certified diamond, the first hip-hop album to do so. The main hit, “U Can’t Touch This,” sampled Rick James’ 1981 hit “Super Freak,” and other tracks on the album sampled artists such as The Jackson 5 and Prince. Far more controversial than Hammer, though, was the rise and fall of Vanilla Ice, who released *To the Extreme* in 1990. “Ice Ice Baby,” the first song on that track, sampled Queen and David Bowie’s 1981 song “Under Pressure,” boasted of Vanilla Ice’s rhyming ability (“To the extreme I rock a mic like a vandal”), and alluded to Vanilla Ice’s life as a gangster in Miami a la Ice-T. So what’s the problem? One, Vanilla Ice did not clear the “Under Pressure” sample (in addition to not crediting Wild Cherry in his song “Play that Funky

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Music"). And two, Vanilla Ice had fabricated a flashy, gangster image, for which he was branded for. While MC Hammer was also excessively flashy, he was (initially) careful not to pretend to be something that he was not. And the main difference between the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice is that the Beastie Boys did not portray themselves as something they were not, *as well as* already having the credibility that came with being associated with some of hip-hop's greatest. Vanilla Ice was a creation of the genre, and he never truly represented hip-hop.

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Chapter 8: 1991

*This is for the masses the lower classes
The ones you left out, jobs were givin', better livin'
But we were kept out
Made to feel inferior, but we're the superior
Break the chains in our brains that made us fear yah
Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us
Honor a man that who refuses to respect us
"Emancipation Proclamation?" Please!
Lincoln just said that to save the nation
These are lies that we all accepted
Say no to drugs but the governments' keep it
Running through our community, killing the unity
The war on drugs is a war on you and me
And yet they say this is the Home of The Free
But if you ask me, it's all about hypocrisy
The constitution, Yo, it don't apply to me
Lady Liberty? Stupid bitch lied to me
Steady strong nobody's gonna like what I pumpin'
But it's wrong to keeping someone from learning something
So get up, it's time to start nation building
I'm fed up, we gotta start teaching children
That they can be all that they want to be
There's much more to life than just poverty.
(2Pac, "Words of Wisdom," 1991)*

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Back in 1984, when Run-DMC released their first album, David Stern became the commissioner of the National Basketball Association. A league that already had Larry Bird and Magic Johnson was about to be bolstered by that year's draft of future Hall of Famers John Stockton, Charles Barkley, Hakeem Olajuwon, and Michael Jordan. Everyone knew Jordan was going to be great, but it was not until 1991 that he won his first NBA championship. That fall, Jordan hosted the 1991-1992 season premiere of *Saturday Night Live*, becoming the first active NBA player to host the show. The musical guest for that show was none other than Public Enemy, who had their fourth album out, *Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Back*. The bond between hip-hop and basketball has always been there, and by 1991 it was clear to see. The rise of the NBA's popularity occurred at about the same time that hip-hop was rising to its golden age.

The perception of hip-hop was about to be redefined in 1991 with the release of the two albums that held "Apocalypse" in their names: Public Enemy's *Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Back* and 2Pac's *2Pacalypse Now*. The music video for "By the Time I Get to Arizona" was banned by *Yo! MTV Raps* because the video was deemed too violent (Christian, 2008). 2Pac's debut album featured some of his most politically conscious lyrics. For example, "Brenda's Got a Baby" tells the story of a teenager who struggles with a pregnancy in the ghetto. However, United States Vice President Dan Quayle chose to crusade against 2Pac's album, saying it has no place in society after the death of a Texas state trooper (Ogbar, 2007, p. 156). Ice

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Cube released *Death Certificate* in 1991, and on the single “True to the Game,” he attacks MTV and black sell-outs (indirectly coming at MC Hammer in the music video for the song). Hammer, by the way, would release *Too Legit to Quit* that year and would become the first rapper to host *Saturday Night Live*. The song “represents a gold standard in hip-hop’s cult of authenticity” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 23) and continued to convey the shaky relationship between the media and hip-hop. Ice Cube would also be expanding his outreach by starring in the critically acclaimed film *Boyz in the Hood*.

Cypress Hill and the Geto Boys were two gangster rap groups that also made their presence felt in 1991 while adding something new. Cypress Hill added to the West Coast gangster scene that still featured Ice-T (who released *O.G. Original Gangster* in 1991), Ice Cube, and N.W.A. (who released *Niggaz4life* in 1991). Cypress Hill was a Latino group, and their first single was “How I Could Just Kill a Man.” The Geto Boys, made up of Scarface, Willie D, and Bushwick Bill, were from Houston, a relatively unheard from area of hip-hop. Their fourth album, *We Can’t Be Stopped*, was perhaps their most controversial album. The album cover was another exercise in “keeping it real,” featuring a photo of Scarface and Willie D flanking Bushwick Bill in the hospital after he had shot himself in the eye during a drunken, suicidal rage. It was a graphic shot, and coupled with the success of the single “Mind Playing Tricks on Me,” *We Can’t Be Stopped* was a hit. Scarface also released his solo debut *Mr. Scarface is Back* in the same year.

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Just as censorship was about to take form, the underground and alternative rap scene was also breaking through even further. A Tribe Called Quest released perhaps their greatest album, *The Low End Theory*, an album that “kicked the door down and knocked it off its hinges” (Coleman, 2005, p. 442). The album introduced future star Busta Rhymes, who was part of The Leaders of the New School at the time, who were featured in the song “Scenario.” Another future star that made his debut amongst an alternative group making a significant album was Nas, who was featured in Main Source’s “Live at the Barbecue,” off the album *Breaking Atoms*. Other underground albums released in 1991 include Black Sheep’s *A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing* and Gang Starr’s *Step in the Arena*. The jazz-influenced beats of these albums gave them an aesthetic feel to hip-hop that was first introduced by Eric B. & Rakim. This was significant because the sound of hip-hop was bound to change after Biz Markie’s illegal use of a sample forced all samples to be cleared before use.

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Chapter 9: 1992

*Now it's time for me to make my impression felt
So sit back, relax, and strap on your seatbelt
You never been on a ride like this befo'
with a producer who can rap and control the maestro
At the same time with the dope rhyme that I kick
You know, and I know, I flow some ol' funky shit
to add to my collection, the selection
symbolizes dope, take a toke, but don't choke
If you do, you'll have no clue
on what me and my homey Snoop Dogg came to do.
(Dr. Dre, "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang," 1992)*

1992 was the beginning of the end of the golden age in hip-hop. The success of Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* was an album released on Death Row Records that kept West Coast gangsta rap on top as well as introducing Snoop Dogg to the rap scene. It also was innovative in its production; this was the album where Dr. Dre popularized G-funk (gangsta funk), using samples that were heavily influenced by the funk of George Clinton. However, the lyrical content in *The Chronic* would come under heavy scrutiny. Dr. Dre lyrically attacked his former N.W.A. partner Eazy-E, East Coast rapper Tim Dog (who had attacked N.W.A., Dr. Dre, and the West Coast rap scene in "Fuck Compton"), and Miami's Luke Campbell of 2 Live Crew in "Fuck Wit' Dre Day (And Everybody's Celebratin').

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1992 was a year that was rocked by the police brutality of the Rodney King beating and the subsequent Los Angeles riots. It was reminiscent of the Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn the year before and the film *Do the Right Thing* in terms of the racially motivated violence, and Ice Cube's 1992 album *The Predator* referenced the riots throughout, most notably on the track "We Had to Tear This Motherfucka Up." On the album *The Predator*, Ice Cube precedes "We Had to Tear This Motherfucka Up" with "It Was a Good Day," a song that samples The Isley Brothers' 1977 hit "Footsteps in the Dark." "It Was a Good Day" was a laid-back track that seemed to express everything that was right with Ice Cube. But then after talking about a good day, he goes to describe the terror and destruction of Los Angeles on the album. But there was no way that "We Had to Tear This Motherfucka Up" was going to be a music video; the sequel to the music video of "It Was a Good Day" was the remix version of "Check Yo Self." In that music video, Ice Cube is shown at the end of his "good day" being arrested and taken to prison. The album version of "Check Yo Self" featured a sample of Wilson Pickett's "Mustang Sally," while the remix version of the song that appeared in the music video featured a sample of Grandmaster Flash's "The Message."

1992's alternative hip-hop movement began to expand beyond the East Coast as Atlanta's Arrested Development released *3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life Of...*, Los Angeles' The Pharcyde released *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*, and Chicago's Common released *Can I Borrow a Dollar?* New York's underground alternative hip-hop scene featured albums from Gang

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Starr (*Daily Operation*) and Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth (*Ghetto of the Mind*).

While these albums were critically acclaimed, they still did not sell as well as their West Coast counterparts. What is interesting is that EPMD's

"Crossover," off of their fourth album *Business Never Personal*, turned out to be their most commercially successful single despite its condemnation of

crossing over. EPMD's protégé Redman would release his first album *Whut?*

Thee Album in 1992, one of the first East Coast hardcore records.

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Chapter 10: 1993

*We got stickup kids, corrupt cops, and crack rocks
and stray shots, all on the block that stays hot
Leave it up to me while I be living proof
To kick the truth to the young black youth
But shorty's running wild smokin sess drinkin beer
And ain't trying to hear what I'm kickin in his ear
Neglected, but now, but yo, it gots to be accepted
That what? That life is hectic.*

(Wu-Tang Clan, "C.R.E.A.M.," 1993)

When the Wu-Tang Clan debuted in 1993 with their album *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*, they represented more than just Staten Island. They were unique in that they were a hip-hop group with nine members: RZA, GZA, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Inspectah Deck, Raekwon, U-God, Masta Killa, Ghostface Killah, and Method Man. They were hardcore, gritty, and bitter as they directed their lyrical assault on the establishment that was the major record labels. Their lyrics were influenced by Kung Fu movies as well as Nation of the Gods and Earths teachings, the latter being a hip-hop descendent of Rakim. As shown in "C.R.E.A.M." (An acronym for Cash Rules Everything Around Me), their lyrics were also a social commentary in the style of KRS-One (who would release his solo debut *Return of the Boom Bap* in 1993). The Wu-Tang Clan would also re-popularize the posse cut simply by design. In addition to all of the above, the production of RZA perfectly matched the style of the Wu-Tang Clan, mixing in Kung Fu film samples with music from Hall &

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Oates and Gladys Knight among others. RZA's production ability rivaled that of Dr. Dre, while GZA and Ol' Dirty Bastard were like a new version of Public Enemy's Chuck D. and Flavor Flav. The Wu-Tang Clan was something never seen before in hip-hop.

Mobb Deep was a duo (Havoc and Prodigy) from Queens. In 1993 they released their debut *Juvenile Hell*, which featured the single "Peer Pressure." "Peer Pressure," like the Wu-Tang Clan's "C.R.E.A.M.," told the story of young teens struggling in the projects. 1993 would also see Queen Latifah (*Black Reign*) and Salt-N-Pepa (*Very Necessary*) release their most successful albums. Queen Latifah's "U.N.I.T.Y." was another song challenging the misogynistic directions of hip-hop, much like "Ladies First." Queen Latifah repeatedly and angrily asks "Who you calling a bitch?" throughout the chorus of the song while also "(extolling) black male and black female love and affection" (Ogbar, 2007, p. 83).

Alternative hip-hop continued to grow in 1993, with A Tribe Called Quest releasing their third album *Midnight Marauders*, Souls of Mischief releasing *93 'til Infinity*, and Digable Planets releasing *Reachin' (A New Refutation of Time and Space)*. The hit single "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)" won the group a Grammy in 1994, over the more established Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Cypress Hill, and Naughty By Nature (who released *19 Naughty III* in 1993). According to Digable Planets' Doodlebug, there was backlash from KRS-One because "he thought a hardcore group should have won the

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Grammy” (Coleman, 2005, p. 171). Doodlebug also attributes the success of the single to their January 1993 performance on *In Living Color*, further showing the critical influence of the show.

On the West Coast, it seemed that Dr. Dre was grooming Snoop Dogg to be a star on *The Chronic*, and in 1993 Snoop Dogg fulfilled his promise on his G-funk, Dr. Dre produced album *Doggystyle*. Besides the G-funk hits “Gin and Juice” and “Who Am I (What’s My Name?),” Snoop Dogg paid homage to Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh on his cover of “Lodi Dodi,” while also exploring the death of a hip-hop star in “Murder Was the Case.” In addition to Snoop Dogg, Cypress Hill (*Black Sunday*) and Tupac Shakur (*Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*) released their second albums in 1993. Tupac also followed up his starring role in 1991’s *Juice* with a starring role alongside Janet Jackson in *Poetic Justice*. Cypress Hill became musical guests on *Saturday Night Live* in October 1993, performing “Insane in the Brain” and “I Ain’t Goin’ Out Like That.” They would earn a lifetime ban from the show after trying to smoke cannabis during their performance of “I Ain’t Goin’ Out Like That.”

Going back to the NBA/hip-hop correlation, it is interesting to note that as the golden age of hip-hop was coming to a close in 1993, Michael Jordan retired for the first time after winning his third straight championship with the Chicago Bulls. While the best star of the game was gone from the game (temporarily), this allowed the NBA’s other stars to shine. This was showcased on the VHS special *NBA Rising Stars*. At the end of the special, Naughty By

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Nature was featured with several young NBA stars in a NBA-remix music video of “Hip Hop Hooray.” One of those stars, Shaquille O’Neal, released his debut album *Shaq Diesel* in 1993. *Shaq Diesel* “signaled hip-hop’s synergy with other arenas of entertainment like sports” (Watkins, 2005, p. 60).

Also in 1993, Chris Rock starred in the gangsta rap mockumentary *CB4*. The film featured songs such as “Sweat from My Balls” and “Straight Outta Locash,” a parody of N.W.A.’s “Straight Outta Compton.”

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PART 3: THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA OF HIP-HOP (1994-1998)

Chapter 11: 1994

*I might've failed to mention that the shit was creative
But once the man got you well he altered her native
Told her if she got an image and a gimmick
that she could make money, and she did it like a dummy
Now I see her in commercials, she's universal
She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle
Now she be in the 'burbs lickin' rock and dressin' hip
And on some dumb shit, when she comes to the city
Talkin about poppin glocks servin rocks and hittin switches
Now she's a gangsta rollin with gangsta bitches
Always smokin blunts and gettin drunk
Tellin me sad stories, now she only fucks with the funk
Stressin how hardcore and real she is
She was really the realest, before she got into showbiz
I did her, not just to say that I did it
But I'm committed, but so many niggaz hit it
That she's just not the same lettin all these groupies do her
I see niggaz slammin her, and takin her to the sewer
But I'ma take her back hopin' that the shit stop
Cause who I'm talkin bout y'all is hip-hop.
(Common, "I Used to Love H.E.R.," 1994)*

1994 was the beginning of another new era in hip-hop, the West Coast versus East Coast – the Civil War of hip-hop. "I Used to Love H.E.R.," off of

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Common's second album *Resurrection*, personifies hip-hop as a girl and chronicles the rise and perceived decline of rap up until then.

Unintentionally, he caught the negative attention of Ice Cube, and the two exchanged diss records. The Common vs. Ice Cube beef was not as one sided as the Tim Dog vs. Death Row Records battle from *The Chronic*, but considering Common's status as an underground rapper and Ice Cube focusing on other projects at the time, it was not as publicized as it could have been. But it was a sign of things to come.

1994 did mark the revitalization of the East Coast. Following up on the Wu-Tang Clan's *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*, Method Man released *Tical* in 1994. This made Method Man the first member of the Wu-Tang Clan to release a solo album. The two most important albums released in 1994 were Nas' *Illmatic* and The Notorious B.I.G.'s *Ready to Die*. *Illmatic* is renowned for Nas' lyrical content that was evocative of Rakim as well as the legendary team of producers that came together to create an iconic sound: Main Source's Large Professor, Gang Starr's DJ Premier, Pete Rock, and A Tribe Called Quest's Q-Tip. Brooklyn's Notorious B.I.G. teamed up with Sean Combs, the founder of Bad Boy Records, and helped shift the attention of rap back to the East Coast. Now the East Coast had the star power to challenge the West Coast.

OutKast (Andre 3000 and Big Boi) would do for Atlanta what the Geto Boys did for Houston, releasing their debut *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* in

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1994. Though Arrested Development did well in 1992, OutKast had the staying power that would make the “Dirty South” relevant in hip-hop. The music on *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* had a G-funk sound to it, and the lyrical content mixed in the life of a “player” while also delivering socially conscious messages on songs such as “Git Up, Git Out.”

Up front, 1994 seemed like a great year for hip-hop, and it was. The East Coast had new stars to challenge the West, the South had representatives in OutKast, and even the Beastie Boys returned to the top of the charts with *Ill Communication*. Tupac Shakur also was featured in the urban basketball drama *Above the Rim* in 1994. However, Tupac Shakur's issues with the law that year (he had been accused of sexual abuse) took a turn for the worse when he was robbed and shot in New York. He would accuse The Notorious B.I.G. and Sean Combs of setting him up, and the next day he was sentenced to serve time in prison.

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Chapter 12: 1995

*There's a war goin on outside, no man is safe from
You could run but you can't hide forever
from these, streets, that we done took
You walkin witcha head down scared to look
You shook, cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks
They never around when the beef cooks in my part of town
It's similar to Vietnam*
(Mobb Deep, "Survival of the Fittest," 1995)

By 1995, the perception of hip-hop was at a crossroads. *In Living Color* had been cancelled, *Yo! MTV Raps* followed suit in 1995, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* was entering its last season. After a short battle with AIDS, N.W.A.'s founder Eazy-E had died at the age of 31. While Eazy-E's greatest supporters and adversaries prayed for him (especially Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, and Dr. Dre), the media dropped the ball:

Eazy-E was the first major pop music figure who was not openly gay to die from AIDS. But instead of seizing this opportunity to educate, the media downplayed Eazy's death. MTV had devoted around-the-clock coverage to Kurt Cobain's suicide, but squeezed only a few paltry minutes on Eazy into their regular *MTV News* broadcasts. *The New York Times* and *People* offered slightly expanded obituaries, and *BET* seemed asleep at the wheel. The media's laxity was especially shameful considering that Eazy's core audience – young people of color – are currently contracting the virus at such an accelerated rate (Harris, 1995).

Instead of helping turn a negative into positive, politicians calling themselves cultural activists were making their voice heard against rap. These individuals included William J. Bennett (former drug czar of the first

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Bush administration and head of Empower America, an advocacy organization for “personal responsibility”), C. Delores Tucker (president of the National Congress of Black Women), Newt Gingrich (speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives), and Bob Dole (Kansas Senator and future Republican nominee for President in 1996). Their influence would result in Time Warner selling its 50 percent stake in Interscope Records, “the label chiefly accused of promoting morally unsound rap” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 111). While it is true that the violent and misogynistic lyrics of hip-hop were running rampant at the time, these “activists” failed to acknowledge the voices of criticism from within the hip-hop community: “From rappers to hip-hop magazine editors, many have criticized both the violent, hyper-materialistic, sexist gangsta music and the politicians and culture critics who denounce rap music” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 111).

As far as the music, the East Coast hardcore scene was further bolstered by Ol' Dirty Bastard's *Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version*, Mobb Deep's *The Infamous*, Raekwon's *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...*, and GZA's *Liquid Swords*. Ol' Dirty Bastard brought a sound that was even rawer than what he showed on *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*. *The Infamous* “was all part of the movement that Wu-Tang had started and Nas had continued” (Coleman, 2005, p. 270), while Big L's *Lifestylez Ov Da Poor & Dangerous* was his only album before his murder four years later. Jay-Z would be featured on “Da Graveyard.” *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* helped popularize Mafioso rap in 1995. The idea of an album being like a movie a la *Scarface* was Raekwon's

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trademark, and RZA's production made it work. The album featured tracks such as "Criminology," "Incarcerated Scarfaces," and "Wu-Gambinos," on which half of the Wu-Tang Clan adopted mafia-like aliases. The album featured all of the Wu-Tang Clan - especially Ghostface Killah, who was featured on 14 of the 18 tracks - and Nas appeared on the track "Verbal Intercourse." The fourth Wu-Tang Clan solo album, *Liquid Swords*, was much like *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*, with GZA applying lyrical surgery on the mic. In addition to these four albums, The Notorious B.I.G. got further involved in the Mafioso rap scene when his group Junior M.A.F.I.A. released *Conspiracy* in 1995. Junior M.A.F.I.A. introduced Lil' Kim and featured the singles "Player's Anthem" and "Get Money."

While 2Pac was incarcerated, he released his third album *Me Against the World* in March 1995 and debuted at the top of the charts, becoming the first artist to achieve that feat while incarcerated. 2Pac's success made him the tip star on the West Coast despite his imprisonment. Before he went to prison, an unreleased track by The Notorious B.I.G. called "Who Shot Ya?" surfaced, and 2Pac took offense to the track as he believed it was a taunt directed at him related to his shooting. That August, The Source Awards was held in New York City. Suge Knight, who had taken a leadership role at Death Row Records with Dr. Dre, criticized Sean Combs of Bad Boy for appearing in The Notorious B.I.G.'s music videos and encouraged artists to come to Death Row. While Sean Combs tried to downplay the toxic situation that night, Snoop Dogg would later chide the crowd for booing Death Row that night.

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Later that year, he proposed to 2Pac a deal that would gear the West Coast up for the “hip-hop Civil War”: Knight would post 2Pac’s \$1.4 million bail if he agreed to join Death Row Records. 2Pac accepted, and promised that he’d “vent his anger” on his upcoming album (Kitwana, 2005, p. 29).

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Chapter 13: 1996

Lost generation, fast paced nation
World population confront they frustration
The principles of true hip-hop have been forsaken
It's all contractual and about money makin
Pretend-to-be cats don't seem to know they limitation
Exact replication and false representation
You wanna be a man, then stand your own
To MC requires skills, I demand some shown
I let the frauds keep frontin
And roam like a cellular phone far from home
Givin crowds what they wantin
Offical hip-hop consumption, the 5th thumpin
Keepin ya party jumpin with an original somethin
Yo, I dedicate this to the one dimension-al
No imagination, excuse for perpetration
My man came over and said, "Yo we thought we heard you"
Joke's on you; you heard a bitin-ass crew...
(The Roots, "What They Do," 1996)

1996 marked the high point of the "hip-hop Civil War." As a response to "Who Shot Ya?" 2Pac released "Hit 'em Up," a diss track that attacked Biggie, Bad Boy Records, Junior M.A.F.I.A., and Mobb Deep, among others. 2Pac also released the double-album *All Eyez on Me* in February 1996. While *All Eyez on Me* was a success, it was a departure from 2Pac's earlier, more political, socially conscious work. Two notable songs are "2 of Amerikaz Most

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Wanted,” which featured Snoop Dogg, and “California Love,” which featured Dr. Dre. It is important to note that Dr. Dre left Death Row Records soon after the release of *All Eyez on Me* to start his own label Aftermath.

The summer of 1996 saw the release of two Mafioso themed albums: Jay-Z’s *Reasonable Doubt* and Nas’ *It Was Written*. Jay-Z, from Brooklyn, was an associate of Biggie, who was featured on “Brooklyn’s Finest.” The album was released on Roc-a-Fella Records, the label started by Jay-Z with Damon Dash. The song “Dead Presidents” would controversially sample Nas’ “The World is Yours.” While Jay-Z was affiliated with The Notorious B.I.G., he was not caught up in his beef with 2Pac. Neither was Nas, whose second album featured guest verses by Mobb Deep and a guest production appearance by Dr. Dre. It should be noted that the name of Snoop Dogg’s last Death Row release, 1996’s *Tha Doggfather*, was a reference to *The Godfather* series. The Wu-Tang Clan’s Ghostface Killah would also make his solo debut in 1996 with his album *Ironman*.

The last track on *It Was Written* was “If I Ruled the World (Imagine That),” a song that sampled Whodini’s 1984 hit “Friends” and featured The Fugees’ Lauryn Hill. It is a song that speaks to freeing political prisoners (Ogbar, 2007, p. 161). Earlier that year, The Fugees (Wyclef Jean, Pras, and Lauryn Hill) released their highly successful Grammy-winning album *The Score*. The hit “Ready or Not” combines elements of reggae (“Buffalo Soldier, dreadlock Rasta” refers to Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier”), 1960s soul (the

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song interpolates The Delfonics' 1969 hit "Ready or Not Here I Come"), and samples Enya's 1987 song "Boadecia." Lyrically, "Ready or Not" criticizes the Mafioso scene in rap: "while you imitatin' Al Capone/I'll be Nina Simone and defecating on your microphone" (The Fugees, "Ready or Not," 1996).

Another innovative hip-hop group, Philadelphia's The Roots, released their third album *Illadelph Halflife*. The Roots, led by drummer ?uestlove and rapper Black Thought, were a group that performed with a live band. The music video for "What They Do" "derided the make-believe world of their peers" (Ogbar, 2007, p. 115). A Tribe Called Quest, who released their album *Beats, Rhymes and Life* in 1996, also criticized the direction of rap. Busta Rhymes, who had been featured on Tribe albums, released his debut album *The Coming* in 1996.

It should be noted that on OutKast's second album *ATLiens*, Andre 3000 and Big Boi went from portraying themselves as players to portraying themselves as aliens. They started to move away from the G-funk sound that was prominent on *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* as well. It makes sense to become "alien" to the styles of the West Coast and the East Coast and become a part of an original sound as representatives of the South.

On September 7, 1996, two months before the release of his fifth album *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*, Tupac Shakur was shot four times in Las Vegas, NV. He died six days later. The homicide of Tupac Shakur would rock

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the hip-hop war as Tupac died at the apex of his career. Unfortunately, he would not be the only casualty of the hip-hop Civil War.

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Chapter 14: 1997

*Seems like yesterday we used to rock the show
I laced the track, you locked the flow
So far from hangin' on the block for dough
Notorious, they got to know that
Life ain't always what it seem to be (uh-uh)
Words can't express what you mean to me
Even though you're gone, we still a team
Through your family, I'll fulfill your dream (that's right)
In the future, can't wait to see
If you open up the gates for me
Reminisce some time, the night they took my friend (uh-huh)
Try to black it out, but it plays again
When it's real, feelings hard to conceal
Can't imagine all the pain I feel
Give anything to hear half your breath (half your breath)
I know you still living your life, after death.
(Sean "Diddy" Combs, "I'll Be Missing You," 1997)*

Six months after the death of Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G. was shot and killed in Los Angeles, only weeks before his 1997 *Life After Death* was released. Like 2Pac's *All Eyez on Me*, *Life After Death* was a Grammy-nominated double-album. However, the impact of Biggie's death was felt on subsequent releases by Diddy (*No Way Out*) and Jay-Z (*In My Lifetime, Vol. 1*). While *No Way Out* featured "I'll Be Missing You" (which samples The Police's

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1983 hit “Every Breath You Take”), Jay-Z had a song titled “The City is Mine,” where Jay-Z declared that he would hold down Brooklyn in memory of Biggie.

One of the most anticipated albums from 1997 was the Wu-Tang Clan’s *Wu-Tang Forever*. *Wu-Tang Forever*, like *Life After Death* and *No Way Out*, was a Grammy-nominated double album. Will Smith, formerly known as The Fresh Prince, released his solo debut *Big Willie Style* in 1997. *Big Willie Style* coincided with his budding film career, and he won Grammys for “Men in Black” (from his 1997 movie *Men in Black*) and “Getting’ Jiggy with It.” Despite the success of *The Score*, The Fugees broke up in 1997. Wyclef Jean would release *Wyclef Jean Presents The Carnival Featuring Refugee All-Stars*, which featured the hit “Gone Till November.” Busta Rhymes would release his second album *When Disaster Strikes* in 1997 and Missy Elliott, from Virginia, would debut with *Supa Dupa Fly*. *Supa Dupa Fly* would be a popular album and it made Virginia’s Timbaland a go-to producer.

It is important to note the repercussions of hip-hop’s Civil War. While the East Coast would survive on the strength of the aforementioned albums, the West Coast had no replacement for their fallen star Tupac Shakur. What started in 1987 with Ice-T’s *Rhyme Pays* and continued with the gangster rap successes of N.W.A., Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Snoop Dogg, ended with the death of Tupac Shakur.

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Chapter 15: 1998

*I philosophy
Possibly speak tongues
Beat drum, Abyssinian, street Baptist
Rap this in fine linen, from the beginning
My practice extending across the atlas
I begat this
Flipping in the ghetto on a dirty mattress
You can't match this rapper slash actress
More powerful than two Cleopatras
Bomb graffiti on the tomb of Nefertiti
MCs ain't ready to take it to the Serengeti
My rhymes is heavy like the mind of Sister Betty (Betty Shabazz!)
L-Boogie spars with stars and constellations
Then came down for a little conversation
Adjacent to the king, fear no human being
Roll with cherubims to Nassau Coliseum
Now hear this mixture, where Hip-hop meets scripture
Develop a negative into a positive picture.
(Lauryn Hill, "Everything is Everything," 1998)*

If 1994-1997 was the Civil War of hip-hop, then 1998 was the Reconstruction era. Despite the losses of rap's two biggest stars, Biggie and Tupac, hip-hop dominated the music industry in 1998. It was the year that six different artists hit number one on the *Billboard 200* chart and established hip-

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hop as not only cultural force, but a major economic force as well (Watkins, 2005, p. 62). Just as Michael Jordan's second retirement from the NBA in 1998 at the end of his second three-peat with the Chicago Bulls allowed new stars to step up, Biggie and Tupac's death opened up the rap game.

The first album of that year to top the charts was DMX's debut *It's Dark and Hell is Hot*. This hardcore, East Coast album replaced Garth Brooks from the top of the spot in May 1998, selling more units than anyone else in the nation. What made this significant was that DMX, a relative unknown from Yonkers, New York, helped begin to put hip-hop in a position to "challenge Nashville's claim as America's most popular music" (Watkins, 2005, p. 63). That December DMX released his follow-up LP *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood*.

The next three hip-hop albums to take turns on the top of the charts were No Limit Records head Master P's *Da Last Don*, Beastie Boys' fifth album *Hello Nasty*, and Snoop Dogg's No Limit Records debut *Da Game Is to Be Sold, Not to Be Told*. The success of Master P and the New Orleans-based No Limit Records that year "established the 'Dirty South' as a vital region in hip-hop" (Watkins, 2005, p. 65), while Snoop Dogg's move to No Limit gave the label credibility from a West Coast star, even though his album was a departure from the G-funk of *Doggystyle* and *Tha Doggfather*.

Further diversifying hip-hop's "Reconstruction era" in 1998 was Lauryn Hill's solo debut *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. The album featured the

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“mixture and unparalleled mastery of intelligent hip-hop lyrics, soul-soothing ballads, foot-stomping R&B, and radio friendly grooves” (Watkins, 2005, p. 71). First week sales of *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* would set a record for a female solo artist, win several Grammys, and allow Hill to “(shine) as a brilliant symbol of hip-hop’s phenomenal evolution and musical maturation” (Watkins, 2005, pp. 72-73). Lauryn Hill’s success and influence surpassed that of other female rappers such as MC Lyte and Queen Latifah.

Jay-Z’s *Vol. 2 ... Hard Knock Life* stayed on the charts for five weeks after its release in September 1998. Jay-Z became a superstar with the release of *Vol. 2 ... Hard Knock Life*. “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” used a sample from the Broadway musical *Annie* to help Jay-Z officially crossover into celebrity status. He straddled the line between party anthems such as “Can I Get A...” and more narrative tracks of the consequences of the “good life” (Watkins, 2005, pp. 75-76). In addition to *Vol. 2 ... Hard Knock Life*, Jay-Z and Roc-A-Fella Records released the film *Streets Is Watching*, further broadening Jay-Z’s scope of influence.

In all, the aforementioned six hip-hop acts all represented something totally different: the East Coast newcomer (DMX), the Southern retread (Master P), the white legends (Beastie Boys), the West Coast defect (Snoop Dogg), the strong black woman (Lauryn Hill), and the Brooklyn superstar (Jay-Z).

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That was just the top of the deck; the depth of the hip-hop “Reconstruction of 1998” goes deeper. Black Star, made up of Brooklyn rappers Mos Def and Talib Kweli, released *Mos Def and Talib Kweli are Black Star* in August 1998. Black Star brought back themes reminiscent of the golden age of hip-hop such as Afro-centricity (“Astronomy (8th Light)”), anti-violence in hip-hop (“Definition,” of which the chorus featured a slight variation of BDP’s 1988 song “Stop the Violence” to reference Biggie and Tupac), black feminism (“Brown Skin Lady”), political activism (“K.O.S. (Determination)”), prison injustice (“Thieves in the Night”) and social consciousness (“Respiration,” which features Common). Black Star also remade Slick Rick’s 1988 hit “Children’s Story” to reference commercialized hip-hop, turned their attention to the lack of recognition for underground artists in “Hater Players,” and celebrated the culture of hip-hop in “B Boys Will B Boys.” OutKast’s *Aquemini* and A Tribe Called Quest’s final album *The Love Movement* were both released in September 1998. *Aquemini* saw OutKast come into their own, as the lyrical content challenged the social constructs of not just the hip-hop community but also America as a whole. OutKast would also find controversy after being sued by Rosa Parks over the single bearing the same name.

Even though the Wu-Tang Clan and Sean “Diddy” Combs did not figure into the hip-hop Reconstruction of 1998, they did contribute a memorable moment. At the 1998 Grammys, *No Way Out* beat out *Wu-Tang Forever* for best hip-hop album; Ol’ Dirty Bastard would later come on stage to interrupt Shawn Colvin as she was coming to accept her award for song of the year and

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declare that “Wu-Tang is for the children” and that “Puffy is good, but Wu-Tang is the best.” ODB would be featured later in the year on Pras’ hit single “Ghetto Supastar (That is What You Are),” off his solo debut *Ghetto Supastar*. RZA would also release his solo debut *Bobby Digital in Stereo*.

Finally, it is important to note the print aspect of hip-hop in 1998. *XXL*, a magazine that had been launched a year earlier in 1997 to challenge *The Source* and *Vibe* (which had launched in 1993 under the direction of Quincy Jones), convinced legendary photojournalist Gordon Parks to help re-create the 1958 photo “A Great Day in Harlem.” The original photo, featured in *Esquire* magazine, “included 57 jazz artists, among them giants Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Count Basie” (Watkins, 2005, pp. 58-59). The new photo, billed as “A Great Day in Harlem ’98,” appeared on the cover of *XXL* and not only paid homage to jazz but also “signified the degree to which the hip-hop movement was beginning to come to terms with itself: its rise and the enormous influence it wielded in America and beyond” (Watkins, 2005, p. 61).

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PART 4: THE BEEF ERA OF HIP-HOP (1999-2003)

Chapter 16: 1999

It's a lot of things goin' on y'all

21st century is comin'

20th century almost done

A lot of things have changed

A lot of things have not, mainly us

We gon' get it together right? I believe that

Listen ... people be askin' me all the time,

"Yo Mos, what's gettin ready to happen with Hip-Hop?"

(Where do you think Hip-Hop is goin'?)

I tell em, "You know what's gonna happen with Hip-Hop?"

Whatever's happening with us"

If we smoked out, Hip-Hop is gonna be smoked out

If we doin' alright, Hip-Hop is gonna be doin' alright

People talk about Hip-Hop like it's some giant livin in the hillside

Comin' down to visit the townspeople

We are Hip-Hop

Me, you, everybody, we are Hip-Hop

So Hip-Hop is goin' where we goin'.

(Mos Def, "Fear Not of Man," 1999)

The "hip-hop Reconstruction of 1998" set up hip-hop for a new era headed into the turn of the century. However, some of the players in the game would change. DMX would release his third successful album in 1999, ...*And Then There Was X*, which featured the singles "Party Up (Up in Here)"

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and “What’s My Name?” Ja Rule, a rapper similar to DMX, would debut in 1999 with his album *Venni Vetti Vecci*.

The big label that year was Dr. Dre’s Aftermath. Dr. Dre discovered Eminem, a white rapper from Detroit, and signed him to Aftermath. This move would continue Dr. Dre’s influence on hip-hop that started with N.W.A., as Eminem would come to be a major figure in hip-hop. In 1998, before Dre discovered him, he became the first white rapper to appear in *The Source*’s “Unsigned Hype” column (a la The Notorious B.I.G., Common, and Mobb Deep) (Ogbar, 2007, p. 57). In February 1999, Eminem released *The Slim Shady LP*. The album, featuring the controversial Dr. Dre produced hits “My Name is” and “Guilty Conscience,” was a success. Eminem is described by Touré as “an original voice in the national conversation that is hip-hop because he speaks of the dysfunctionality of his white-trash world – his absentee father, his drugged-out mom, his daughter’s hateful mother, his own morally bankrupt conscience” (Touré, 1999). What made Eminem different from Vanilla Ice is that he was authentic and had credibility from some of the greatest voices in hip-hop.

Dr. Dre would build off of Eminem’s success and release *2001*, his first album since *The Chronic*. Dre would bring back Snoop Dogg on “Still D.R.E.” and “The Next Episode,” and featured Eminem on “Forgot About Dre.” The album was not as much a return to the game for Dr. Dre as it was a reminder

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that Dr. Dre is still heavily influential in the game itself. He would leave Eminem to be the future star.

The success of New Orleans' No Limit Records in 1998 allowed for Cash Money Records, another New Orleans' based label, to get some of the spotlight. The Cash Money Millionaires included the Big Tymers (co-founder Birdman and producer Mannie Fresh) and the Hot Boys (Juvenile, B.G., Turk, and Lil Wayne). 1999 saw them get exposure on "Back that Azz Up" from Juvenile's *400 Degreez*, "Bling Bling" from B.G.'s *Chopper City in the Ghetto*, "Tha Block is Hot" from Lil Wayne's debut *Tha Block is Hot*, and "We on Fire" and "I Need a Hot Girl" from the Hot Boys' *Guerilla Warfare*.

The female rappers in 1999 had a tough act to follow in Lauryn Hill. Missy Elliott released her second album *Da Real World* in June. Eve, a Philadelphia rapper who was associated with DMX as part of the Ruff Ryders, released her first album *Let There Be Eve ... Ruff Ryders' First Lady* in September 1999.

Jay-Z would release *Vol. 3 ... Life and Times of Shawn Carter* in December 1999. The album contained arguably his most notorious hit "Big Pimpin'," a song about nothing much more than being an aggressive pimp. Timbaland produced the song, which features Middle Eastern elements. After a three year hiatus Nas would release two albums in 1999, the comeback *I Am...* in April and the less acclaimed *Nastradamus* in November. *I Am...* featured two notable tracks. "Hate Me Now" which features Sean "Diddy"

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Combs, was Nas' comeback single. "We Will Survive," which pays homage to Biggie and Tupac, takes a subliminal dig at Jay-Z with the line, "...these niggaz is wrong – usin' your name in vain/And they claim to be New York's king? It ain't about that" (Nas, "We Will Survive," 1999). It should also be noted that another rapper from Queens took a dig at Jay-Z (and several other rappers, singers, hip-hop personalities, and celebrities) in 1999: underground rapper 50 Cent, who released "How to Rob" with humorous intentions. Nevertheless, all of the pieces for the "beef era" would be in place.

Following up on *Mos Def and Talib Kweli are Black Star*, Mos Def released *Black on Both Sides* in October. The album showed off Mos Def musical talents as well as his lyrical skill, in addition to presenting the socially conscious level of rap. The track "UMI Says" is inspired by Mos Def's mother, and speaks to his wish for black people to be free. It is a soulful track that has been defined as "a heart's cry" (Pride, 2007, p. 197). The Roots released *Things Fall Apart*, which featured the Grammy-winning single "You Got Me."

The Wu-Tang Clan still had members releasing important albums in 1999. GZA released *Beneath the Surface*, an album that continued GZA's lyrical mastery. A great example of this is "Publicity," where GZA uses the names of magazines such as *The Source*, *XXL*, and *Vibe* throughout a track that also references the NBA lockout of the time. Ol' Dirty Bastard released *Nigga Please*, which set ODB in an even more warped environment than *Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version*. The album was a success despite ODB's legal

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issues at the time. Comedian Chris Rock is featured on “Recognize” and “Got Your Money” samples Slick Rick’s “Children Story.” The productions of those two tracks are handled by The Neptunes (Chad Hugo and Pharrell Williams), who along with another Virginia-based producer Timbaland would establish themselves as one of the top producers at the turn of the century.

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Chapter 17: 2000

*I'm like a head trip to listen to, cause I'm only givin' you
things you joke about with your friends inside your living room
The only difference is I got the balls to say it
in front of y'all and I don't gotta be false or sugarcoated at all
I just get on the mic and spit it...*
(Eminem, "The Real Slim Shady," 2000)

Eminem's 2000 album *The Marshall Mathers LP* was arguably darker than his previous release. His popularity would continue to rise, and with that the rise of controversy for what was perceived as homophobic and violent ("Kim," the name of Eminem's wife, is an explicit of domestic violence involving his wife) content. "Stan" is a song written from the perspective of a huge Eminem fan that becomes so discontent with Eminem's ignorance to his request for a reply that by time Eminem does reply the fan had locked his pregnant girlfriend in the trunk and driven off a bridge. "The Real Slim Shady" is a social commentary in that he comments on how anybody can talk about what he talks about on his records, but because he does it so explicitly he is persecuted for it. The popularity of Eminem at this time despite the activist backlash was reminiscent of the controversial Ice Cube 10 years earlier.

Before the Wu-Tang Clan released their third album *The W* in November 2000, Ghostface Killah released his best album *Supreme Clientele* that January. Ghostface Killah's unique and rather exclusive slang would be

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held in high acclaim. *The W* would be a decent release by the Wu-Tang Clan, as they would move into more socially conscious material such as “Let My Niggas Live” (which featured Nas) and “I Can’t Go to Sleep” (which featured Isaac Hayes). Jay-Z would spend 2000 exercising the power of Roc-A-Fella, releasing his album *The Dynasty - Roc La Familia* in October 2000. The album would feature the hit “I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me),” which was produced by The Neptunes and features Pharrell Williams’ vocals and a sample of Rick James’ 1981 hit “Give it to Me Baby.” *The Dynasty – Roc La Familia* also featured the production debut of, among others, Kanye West.

OutKast released their fifth album *Stankonia* in October 2000. The Grammy-winning hit “Ms. Jackson” was a song that documented the real life breakup of Andre 3000 and Erykah Badu (Ms. Jackson being the mother of Badu). The song samples The Brothers Johnson’s funk song “Strawberry Letter 23.” Atlanta would get a new star with the emergence of Ludacris, who released *Back for the First Time* in 2000. Also, St. Louis’ Nelly released his album *Country Grammar*, which featured hits such as “E.I.” and “Ride Wit Me.”

Florida’s dead prez released their political rap album *Let’s Get Free* in March 2000. The song “Hip-Hop” discussed the fact that the issues in hip-hop are bigger than hip-hop itself; in other words, “It’s been lifted on a pedestal for being both a political movement and a tool for social change while simultaneously being charged with being neither” (Pride, 2007, pp. 138-139).

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Common released *Like Water for Chocolate* in the same month. Teaming up with ?uestlove of The Roots, the album was a critical breakthrough for Common.

2000 would also mark the beginning of BET's new show *106 & Park*, a show that, on one hand, presented the opportunity for more music videos to be shown. On the other hand though, the quality and decisions behind what videos are shown would lead to a misinterpretation of what brand of hip-hop is actually worth showing. Also, in October 2000, Philadelphia 76ers All-Star Allen Iverson was heavily criticized by NBA commissioner David Stern and Martin Luther King, Jr. Association for Nonviolence president C. Delores Tucker for lyrics in an unreleased rap song that was playing in Philadelphia entitled "40 Bars." The song was reprimanded for homophobic and violent lyrics and Iverson decided not to release his rap album *Misunderstood* (Moss & Johnson, 2001). This situation mirrors the backlash that Eminem was receiving at the same time. It should also be noted that 50 Cent was shot nine times from close range in 2000. He was set to release an album on Columbia Records, but he was dropped from the label after they found out about his shooting (Weiner, 2005).

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Chapter 18: 2001

Call a truce, world peace, stop actin' like savages
No war, we should take time and think
The bombs and tanks makes mankind extinct
But since the beginning of time it's been men with arms fightin'
Lost lives in the Towers and Pentagon, why then?
Must it go on, we must stop the killin'
Tell me why we die, we all God's children.
(Nas, "Rule," 2001)

With the release of Jay-Z's *The Blueprint* and Nas' *Stillmatic*, the two rappers officially aired out their animosity towards each other and engaged in a battle for New York that was reminiscent of the great journalistic battles between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. In more relative context, it is reminiscent of the feud between Kool Moe Dee and LL Cool J years earlier in that Jay-Z, like LL, was at the top of the rap game. However, Jay-Z would be the one to fire the first volleys in this battle. In "Takeover," which samples The Doors' "Five to One," Jay-Z expresses the power of Roc-A-Fella in the first verse, disses Mobb Deep in the second verse, and attacks Nas in the third verse. It was a scathing commentary on Nas' career up to that point in that he was steadily declining after every album since *Illmatic*.

"Takeover" went for the knockout punch on Nas' career, but not only did Nas' come back at Jay-Z with an equally biting diss track "Ether," he revitalized his own career with the release of *Stillmatic*. In "Ether," Nas criticizes Jay-Z for keeping Nas' name in his music (referring to Jay-Z's use of Nas' "The World is

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Yours” in “Dead Presidents”), for naming his album *The Blueprint* after Boogie Down Productions had already done so, for implying that Jay-Z is better than Biggie in the track “Hola Hovito,” for selling out, and for being overshadowed by Eminem on “Renegade.”

There are two important things to note about *The Blueprint* and *Stillmatic*. One, both albums were released on or after 9/11 (*The Blueprint* was released on 9/11; *Stillmatic* was released three months later in December 2001). At a time when the country was dealing with a national tragedy, hip-hop still remained relevant in part to the publicity and quality of *The Blueprint* and *Stillmatic*. Two, these two albums both represent a stylistic change in both rappers; Jay-Z more sonically, Nas more in content. *The Blueprint* had five tracks produced by Kanye West; the R&B/soul samples that West used in songs such as “Izzo (H.O.V.A.)” (which samples The Jackson 5’s “I Want You Back”) and “Never Change” (a song on which West’s vocals are used and samples David Ruffin’s “Common Man”) were inspired in part by RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan and signaled that “the reign of the digitally cold keyboard-driven production style was dislodged as the predominant sound emanating from hip-hop’s birthplace” (Cowie, 2004). Just Blaze produced four tracks on the album, and Eminem produced “Renegade,” a track that criticizes the media and America’s hypocrisy as it relates to Jay-Z and Eminem’s lyrics. Jay-Z accuses the media of shallow listening (“Do you fools listen to music or do you just skim through it?”) while Eminem acknowledges the labels the media puts on him as hypocritical (“I’m debated disputed hated and viewed in

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America/as a motherfuckin' drug addict - like you didn't experiment?") (Jay-Z and Eminem, "Renegade," 2001). Jay-Z also asserts himself as the "Michael Jordan of hip-hop," specifically in the Timbaland-produced track "Hola' Hovito": "I ball for real, y'all niggaz is Sam Bowie/And with the third pick - I made the earth sick/M.J., hem Jay, fade away perfect" (Jay-Z, "Hola' Hovito," 2001). This assertion was made just as Jordan was ending his retirement for the second time to join the Washington Wizards for the 2001-2002 NBA season.

Stillmatic reflected Nas' refocus on political and social consciousness. While Jay-Z rapped about material things in "All I Need," Nas stated in "One Mic" (which samples Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight") that all he needed was not cash, cars, women, or jewelry; just "one mic...to spread my voice to the whole world" (Nas, "One Mic," 2001). In "2nd Childhood," Nas refers to people not growing up (including himself) as living in a second childhood. The first single from *Stillmatic*, "Rule," samples the 1985 Tears for Fears hit "Everybody Wants to Rule the World." Its lyrical content reflects Nas' thoughts after the 9/11 tragedy and expresses a need for world peace as well as fixing the problems in the country.

9/11 had an effect on other artists in hip-hop as well. In OutKast's single "The Whole World," Andre 3000 gives a shoutout to people who were laid off at the airport, while the Wu-Tang Clan's fourth album, *Iron Flag*, has references to 9/11 as well as other issues in the nation. In "Rules," Ghostface

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Killah demands to know who was behind the 9/11 attacks and tells President George W. Bush “America, together we stand, divided we fall/Mr. Bush sit down, I’m in charge of the war!” (Wu-Tang Clan, “Rules,” 2001). And the album cover for The Coup’s fourth album *Party Music* had to be changed because the original depicted the World Trade Center towers exploding. The original cover was made in June 2001. While The Coup, a political hip-hop group, expressed regret over the events of 9/11 and made it clear that they do not condone terrorism, they wanted to keep the original album cover. Group member MC Boots Riley explained that the cover would allow him the platform necessary in order to expose right-wing political and media agendas (Goedde, 2001).

Ludacris released his album *Word of Mouf* in November 2001. The album was a success for Ludacris, as it featured hits such as “Area Codes,” “Rollout (My Business),” and “Move Bitch.” However, these songs’ misogynistic and violent lyrics would set Ludacris up for some high profile controversy.

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Chapter 19: 2002

*Who woulda' thought standin' in this mirror
Bleachin' my hair wit some Peroxide
Reachin' for a T-shirt to wear
That I would catapult to the fore-front of rap like this
How can I predict my words
And have an impact like this
I musta' struck a chord wit somebody up in the office
Cuz congress keeps tellin' me
I ain't causin' nuttin' but problems
And now they sayin' I'm in trouble wit the Government
I'm lovin' it...*

(Eminem, "White America," 2002)

2002 would be the year that Eminem established himself as not just a good white rapper, but a bona fide hip-hop icon. Eminem released *The Eminem Show* in May, his third straight successful album. While his previous two albums were known for vacillating "between Jerry Springer-like family drama, more metaphors than you can shake a stick at and typical teen rebelliousness" (Kitwana, 2005, p. 138), *The Eminem Show* was less shocking, but arguably just as effective. "Without Me" followed the same pattern as "My Name Is" and "The Real Slim Shady" as he answers critics and comments on the fact that his success is due only in part to his race and more to his skill as a rapper and knack for igniting controversy. Perhaps a more straightforward example of this (e.g., without the attacks on Moby and Chris

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Kirkpatrick) is “White America,” where Eminem explains that because his message is relative to the youth of suburban America, he has their attention, and as a result he is persecuted by the older generation of parents not used to his message. He also commentates on how his skin color led to him getting a cold shoulder from label executives before Dr. Dre discovered him.

Jay-Z and Nas continued their feud into 2002 while both rappers released new albums. Jay-Z's *The Blueprint²: The Gift & The Curse* was a double disc release that featured many guest artists, a sharp contrast to *The Blueprint* which only featured Eminem as a featured guest vocalist. Guests on the album included Beyoncé on “Bonnie & Clyde 03,” Lenny Kravitz on “Guns & Roses,” and Pharrell on “Excuse Me Miss,” which samples Luther Vandross’ “Take You Out.” Nas’ *God’s Son* was a solid follow-up of *Stillmatic*. “I Can” was an inspirational song for black children growing up in the ghetto, while “Thugz Mansion” was a song with Tupac Shakur that imagined a place like heaven where, as Tupac put it, “thugs get in free and you gotta be a G” (Tupac Shakur, “Thugz Mansion,” 2002).

The Neptunes had a huge impact on the sound of hip-hop in 2002. They would produce several hits for several different artists. Clipse, a duo in the mold of Mobb Deep from Virginia, would debut with their album *Lord Willin’* in 2002. Most of their album was produced by The Neptunes. Common’s “Come Close,” from the album *Electric Circus*, was produced by The Neptunes. “Luv U Better,” from LL Cool J’s tenth album *10*, is a song about

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Lil's desire to treat his girl better. "Nothin'" off of N.O.R.E.'s album *God's Favorite*, N.O.R.E.'s best known song. Nelly's 2002 album *Nellyville* featured the Grammy-winning single "Hot in Herre," produced by The Neptunes. Finally, the two biggest singles from Snoop Dogg's 2002 album *Paid Tha Cost to Be Da Bo\$\$*, "From Tha Chuuuuch to da Palace" and "Beautiful," were produced by The Neptunes.

2002 marked the solo debut of Talib Kweli, who released *Quality* in November. Kanye West (who suffered a near-fatal auto accident in October 2002) produced two tracks for the album, "Good to You" and "Get By." "Get By" is considered to be "a wake-up call with soul" that "sports a hook that makes you sing along like you're part of the choir" (Pride, 2007, p. 209). While Kweli represented a good sign in the direction of conscious rap, Atlanta's Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz would release *Kings of Crunk* in 2002. The main single from that album was the party-oriented "Get Low." Lil Jon has been heavily criticized for "his brash lyrics of violence, hypersexuality, platinum-grilled smiles (what some black nationalists call 'coonin' for the camera'), and animated demeanor" (Ogbar, 2007, p. 31). The advent of crunk in hip-hop would have a negative effect on hip-hop, especially in lyrical quality and especially from the Dirty South.

A big hit in 2002 was Missy Elliott's hit "Work It" off her album *Under Construction*. Timbaland produced the song, which samples Run-DMC's 1986 song "Peter's Piper." Also from *Under Construction* was "Gossip Folks," a

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song about people who would speculate about Missy Elliott's weight and sexual orientation which featured Ludacris. The music video for "Gossip Folks" was set in a school and featured a cameo from DMC as a bus driver and paid tribute to Aaliyah, Lisa Lopes of TLC, and Run-DMC's Jam Master Jay. Jam Master Jay had been murdered in a recording studio in New York at the age of 37 in October 2002.

The success of Ludacris as of the summer of 2002 had landed him an endorsement deal with Pepsi. However, this endorsement was met with harsh criticism by conservative Fox News journalist Bill O'Reilly. In an August 2002 taping of his show *The O'Reilly Factor*, O'Reilly questioned Pepsi for hiring Ludacris, criticizing Ludacris for his violent lyrics in "Move Bitch." A day after O'Reilly encouraged Pepsi to drop Ludacris, they did; however, "hip-hoppers pointed to the clear incongruence with the television host's reticence on the sex and violence on his own network or with the music recorded by Ozzy Osborne who also inked an endorsement deal with Pepsi around the same time as Ludacris" (Ogbar, 2007, p. 123). This incident would firmly place Bill O'Reilly in the crosshairs of the hip-hop community, as it shows a biased, negative media perception of hip-hop.

In addition to *The Eminem Show*, Eminem starred in *8 Mile*, a movie released in November 2002. The movie was a semi-autobiography of Eminem and his struggle and rise to success as an underground rapper. The movie was a huge success, "grossing \$54 million [on] opening weekend, a best-

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selling soundtrack (700,000 in the first week) and endless magazine covers...” (Kitwana, 2005, p. 140). “Lose Yourself,” a track from the film, would become the first rap song to ever win the Academy Award for Best Original Song. All of the success for Eminem would lead to another battle from an unlikely source.

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Chapter 20: 2003

*I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder
As I'm gettin' older, y'all, people gets colder
Most of us only care about money makin'
Selfishness got us followin' our wrong direction
Wrong information always shown by the media
Negative images is the main criteria
Infecting the young minds faster than bacteria
Kids wanna act like what they see in the cinema
Yo', whatever happened to the values of humanity
Whatever happened to the fairness in equality
Instead of spreading love we're spreading animosity
Lack of understanding, leading lives away from unity
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' under
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' down
There's no wonder why sometimes I'm feelin' under
Gotta keep my faith alive till love is found
(Black Eyed Peas, "Where Is the Love?," 2003)*

After the incredible success of Eminem over the last four years, he appeared to be relaxed in the hip-hop elite. However, *The Source*, a magazine led by David Mays and Ray "Benzino" Scott, would launch a mudslinging campaign to bring Eminem down. The concern for *The Source* was that Eminem was a "culture bandit" and the next Elvis and that he had perhaps surpassed Mays and Benzino as the "coolest white presence in hip-hop" (Kitwana, 2005, pp. 144-145). Also, Benzino had an underwhelming

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recording career despite the networking advantages that come with being an owner of *The Source*. To see Eminem succeed clearly bothered the magazine and they would go as far as character assassination in the form of leaking old tapes from Eminem in attempt to seriously curtail his success.

Eminem would play a part in 50 Cent's emergence. It was Eminem who persuaded Dr. Dre to sign 50 Cent to *Aftermath*, and in 2003 50 released *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. The album was hailed as a legitimate return of gangsta rap. However, Ta-Nehisi Coates notes that gangsta rap is more fantasy and irrelevant now than it was in the golden age of hip-hop: "millennial black America is hardly the Wild West scene it was during gangsta rap's prime. Gangsta could once fairly claim to reflect a brutal present. Now it mythicizes a past that would fade away much faster without it" (Coates, 2003). While 50 Cent's album was selling well, he applied the term "Wanksta" to Ja Rule of Murder Inc. and attacked his credibility in "Back Down," setting up a hip-hop feud that would see Ja Rule come back and attack 50 Cent, Eminem, and Dr. Dre in a freestyle track entitled "Loose Change." By time Ja Rule's 2003 album *Blood in My Eye* was released, he had divided his fan base and had attracted the attention of Louis Farrakhan, who aimed to diffuse the feud between 50 Cent and Ja Rule.

While new feuds were starting, one major one that carried hip-hop into the turn of the century was about to end as Jay-Z announced his retirement on 2003's *The Black Album*. While *The Blueprint²: The Gift & The Curse* would

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feature an excess of guest rappers, *The Black Album* would feature no rappers other than Jay-Z. Jay-Z also would not reference Nas at any point in the album (Nas would say “y’all already know who I’m better than” in the Bravehearts’ track “Quick to Back Down,” off of their album *Bravehearted*).

OutKast would release a double disc in 2003, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*. Big Boi’s side is *Speakerboxxx*, while Andre 3000’s is *The Love Below*. The double album would result in a Grammy award for the group for Best Album (not just Best Rap Album). Ludacris would fire back at his critics (namely Bill O’Reilly) in his 2003 album *Chicken-N-Beer* while establishing himself as the top solo rapper from the Dirty South. T.I. released *Trap Muzik* in 2003, which provided him a breakthrough featuring singles “24’s” and “Rubberband Man.”

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in 2003 was the Black Eyed Peas. Off the strength of their pacifist, introspective collaboration with Justin Timberlake entitled “Where is the Love?” and other singles such as “Hey Mama” and “Shut Up,” *Elephunk* was a surprising success. Also released in 2003 was Little Brother’s *The Listening*. The title track to the North Carolina-based underground group laments the fact that people who listen to hip-hop don’t listen to groups like them anymore, and when they do, they only pay attention to the beats, not the lyrics. The song features a sample of Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth’s “They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.).”

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2003 would see Dave Chappelle create *Chappelle's Show*, a sketch-comedy show on Comedy Central. For three seasons, *Chappelle's Show* would be the most hip-hop relevant comedy show since *In Living Color* from the early 1990s. Also in 2003, *Malibu's Most Wanted*, starring Jamie Kennedy, was released. The film would be a benchmark in how hip-hop had permeated the mainstream (Kitwana, 2005, p. 112).

Like the NBA in the wake of Michael Jordan's third and final retirement, hip-hop was in another state of transition by the end of 2003. Eminem was embroiled in controversy with a major hip-hop publication. The beef between Jay-Z and Nas effectively (but not officially) ended with Jay-Z's self-imposed retirement. 50 Cent was a hot rapper, but seemingly on a brand of hip-hop that was fading from honest narrative into an "overblown stereotype" (Coates, 2003). Crunk music was becoming a threat to hip-hop's artistic and intellectual quality. Hip-hop in general was attracting the negative attention of activists and losing the credibility to combat them. The "Beef Era" was turning into the "Crisis Era of hip-hop."

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PART 5: THE CRISIS ERA OF HIP-HOP (2004-2008)

Chapter 21: 2004

So here go my single dog radio needs this

They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus

That means guns, sex, lies, video tapes

But if I talk about God my record won't get played Huh?

(Kanye West, "Jesus Walks," 2004)

The final era discussed in this thesis is the "Crisis Era of hip-hop."

While this label is meant to capture the real concern over the state of hip-hop, it also captures the turmoil in the United States of America during these years. Many of the controversies that would come up during the "Crisis Era" would be tied into hip-hop.

Eminem emerged from his beef with *The Source* magazine to release another successful album in 2004, *Encore*. While he would catch backlash for parodying Michael Jackson in "Just Lose It" (another song in the vein of "My Name Is," "The Real Slim Shady," and "Without Me"), Eminem would focus on bigger things in "Mosh" and "Like Toy Soldiers." "Like Toy Soldiers," which samples Martika's "Toy Soldiers," expressed Eminem's desire to stop the violent feuding in hip-hop that he and 50 Cent were involved in. Ja Rule's underground track "Loose Change" had mentioned Eminem's daughter by name, and Ja Rule also had asserted that he had stabbed 50 Cent, which is why the feud had gotten personal. Eminem stated in "Like Toy Soldiers" that he would stop rapping before personal harm would come to anyone. "Mosh"

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was a strong political statement against President Bush and, like “White America,” was very controversial for its animated music video. Even though BET had banned “Just Lose It,” it agreed to air “Mosh” as it urged people to get out and vote.

The 2004 election would play a role in hip-hop that year, and it was not limited to just music. Several youth-oriented organizations and movements were instrumental in securing Democratic votes in between the Democratic primary and the election, including Sean Combs’ Citizen Change (featuring the “Vote or Die” slogan), the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, the National Hip-Hop Political Convention, and the Young Voter Alliance (Kitwana, 2005, pp. 180-181). In his 2004 album *Kiss of Death*, Jadakiss would ask several political related questions in “Why,” including “Why did Bush knock down the Towers?,” “Why’d they let the Terminator win the election, come on pay attention,” and “why niggaz can’t get no jobs” (Jadakiss, “Why,” 2004). The 2004 Presidential election saw Bush get reelected, but “while the voting rate increases were starkly high for all youth voters, these increases were led by black voters who produced the largest increase in turnout among any group” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 132). This would set the stage for the next Presidential election. In *Street’s Disciple*, Nas would criticize the state of American politics in “American Way,” a track that would sample George Clinton’s “Atomic Dog.” There is one line in the song that is eerily prophetic: “I don’t care about the hurricane/As long as my family’s safe” (Nas, “American Way,” 2004).

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Ludacris released his album *Red Light District* in 2004, and in the song “Number One Spot,” Ludacris taunts Bill O’Reilly’s sexual harassment lawsuit: “Already offers on my 6th album from labels tryin to sign me/Respected highly, HI MR. O'REILLY/Hope all is well, kiss the plaintiff and the wifey” (Ludacris, “Number One Spot,” 2004). T.I. would release *Urban Legend*, which featured “Bring Em Out” (which uses a sample from Jay’-Z’s “What More Can I Say”). 2004 saw Lil Wayne release *Tha Carter*, which featured “Go DJ.” These three artists would eventually become the three most influential Dirty South representatives over the next five years.

However, the biggest breakthrough in 2004 came from Kanye West’s *College Dropout*. West would establish himself as a new leader in hip-hop with this album, as he was a different kind of rapper. Instead of the gangsta rapper that 50 Cent was, Kanye West rapped from the perspective of a college dropout and tore down many of the stereotypes that rappers are supposed to uphold. West would produce his songs using the same type of R&B/soul samples that were featured prominently in *The Blueprint*. “Through the Wire,” which samples Chaka Khan’s “Through the Fire,” was recorded while his jaw was wired shut two weeks after West’s car accident. In “Jesus Walks,” which would win a Grammy that year, West spoke about his faith and how other topics are raised in rap but religion is seldom one of them. West also brought together many different artists on the album, including Jay-Z, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Common, Freeway, Twista, Jamie Foxx, John Legend, and Ludacris.

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Nelly would release two albums on the same day, *Sweat* and *Suit*. While both albums were solid efforts, he was involved in a controversy at Spelman College regarding his sexually explicit music video for “Tip Drill.” Nelly was scheduled to attend the all-female HBCU in order to hold a bone marrow drive. The students at Spelman would agree to let Nelly come to Spelman for the bone marrow only if Nelly agreed to talk about the music video. Nelly declined to appear at the University.

Finally, 2004 would mark the “Malice at the Palace” in the NBA between the Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons. The fight was seen as the nadir of player-fan relations in the NBA, and David Stern would implement a dress code in the league that was intended to improve the NBA’s image among middle class NBA fans and also to bring in more corporate sponsors. The items that are targeted by the NBA dress code are the same typically associated with that of the hip-hop culture, a subculture that the NBA repeatedly goes to when promoting the NBA’s urban appeal. This is made even clear given the fact that rappers Jay-Z (New Jersey Nets) and Nelly (Charlotte Bobcats) obtained part-ownership roles in 2004. These items that are now prohibited on “league time” and subject to penalty (suspension and/or fine) include T-shirts, throwback jerseys, caps, headbands, do rags, chains, pendants, and medallions; items that could clearly be exhibited on hip-hop clothing lines such as Roc-a-Fella (Jay-Z) and Apple Bottoms (Nelly).

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Chapter 22: 2005

*And to the radio stations, I'm tired o' being patient
Stop bein' rapper racists, region haters
Spectators, dictators, behind door dick takers
It's outrageous, you don't know how sick you make us
I want to throw up like chips in Vegas
But this is Southern face it
If we too simple then y'all don't get the basics*
(Lil Wayne, "Shooter," 2005)

In 2005, 50 Cent would release *The Massacre*, the follow up to *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. In "Piggy Bank," 50 Cent would diss New York rappers Ja Rule, Fat Joe, Jadakiss, and Nas while bragging about his success as well as that of G-Unit's. However, one of the newest members of G-Unit, The Game, refused to engage in 50 Cent's beef with these rappers. The Game, a rapper from Compton who (like 50 Cent) had been shot a few years earlier, had released a successful debut album *The Documentary* just a month before *The Massacre*. Because of this show of disloyalty, The Game would be kicked out of G-Unit in a very public feud.

Kanye West would release his second album *Late Registration* in 2005, which was another success on the strength of singles such as "Gold Digger" (which samples Ray Charles' "I Got a Woman"), "Touch the Sky" (which samples Curtis Mayfield's "Move on Up"), and "Heard 'em Say" (which samples Natalie Cole's "Someone That I Used to Love"). "Touch the Sky"

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marked the debut of fellow Chicago rapper Lupe Fiasco. *Late Registration* made even more political statements than *The College Dropout*. On “Heard ‘em Say,” West implies that the government is responsible for the AIDS epidemic while he implies that President Bush was responsible for Saddam Hussein obtaining anthrax on “Crack Music.” The first single from the album, “Diamonds from Sierra Leone,” featured Jay-Z and brought attention to conflict diamonds.

Lil Wayne released *Tha Carter II* in 2005; it represented a further rise for Lil Wayne as well as more of a commercial breakthrough. Lil Wayne would have a hit with “Fireman,” while collaborating with Robin Thicke on “Shooter.” Perhaps the biggest claim on the album is the track “Best Rapper Alive.”

Besides his own work on *Late Registration*, Kanye West would be involved in fellow Chicagoan Common’s commercial comeback album, *Be*. West produced many of the tracks on the album and was featured on “The Corner” and “Go!”

Like Eminem with *8 Mile*, 50 Cent was in a semi-autobiographical film named after his first album, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*. There were several incidents at showings around the country, including a man being murdered right after the screening. Bracketing 50 Cent’s film was a book (*From Pieces to Weight: Once Upon a Time in Southside Queens*) and a rated mature video game (*50 Cent: Bulletproof*). Combined with numerous endorsements, it

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would be clear that 50 Cent's aim was capitalistic establishment (*Get Rich or Die Trying*), which he received.

Another controversy in 2005 involved Kanye West on *A Concert for Hurricane Relief*, a benefit concert broadcast live on NBC in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. While on camera with Mike Myers, Kanye West went off script to criticize the media's portrayal of black people before stating "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

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Chapter 23: 2006

The bigger the cap, the bigger the peelin'
Come through, something ill, missin' the ceilin'
What influenced my raps? Stick-ups and killings
Kidnappings, project buildings, drug dealings
Criticize that, why is that?
'Cuz Nas rap is compared to legitimized crap
'Cuz we love to talk on nasty chickens
Most intellectuals will only half listen
So you can't blame jazz musicians
Or David Stern with his NBA fashion issues
Oh, I they like me, in my white tee
You can't ice me – we here for life, B!
On my second marriage, hip-hop's my first wifey
And for that, we not takin' it lightly
If hip-hop should die, we die together
Bodies in the morgue lie together
All together now!
(Nas, “Hip Hop is Dead,” 2006)

By 2006, Nas and Jay-Z had ended their feud. The year before Jay-Z introduced Nas at a concert to perform “Dead Presidents” together and in 2006 Jay-Z would guest on “Black Republican,” a song off of Nas’ album *Hip Hop is Dead*. The title of the album would be a stirring statement, made right in the middle of the “Crisis Era.” While Nas would receive support from many artists, the title of his new album would also be taken offensively by several

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Southern rappers such as Ludacris, T.I., Lil Wayne, Young Jeezy, and Big Boi of OutKast. However, Nas would say that hip-hop's death had nothing to do with region, but everything to do with lack of creativity and beef being too prevalent.

2006 marked the official return of Jay-Z to rap, as he released *Kingdom Come* in November. The first single was "Show Me What You Got." The song "Minority Report" was about and dedicated to Hurricane Katrina victims.

Lupe Fiasco, who Jay-Z would call a "fresh breath of air" to hip-hop, would make his debut in 2006 with *Lupe Fiasco's Food & Liquor*. The songs "Hurt Me Soul" and "American Terrorist" would be examples of Fiasco's thoughts on hip-hop and America. Ludacris' *Release Therapy* was released in 2006, which would earn him a Grammy; T.I. would release *King* while also starring in the movie *ATL*; and OutKast would star in a movie called *Idlewild* while releasing an album of the same name. The Three 6 Mafia song "Hard Out Here for a Pimp," which was featured in the movie *Hustle & Flow* (of which Ludacris starred in as well), won an Academy Award for Best Original Song; the Memphis-based group would perform the song at the show, becoming the first hip-hop act to perform at the Academy Awards.

Ludacris' *Release Therapy* was especially notable for being a change of image for him. Besides him cutting his trademark cornrows, Ludacris would focus on balancing songs like "Money Maker" with songs like "Runaway Love," a track that featured Mary J. Blige and the issues of young urban

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females (ages 9, 10, and 11) running away from primarily domestic violence, urban violence, and adolescent pregnancy, among other issues. *Release Therapy* came after a rift with Oprah Winfrey in which he accused her of discriminating against him on her show while a part of the cast of *Crash*. Ludacris would be joined in the anti-Oprah sentiments by 50 Cent and Ice Cube.

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Chapter 24: 2007

...if Al Sharpton is speakin for me

Somebody, give him the word and tell him I don't approve

Tell him I remove the curses

If you tell me our schools gon' be perfect

When Jena Six don't exist

Tell him that's when I'll stop sayin bitch, BITCH!

(Jay-Z, "Say Hello," 2007)

2007 was a year filled with racial controversies and overall tension, as well as several signs that hip-hop was not dead. Kanye West (*Graduation*) and 50 Cent (*Curtis*) both had albums coming out on the same day in September. 50 Cent tried to get West to change his release date, and then stated that he would retire from rap if *Graduation* outsold *Curtis* (50 Cent would later retract these statements). *Graduation* and *Curtis* would both do well commercially in the first week, but *Graduation* was the better album commercially and critically, as it outsold *Curtis* by far and won West three Grammy Awards.

Common and Lupe Fiasco would also release critically acclaimed albums in 2007. Common's album *Finding Forever* would feature singles "The People," "Drivin' Me Wild," "I Want You," and "The Game." Lupe Fiasco's *The Cool* was a concept album that followed the story of a character from "The Cool," a song in his first album. Michael Young History (or, "My cool young history") was the central character, an aspiring rapper.

Jay-Z's album *American Gangster* was inspired by the 2007 film of the same name. It took Jay-Z back to his *Reasonable Doubt* roots while looking at

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his role in rap differently. The song “Ignorant Shit” would criticize those who saw “Big Pimpin’” and “I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me)” as examples of great writing in hip-hop, while at the same time questioning his abilities on more thought-provoking material on *Kingdom Come*. Jay-Z would also question in the song what his lyrics had to do with Don Imus’ “nappy-headed hos” comments. Rev. Al Sharpton would blame the comments of Imus and Michael Richards on the usage of the language in hip-hop, and he started Stop Offensive and Abusive Lyrics in Hip-Hop through Personal Responsibility (SOAP). Jay-Z would argue that the language in his lyrics is not relevant to Don Imus, and that the movie *Scarface* had more of an impact on him than the rap lyrics of *Scarface*. Jay-Z would also criticize Al Sharpton more directly in “Say Hello,” saying that the issues in the African-American community are bigger problems than what words he might use. Jay-Z would feature Nas on the track “Success,” where he acknowledges that material, tangible examples of excess wealth and success are not important and even detrimental and stress-inducing.

Nas would become involved in a couple of high-profile controversies that were a direct result of American events. The first involved a free concert held for the students at Virginia Tech University, five months after the shootings at the campus. Bill O’Reilly would denounce the event because of Nas’ involvement, citing Nas’ criminal record and lyrics in songs such as “Shoot ‘em Up.” Nas would perform at the concert and criticize O’Reilly, eliciting cheers from the Virginia Tech crowd, and afterwards would say that

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he doesn't take O'Reilly seriously. The second controversy would involve the album name of Nas' next release, which was to be titled "Nigger." The album title would touch a nerve with Revs. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, among others. Nas stated that the name of the new album would diminish the power of the word.

Adding to the crisis of hip-hop in 2007 was the fact that the actions of Don Imus and Michael Richards seemed to put hip-hop on "trial." Oprah's Hip-Hop Town Hall Meeting, BET's *Hip-Hop vs. America*, Congress' From Imus to Industry: The Business of Stereotypes and Degrading Images would all take place in 2007, featuring rappers, scholars, and politicians alike to defend the case of hip-hop in American society. And the issue of rap sales declining amid "ringtone rap's" burgeoning popularity would be magnified with the popularity of Soulja Boy, who released the popular but critically panned *souljaboytellem.com*. While hip-hop was based off of dance singles like "Crank That (Soulja Boy)," the lack of lyrical substance or quality combined with the commercial success was a cause for another debate over what is good and bad in hip-hop.

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Chapter 25: 2008

*The Fifth Act that got you all riled up
O'Reilly? Oh really? No rally needed, I'll tie you up
Network for child predators, setting them up
MySpace, pimps, hoes and sluts
Y'all exploit rap culture, then y'all flip on us
And you own the Post, and y'all shit on us
What is their net worth?
They're going to try to censor my next verse
Throw them off the roof neck first
While I'm clicking my cursor
Reading blogs about pressure they put on Universal
It gets worse
While I'm clicking my mouse
While they kick in my house
They figured us out
Why a nigger go south?
It's either he caught a body
Don't sleep, they're watching
I watch CBS, and I see BS
Trying to track us down with GPS
Make a nigger want to invest in PBS
(Nas, "Sly Fox," 2008)*

Nas would decide to leave his 2008 album untitled, but he would still release a highly political statement of an album. Nas would attack the Fox

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network in “Sly Fox.” While Nas is not advocating the word “nigger,” he is advocating that the word not be put on a pedestal. Nas, taking a vocal sample from The Last Poets in the track “Project Roach,” argues that “It is absolutely silly and unproductive to have a funeral for the word ‘nigger’ when the actions continue...we need to have a movement to resurrect brothers, and sisters, not a funeral for niggers” (Nas, “Project Roach,” 2008). Nas argues that the word is a representative of the history of African-Americans; to ignore the word would be the same as ignoring the history of slavery and oppression. As an exposé of what Nas is talking about, Rev. Jesse Jackson was caught using the term to criticize Barack Obama.

Another rapper that would criticize the media for blaming rap for everything that happened in the last five years especially was Ice Cube, who released *Raw Footage* in 2008. The music video for “Gangsta Rap Made Me Do It” featured several media images that coincided with his lyrics. Ice Cube turns the many ills of the government and American society on its side by sarcastically stating “ain’t nothing to it, gangsta rap made me do it” (Ice Cube, “Gangsta Rap Made Me Do It,” 2008). Some of the examples he uses in the video include Michael Richards, Michael Vick’s dog fighting trial from 2007, Hurricane Katrina, Don Imus, the Virginia Tech massacre, the Columbine massacre, the torture by the United States’ military, war images from Iraq, Jena, the Pistons-Pacers fight of 2004, Enron, and global warming.

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After several mixtapes spread through the underground in 2006-2008, Lil Wayne finally released *Tha Carter III*. The album would be a commercial and critical success, helped by the singles “Lollipop,” “Got Money,” “A Milli,” and “Mrs. Officer.” The last song on the album is “DontGetIt,” which features a sample of Nina Simone’s “Don’t Let Me Be Understood.” Like Jay-Z, Lil Wayne would take issue with Rev. Al Sharpton’s crusade to “clean up hip-hop” in the track, saying that he does not respect him and people like him because they would rather “speculate before they informate, if that’s a word ... spect before check” (Lil Wayne, “DontGetIt,” 2008). He questions Sharpton’s credibility, saying that he is not like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or even Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Ludacris’ album *Theater of the Mind* is a loose concept album that features several “co-stars.” “Wish You Would” featured T.I., joining two of the best rappers from Atlanta. “Last of a Dying Breed,” featuring Lil Wayne, samples Eric B. & Rakim’s “Move the Crowd” while challenging the notion that hip-hop is dead. As a continuation of this theme, Ludacris joins Nas and Jay-Z on “I Do it for Hip-Hop.” In the track, all three rappers explain the importance of hip-hop and that they perform for the sake of the music, not the riches that come from it. On “Do the Right Thang,” Ludacris and Common send a plea to the urban community on various issues. The title is a nod to the Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing*, and the track actually features Spike Lee. The unity in hip-hop among its best would continue on T.I.’s *Paper Trail*.

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“Swagga Like Us,” which samples M.I.A.’s “Paper Planes,” features Kanye West, Jay-Z, and Lil Wayne.

Perhaps the most significant example of hip-hop’s cultural relevance is the political attention that hip-hop gave to Barack Obama for the 2008 Presidential Election. Nas endorsed the Obama in “Black President,” a song that samples 2Pac’s “I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto.” On “I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto,” 2Pac laments that “Although it seems heaven sent, we ain’t ready to have a black president” (2Pac&, “I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto,” 1997), while Nas follows that up with Obama’s trademark “yes we can, change the world” (Nas, “Black President,” 2008). Nas would also appear on Young Jeezy’s “My President,” off of Young Jeezy’s third album *The Recession*, a title that was inspired by the economic state of the nation and the globe in 2008. In what is his final album for Def Jam, LL Cool J released *Exit 13* in 2008, and it featured a song with Wyclef Jean entitled “Mr. President.” LL Cool J labels himself as an independent in the song as he addresses his concerns to future presidents and wonders if they would care. In the end, the unity that hip-hop showed was reflected in part by the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America.

While the politically charged atmosphere of hip-hop was refreshing, the debate of good hip-hop versus bad hip-hop would rage on throughout the year. Soulja Boy would be attacked by Ice-T, who claimed that Soulja Boy’s music is garbage. Soulja Boy would respond by disrespecting Ice-T’s age

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among other things. Ice-T would then respond that it is not a regional issue or generational issue, but an issue of what is good and bad. GZA would also have a similar thought about Soulja Boy, claiming he and 50 Cent have no talent. While Ice-T would gain support from artists such as Snoop Dogg and Method Man, Soulja Boy would be backed by artists such as 50 Cent, Nelly, and Kanye West. Kanye West's 2008 album, *808s & Heartbreak*, featured West using Auto-Tune instead of rapping, as he reflected on a breakup from his fiancé and the death of his mother. The album featured less reliance on samples (as only "RoboCop," "Bad News," and "Coldest Winter" used samples) and the production does not sound like that of a typical hip-hop album. The album does feature rappers Young Jeezy ("Amazing") and Lil Wayne ("See You in My Nightmares"). This further asserts West's insistence on doing things his own way and standing out as a performer; however, West would say that *808s & Heartbreak* is not a hip-hop album. The use of Auto-Tune was popularized by T-Pain, who would release *Thr33 Ringz* in 2008. The album would feature artists such as Ludacris ("Chopped N Skrewed"), Kanye West ("Therapy"), and Lil Wayne ("Can't Believe It"). Typically, rappers who use Auto-Tune are not rapping anymore; they are singing with the aid of a voice modifier, making it a sharp contrast from rapping.

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EPILOGUE

It is clear that since Run-DMC's breakthrough in 1984, hip-hop has been connected through five main eras: The Revolution (1984-1988), The Golden Age (1989-1993), The Civil War and Reconstruction (1994-1998), the Beef Era (1999-2003), and the Crisis Era (2004-2008). Hip-hop, as it is now, is not dead; but because it is not growing as much as it was in the 1980s and early 1990s, it has been a cause for concern. The truth is, hip-hop mirrors the people. People grow in their youth until they reach a point where they do not grow anymore. When a child grows, the family and friends of that child are excited for his or her growth and rave about his or her potential in life. The child eventually matures into an adult, and stops growing eventually. However, just because the person stopped growing does not mean that it has ceased to live.

Hip-hop is the same way. It has ceased to grow; records sales are not what they once were, and there is concern over the direction of the genre. However, it is not dead and not going away. The biggest personalities in hip-hop will ensure of its existence, while history suggests that there will be newer styles and newer phenomena. However, uncertainty begets fear, and 2009 is a year not like any seen in hip-hop before. There is a new president, as well as a newfound maturity in terms of the unity of hip-hop's biggest stars. Is hip-hop due to reinvent itself? Should hip-hop rediscover its roots and history? With the advent of Auto-Tune amongst some of its biggest stars, is hip-hop losing "leadership" within music? Can international rappers such as

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K'naan, a Canadian rapper via Somali, pervade into American mainstream? A new era is upon the nation of hip-hop, and it remains to be seen how the media will perceive it and how the people will receive it.

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APPENDIX

- Run-DMC, "It's Like That," *Run-DMC* (1984)
- Run-DMC, "Rock Box," *Run-DMC* (1984)
- LL Cool J, "I Can't Live Without My Radio," *Radio* (1985)
- Run-DMC, "My Adidas," *Raising Hell* (1986)
- Eric B. & Rakim, "Move the Crowd," *Paid in Full* (1987)
- LL Cool J, "I'm Bad," *Bigger and Deffer* (1987)
- Kool Moe Dee, "How Ya Like Me Now," *How Ya Like Me Now* (1987)
- Boogie Down Productions, "The Bridge is Over," *Criminal Minded* (1987)
- Boogie Down Productions, "South Bronx," *Criminal Minded* (1987)
- Public Enemy, "Public Enemy #1," *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* (1987)
- Ice-T, "6 in the Mornin'," *Rhyme Pays* (1987)
- Eric B. & Rakim, "I Ain't No Joke," *Paid in Full* (1987)
- Eric B. & Rakim, "I Know You Got Soul," *Paid in Full* (1987)
- Eric B. & Rakim, "Paid in Full," *Paid in Full* (1987)
- Eric B. & Rakim, "Eric B. Is President," *Paid in Full* (1987)
- Public Enemy, "Don't Believe the Hype," *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988)
- Boogie Down Productions, "Stop the Violence," *By All Means Necessary* (1988)
- DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince, "Parents Just Don't Understand," *He's the DJ, I'm the Rapper* (1988)
- Queen Latifah, "Ladies First," *All Hail the Queen* (1989)
- The D.O.C., "It's Funky Enough," *No One Can Do It Better* (1989)
- The D.O.C., "The Formula," *No One Can Do It Better* (1989)
- De La Soul, "Me Myself and I," *3 Feet High and Rising* (1989)
- Quincy Jones featuring Ice-T, Melle Mel, Tevin Campbell, Andrae Crouch, Take 6, Big Daddy Kane, Kool Moe Dee, "Back on the Block," *Back on the Block* (1989)

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- Ice Cube featuring Chuck D., "Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside)," *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (1990)
- Salt-N-Pepa, "Let's Talk About Sex," *Blacks' Magic* (1990)
- MC Hammer, "U Can't Touch This," *Please, Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* (1990)
- Vanilla Ice, "Ice Ice Baby," *To the Extreme* (1990)
- 2Pac, "Words of Wisdom," *2Pacalypse* (1991)
- Public Enemy, "By Time I Get to Arizona," *Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Back* (1991)
- 2Pac, "Brenda's Got a Baby," *2Pacalypse Now* (1991)
- Ice Cube, "True to the Game," *Death Certificate* (1991)
- Cypress Hill, "How I Could Just Kill a Man," *Cypress Hill* (1991)
- A Tribe Called Quest featuring The Leaders of the New School, "Scenario," *The Low End Theory* (1991)
- Main Source featuring Nas, Joe Fatal, Akinyele, "Live at the Barbeque," *Breaking Atoms* (1991)
- Dr. Dre featuring Snoop Dogg, "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang," *The Chronic* (1992)
- Dr. Dre featuring Snoop Dogg, Jewell, RBX, "Fuck wit Dre Day (And Everybody's Celebratin')," *The Chronic* (1992)
- Ice Cube, "We Had to Tear this Motherfucka Up," *The Predator* (1992)
- Ice Cube, "It Was a Good Day," *The Predator* (1992)
- Ice Cube featuring Das EFX, "Check Yo Self," *The Predator* (1992)
- EPMD, "Crossover," *Business Never Personal* (1992)
- Wu-Tang Clan, "C.R.E.A.M.," *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers* (1993)
- Mobb Deep, "Peer Pressure," *Juvenile Hell* (1993)
- Queen Latifah, "U.N.I.T.Y.," *Black Reign* (1993)
- Digable Planets, "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)," *Reachin' (A New Refutation of Time and Space)* (1993)
- Snoop Dogg, "Gin and Juice," *Doggystyle* (1993)
- Snoop Dogg featuring Dr. Dre, Jewell, "Who Am I (What's My Name)," *Doggystyle* (1993)

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- Snoop Dogg featuring Nancy Fletcher, "Lodi Dodi," *Doggystyle* (1993)
- Snoop Dogg featuring Dat Nigga Daz, "Murder Was the Case (Death After Visualizing Eternity)," *Doggystyle* (1993)
- Common, "I Used to Love H.E.R.," *Resurrection* (1994)
- OutKast featuring Goodie Mob, "Git Up, Git Out," *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* (1994)
- Mobb Deep, "Survival of the Fittest," *The Infamous* (1995)
- Big L featuring Y.U., Lord Finesse, Microphone Nut, Party Arty, Jay-Z, "Da Graveyard," *Lifestylez Ov Da Poor & Dangerous* (1995)
- Raekwon featuring Method Man, Ghostface Killah, RZA, Masta Killa, "Wu-Gambinos," *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* (1995)
- Raekwon featuring Ghostface Killah, Nas, "Verbal Intercourse," *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* (1995)
- The Roots featuring Raphael Saadiq, "What They Do," *Illadelph Halflife* (1996)
- Jay-Z, "Dead Presidents II," *Reasonable Doubt* (1996)
- Nas featuring Lauryn Hill, "If I Ruled the World (Imagine That)," *It Was Written* (1996)
- The Fugees, "Ready or Not," *The Score* (1996)
- Diddy featuring Faith Evans, 112, "I'll Be Missing You," *No Way Out* (1997)
- Jay-Z featuring BLACKstreet, "The City is Mine," *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (1997)
- 2Pac, "I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto," *R U Still Down? (Remember Me)* 1997
- Lauryn Hill, "Everything is Everything," *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998)
- Jay-Z, "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)," *Vol. 2 ... Hard Knock Life* (1998)
- Jay-Z featuring Amil, Ja Rule, "Can I Get A...," *Vol. 2 ... Hard Knock Life* (1998)
- Black Star, "Astronomy (8th Light)," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)
- Black Star, "Definition," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)
- Black Star, "Brown Skin Lady," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)
- Black Star, "K.O.S. (Determination)," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)
- Black Star, "Thieves in the Night," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)

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Black Star featuring Common, "Respiration," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)

Black Star, "Children's Story," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)

Black Star, "Hater Players," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)

Black Star, "B Boys Will B Boys," *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* (1998)

Pras featuring Ol' Dirty Bastard, Mýa, "Ghetto Supastar," *Ghetto Supastar* (1998)

Mos Def, "Fear Not of Man," *Black on Both Sides* (1999)

Eminem, "My Name Is," *The Slim Shady LP* (1999)

Eminem and Dr. Dre, "Guilty Conscience," *The Slim Shady LP* (1999)

Jay-Z featuring UGK, "Big Pimpin'," *Vol. 3 ... Life and Times of Shawn Carter* (1999)

Nas featuring Diddy, "Hate Me Now," *I Am...* (1999)

Nas, "We Will Survive," *I Am...* (1999)

Mos Def, "UMI Says," *Black on Both Sides* (1999)

GZA, "Publicity," *Beneath the Surface* (1999)

Ol' Dirty Bastard featuring Chris Rock, "Recognize," *Nigga Please* (1999)

Ol' Dirty Bastard featuring Kelis, "Got Your Money," *Nigga Please* (1999)

Eminem, "The Real Slim Shady," *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000)

Eminem, "Kim," *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000)

Eminem featuring Dido, "Stan," *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000)

Wu-Tang Clan featuring Nas, "Let My Niggas Live," *The W* (2000)

Wu-Tang Clan featuring Isaac Hayes, "I Can't Go to Sleep," *The W* (2000)

Jay-Z featuring Pharrell, J.U.I.C.E., "I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me)" *The Dynasty – Roc La Familia* (2000)

OutKast, "Ms. Jackson," *Stankonia* (2000)

dead prez, "Hip-Hop," *Let's Get Free* (2000)

Jay-Z, "Takeover," *The Blueprint* (2001)

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Nas, "Ether," *Stillmatic* (2001)

Jay-Z, "Hola Hovito," *The Blueprint* (2001)

Jay-Z featuring Eminem, "Renegade," *The Blueprint* (2001)

Jay-Z, "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)," *The Blueprint* (2001)

Jay-Z featuring Kanye West, "Never Change," *The Blueprint* (2001)

Jay-Z, "All I Need," *The Blueprint* (2001)

Nas, "One Mic," *Stillmatic* (2001)

Nas, "2nd Childhood," *Stillmatic* (2001)

Nas featuring Amerie, "Rule," *Stillmatic* (2001)

OutKast featuring Killer Mike, "The Whole World," *Big Boi and Dre Present...OutKast* (2001)

Wu-Tang Clan featuring Streetlife, "Rules," *Iron Flag* (2001)

Ludacris featuring Nate Dogg, "Area Codes," *Word of Mouf* (2001)

Ludacris, "Rollout (My Business)," *Word of Mouf* (2001)

Ludacris featuring Mystical, I-20, "Move Bitch," *Word of Mouf* (2001)

Eminem, "White America," *The Eminem Show* (2002)

Eminem, "Without Me," *The Eminem Show* (2002)

Jay-Z featuring Pharrell, "Excuse Me Miss," *The Blueprint²: The Gift & The Curse* (2002)

Nas, "I Can," *God's Son* (2002)

Tupac Shakur featuring J. Phoenix, Nas, "Thugz Mansion (Nas Acoustic)," *Better Dayz* (2002)

Common featuring Mary J. Blige, "Come Close," *Electric Circus* (2002)

LL Cool J featuring Marc Dorsey, "Luv U Better," *10* (2002)

N.O.R.E. featuring Pharrell, "Nothin'," *God's Favorite* (2002)

Nelly, "Hot in Herre," *Nellyville* (2002)

Snoop Dogg featuring Pharrell, "From Tha Chuuuuch to da Palace," *Paid Tha Cost to Be Da Bo\$\$* (2002)

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Snoop Dogg featuring Pharrell, "Beautiful," *Paid Tha Cost to Be Da Bo\$\$* (2002)

Talib Kweli, "Good to You," *Quality* (2002)

Talib Kweli, "Get By," *Quality* (2002)

Lil Jon & the Eastside Boyz featuring The Ying Yang Twins, "Get Low," *Kings of Crunk* (2002)

Missy Elliott, "Work It," *Under Construction* (2002)

Missy Elliott featuring Ludacris, "Gossip Folks," *Under Construction* (2002)

Black Eyed Peas featuring Justin Timberlake, "Where Is the Love?," *Elephunk* (2003)

50 Cent, "Wanksta," *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2003)

50 Cent, "Back Down," *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2003)

Bravehearts featuring Lil Jon, Nas, "Quick to Back Down," *Bravehearted* (2003)

Little Brother, "The Listening," *The Listening* (2003)

Kanye West, "Jesus Walks," *The College Dropout* (2004)

Eminem, "Just Lose It," *Encore* (2004)

Eminem, "Mosh," *Encore* (2004)

Eminem, "Like Toy Soldiers," (2004)

Jadakiss featuring Anthony Hamilton, "Why," *Kiss of Death* (2004)

Nas featuring Kelis, "American Way," *Street's Disciple* (2004)

Ludacris, "Number One Spot," *Red Light District* (2004)

T.I., "Bring Em Out," *Urban Legend*, (2004)

Kanye West, "Through the Wire," *The College Dropout* (2004)

Lil Wayne featuring Robin Thicke, "Shooter," *Tha Carter II* (2005)

50 Cent, "Piggy Bank," *The Massacre* (2005)

Kanye West featuring Jamie Foxx, "Gold Digger," *Late Registration* (2005)

Kanye West featuring Lupe Fiasco, "Touch the Sky," *Late Registration* (2005)

Kanye West featuring Adam Levine, "Heard 'em Say," *Late Registration* (2005)

Kanye West featuring The Game, "Crack Music," *Late Registration* (2005)

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Kanye West featuring Jay-Z, "Diamonds from Sierra Leone," *Late Registration* (2005)

Lil Wayne, "Best Rapper Alive," *Tha Carter II* (2005)

Nas featuring will.i.am, "Hip Hop is Dead," *Hip Hop is Dead* (2006)

Nas featuring Jay-Z, "Black Republican," *Hip Hop is Dead* (2006)

Jay-Z, "Minority Report," *Kingdom Come* (2006)

Lupe Fiasco, "Hurt Me Soul," *Lupe Fiasco's Food & Liquor* (2006)

Lupe Fiasco featuring Matthew Santos, "American Terrorist," *Lupe Fiasco's Food & Liquor* (2006)

Ludacris featuring Pharrell, "Money Maker," *Release Therapy* (2006)

Ludacris featuring Mary J. Blige, "Runaway Love," *Release Therapy* (2006)

Jay-Z featuring Beanie Sigel, "Ignorant Shit," *American Gangster* (2007)

Jay-Z, "Say Hello," *American Gangster* (2007)

Jay-Z featuring Nas, "Success," *American Gangster* (2007)

Nas, "Sly Fox," *Nas* (2008)

Nas featuring The Last Poets, "Project Roach," *Nas* (2008)

Ice Cube, "Gangsta Rap Made Me Do It," *Raw Footage* (2008)

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Ludacris featuring T.I., "Wish You Would," *Theater of the Mind* (2008)

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Kanye West, "RoboCop," *808s & Heartbreak* (2008)

Kanye West, "Bad News," *808s & Heartbreak* (2008)

Kanye West, "Coldest Winter," *808s & Heartbreak* (2008)

Kanye West featuring Young Jeezy, "Amazing," *808s & Heartbreak* (2008)

Kanye West featuring Lil Wayne, "See You in My Nightmares," *808s & Heartbreak* (2008)

T-Pain featuring Ludacris, "Chopped N Skrewed," *Thr33 Ringz* (2008)

T-Pain featuring Kanye West, "Therapy," *Thr33 Ringz* (2008)

T-Pain featuring Lil Wayne, "Can't Believe It," *Thr33 Ringz* (2008)

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