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THE LANGUAGE OF HIP HOP: A RACIAL BRIDGE?

African American English (AAE) as Interracial Communication

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The Language of Hip Hop: A Racial Bridge?

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## INTRODUCTION

*Hip Hop youth battle through the theoretical houses of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, Judith Butler, Antonio Gramsci, Jürgen Habermas, shouting out, testing, and challenging theories and philosophies, trying to bring it back to their young bodies in motion, trying to keep theory real.*

*Marcyliena Morgan* [1]

This study questions whether rap - the musical voice of Hip Hop culture - is a form of interracial communication.

What makes rap music sound so peculiar is the use of African American English.[2] Reportedly, in the book *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (2006), linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim[3] describes the linguistic practices of US Hip Hop as both deriving from and expanding from African American English.

In light of this, rap can be examined not just as a musical but also as a speech genre.

Even though typically African American, as a language and cultural form rap has enjoyed such a great mainstream success that also non-Black ethnicities have started to seek access to this practice. According to Toni Mitchell, Hip Hop and rap should not be viewed simply as an expression of African American culture. In fact, they have become vehicles for global youth affiliations and tools for reworking identities all over the world (2001, 1-2). During the 1990s Whites were drawn to Hip Hop culture and language and to the rhetorical power of rap music. Exactly starting from this time-period, White rappers began adopting a wide range of AAE structural patterns in their lyrics.

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[1] Marcyliena Morgan is Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and the Executive Director of the Hip Hop Archive & Research Institute. The quote is taken from her article "After...word! The philosophy of the Hip Hop battle." In Barby D. and T. Shelby (eds.) *Hip Hop and Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason* (2005, 211). The growing importance attached by scholars and academia to Hip Hop is evident in that Harvard has recently recognized Hip Hop classics. In fact, on February 29, 2016, "the Loeb Music Library at Harvard University, in collaboration with the Hip Hop Archive and Research Institute (HARI), began its archive of two-hundred of the most influential Hip Hop albums. [...] The 2016 inaugural collection includes: *The Low End Theory* by A Tribe Called Quest, *Illmatic* by Nas, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* by Lauryn Hill, and *To Pimp A Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar. Professor Marcyliena Morgan of HARI and Peter Laurence of Loeb Music Library are the "project liaisons for this unique collaboration that will bring together a collection of Hip Hop standards, along with LP versions of earlier recordings containing the original music used for their samples." See full article "Harvard Recognizes Hip Hop Classics" *Hip Hop Archive* March 4, 2016, at the following link http://Hip Hoparchive.org/blog/3513-harvard-recognizes-Hip Hop-classics. Last Visited February 6, 2017.

[2] In the present study, it will be called alternatively African American English and Black English, a choice that will be accounted for in the section "Terminology" at the end of the present Introduction.

[3] See *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (2006) and *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* (2012) by Alim, H. Samy (2012). See also Alim H. Samy, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (2009).

The language practice of White rappers who want to affiliate with Hip Hop culture is a phenomenon that has not received a great deal of attention. It is precisely this lacuna of scholarly dialogue that this research tries to fill.

The aim is to shed light on the underestimated potential of such a linguistic behavior, which might provide insightful considerations on rap as a cultural and linguistic practice where racial divides are reimagined.

Specifically, this research will consider the way White rappers' use of AAE intersects with sociolinguistic theories of "crossing" as first theorized by Ben Rampton in 1995. We will consider the dynamics of this phenomenon as well, and the implications of incorporating a language which does not belong to one's ethnicity. *De facto*, linguistic appropriation by White rappers involves crossing racial boundaries.

Although Hip Hop has undoubtedly become an increasingly multiracial and multicultural locus as an effect of globalization, it must not be forgotten that its origins and creative force are bound to African American communities and culture. In addition, there is a discourse within Hip Hop that privileges the Black experience and that harbors anti-White sentiments.

It follows that White rappers' attempt at adopting Black people's language in order to legitimate themselves within a Black domain, unavoidably locates them in a problematic position.

In light of these observations, the question is whether or not rap music can be interpreted as an "approach area," as a meeting point between Blacks and Whites, as a ground for interracial communication where racial boundaries are disputed and reshaped.

To tackle this question our research examines the whole discographies of White rappers Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Paul Wall compared to those of Black rappers Kanye West, Nas and Tyler the Creator. Their career all bloomed between the 1990s and the present day. African American rappers were included in the analysis as a term of comparison with respect to the White ones in order to see how Black rappers, as legitimate in-group AAE speakers, use the variety.

Their linguistic behaviors have been scrutinized by registering the occurrences of AAE and SAE in their lyrics. The data set consists of eight AAE morphosyntactic features from the list Rickford identified as distinctive of AAE (1999, 4-9; 2000).

African American English (AAE) is a variety of Standard American English (SAE) that evolved from the language spoken by the descendants of Africans who were brought to the American colonies as slaves. Over three hundred years of slavery assured that African American speech would be linguistically and stylistically distinct from SAE and from other varieties of English. After slavery

was abolished, due to continued segregation and to the existence of a vigorous and dynamic Black culture, African American speech retained its distinctiveness.

The complex and controversial relationship between African American English and Standard American English is a matter of great concern to our discussion. In order to examine their relation within the lyrics of Black and White rappers, we engaged in an analysis of the longstanding linguistic debate pertaining to the continuing pattern of both divergence and convergence between AAE and SAE.

Ronald Butters discussed these dynamics in *The Death of Black English: Divergence and Convergence in Black and White Vernaculars* (1989). He underlined how the history of American Black -White speech relations is characterized by both divergence and convergence[4] at least since the Civil War due to the historical patterns of partial societal isolation and partial contact between Whites and Blacks (4). As far as the divergence/convergence controversy goes, several linguists have reversed the widely acknowledged historical trend towards linguistic convergence between Black and White English in the United States. The issue intriguing linguists is the divergence hypothesis,[5] that is, the claim that Black English is diverging from other dialects of English, and particularly from standard varieties.

As a matter of fact, the divergence hypothesis holds that Black and White English are currently becoming more distinct from each other structurally, rather than growing more similar over time. Labov and Harris (1986) were the first to elaborate the divergence theory. [6]

Transposing this debate into the context Hip Hop is intriguing. Hip Hop, in fact, in its initial stages (1970s, 1980s) was an epitomized example of the celebration of AAE against SAE.

For Black rappers to diverge from Standard English is a legitimate and predictable strategy of resistance by individuals who feel threatened and denigrated by hegemonic White culture and language.  This trend can be backed up by the historical pattern of divergence recorded by linguists. Vaugh, for instance, affirmed that "According to Labov, a major and important finding of this

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[4] For what the divergence/convergence debate is concerned, an essential source is: "Are Black and White Vernaculars Diverging? Papers from the NWAVE XIV Panel Discussion" by Ralph W. Fasold, William Labov, Fay Boyd Vaughn-Cooke, Guy Bailey, Walt Wolfram, Arthur K. Spears, and John Rickford in *American Speech* 62.1 (Spring 1987): 3-80.
See also: Baugh, John (1979, 1980, 1983); Bloomfield (1933); Davis (1969, 1970); D'Eloia (1973); Dillard (1972, 1992); Fasold (1976, 1981); Johnson (1930); Poplack (1999), and Stewart (1967, 1968, 1969).

[5] The counterarguments to the divergence hypothesis are found in Vaughn-Cook: "The purpose of this paper is to challenge Labov's claims about linguistic change in Black English. I will argue that he has not presented adequate evidence to support his claims and that, through extensive press coverage, he has disseminated erroneous information about a group of speakers to millions of people in this country and abroad" (1987, 14).

[6] Their results were replicated several times by Labov and his associates (Ash and Myhill 1986; Myhill and Harris 1986; Graff, Labov, and Harris 1986). See also Bailey and Manor (1989), Butters (1989), Labov and Harris (1986), Fasold et al. (1987) and Wolfram and Thomas (2002).

research is that Black English, contrary to expectations, is becoming more different from Standard English and other White dialects" (1987, 13). William Labov grounded his theories in the observation of the speech patterns of Blacks in Philadelphia and he asserted that their speech is developing in its own direction and becoming more different from the speech of Whites in the same communities (1987, 5). Labov and his research team found the cities splitting into "Black and White components: Blacks do not participate in the sound changes of White vernacular, and here we find evidence of new Black grammatical features, reinterpretations of features of other dialects, and combined divergence of the tense, mood, and aspect system" (Labov 1987, 6).

Bailey and Maynor also echo this view stating that Black English "is becoming less like, not more like, White English" (1897, 450). Throughout their study[7] they suggest that where formerly the two varieties were converging or becoming more alike, they are now diverging, becoming more different from each other structurally (Bailey and Maynor 1989, 12).

Bailey and Maynor both claim that the divergence hypothesis is closely connected to larger social issues and historical events. The effects of the Great Migration were a drastic relocation of the Black population into homogeneous and relatively permanent ghettos characterized by spatial segregation where hope for having access to larger society was limited (Bailey and Maynor 1987, 467). As a consequence of these social developments, separate Black speech communities arose, which had only marginal interaction with White communities. As Labov put it in 1985, society would be deemed to shift towards a permanent division between Blacks and Whites and the linguistic research gives an objective measure of this dangerous drift (1985, 3).

What we recorded in our research, however, was a pattern of mutual convergence between the two varieties within Hip Hop starting from the 1990s onward. Instead of drifting apart from Whites, Black rappers have been observed to converge towards SAE forms, while we detected that White rappers converged towards AAE forms.

In support of this observation, we found that the divergence hypothesis has met with considerable criticism. Wolfram has argued that both methodological bases and evidence are wanting (1987, 48) and Rickford echoes this view pointing out that if we observe some sociopolitical variables operating, we might think that Black and White vernaculars seem to be moving apart; but he also claims that there is no evidence of this and he adds that divergence claims are not at all strong (Rickford 1987, 73).

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[7] See Bailey, Guy, and Natalie Maynor's "The Divergence Controversy" in *American Speech* 64.1 (1989): 12-39.

The central linguistic features that are assumed to be divergent are: the invariant be (Bailey and associates); the third singular and possessive –s; and the copula (Labov). Therefore, we incorporated these features within our analysis of Hip Hop lyrics, as well.

Having analyzed all of them, Rickford reports that some features remain stable and converge with the White ones (Kautzsch 2002, 8). We recorded the same trend.

In addition, linguists point to the fact that to claim that Black speech is becoming, in some respects, different from White speech, has larger implications. This trend, in fact, would indicate that the segregation of ethnic groups in the United States might still be vast, although attempts have been made to integrate Black people into mainstream US society. If divergence could "ultimately be proven correct, both the social and the linguistic consequences to be drawn would be great indeed," Schneider concludes (1989, 21).

Although approving the divergence hypothesis as a corrective to simplistic assimilationist views, Arthur Spears expresses his concern about viewing it as a "dangerous drift" - as Labov put it - since "Black culture is creative and transformative, taking from mainstream culture as well as other American cultural traditions, but at the same time it is maintaining and evolving its own distinctiveness" (Spears 1987, 49).

Moreover, he states that there may actually be both convergence and divergence (Spears 1992), for as Wolfram and Thomas say "it is quite possible for particular structures, or structures on one level of language organization, to show convergence at the same time that other structures indicate divergence" (2002, 24).

Spears adds that Labov and Maynor have taken an important step in challenging the prevailing simplistic view that one sided convergence is an adequate characterization of the historical relationship between Black and White speech in the United States (Spears, 1987, 49).

In Spears' words "it seems that one-sided convergence was assumed to be the result of mass media influence, language norms inculcated by public school education, and increased social interaction between Blacks and Whites resulting from school integration" (1987, 50).

This assumption of one-sidedness, resulting from information disseminated by linguists during the late 1960s and especially the early 1970s, permeated much of the public's thinking about Black English in those years.

In Spears' opinion, it is precisely against this background that Labov's claim of divergence takes on a special importance, as he says that the overall evolution of Black culture is about much more than assimilation: "I believe we could expect, *a priori*, at least some divergence, in language as well as

other areas of Black culture" (1987, 50). Studies of this nature, in fact, fall into two groups, the linguistic and the social,[8] and it is impossible to keep the two apart. As a matter of fact, for divergence to exist in social terms, the only requirement is that there be vital Black communities that have a thriving cultural life of their own. Furthermore, from a linguistic point of view, Spears' and Rickford's studies have demonstrated that we can indeed talk about divergence with reference to some specific features of grammar. However, when referring to this phenomenon, Spears prefers to substitute the term "divergence" with "independent cultural development." On account of this, Spear's remarks that divergence or "independent cultural development" must not be seen as dangerous. At the same time, he claims that a simplistic assimilationist agenda would be demeaning when considering the crucial role of minority contributions to American culture. Entirely in line with this, Rickford emphasizes the positive side of divergence stating that accelerated AAE use is part of a "symbolic statement of today's young people awareness and pride of their African American identity" (1999, XIII).

Keeping with Rickford's claims, Black rappers have been observed to purposely diverge from SAE and use AAE as a marker of their identity in the early stages of Hip Hop.

Totally unexpected, and outside of this predictable framework, is for White rappers to converge towards AAE and engage in a Black genre. This is especially true if we consider two aspects: first, that AAE in mainstream White U.S. society is stigmatized as an inferior and ungrammatical variety; second, because White people and institutions traditionally figure prominently as objects of disdain and anger in politically-oriented Hip Hop music from the 1990s (see Public Enemy, NWA, KRS-One, Ice-T and others).

In light of these considerations, Chapter 1 aims to provide a theoretical and linguistic background to the discussion of the complex power-relations that exist between AAE and SAE. In the first part issues of language politics, racism and power in relation to African American English will be discussed. In fact, any study of Black and White intercultural communication must take into account the persistent racial tensions that undergird the relationship between Standard American English (SAE) and African American English (AAE) in the US. The second part provides an account of African American English linguistic features, which is of paramount importance for the understanding of the highly complex discursive zone of rappers.

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[8] For what the sociolinguistic approach concerns, see Meyerhoff's *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (2011), Martí's *Words and Worlds* (2005), Hurley, Larrier and McLaren's *Migrating Words and Worlds: Pan-Africanism Updated* (1999), Williams' *Sociolinguistics: A Sociological Critique* (1992), Wardhaugh and Fuller's *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2006), Hudson's *Sociolinguistics* (1996).

Chapter 2 provides a general overview of the culture of Hip Hop and rap – which is a music form that grew out of it – and thereupon focuses on rap's rhetoric.

Because of its functional and structural affiliation with the African American oral tradition of Signifyin(g), [9] the practice of rap will be read not simply as verbal artistry and masterful elocution but rather, as a metalinguistic medium through which a philosophy of life is disclosed.

Examining the structural kinship between rap and Signifyin(g), the present study demonstrates that they both are meta-rhetorical practices aimed at challenging the White order of meanings.

For such a reason AAE and - by inference - rap, also function as anti-languages. The term "Anti-Language" was coined by Halliday in 1976 to describe a sociolinguistic situation where a minority group uses a peculiar language in order to separate itself from the mainstream speech community.

The best score of this process of linguistic, semiotic, political and metaphysical offensive against the White order of meaning is the term "nigga" as re-imagined by Hip Hop culture. No word, in fact, could better reveal Hip Hop as an anti-society with an anti-language.

Therefore, Chapter 3 will be entirely devoted to the analysis of the origin and meaning of the word "nigga." Although the term has recently received increased media attention, discussions about it have rarely made it into scholarly discourse. It is a common belief, nowadays, to associate the schwa variant (nigg-a) with Hip Hop culture, while nigg-er is still seen as inextricably linked to White racism in the American hate-speech lexicon. Dalzell - together with the majority of scholars - claims that Hip Hop artists have taken the word nigger and turned it into a term of self-empowerment by pioneering the new defiant use of nigga as a deliberate re-spelling (2014, 19).

It will be taken objection to this by bringing evidence that Blacks have been using the term nigg(-a) since slavery times, hence the respelling is not new at all. What is more, the belief that the pronunciation 'nigga' has been prerogative of Black usage only will be problematized.

We suggest that the logic behind the new spelling by younger Black rappers breaks down by bringing to light historical and linguistic evidence that White racists have used 'nigger' nearly as often as they have used 'nigga.'

It will be shown that nigg-a was first introduced via the schwa pronunciation of White colonists in the American South under the influence of the dialect of 18th century London aristocrats, who developed a 'non-rhotic' speech variant.

The claim that nigg(-er) would be only a White racial slur will be questioned as well.

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[9] I embrace Henry Louis Gates' choice to capitalize the initial S and to put in brackets the final (g) in order to distinguish the African American term Signifyin(g) from the one pertaining to Standard English Language (signifying).

Historically, we have attestations proving how nigger was used among Blacks as a self-referential term, as a term of endearment and as a neutral term.

To summarize, while many people still claim that the respelling (nigga) is new, or that its meaning can be described as simply a new positive use by rappers, this analysis will distinguish more specifically that the new usage of the term by rappers can be seen as a coming out of a particular socio-political context and embodying a specific (not simply positive) socio-political stance.

The novelty will be shown to rest neither in a new pronunciation nor in a positive meaning attached to the word, but in its public mobilization as a tool for the articulation of a self-conscious assertion of identity which is constructed to function as a form of anti-language.

The present chapter is not meant to undermine the evidence that Hip Hop had indeed a revolutionary impact. It rather suggests that the impact is not a matter of the emergence of a new respelling, but a new way that an old spelling came to be re-used.

To summarize, Chapter 1, 2 and 3 confront AAE, Hip Hop culture, and rap language structures and meanings, in order to pave the way for discussion, in Chapter 4, of Hip Hop as a possible ground for interracial communication.

Chapter 4 tackles this main issue by considering the presence of AAE morphosyntactic features in the speech of White rappers.

Ben Rampton (1995) would call this linguistic practice "crossing." This sociolinguistic concept focuses "on the code-alternation by people who aren't accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ. It is concerned with switching into languages that aren't generally thought to belong to you" (270-271).

White rappers are outsiders of African American culture yet they resort to the use of AAE to show their appreciation for it and to be authenticated as in-group members of the Hip Hop community.

Notably, however, Whites not only are perceived as outsiders, but they are also portrayed as objects of hatred by Black rappers. In light of this, the chapter provides an investigation of anti-White sentiments in Hip Hop.

Further, it ponders on the possible reasons that might draw Whites to affiliate with a genre that is coded as anti-White. Worth noting is that the appropriation of AAE and of Black music on the part of Whites might simultaneously index their esteem and orientation towards Hip Hop and Black culture as well as signaling stances that draw on the indexical meanings of AAE - especially coolness and masculinity.

Concurrently, it is impossible to talk about White participation in the speech of African Americans without hinting at the long history of similar appropriations. Thus, the way in which Hip Hop culture and AAE are taken up by White rappers in the cultural and historical context of the US must be viewed in relation to previous acts of appropriation by Whites. The section titled "Black Empires - White Desires" addresses this issues.

Finally, the results stemming from the analysis of the lyrics of White and Black rappers - with records of how they stylize their speech using linguistic features drawn from AAE - are presented and discussed.

## Terminology

Some explanation is needed on our alternative usage of the terms African American English and Black English to refer to the language of Black people.

Over the past fifty years, American sociolinguists have used a variety of terms to describe the language patterns and dialectal features associated with African Americans in the US.

Salikoko Mufwene (2012) has poignantly summarized the labels given to the speech used by the majority of African Americans throughout the years as "urban Negro speech" (Stewart 1965); "American Negro Dialect" and "Negro (nonstandard) English" (Stewart 1968); "Merican" (Fickett 1970); "American Negro English" (Stewart 1965, 1974); "Negro nonstandard dialect" (R. Smith); "Black English" (Smitherman 1977, 2000, 2006; Dillard 1972, and others); "Black English Vernacular" abbreviated as BEV (Labov 1972); "PALWH" (pronounced [pælwhə]) for "Pan-African Language in the Western Hemisphere" (Twiggs); "Ebonics" (Tolliver-Weddington; R. L. Williams, and several others since 1997), and "Black Street Speech"(J. Baugh 1983).

Other names include "Black Dialect," "AAL," (African American Language),[10] "Black Idiom," and "Black Talk" (Smitherman 1977, 1994).

Finally, the two labels that have made their stream currency into the linguistic academy[11] are "African American English" (AAE) and "African American Vernacular English" (AAVE). However, concerns about the inadequacy of the term "vernacular" - particularly in reference to the speech of middle class, educated African Americans - lead many sociolinguists to privilege the use of the term African American English (AAE). According to Marcyliena Morgan (1994), labelling the speech of all

[10] Smitherman (1997) defines African American Language (AAL) as a communication system that functions both as a resistance language and as a linguistic bond of racial and cultural solidarity for African Americans.

[11] Especially, among scholars and linguists such as Smitherman (1977, 2000), Mufwene, Baugh, Rickford and Bailey (1998), Tottie (2002); Green, 2002; Wolfram and Thomas (2002); Finegan and Rickford, (2004).

African Americans as "vernacular" has overtones of racism and essentialism, and fails to describe the range of standard forms spoken by some.

In this light, AAE appears to be more appropriate than AAVE in that it captures the full range of standard as well as non-standard - or "vernacular" - varieties or dialects used by people of African American descent in the US (Morgan 1998; Spears 1998).

Entirely in line with this, Arthur Spears explains that AAE is an umbrella term for both Standard African American English (SAAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), both of which are in turn cover terms for the collection of standard and non-standard varieties of AAVE respectively.

We embrace Spears' and Morgan's choice of the term AAE instead of AAVE.

An additional reason for taking up AAE is that the nature of the term "vernacular" would prove problematic and highly limiting when trying to define rappers' language.

In "Field Methods of the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation" (1984) William Labov described the vernacular as the style of a "given group in which the minimum attention is paid to speech" (29). Labov goes on defining it as the speaker's most automatic linguistic production free of conscious interference, which is to be witnessed in the most unreflective, spontaneous language flow. Labov's definition focuses on the workings of the vernacular as the most unreflecting, unmonitored, relaxed non-standard speech variety (1984, 15-29).

Defining the language of rappers as AAVE would therefore entail that rappers are using a non-monitored language variety. This proves highly limiting since rappers are, on the contrary, poets, and as such, both their language and their lyrics are highly monitored and reflective -- they are making conscious choices of what to put in their lyrics.[12]

Wanting to use the term AAVE to refer to rapper's linguistic mastery would be misleading. Rappers might no doubt use AAVE forms and draw fully from the vernacular in their everyday life, but to call that way the language they use to create lyrics would not be appropriate.

The label AAE gives more justice to their linguistic outputs and it does not necessarily circumscribe their skills and mastery within the limiting circle of a vernacular variety, while simultaneously including vernacular varieties under its umbrella.

Besides, in a larger scale, the term AAE denotes the reality of the double consciousness and dual cultural heritage of Black folks: part Africa, part America.

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[12] It is true, no doubt, that a highly percentage of the linguistic material they are using in their lyrics comes directly from the street culture and the vernacular language (AAVE), but the fact that they are speakers of AAVE in their everyday life does not entail that their language in rap lyrics is as unmonitored as their free, natural in-group talk.

Despite the fact that AAE is the more linguistically logical designation and despite having made its way through the academy, AAE is still not as semantically appropriate as Black, for the concept of Black itself connotes the psychological weight of the contradictory impulses towards skin color in America. In fact, as Smitherman contends, Black functions as a metaphorical reminder of the historical pendulum movement of denial and affirmation of Black skin in White America (Smitherman, 1977, 40-41).

Black is a crucial term in the history of the US due to its bond to the radical changes that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, when Stokely Carmichael called for "Black Power."

The term Black, in fact, entails sociopolitical issues related to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. It was literally during those times characterized by the Black Liberation's Movement philosophy, the Black consciousness movement of Black Pride, and the celebration of Blackness and Black culture, that "Negro" fell out of favor and it was replaced by "Black" (Alim and Smitherman 2012, 113).

To emphasize Blackness was a revolutionary and highly significant choice considering that Black skin color had always been seen very negatively by Blacks and Whites alike: "If you White you all right, if you brown stick around, if you Black stay back" was a famous childhood rhyme in Black America (Smitherman 1977, 39).

By choosing the term Black, African American asserted the right to define themselves, to select their own name and to defend their Blackness as a badge of pride: "The Blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" (Smitherman 1977, 41) or "We call ourselves Black , we are Black and we are proud" (Smitherman, 1977, 39), echoing James Brown's song "Say it loud, I am Black and I am proud" (Costello and Foster Wallace, 4).

An account of this, labelling the language of Black people "Black English" includes recognizing the significant historical and sociopolitical weight of the term.


In addition, we retain both terms "race" and "ethnicity" within this research, choosing willingly not to avoid "race." The use of "race" Vs "ethnicity" is still a matter of great concern.

In the early twentieth century, beginning with Franz Boas's work, cultural anthropology reimagined racial difference as a social construct, not a biological fact. If human differences thought to be "natural and biological turned out to be cultural, then, Boas and his supporters (including W. E. B. Du Bois) argued, racial inequality could be overcome" (Kajikawa 7).

Seeking a way to counter biological racism in the aftermath of World War II, cultural anthropologists and other social scientists promoted the term "ethnicity" in substitution of the term "race." In a similar fashion, Ben Rampton privileges the use of the term "ethnic" in his sociolinguistic studies on language crossing by groups of multiethnic adolescents in a British working-class community.

Although it might be tempting to replace all instances of the term race with the more politically correct term ethnicity, one must take into account that in the US history the salience of the notion of race - as related to human difference, to the legacy of slavery and to skin color - determined life chances and changes. The concept of race is ascribed in experiences and histories unique to the United States and remains therefore crucial in the discussion of US Hip Hop culture.

In light of these considerations, the present study will retain the use of both terms "race, racial" and "ethnicity, ethnic."

In a similar fashion, we employ the racial identifiers White and Black throughout the analysis, but recognize them as social constructs that have particular meanings in the US rather than pointing to biologically meaningful categories.

The choice to capitalize the word "Black" is in line with Lori L. Tharp claiming that "when speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalized. Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase Black is simply a color."[13]

In support of this view, the AP style book dictates that nationalities, races and cultures be capitalized. In addition, we see the capitalization of B as respectful and appropriate towards the history and struggles of Black people.

As for the capitalization of "White" we follow the Census' philosophy: all racial and ethnic categories are capitalized on the Census — including White.[14]

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[13] See *The New York Times* November 18, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-Black -with-a-capital-b.html?smid=tw-share&_r=2. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

[14] See http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/01/21/race-and-the-census-the-%E2%80%9Cnegro%E2%80%9D-contro versy /. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

CHAPTER 1

AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

*Preface*

*In the first part of the present chapter I will discuss issues of language politics, racism and power in relation to African American English. In the second part, I will give an overview of the broad range of African American English's linguistic features, of paramount importance for the understanding of the highly complex discursive zone of rappers.*

## 1.1 African American English: Linguistic Prejudice and White Supremacist Thinking

Jesse B. Semple, the folk hero that Langton Hughes created as his alter ego for a series of columns he wrote for *The Chicago Defender*,[15] well articulates some truths about language in the story "Grammar and Goodness" (134-136).[16] According to dozens of critical assessments, what makes Mr. Simple a notable creation is the fact that he is the truthful epitome of the Black working everyman – the average Harlem citizen representative of the masses of Black folks in the 1940s (Akiba and Harper 3-4). Like many other Blacks, having migrated to Harlem from the South he vividly remembers the racism he experienced in Dixie and celebrates the opportunities for African Americans in the North. Mr. Simple speaks and writes poems in Black English, using typical African American English grammatical structures such as stressed been as in "I been swimming with my head underwater" (Hughes 2002, 135), "you been calling me" (Hughes 2002, 134) and copula absence "Now you mad because I won't ride in the back end of your bus"[17] (Hughes 2002, 135).

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[15] Jesse B. Semple is also known as "Mr. Simple" - for short. This character was conceived in 1943 and appeared originally in a series of columns written by Langston Hughes for the *Chicago Defender*, *a Negro weekly*. This character later appeared also in Hughes' companion-works, *Simple Speaks his Mind* (1950) and *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953). Literary critics, scholars, and Hughes' fellow artists have praised Mr. Simple as the most famous character in Black fiction and have deemed the Simple stories as Langston Hughes' greatest contribution to American culture (Akiba and Harper 3).

[16] The full story is available in the volume *The Early Simple Stories. Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Vol 7* by Langston Hughes (2002).

[17] This is a clear reference to Rosa Parks (1913 – 2005) an American civil rights activist who, on December 1, 1955, in Montgomery (Alabama) resisted bus segregation by refusing to obey bus driver James F. Blake's order to give up her seat to a White passenger, after the White section was filled. That same bus driver had already humiliated Parks in several occasions before that episode, for instance when some time before she had paid her fare and Blake insisted that Parks had to exit and reboard through the back door. On that occasion, feeling humiliated, Parks purposely dropped her purse and sat down in a seat in the Whites-only section to pick it up, at which act Blake poised to hit her. So, on the day when it came to obey and give up her seat to the White man, as Parks herself recalls, she had not planned the protest but had been pushed as far as she could. She could not take it anymore, the line between reason

Interestingly, when replying to his interlocutor who states that his poem written in Black English is good but grammatically weird, Mr. Simple comments:

> If I get the sense right, the grammar can take care of itself. There are plenty of Jim Crowers[18] who speak grammar, but do evil. I have not had enough schooling to put words together right – but I know some White folks who have went to school forty years and do not do right. I figure it is better to do right than to write right, is it not?[19] (Hughes 2002, 136).

This short story on language and grammar represents a starting point as well as a poignant stimulus to approach Black English by taking into account the persistent racial tensions that undergird the relationship between Standard American English (SAE) and African American English (AAE) in the US.

Wolfram's (1974) paper on the controversial nature of Black English and its relation to White America's linguistic disapproval begins with an observation that Black–White speech differences are still interpreted by some through the White supremacist ideological lens of Black inferiority.

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and madness growing thinner due to the horrible restrictiveness of Jim Crow laws. Hence, she bravely decided to withdraw her participation in that system of degradation. In fact, by giving up, Parks felt she was being asked to consent to her own humiliation and reported that if she stood up, it meant that she approved the way she was being treated, and she did not approve. Moreover, the fact that she was being asked to stand for a man carried another cost, as Parks herself recounted. Precisely, it meant to mark herself not as a lady, since etiquette dictated that a man would never take a seat from a woman.

After the bus driver insisted that she gave up the seat to the White man anyway, she replied that she got on first and paid the same fare, and that she did not think it was right for her to have to stand up so that someone else who got on later could sit down. That same day (December 1) she was arrested. A collective uprising followed her arrest, leading to a mass movement in Montgomery. The day of her arrest has become "Rosa Parks Day." On February 27, 2013, President Barack Obama together with Democratic and Republican congressional leaders gathered to pay tribute to the legacy of Rosa Parks.

All info provided in the previous description are taken from Chapter 3 "I had Been Pushed as Far As I Could Stand to be Pushed – Rosa Parks's Bus Stand" in *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (2014) by Jeanne Theoharis.

[18] Jim Crow is a term referring to those laws and practices - enacted after the Reconstruction period and after the abolition of slavery - that mandated racial segregation in all public facilities, thus systematically segregating Blacks under the 1890 de jure mandated "separate but equal" status for African Americans Jim Crow laws. De Jure segregation were officially and formally ended by the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. See also *Ghosts of Jim Crow: Ending Racism in Post-Racial America* (2013) by Higginbotham.

[19] "The character of My Simple Minded Friend is really very simple. It is just myself talking to me. Or else me talking to myself. That has been going for a number of years and, in my writing, has taken one form or another from poetry to prose, song lyrics to radio, news- paper columns to books." In "Simple and Me" by Langston Hughes in *Phylon* (1940-1956), Vol. 6, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1945), pp. 349-353.

In line with these premises, this chapter is meant to provide an overview on Black English and its features in order to call for the eradication of the still persisting ideology of linguistic supremacy,[20] i.e., the uncorroborated beliefs that certain linguistic norms are inherently superior to the linguistic norms of other communities. Specifically, the chapter's aim is to challenge the practice of mapping Standard American English onto the language of school, economic mobility, and success, against the use of African American English, erroneously stigmatized as "bastardized Standard English" (Anderson 1994, 7).

In its place, I argue for the structural and social equality of languages and for the appreciation and respect towards AAE. Far from being an inferior language, it has been in fact recognized as a rule-governed variety in its own right which is having a very special influence on global language, especially because of its expansion via Hip Hop music.

Notably, when linguist Geneva Smitherman was asked what she thought to be the most significant event in the history of the development of Black English and why, she mentioned African American language use in Hip Hop music which, thanks to its global dispersion, has made features and patterns of AAE known, used and sang all over the world, in places far removed from the home of US slave descendants. (Scott 2008, 27).[21]

Namely, rap - the style of delivering lyrics in Hip Hop music - has been dominated by Black performers ever since it was introduced as a new music genre in the 1970s (Keeley 2001, 9; Trudgill 2000, 52). Hence, the centrality of African American culture within Hip Hop is undisputed, as it is the connection between AAE and the speech style associated with Hip Hop (Alim 2004, Rose 1994). As a matter of fact, the language Black rappers adopt is AAE or Black English, the talk of Black America.

It follows that the relationship between Hip Hop Language and Black English is a familiar one, since Hip Hop culture's creators are members of the broader Black American community, and the language that they use most often when communicating with each other is Black English (Alim 2009, 74).

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[20] For an insightful discussion of language policies favoring English see the debate raised by Macedo et al. in *The Hegemony of English* (2003) where the authors discuss the way dominating language policies are imposed and promoted by neoliberal ideologies not only in the US, but also in their ramifications worldwide and the way these policies lead to linguistic and cultural discrimination.

[21] From Scott, Cobb, Straker, and Katz (eds), *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices* (2008) in the chapter "An Insider's view of African American Language Policies and Pedagogies" (24-27).

African American English is spoken by 80 per cent of the African American community (Morgan 1977, 76), and it is systematic and rule-governed like all natural speech varieties. Labov (1982) defined it as a variety of English with a distinct set of phonological and syntactic rules that show a highly-developed system quite different from other dialects of English (192).

In the words of Smitherman, AAE is a) an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America's linguistic and cultural African heritage and its condition of servitude and oppression in America, and b) a Euro-American speech with an Afro American meaning, nuance, tone and gesture (1977, 2). Smitherman further attests that Black language has allowed Blacks to create a culture of survival in a hostile environment,[22] simultaneously being a by-product that has served to enrich the language of all Americans.[23]

False linguistic myths concerning race and language raised especially by much of the literature of the 18th and 19th century (Campbell 1851), motivated by racism and linguistic ignorance, have contributed to the general widespread belief of the inferiority of Black English and its being inextricably bound to race. Campbell, for example, thus dismissed speakers of Black English: "the typical wooly-haired races have never invented a reasoned theological system, discovered an alphabet, framed a grammatical language, nor made the least step in science or art" (1851, 172). This statement perfectly embodies the biased attitude against Black people's cultural, political, and social reality.

Significant linguistic studies in the XX century have proven theories concerning the inferiority of Black English wrong by demonstrating that it is subject to its own system of rules and conventions, and that it is no less correct than any other variety of English (Rickford 1999, XII). Beginning in the mid-1960s, considerable attention was devoted to the description of AAE's linguistic features by many linguists such as William Labov[24] et al. (1968), Joey L. Dillard (1968), Guy Bailey (1969), Ralph

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[22] According to the divergent hypothesis the unique features of AAE are a reflection of social and racial segregation. As Labov states, divergence is due to "residential segregation, combined with increasing poverty" (Labov 2010, 15).
The divergence hypothesis was first introduced by Labov and Harris (1986) who felt that Black and White vernaculars in Philadelphia had both diverged from each other because of the increased segregation which White and Black middle-class suburban flight had produced in that and other cities (Rickford, 1999, XVIII).
[23] As a matter of fact, many African American lexical items have now entered mainstream standard English (SAE), especially via Black music (see the section devoted to the Lexis in Chapter 3).
[24] White linguist William Labov skillfully dispelled the racist myth that African American Language is illogical or ungrammatical. In his *Logic of Non-Standard English* (1970), a classic study that serves as a corrective to false impressions about Black English, he proved that Black speech is rule-governed and systematic, not a collection of arbitrary errors. Labov's work (e.g. 1968, 1972), along with that of other linguists working in the 1960s - such as Fasold (e.g. 1972) and Wolfram (1969) - introduced the study of Black language into academia as a critical and legitimate line of scientific and intellectual inquiry. Their pioneering research paved the way for a generation of African American scholars who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and who produced advanced and detailed studies on the complexity of

W. Fasold and Walt Wolfram (1970), John Baugh (1983), Geneva Smitherman (1986, 1977, 2006), Lisa J. Green (1993), John R. Rickford (1999) and Salikoko S. Mufwene (1998). They presented their research in a political climate that included both reactions to the charge that African American language was deviant and deficient as well as the necessity to express African-American pride and identity, in an attempt to dismantle the false beliefs on AAE as a form of incorrect Standard English uttered by speakers of lesser intelligence (Morgan 1997, 75).

With this respect, it is highly significant to mention the legal case filed in 1977 on behalf of the children of the Martin Luther King Junior Elementary school against the Ann Arbor School District Board,[25] charging school officials of placing African American children in learning-disabled and speech pathology classes, and holding them at low grade levels because of language, culture, and class difference (Morgan 1997, 76). This case shows how even allegedly well-intentioned teachers are enacting Whiteness in their pedagogical praxis and "subscribing to a hidden ideology of linguistic supremacy[26] within a system of daily cultural combat" (Alim 2006, 59).[27]

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AAE. See for example Baugh (1983), Major (1970), Rickford (1973), Spears (1982), Williams (1975). Among the most recent works on AAE are Asante (1990), Baugh (1990, 2000, 2003), Rickford (1999), Rickford and Rickford (2000), Green, Lisa J. (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004).

[25] The formal name of this Federal court case is *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children, et al. Vs Ann Arbor School District Board* (Scott 2008, 24)

[26] Bell hooks has written extensively on the notion of White supremacy and has raised this debate for more than thirty years now, from *Talking Back* (1986), to *Reel to Reel* (1996), *Outlaw Culture* (2006) and, more recently, in *Writing Beyond Race* (2012).

As hooks explains, the problem lies in that White supremacist thinking and practice has been and still is the political foundation undergirding all systems of domination and it is difficult to undermine, because it is still present at all levels within society: "when describing the political system that we live within here in the United States, more often than not, I use the complicated phrase imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (2012, 4).

Hooks, in fact, states that White supremacist thinking continues to be the invisible and visible glue that tends to function unconsciously, and that this is the primary reason it is difficult to challenge and change (2012, 3). Hooks' aim is to unveil mechanisms that work together to uphold and maintain cultures of domination since, as she notices, there is still resistance in recognizing that such forces are present and at work: "I have found that most citizens of the United States resist the notion of White supremacist thought and action. And yet, as a nation we have always had a public discourse about race and racism" (2012, 4). As hooks indicates, emblem of such a public discourse was the movement for Black Power that, alongside its militant anti-racist struggle, called the attention to internalized racism. Malcolm X was the Black power advocate who most called attention to it. However, this awareness did not become the basis for a national restructuring of anti-racist political struggle. Instead, the issues that have been raised by a focus on internalized racism have been regarded as more personal and psychological, not truly political. His "early focus on rage as a catalyst for protest was deemed more important" (hooks 2012, 18-19). In fact, during much of the militant Black power movement, anger and rage[26] were the emotions anti-racist advocates fixed as the pivotal element upon which the liberation struggle had to be constructed. Even though noticing how Malcolm's warning against internalized racism remained pretty much unheard, bell hooks nevertheless insists upon the importance of thinking about White supremacy as the foundation of race and racism as a crucial step to see beyond skin color, to realize all the myriad ways our daily actions can be imbued by White supremacist thinking no matter our race (hooks 2012, 13). Hooks warns against the risk of taking certain literary works as cultural products that discuss and debate White supremacy when, instead, they just aim at reinforcing ideologies of White supremacist power.

[27] Negative stigma on Black English was present then, in 1977, as well as today. As a matter of fact, in 2006, many years after the *King V. Ann Arbor case*, Alim interviewed a teacher from Haven High in Sunnyside, who reported that one of her main goals was to attempt to eradicate the language patterns of her Black students throughout that academic year. The teacher not only worked to eradicate the language patterns of her Black students, but also described Black students

Further socio-political issues relevant to African American English arose in the 1980s with the wake of a real agenda for discrimination: The English Only Movement.[28] The English-Only proponents' aim was to impose Standard English as the only viable vehicle of communication in the American society's institutional and civic life (Macedo and Gounari 36). It was a clear attempt to impose cultural domination through linguistic domination. Erasing linguistic diversity clearly revealed to be an undertaking to delete America's multicultural richness.

As Crawford underlines in *At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (2000), no one had previously warned that "the nation's dominant language was endangered by the encroachment of other tongues, creeping bilingualism, or that it needed legal protection in the United States" (4); then, suddenly, there were legislative campaigns to give SAE official status and to restrict the public use of other varieties. Such Official English measures have been adopted by twenty-three states and in 1996, for the first time, a bill designating English as the federal government's sole language of official business was approved by the House of Representatives (Crawford 4). This restrictionist legislation, born of racial fear and loathing, grew directly out of the immigration-restriction movement which, in turn, received support from eugenicists, Ku Klux Klan sympathizers, and other defenders of White supremacy (Crawford, 1992).

The English-Only movement[29] embittered the conflict between the alleged socially prestigious Standard English norm and other socially stigmatized varieties, such as AAE.[30] In Macedo and

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and their ways of speaking as "unspoken language," "abrasive" and not "respectful." (Alim 2006, 59). This attribution of negative characteristics due to cultural differences has been noted frequently in studies of intercultural communication (Gumperz 1982a, 1982b).

[28] For an insightful discussion on the English-Only Movement policies see "The 'English Only' Movement in the USA: Its Attitudes, Politics and Discursive Practices… and the Sundry Questions It Raises" (62-89) by Donna R. Miller in *American English(s)* edited by Cagliero and Belladelli, as well as Bordin Elisa's "Introduction" on Iperstoria.it: http://www.iperstoria.it/joomla/component/content/article/17-numero-i/51-introduzione and De Rossi Valentina's article "The English-Only Movement in the United States" at http://www.iperstoria.it/vecchiosito/httpdocs//?p=547
Further sources are Sagarin's "Polylingualism in the United States of America: A multitude of Tongues amid a Monolingual Majority" (1985), Beer and Jacobs (eds.), *Language Policy and National Unity* (1985), Wiley's "Language Planning, Language Policy, and the English-Only Movement" (2004), Finnegan and Rickford, *Language in the USA* (2004) and Filmer "African-American Vernacular English: ethics, ideology and pedagogy in the conflict between identity and power" (2003).

[29] For a fuller discussion of the English Only Movement see also Terrence G. Wiley's essay "Language Planning, Language Policy, and the English-Only Movement" (2004).

[30] A similarly discriminatory agenda emerged in 2010 when the Arizona school district banned books by Chicano, Native American authors by initiating the passage of a law targeting a controversial Mexican-American Studies program in Tucson public schools that they said stimulated resentment against Whites. Independent researchers, by contrast, credited the programs with improving student achievement and fostering critical thinking skills. The law prohibited courses that taught the overthrow of the government or bred ethnic resentment, among other things. Then-state Sen. John Huppenthal, a Republican, led the drive in the legislature to pass the law. Upon taking office as the state's Superintendent of Public Instruction the following year, he promptly found Tucson in violation of the law and succeeded in pushing the city's school board to shut the program down. For a fuller discussion see "Intervista a Carlos Muñoz sul provvedimento di Tucson" http://www.iperstoria.it/joomla/component/content/article/17-numero-i/12-intervista-carlos-munoz. Last Visited February 6, 2017.

Gounari's words, the rise of the English-Only Movement legitimized the standard as the 'norm' that benefited the dominant order and served as yardstick against which all other linguistic varieties were measured (2003, 34-36). This evaluation process inevitably led to forms of devaluation, which were predominantly connected to factors of culture, ethnicity, class, gender and race: "Through this process the dominant ideology works to devaluate any form of 'different' or 'popular' language, or language of a 'different color.' The same ideology labels African American English as nonstandard and creates the perception that it is an incomprehensible dialect" (Macedo and Gounari 35). As David Crystal points out, the effects of the English-Only Movement continue to infiltrate U.S. educational policies:

> This disgraceful view cannot be altogether ignored even today because it has affected the history of the study of Black American English. The influence of this earlier racist view lingered on in the following way: since differences in Black speech had formerly been regarded as a sign of inferiority, it remained difficult to acknowledge that Black speech was actually different without this view appearing to be racist. Eventually, however, it came to be recognized that this attitude was the ethnic group counterpart of the view, similarly recognized as false, that differences between social dialects implied the linguistic superiority of one variety over another. If Blacks and Whites spoke differently, this simply meant that there were different (linguistically equally valid) ethnic-group language varieties. (Trudgill 2000, 52) [31]

Every attempt to impose English on people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as in the case of the English-Only Movement, is no new practice. It has been implemented and tested for centuries through colonization in order to achieve political domination: "Institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of a dominant language recognize this process as a means for establishing relations of linguistic domination and colonization" (Macedo and Gounari 36).

As a matter of fact, ideologies of linguistic supremacy stem from the colonial linguistic inheritance. In *Linguistic Imperialism*, Robert Phillipson states that the hegemony of the dominant colonial languages was buttressed by an actively propagated discourse of linguistic supremacy, an attitude praising the virtues of English and condemning the failings of other languages (115).

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[31] See also Crystal's *The Fight for English: how Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left* (2007).

This process of 'cultural colonization' was set in motion by the colonizers in order to impose a set of values and beliefs that could ultimately legitimize their presence in those lands they illegitimately appropriated. Moreover, as bell hooks notes, living as they did in close proximity with enslaved Black folks and "relying on them to serve obediently and subserviently, White dominators needed a psychological mode of colonization that would keep every-one in check, that would teach everyone their place in their race-based hierarchy that is the aim of White supremacist thinking and practice" (2012, 4-5).

As regards British colonization, exercising power implied the cultural enforcement of the English language as the symbol of English supremacy: "British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand, and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education" (Viswanathan 2).

Evidence of how culture and politics were strictly related, and of the belief in the inferiority of colonized people, can be inferred from Victorian essayist Thomas Macaulay's speech entitled "Minute on Indian Education" where he asserts his propagandistic ideas on the supremacy of English culture, language, and literature: "How then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue" (428).

This emphatic start, characterized by the use of the verb "have to," makes manifest the intent of the speaker, who sees education as a moral duty in order to face the alleged cultural and linguistic 'inferiority' of the colonized.

Another hot-button issue that sounded the clarion call about the position of Black English in society and schools emerged in 1996 when the Oakland California Unified School District Board issued its "Resolution on Ebonics"[32] on December, 18. The Oakland Ebonics Resolution called for the "recognition of Ebonics as a legitimate, rule-governed language system spoken by the majority of Oakland's Black students, and for Oakland teachers to use the students' home language as a bridge to teach them standard English" (Lanehart 559).

A hotly contested debate still exists as to whether Black English – or Ebonics, according to the Resolution -  should be taught alongside Standard English in schools containing a large proportion

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[32]Ebonics was a term coined by Williams in 1973 during a discussion within the conference on "Cognitive and Language Development of the Black Child," held in St. Louis, Missouri (Scott et al. 2008, 26). As Williams explains in *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* (1975), the label "Ebonics" could allow to avoid derogatory terms of the past. Moreover, according to Williams, the term perfectly fits Black talk's speech sound and language as the word Ebonics itself consists of 'ebony,' which means 'Black,' and 'phonics,' which means 'sound' (Scott et al. 26).

of African American students (Baugh 1998).[33] The Resolution met - and still meets - with considerable criticism both among Blacks and Whites, and proves problematic and controversial on several crucial points. The original Resolution as well as its later revised version (issued in January 15, 1997) was reprinted and discussed by John Baugh in *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice* (2000).[34] Just to give an example, Baugh observes that the original 1996 Oakland Resolution had declared Ebonics to be an African Language Systems other than English, i.e., "not a dialect of English" (Baugh 2000, 44), whereas the 1997 revised version reports African Language Systems as "not merely dialects of English" (Baugh 2000, 44). According to Baugh, this change is highly significant since the latter definition rightly includes Ebonics within the English speech community, whereas the original version excluded Ebonics from English language, thus providing a wrong perspective and a biased vision of the linguistic actual truth of Black English - which is indeed a variety of English (Baugh 2000, 47), and not a separate language.

The controversial nature of the resolution led to varying reactions within the Black community: "some African Americans were absolutely thrilled by the media spotlight and the opportunity to flaunt linguistic and educational conventions, but other Black people were equally outspoken regarding their anger, shame, and sense of betrayal" (Baugh 2000, 43). Just to mention an example, even those middle-class Blacks who were skillfull speakers and writers of Black English themselves, such as poet Maya Angelou and Reverend Jesse Jackson,[35] were against the resolution (Lanehart 558).

As a matter of fact, the wake of the controversy that followed the Oakland Resolution, with the subsequent public outrage and racist reactions[36] sweeping the country, "left little doubt as to the low status still accorded to the language of African Americans in the US, both among educated, liberal minded journalists and public figures, as well as the general public" (Cutler 2014, 4). As Macedo and Gounari observe, the intolerance for Ebonics and Black English that ensued after the Oackland Resolution, resulting in the mainstream mass media and public opinion's rejection of this

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[33] Publications such as Smitherman (1981) and Brooks (1985) focus on the educational system's continuing failure to incorporate knowledge of AAE into curriculum in ways that benefit the education of African American children. As Morgan notes, the volumes written on the language and education of African Americans reflect the tremendous effort expanded over the past twenty years in proving that society in general, and the educational system in particular, should respect AAE and its speakers (1997, 75).

[34] Among other works addressing this issues see also Lakoff's "Ebonics-It's Cronic" in *The Language War* (2000), Baugh "Ebonics and its controversy" (2004) and Perry and Delpit *The Real Ebonics Debate. Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children* (1998).

[35] In *Writing Beyond Race* (2012) hooks observes: "One of the sad ironies of racism in the United States is that so many Black people and people of color, unwittingly collude in the perpetuation of White supremacy while simultaneously denouncing racism and actively speaking out against justice" (5).

[36] Baugh devotes a whole chapter to such racist reception. See "Racist Reactions and Ebonics Satire" in *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice* (2000).

form of linguistic and cultural "otherness,"  manifested a form of inherent racism in the constant devaluation of Ebonics: "In this context it is not an exaggeration to speak about linguistic hegemony to the extent that the development of normative discourse through Standard English naturalizes, for instance, ideologies and practices connected to White supremacy, racism and oppression" (35).

In light of these considerations, attacks over attempts to achieve bilingual education (with reference to the Oakland Resolution) and undertakings such the English-Only Movement have very little to do with language *per se*, the real issue being the economic, social and political control by a dominant minority of a largely subordinate majority. The problem with Black Language itself thus remains closely related to still-existing forms of racism towards Black people, despite scholars having widely demonstrated that there is no biological connection between the way someone speaks and the color of his skin (Wolfram-Schilling-Estes 1998). [37]

In fact, since language is erroneously identified with race, it is obvious why oppressed and marginalized ethnic or cultural groups are perceived as "speaking a non-standard or 'second-class' language, a 'dialect' that does not deserve to be heard or taught and which is always associated with backwardness and savageness (Madcedo and Gounari 35-36). Linguistic prejudice thus becomes a proxy for the socio-structural system of White racism[38] and White supremacist thinking in the US.

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[37] Linguists have widely demonstrated that Black English is not determined by the genetic asset of the speaker, nor by their race, but rather by a multitude of socio-historical factors. As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes affirm, "we consider Anglo American and African American to be labels for culturally constructed ethnicities rather than genetically determined racial groups" (1998, 170).
Hence, linguistic issues are cultural issues and not biological ones. In this regard, the name African American English can be misleading, since not all African Americans speak it, and not all people who speak it are African American. As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes have demonstrated, with accents and dialects there's no biological connection between the way someone speaks and the color of their skin. What matters more is who someone grew up with, their peers, and what groups they want to be identified with. During a personal skype conversation with African American Professor Hiram Smith (on May 2016) he reported that he knows personally a Puerto Rican home boy and a Mexican home boy who were both raised by Black people and around Black people, and for this reason they are native speakers of Black English in the same way a Black boy or girl would be.

[38] Racism is generally defined as actions, practices, or beliefs that consider the human species to be divided into races with shared traits, abilities, or qualities, such as personality, intellect, morality, or other cultural behavioral characteristics, and especially the belief that races can be ranked as inherently superior or inferior to others, or that members of different races should be treated differently. The exact definition of racism is controversial both because there is little scholarly agreement about the meaning of the concept of race and because there is also little agreement about what does and does not constitute discrimination. Critics argue that the term is applied differentially, with a focus on such prejudices by Whites, and defining mere observations of racial differences as racism. Cf. the article by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Ashley Doane Jr. (eds) ''New Racism, ColorBlind Racism, and the Future of Whiteness in America,'' published in *Whiteout: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (2003).
For an investigation of the concept of 'race', see chapter three of *Lines of Descent, W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* by Kwame Anthony Appiah who presents Du Bois's attempt to overcome the problem of the color line by redefining the meaning of race. Could Black people be considered as a race? What did Du Bois have in common with people in Africa? Could a biological account provide an explanation for the unity of Black people? Appiah gives a vast overview of the scholars that most influenced Du Bois's quest for the race concept and he highlights how, after studying

As Alim (2006, 66) notes, linguistic differences are currently being used in a number of ways to exclude Blacks from full participation in society since overt forms of racism begin to be more publicly censured in some areas of the US. Linguistic profiling is such an example: an extensive analysis on linguistic profiling in housing discrimination based on "Black-sounding" voices was conducted by Baugh in *Black Linguistics: Language, Politics and Society in Africa and the Americas* (2003). Bertrand and Mullainathan have done research on differential access to employment based on "Black-sounding" names in "Are Emily and Brendan more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination" (2004). Just to mention another example, during the O. J. Simpson trial the issue of racial identification based on speech was a "major concern—so much so that Simpson's attorneys implied that anyone willing to draw racial inference based exclusively on hearing someone's voice would be racist" (Baugh 2000, 93).

Although the present study does not take into consideration such a debate, the very existence of these racist attitudes shows how linguistic prejudice and linguistic racially-motivated prescriptivism[39] are far from being eradicated.[40]

Despite claims of a colorblind society[41] - optimistically expressed even in Michael Jackson's song "It don't matter if you're Black or White"[42] - today race is still paramount in the consciousness,

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Dilthey, Lotze, Boas, and Ratzel, he discovered and embraced the theory of the biology of heritable characteristics elaborated by Sir Julian Huxley in *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (1942). According to this synthesis between Mendelian genetics and Darwinian evolutionary theory, there is no necessary connection between bodily phenotype and mental capacity. The consequent conclusion is that there is no longer reason to take racial groupings seriously. As a matter of fact, biologically speaking it might be said that sometimes the properties that the members of a supposed "race" share are only the superficial phenotypic features that we use in social life to assign people to racial categories. But this is not the case when interbreeding occurs; it may happen, in fact, that some members of a racial group share physical characteristics with members of other racial groups. This is further evidence that there are no races in the sense of separate and pure breeds of humans, differing in capacities. Consequently, a scientific proof of the existence of different 'races' is denied. It was thanks to Franz Boas' studies in the early twentieth century that cultural anthropology reimagined racial difference as a social construct, not a biological fact: "If human differences thought to be natural and biological turned out to be cultural, Boas and his supporters (including Du Bois) argued that racial inequality could be overcome" (Kajikawa 7).

Because post–Civil Rights racial norms disallow the open expression of racial views, Whites have developed a concealed way of voicing them. Therefore, racism and White supremacy are systemic and ingrained. For a discussion of institutionalized racism, see Warner, Kristen J's *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting* (2015) and O'Brien Eileen's *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action* (2001). Notably, Spike Lee's words poignantly summarized this ongoing debate during an interview with Jason Solomons for The Guardian by affirming: "Anyone who thinks we move in a post-racial society is someone who's been smoking crack" in http://www.theguardian.com/film/video/2009/oct/05/spike-lee-do-the-right-thing.

[39] Linguistic prescription is the practice of prescribing rules that must govern language use and which do not reflect the way that people speak in practice. Such prescribing rules arbitrarily privilege certain varieties of speech over others. Linguistic prescription systematically and invariably privileges the language of the already powerful. See. *Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexity* (2006) by Karen Risager, p.76.

[40] The Deficit theorists view the language of the descendants of enslaved Africans in America as a by-product of deficient learning. These beliefs often form the basis of negative educators' attitudes toward African American language. See. Duranti's *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader* (1997), p.82-83.

thoughts, and behaviors of both Blacks and Whites. In Smitherman's words: "Everybody jes be playin like race and skin color don't count. But incident after incident keep poppin up to let us know that, as Cornel West[43] says 'race matters'" (Scott, Straker, and Katz, 26).

Another such "incident" emerged in the recent treatment of Rachel Jeantel's testimony. Rachel Jantel, the woman who was on the phone with Trayvon Martin before Martin's death, is the prosecution's 'star-witness' in the George Zimmerman murder trial. On February 26, 2012, in fact, George Zimmerman fatally shot 17-year-old African American high school student Trayvon Martin.[44] Nationwide protests arose against White George Zimmerman's acquittal of all charges in the death of Trayvon.[45]

During Jeantel's testimony, criticism and blame emerged as soon as she began to speak: she was called uneducated and difficult to understand, and lawyer Don West, defense attorney in the George Zimmerman murder trial, asked her whether she was actually a native English speaker and

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[41] Warner – in *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting* (2001) - defines colorblindness as a utopian social construct that aims to create a model of fairness by which all individuals can be judged fairly and without bias or regard to skin color. Thus, colorblindness would stand as the ideal morality for an ideal society.

In *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action* (2001), Eileen O'Brien thoroughly discusses the notion of colorblindness, stating that "if this were a perfect world, you could reach the utopia where color did not matter in jobs or whatever, but history is there… you have to respect the history that came before, and understand it…I think for somebody who is colorblind in the negative sense of the word, I want to work from the negative colorblind to the positive colorblind… There should be a shift in the definition" (59).

However, Bonilla Silva typifies how dangerous the waters of colorblindness can be and he regards the ideology of colorblindness as the current dominant racial ideology. In his book *Racism without Racists* (2014) he shows how it is possible for Whites to claim they are colorblind and still be racist and talk about race in crude ways and he contends that their statements are all emblematic of a racial ideology that in his book he labels ''colorblind racism.'' In his words: "At the heart of color blindness lies a myth: the idea that race has all but disappeared as a factor shaping the life chances of all Americans. This myth is the central column supporting the house of color blindness. Remove this column and the house will collapse" (208). Along these lines, as previously mentioned, bell hooks (2012) states that by negating the presence of race, we perpetuate racist views.

[42] Michael Jackson. "Black or White." http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/michaeljackson/BlackorWhite.html

[43] In *Race Matters* (1953) Cornel West discusses the persistence of White supremacist thinking underlining how Malcolm X was one of the first who insisted that Black folks work on 'decolonizing the minds,' consciously taking steps to challenge White supremacy and privilege. Sadly, as West points out, Malcolm X's "focus on decolonizing the mind did not have as much impact as his focus on using anger and rage to denounce White privilege" (hooks 2012, 19).

Joe Wood, in *Malcolm X: in Our Own Image* explains how the 'true Black spirit' was associated with notions such as 'militant,' 'proud,' and, above all, 'angry' and he goes on stating that Malcolm's icon and his aura gravitating around the concept of 'anger' was so forceful that it attracted even angry non-African Americans. Eventually, Wood states that the commodification of the figure of Malcolm X was purportedly made in order to deflect attention away from his call for global confrontation of White supremacy and his demand that Black folks actively change the 'consciousness' and free themselves from internalized White supremacy. In fact, even though Malcolm worked to call attention to Black folks' passive acceptance of White supremacy, his fans tend to focus more on his angry icon image and not on his consistent and insightful address towards the development of critical thinking.

[44] The Trayvon Martin case thrusts the persistence of racism in America uncomfortably into the spotlight.

[45] George Zimmerman walked away a free man due to Florida's controversial Stand-Your-Ground law. See Arian C. F. and Waddel L., "Jury acquits Zimmerman of all Charges," *The Wall Street Journal*, 14th July 2013 at https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324879504578603562762064502. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

whether she had troubles understanding English - despite Jeantel had been answering his questions in fluent English.[46]

During the following days, the internet was inflamed with comments about her 'poor English,' some of them intentionally mean-spirited and others prescribing well-intentioned solutions to the perceived problem of widespread ungrammatical English - sadly enough, the same problem Mr. Simple was confronted with back in the 1940s.

What escaped the understanding of those who made such claims is that ungrammaticality was not a problem that Jeantel had. As Marina Bolotnikova pointed out in the article "Rachel Jeantel's Language is English – It's just not Your English"[47] there is nothing incorrect about the way Jeantel speaks, as any authority on language could readily point out. As linguist John McWhorter explained, Jeantel's "English is perfect. It's just that it's Black English."[48]

Thus, Jeantel case is alarming: she was being subjected to an intense form of linguistic discrimination which may have affected her testimony and the degree to which she was seen as a credible witness. Some have rightly denounced the racism implicit in Jeantel's questioning by West, who ignored that Jeantel is indeed a native speaker of English, hers being simply another variety of English, and as such different from what is seen and conceived as mainstream or standard.

As previously attested, African American English, a variety of Standard English, does not have anything inherently bad or wrong, as well as standardized varieties don't have anything inherently good or right: they are simply different varieties. The reason why a dialect or a variety becomes standardized or stigmatized usually has to do with social and historical forces, i.e. to the extent that the dialect of those in power becomes the "standard" way of speaking.

Alim points to the fact that in any society it is precisely the language and the communicative norms of those in power which tend to be labeled as "standard," "official," "normal," "appropriate," "respectful," and so on (2006, 57).

In light of these considerations, Jeantel's English is as grammatical as the Standard American variety spoken by Zimmerman's attorney, but unlike the defense attorney, Jeantel's variety had the disadvantage of not having been sanctioned by America's dominant social stratum.

Therefore, there is nothing standard about "Standard English." Standard simply means that this is the language variety that those in authority have constructed as the variety needed to gain access

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[46] http://www.msnbc.com/politicsnation/rachel-jeantel-don-west-disrespected-me

[47] https://mic.com/articles/52697/rachel-jeantel-s-language-is-english-it-s-just-not-your-english#.YaLWZfsE7

[48] In the same article Bolotnikova underlines that what McWhorter calls "Black English" is a variety spoken by millions of Americans, and decades of linguistics research, much of it compiled by McWhorter himself, attests that it is a robust dialect like any other, with an internally consistent grammar and vocabulary.

to resources. What is considered as "standard" in the US is nothing but the imposition of White linguistic norms and ways of speaking, with the purpose of granting access to resources to Whites and denying those same resources to as many 'others' as possible.

Ultimately, what comes out is that be it in the courtroom or in the classroom, linguistic prejudice can have real consequences.

Such an unjust linguistic stigma attached to AAE still leads millions of African Americans, especially professional African Americans, to avoid speaking AAE in the workplace or in social settings.[49] In order to ensure that their thoughts are clearly conveyed and interpreted, they adopt the language common to all Americans, i.e., Standard American English.

Further, the very practice of Black community members adopting SAE often ignites a discussion about the critical divide between sticking to the Black community's roots (thus maintaining and defending the use of AAE) and "acting White,"[50] i.e., adopting White-identified language (SAE) in order to move up the social ladder and gain better job chances (Van Herk 80). Socially mobile members of these communities employ a range of strategies to negotiate this divide, which nervertheless emphasizes the twoness of African American consciousness in the United States first exposed by Du Bois.[51]

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[49] As Smitherman notes in *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices* (2008): "This is a reflection of the political climate that can be described as a racialized one, so it was in 1977, in 1996, and today in 2007" (24).

[50] The psychological processes behind "acting White" can be related to what Paulo Freire described as cultural invasion: "For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority… The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, to talk like them" (Macedo and Gounari, 34).

In *Acting White? Rethinking Race in Post-Racial America* (2013) Devon Carbado thus describes the problematic aspects of acting White: "Being an African American in a predominantly White institution is like being an actor on stage. There are the roles one has to perform, storylines one is expected to follow, and dramas and subplots one should avoid at all cost. Being an African American in a predominantly White institution is like playing a small but visible part in a racially specific script. The main characters are White. There are one or two Blacks in supporting roles. Survival is always in question. The central conflict is to demonstrate that one is Black enough for the perspective of the supporting cast and White enough from the perspective of the main characters. The "double bind" racial performance is hard and risky. Failure is always just around the corner. [...] Yet, Blacks working in White institutions act out versions of this "double bind" racial performance every day" (1).

[51] Du Bois' concept of double consciousness is expressed in *Souls of Black Folks* (1903), where Du Bois poignantly states: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder [...] He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (7-8).

Du Bois's theory of double consciousness has served as one of the most significant conceptualizations of racial identity in the twentieth century.

In fact, middle-class African Americans might use standard grammar, but retain AAE pronunciations or discourse strategies (Spears 1998). However, it is likely that the use of SAE by Black community members might still be seen as "selling out or stuck up, perhaps an attempt by the speaker to deny community membership" (Urciuoli 1996; Fought 2003).


In this regard, it must be taken into consideration that - despite White America's overt linguistic disapproval - the use of AAE intersects with a discussion about in-group covert prestige, i.e. within the Black community it is precisely AAE that enjoys a highly-respected position as the "prestigious variety."

On this subject, in "New York Department Store Study" (1966) Labov discusses overt and covert prestige, both of which relate to the process of changing speech habits to gain prestige in order to achieve an often apparent-only higher reputation, standing and success. Of course, overt and covert prestige mechanisms - even though being fueled by the same longing to achieve social prestige - work in opposite directions: overt prestige is to put on an accent that is generally widely recognized as being used by the 'culturally dominant group'. Covert prestige, instead, means to put on an accent to show membership to an 'exclusive community' in the area, rather than to fit with the dominant culture group.

Many people shy away from AAE as it does not have overt prestige at all within a broader context. Yet, it is endowed with covert prestige within the Black community. Precisely, in every society there is a prestigious variety of speech usually enjoyed by the wealthy or the middle class, the educated group, the media, the government, and the legal class. This prestigious variety, which is also used in documents and textbooks,[52] is "overt." African American English is an epitomized example of a variety that does not have overt prestige. Everybody would shy away from it and everyone would be told not to talk African American English (at least if one wants to get better opportunities in the job market), except for the fact that inside the Black community AAE can boast the so called "covert" prestige.

To put it in practical terms, if an African American Professor is inside the academic University environment, he is supposed to adhere to Standard English rules and he is not supposed to use AAE, which has no overt prestige within that environment, whereas when he is back home, while

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[52] Macedo and Gounari ponder on the concept of Standard English: "Standard English would literally be 'clear' English, sterilized from any 'familiarity', 'jargon', or 'unacceptable' forms that dialects often use, the kind of English used in the 'Great Books'" (33).

talking to his family and friends, if he uses the Standard English variety, that choice wouldn't work and he would feel uncomfortable.  In the words of the direct testimony of Professor Hiram Smith:

> Standard English variety does not have prestige anymore in that context, surely not in the hood. So, I better talk normal, talk right, talk like everybody else in the hood because that has covert prestige inside of the community of speakers.  People would get ridiculed for sure if they speak SAE, and that's ironic because when they go to school they are ridiculed for talking Black, but when you go to the hood you get ridiculed because you are talking White.[53]

It follows that in a wider society White speech or mainstream English (SAE) has overt prestige, but not in the hood. [54]

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[53] Personal conversation with Professor Hiram Smith from the Pennsylvania University.
[54] The "hood" is a spatial construct associated with some of the poorest and most socially marginalized members of African American U.S. society. See. Murray, Forman. The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Hip Hop and Rap. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

## 1.2 The Language of rappers: AAE - Origin and features

On account of the previous section's considerations, rappers are an epitomized example of the celebration of AAE, all the more because it is a variety that has prestige in the hood - i.e. in their in-group speech community - as well as being a marker of their identity: rappers thus purposely mark themselves as AAE speakers (Smitherman 2000, 282).[55] Moreover, the use of this variety in itself conveys an attitude of resistance towards the hegemonic White American society.

Henceforth, rappers' language is proudly grounded on AAE and it draws its poignancy and soul from it (Rickford and Rickford 2000).

In the present section, an account of AAE and its features will be provided in order to lay the foundations for the analysis of the discursive zone of rappers in Chapter 4.

In fact, all rappers object of the present study, both Black and White, have been observed to employ the African American English features presented below.

AAE, the speech used by the majority of African Americans, is different and distinguishable from Standard American English (SAE) in many significant ways, including the way words are pronounced (phonology), the way sentences are formed to carry both meanings and states of being (morpho-syntax), and for owing African lexical retentions as well as African[56] grammatical structures, although much of its vocabulary and grammatical features are borrowed from SAE. As previously stated, according to what linguists have found out, since African American English is systematic and rule governed like all natural speech varieties, many of its characteristic linguistic features can be definitively identified. The next sections will include some of the most relevant features (not all of them).

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[55] See. Spady and Eure (1991), Smitherman (1997) and Yasin (1999) who unanimously state that rapper's language - being rooted in Black English language and communicative practices - has become an emblem and celebration of Black speech as a marker of Black language's specific identity.

[56] The Language behavior of African Americans is different from that of Whites and similar to that of Africans in Africa and the diaspora (Morgan 1997, 80). This attention to African identity and AAE has been addressed by African American linguists such as Taylor (1975) and Smitherman (1977), as well as writers such as Hurston (1942),[56] Baldwin (1979) and Morrison (1981).

## Origin: An Open Debate

Before entering the discussion of AAE features, a brief mention will be provided on the two major theories concerning the origin and historical development of African American English: the Creolist hypothesis and the Anglicist hypothesis.

In his book *The Historical Evolution of Earlier African American English: an Empirical Comparison of Early Sources* Alexander Kautzsch lists a summary of the main issues that the study of AAE is comprised of, i.e origins, sources for historical reconstruction, socio-historical evidence, divergence, comparison to English-based creoles, comparison to White vernaculars, synchronic description, education (2002, 1), all data used by Kautzsch in order to verify the existing explanatory models of the complex origin of AAE.

In essence, the "creolist hypothesis" holds that AAE has originated as a creole[57] that emerged across the African diaspora as a result of the slave trade and that it was characterized by the need to generate a form of communication between the slaves and the colonizers. (Bailey, 1965; Stewart, 1967; Dillard, 1972; Crystal 1995).

The ancestors of the African Americans who use AAE today came from Africa, and they spoke different African languages, mostly from the West of the continent. Hence, in order to be able to talk to their captors and to slaves from other countries and tribes, they combined English expressions with grammar and vocabulary typical of their various African languages, and thus created a pidgin, a reduced, mixed, and simplified language that functioned as a contact language (Trudgill 2000, 53 and 2002, 68; Dillard 1973, 117). The pidgin was later developed into a creole, as it became the native language of a speech community (Dillard 1973, 74).

It is also suggested that AAE derives from an English Creole like the one spoken in Jamaica. Further, contemporary varieties of Pidgin English that are now spoken in the coastal areas of West Africa, and English creoles used by people of African descent in the West Indies have, just like AAE, vocabularies similar to that of English and seem to be partly influenced by African languages. These are all arguments supporting of the creole hypothesis (Trudgill 2000, 53-54).

According to the "Anglicist hypothesis," instead, AAE owes most of its distinctive features to archaic British dialects and European American speech, but has since diverged from them (Labov

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[57] Wolfram and Schilling-Estes succinctly define a creole as: "a special language developed in language contact situations in which the vocabulary from one primary language is imposed on a specially adapted, restricted grammatical structure" (1998, 175).

1998; Poplack 2000). In fact, the English of the British Isles and AAE would have since then developed in different directions, due to segregation and natural language change (Trudgill 2000, 52-53).

Tottie (2002, 227) and Trudgill (2000, 52) agree that AAE would be a dialect of English that the slaves picked up from the White speakers and that derives historically from the British Isles. As a matter of fact, AAE shares quite a few features with Southern White varieties, this being a further clue which supports the Anglicist hypothesis (Tottie 2002, 218).

However, AAE is quite different from other dialects of American English and it has a unique and peculiar grammar, which suggests that it should be considered as a separate variety (Tottie 2002, 221). Hence, the Anglicist position holds that AAE is a result of African immigrants having learnt English as a second language, in particular the regional dialects of the surrounding White speakers.

The data in the form of written records of ex-slaves support the Anglicist hypothesis (Schneider 1989), as this written speech "was not nearly as distinct from postcolonial Anglo American English varieties as would have been predicted under the Creolist hypothesis" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 176).

Further researches - such as those conducted by Poplack and Sankoff (1987) regarding Black expatriate insular varieties of English and of Samana in the Dominican Republic - support the Anglicist hypothesis. According to Poplack and Sankoff what is worth noting is that these kinds of communities are able to retain a relic variety of English despite centuries of relative isolation.

As Kautzsch observes, the main reason for the ongoing disagreement on the interpretation of the diachronic status of AAE is not to be found in the methodology of analyzing the data, but in the nature of the data themselves and in the varying interpretation of their quality.

## Features of African American English[58]

*People speak AAE to varying degrees.*

*Many use some of the features included in the linguistic definition,*

*but never all of them.*

*Arthur K. Spears*


It is assumed here, that AAE is internally diverse and may vary structurally from one speaker, setting, or region to the other[59] (Baugh 1983), although all varieties are perceived as manifestations of basically the same language variety.

Internal diversity is characteristic of all language varieties. For example, not all Southerners – born, raised, and living in the American South – use all the linguistic features associated with Southern English. Every Southerner adopts a different subset[60] of the features, which overlaps with other speakers' subsets. The set-theory union of these idiolects[61] defines Southern English. So it is with African-Americans who either claim or are assumed to speak AAE. The description of any language variety is thus a useful construct, which makes it possible to situate every speaker of the variety within its range of lects (Mufwene 2001, 292).

It might be inferred that there are a range of common traits that define AAE, but the grammatical set of rules and features that are described in the present section should not be taken as universal. For instance, copula absence is widespread in many Black varieties, yet many people who usually omit the copula a lot, use contracted forms, as well. Hence, those who would say *She fine*, would

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[58] The phonological, syntactic, lexicographical and historical account given here merely aim at providing a brief introduction to AAE features. For a full discussion of AAE see Rickford (1999), Green (2002), Smitherman (1977, 2006), Mufwene (2001, 2015), Wolfram and Thomas (2002), Trudgill (2000), Keeley (2001) and Tottie (2002).

[59] The great degree of linguistic diversity within Black communities is due to different geographic position, social class, level of education, rural versus urban, the south versus the north. Black people do not speak the same, if we go from Texas to Oklahoma we'll find out really quickly, even driving thirty minutes, that folks talk totally different.

It is precisely such linguistic variation that sociolinguistics took as object of study in the 1960s, "celebrating the heterogeneity of language based not only on linguistic constraints but also on variation occasioned by region, ethnicity, age, gender, and social status of its speakers (Lucas, Bayley and Valli XI).

As Scott F. Kiesling attests in *Linguistic Variation and Change* (2011), key questions of sociolinguistcs are in fact those addressing the way variation and change are embedded in the social fabric of the speech community. The work of describing the embedding of variation is the central descriptive work of research on social factors. When variationists have discussed social factors, they have traditionally referred to patterns that predict rates of variant usage for major "identity categories" such as age, class, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and region (52-54). This concern is traceable to Labov's (1966) study of New York City (Alim 2006, 60). It is precisely thanks to Labov's (1969) research on Black teenagers in New York City, and Baugh's (1979, 1983) research on the styleshifting of Black adults in LA and other urban centers, as well as Rickford and McNair-Knox's (1994) reporting of the styleshifting of one 18-year-old Black female, that I put forward the statement that the speech of Black people varies according to age, gender, class and region.

[60] A subset is a set where each element is part of an inclusive set.

[61] An *idiolect* is a person's specific, unique way of speaking.

also use *She's (contraction) fine*. And of course, every speaker would also use the full SAE form *is* in specific contexts, as for example at school, University, or work. In fact, it must be kept in mind that most Black people can perfectly manage SAE forms and that they employ AAE features with different frequencies in different social situations and for different speakers - i.e. according to the person they are talking to. As Rickford contends, most Black people alternate AAE features with SAE variants, sometimes even in the course of a single utterance or interaction (1999, 3-14).

Another element that should be taken into consideration is that most people use copula absence as a marker of their African American identity, whereas other Black people do not use the copula absence at all since it has been very stigmatized. Further, in some speech communities this pattern is generational. Professor Hiram Smith,[62] with whom I had a conversation on this topic, testifies that he omits the copula (*She real cool, man!)* when he is at home with his friends and family, but he affirms that his two sons[63] don't speak like him and they don't omit the copula at all. There is something his sons have picked up from his speech, he attests, but there are some other features that they don't use, regardless of whether Professor Smith uses them. Alongside such aspects of intragroup linguist variation, Professor Smith went on stating that his younger sister

> does not have college education and she speaks a Black vernacular - that's how I call it – which is different from the way me and my brother speak, so the point is, we come from the same family and we do not speak the same. *That is not to say that there aren't a lot of shared features, we have a lot of shared African American features when we are talking to each other*.[64]

Along these last lines, despite the natural presence of intragroup linguistic variation – which is characteristic of all languages – authoritative linguistic studies have identified a wide variety of unique features that are 'typical' of AAE speech which are not present in SAE.[65]

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[62] Professor Hiram Smith from Pennsylvania State University is an African American native speaker of AAE with whom I had several conversations on this topic.

[63] Eckert and Rickford in *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation* (2001) state that this kind of styleshifting seems to be one of the keys to what is seen as the central issue of the theory of the 'transmission problem' within language change. In the course of linguistic change, in fact, children learn to speak differently from their parent in the same direction that their parents learned to talk differently from their own parents (85). See also Hindle 1980, Cukor-Avila 1995, Coupland 1980, and Bell 1984.

[64] My emphasis. Personal conversation with Professor Hiram Smith from the Pennsylvania University.

[65] Rickford (1998) observed that AAE also shares some features with other stigmatized English dialects, however they occur with greater frequency in AAE than in other varieties (Rickford 1998).

In order to select a manageable number of the most typical AAE traits, this study cross-references a list of phonological and syntactic features in the work of Rickford (1999), Mufwene (1998, 2001), Smitherman (1977, 2006), Rickford and Rickford (2000), and Lisa J. Green (2004, 2011). Therefore, the examples given below are drawn mainly from their works.

The range of features selected for the present analysis accounts for the fact that they are the best candidates as unique features of AAE and, simultaneously, they are the most frequent features to be heard in rap songs in general, as well as in the lyrics analyzed in the present study. A considerable number of phonological features were excluded from this general overview for their being either "variables" specific to one geographical area only – e.g.: the use of [ɔɪ] in place of SAE [oʊ] is exclusive to the Southern States of the USA as Green (2002) points out - or for being too much fine-graded phonological distinctions between vowel sounds (for example, relative backing of the nucleus in /ai/ and relative fronting of the back vowels (Wolfram and Thomas (2002, 170), that would result too difficult to distinguish in the rapid speech stream.

## African Imprint

In Smitherman's words, Black English is a language mixture, adapted to the conditions of slavery and discrimination. Having developed within that context without benefit of any formal instruction, Black English often involved the substitution of English for West African words, but within the same basic structure and idiom that characterized West African language patterns. As a matter of fact, AAE is a combination of language and style inextricably interwoven with African and African American culture (1977, 3-4).

A first example is the fact that West African languages allow for the construction of sentences without a form of the verb to be. Thus, a typical African-English Pidgin sentence is *He tell me he God*.[66] In the *He God* statement, the words are English, but the grammar or structure is West African. Any modern-day Black community currently uses such sentence patterns without any form of the verb *be,* a phenomenon known as copula absence.

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[66] Used by Tituba, a slave from the island of Barbados in the British West Indies, and recorded by Justice Hathorne at the Salem witch trial in 1692 (Smitherman 1977, 5). Justice John Hathorne, the only judge involved in the Salem witch trials who never repented for his actions, was related by blood to American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, born in 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts, who purposely added a "w" to make his name "Hawthorne" in order to hide his relation to the former Justice Hathorne. See. The book *Salem Witchcraft* by Charles W. Upham (2010).

This kind of adaptation derives from the fact that it is easier to master the vocabulary of a foreign language rather than its syntactical structures and idiomatic rules. Therefore, what African American English speakers tried was to mold the new words and sounds in the structure of their native African language.

Below are a few of the West African language grammar and structure rules that were grafted onto early Black English, and which still operate in Black English today (Smitherman 1977; 2006).

1. **Grammar and Structure rule in West African Languages**: Appositive or pleonastic pronouns, i.e. repetition of noun subject with pronoun straight after it (Fasold and Wolfram 1970, 81).

**Black English**: *My father, he* work there; or *The teacher, he* say I can't go; or *My brother, he* know how to fix it.

2. **Grammar and Structure rule in West African Languages:** Same form of noun for singular and plural.

**Black English:** one boy; five boy.

3. **Grammar and Structure rule in West African Languages:** same verb form for all subjects.

**Black English:** I know, you know, he know, we know, they know.

4. **Sound rule in West African Languages:** no consonant pairs.

**Black English:** the word "just" is pronounced [dʒʌss] instead of [dʒʌst]

5. **Sound rule in West African Languages:** no [r] sound.

**Black English:** the word "more" is pronounced [mɔː]

6. **Sound rule in West African Languages:** absence of [θ] and [ð] sound for /th/.

**Black English:** instead of pronouncing [θ] or [ð], a Black English speaker uses /f/ or /d/; hence we can hear the word "south" pronounced as [saʊf] instead of SAE [saʊθ] and the word "this" uttered as [dɪs] instead of SAE [ðɪs].

## Distinctive Phonological Features of AAE

Distinctiveness and real beauty of the Black sound system actually lie in those features such as its speech rhythms, voice inflections, stress, and tonal patterns (called prosodic features).[67] However they are really hard to document. For this reason, the following section will be devoted to the main phonological features of AAE that are easily identifiable. Evidently, when talking about pronunciation, there is no national standard, not even among White speakers, since the different regional dialects of the country all have their own individual standards. The following list indicates some pronunciations in Black English that are used and shared by large numbers of Black speakers:

## 1. Sound patterns for th ([θ]; [ð])

One of the most common stereotyped features characterizing AAE (already hinted above while talking about traits deriving from African speech) is the variable absence of interdental fricatives. When the interdental fricatives are in intervocalic and word-final position, they are sometimes replaced by [f] and [v], thus producing for example [maʊf] instead of SAE [maʊθ] and [wɪv] instead of SAE [wɪð] (Mufwene 2001, 295).

At the beginning of the word they are often replaced by [t] or [d], thus producing "think" as [tɪŋk] instead of SAE [θɪŋk]. In other words, this AAE pattern produces *t/d* and *f/v* in environments where the *th* sound would occur in SAE (Green 2002, 117). Evidence of this feature can also be found in Kanye West's song *Homecoming* where he raps "Jumpin' in the [da] crowd," and in the same song he says "guess when I heard that [dat]."  Another example is Snoop Dog's "Those gurlz" where he says "Momma told me there'd be days like this [dis]."

Another example where the [θ] sound is treated as [t] is Snoop Dogg's "Let it out" where he sings "ain't got nothing [nʌt] Jack," where [nʌt] replaces SAE pronunciation [ˈnʌθɪŋ].

## 2. R-lessness

AAE is often characterized as non-rhotic, i.e. [r] is omitted or vocalized after a vowel (Labov 1972, 43). Hence, words that end with the -er suffix and exceed two syllables are vocalized and re-

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spelled in -a, -uh, or -ah, [68] as for example SAE "sister" which is pronounced "sistah" (Rickford 1999, 5). Just to quote a few more examples: broth-er/broth-a; gangst-er/ganst-a; reef-er/reef-a; bang-er/bang-a; burn-er[69]/burn-a; bust-er/bust-a;[70] ev-er/ev-a; teach-er/teach-a; preach-er/ preach-a and finally rapp-er/rapp-a.

As mentioned earlier, non-rhotic speech can be traced in African languages. Notably, however, we also detected the presence of non-rhotic speech (r-lessness) in Southern U.S. dialects spoken by White Americans. Southern American dialects influenced significantly the development of AAE speech. This acknowledgement is a first critical step in understanding the presence of r-lessness in AAE as well as the nigg-er/nigg-a distinction (which will be discussed in Chapter 3). As a matter of fact, "the spread of r-lessness throughout the South and New England was almost certainly due in part to emulation of British standards" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 113-115). Finally, this feature spread to other areas throughout the South - particularly South Carolina and Georgia - and became a feature of Black speech as well (ibid, 115, 128).

An example of dropping the [r] in rap lyrics can be found in Snoop Dogg's "Let it out": "Well it's the super duper[71] Snoopa," pronounced by Snoop in the song as "supa dupa": [ˈsuːpɑː] [ˈduːpɑː].

## 3. Deletion of middle and final /l/, also known as liquid vocalization

Although this trait occurs less commonly than the omission of postvocalic [r], the lateral [l] is often deleted or vocalized after a vowel, as in *he'p* for SAE *help* (Rickford 1999, 5). This pattern may have the grammatical effect of deleting the 'll of contracted will: "When a contracted form of will is used /'ll/, Black English behaves turning that contraction into an /ah/ sound, as for example in *I'll be there* which becomes *I* ah [ɑː] be there" (Smitherman 1977, 17). The dropping of liquid "l" is abundant in rappers' lyrics, as for example in "I'll [ɑː] bake a nigga" (Snoop Dogg: "Let it out").

Mufwene notes (2001, 296) that the omission of /l/ in *help* can also be related to a more general simplification of consonant clusters in word-final position.

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[68] As in brothah (brother), suckah (sucker). See also King and Turner's *Contemporary African American Literature: The Living Canon* (2013).

[69] A burner is a "throwaway prepaid cellphone, typically used by dealers. Used until the minutes are up, then thrown away so they cannot be tapped." See. http://www.urbandictionary.com

70 A buster is someone who is inexperienced, a chump, someone who kills the "game," someone who keeps you from reaching a climax: a loser. It derives from the acceptation of "busted" which in AAE means "caught doing something wrong" (Brathwaite 11). An example might be drawn from "Ratha Be Ya Nigga" where Tupac uses the word "buster" with this acceptation: "It don't matter if you lonely baby, you need a thug in your life/ ('Cause) These busters ain't loving you right."

[71] Super duper means "of the greatest excellence, size, effectiveness, or impressiveness." See. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary.

## 4. Simplification of consonant clusters (i.e. sequences of two or more consonants)[72]

Consonant cluster reduction is a process whereby the word-final consonant group or cluster, composed of two consonant sounds, is reduced to a single consonant sound. The consonant cluster simplification rule applies especially to the alveolar stops [t] and [d] in monomorphemic words, such as *guest*, *desk*, *test*, and *wasp*, which are often pronounced without the final stop as *guess*, *dess*, *tess*, and *wass*, and are pluralized as *guesses*, *desses*, and *wasses*.

Further, this pattern includes the deletion of most final [d] even in word-final single consonant, as in *hood= hoo*; *bed= be'* (Rickford 1999, 4). As Green notes, final consonant groups of clusters in AAE have been used as evidence that the language variety is systematic and governed by rules (2002, 107). Examples of reduction of words' final clusters can be found in "she got so cold [col] on me [...] platinum and gold [gol]" (Kanye West: "Homecoming"), in "Wait [wei] baby girl I'm the great [grei]" (Snoop Dogg: "Those gurlz") or also in Nas' song "Life's a Bitch" when he says "Load up the mic' and bust one" (pronounced as [ˈbəs ˈwən]).

Forms involving the reduction of final consonant clusters are so frequent that they are actually reflected in the spellings of song names, as in the track "Buss Down" by Wiz Khalifa Prince of the City, where the word "bust" has been respelled as "buss."

## 5. Diphthongs are turned into mono-thongs

AAE is characterized by monophthongal pronunciation of diphthongs such as [aɪ] (Rickford 1999, 5). Hence, the first person singular "I" is pronounced as [ɑ:] instead of SAE [aɪ]. See also the following excerpts from Snoop Dogg and Kanye West: "When *I* [ɑ:] peeped this lil' freak out" (Snoop Dogg: "Sensual seduction"); "I love how you stay *fly* [flɑ:] [...] and I'll *reply* [replɑ:] [...] I'm the *guy* [gɑ:]" (Snoop Dogg: "Those gurlz"); "When *I* [ɑ:] look you in the *eyes* [ɑ:s]" (Snoop Dogg: "Those gurlz"); "I'm on the *fly* [flɑ:] [...] want a *ride* [rɑ:] [...] grippin' on my *nine* [nɑ:] [...] C's up in the *sky* [skɑ:]" (Snoop Dogg: "Those gurlz"); "*I* [ɑ:] know I [ɑ:] got angels" (Kanye West: "Never let me down"), in "want a ride [rɑ:] [...] grippin' on my nine [nɑ:]" (Snoop Doog: "Those gurlz").

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[72] Reduction of consonant cluster is also cited by Wolfram and Thomas (2002), Zeigler (2009), Wise (1975), Labov (2012: 144), Baugh (1983), Smitherman (2000), Mufwene and Rickford (1998), Bailey and Thomas (1998).

## 6. [æŋ]

Sometimes vowel plus "ng" in words such as in thing, ring, and sing, are rendered as [æŋ] instead of SAE's [ɪŋ] (Rickford 1999, 5 and Smitherman 1986, 18).

Some speakers of AAE, in fact, lower the vowel [ɪ] to [æ] before the velar nasal thus pronouncing *thing*, *sing*, and *ring* as thang [θæŋ], sang [sæŋ] [73]and *rang* [ræŋ] instead of SAE's [θɪŋ], [sɪŋ] and [rɪŋ].

## 7. –ing suffix

In the -ing suffix of words with more than one syllable, the –ing ([iŋ] sound is realized as [ɪn] – e.g. walkin' [wɔːkɪn] instead of SAE walking [wɔːkɪŋ] (Rickford 1999, 4).

S*ing* and *ring,* being monosyllable, are not affected by this feature. As Green points out, this pattern is to be found also in nonstandard varieties of English as well as in general American English in unstressed syllables. As a result, when the final syllables of nothing ['nʌθɪŋ] and something ['sʌmθɪŋ] are unstressed, the words become nothin' ['nʌθɪn] and somethin' ['sʌmθɪn] (Green, 2002, 122). This feature is adopted by all rappers.

## Distinctive Grammatical (Morphological and Syntactic) Features of AAE

The most relevant differences between AAE and SAE are on the level of grammatical structure. Being grammar the most rigid and fixed aspect of speech, it is least likely to change over time. Thus, it is a logical consequence that grammatical patterns of Black English, most often deriving from some African language structure, have been the last component of Black English to change in the direction of SAE.

As hinted in the introductory part of the present section, despite internal diversity, region of the country, and in some instances also despite social class level, AAE speakers throughout the United States have certain grammatical structures in common.

Below, some of the most distinctive grammatical structures of Black English are presented.

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[73] See for example: "*Sang* good, now y'all" which stands for "Sing good" pronounced by a female adult in a Baptist church (Smitherman 1977, 18)

**Feature 1. Zero Copula: absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions (when not in the first personal pronoun).**

Sentence patterns with no form of the verb be like *He tell me he God* (1692) and *Me massa name Cunney Tomsee* (US 1776) date back to slavery times and they have survived today as one of the most frequent features of AAE (Smitherman 1977, 9; 21).

Black English speakers omit the verb *be* when referring to conditions that are fixed in time and to events or realities that do not repeat themselves. Copula absence can be applied before nouns (*He a hippie now*); before adjectives (*He too tall for me; He busy right now*); before adverbs (*They shoes right here*); before prepositional phrases (*My momma in the hospital*); and in auxiliary constructions (*They talking about school now*). Some additional examples of the absence of *be* to indicate a non-recurring event or a fixed, static condition, are:

> You Ø good!
>
> He Ø sick today
>
> This Ø my mother
>
> That man Ø too tall for her little short self
>
> They daddy Ø in the house
>
> Man, your ride Ø really bad.
>
> (Smitherman 1977, 17; Trudgill 2000, 55)

Rappers' lyrics present abundant use of this pattern, as in "You Ø a freak" (Snoop Dogg in "Sensual seduction"); "Now they Ø dismantled" (Nas in "Project Window"); Tyler the Creator's "This Ø my Zombie Circus" in the song "Bastard."

**Feature 2. Absence of third person singular present tense -s.**

Most English verbs are not marked for person. The same verb form serves all subjects, whether singular or plural. The subject and number of the verb are marked by the context of the sentence or by some word in the sentence.

This happens most of the times in the present tense: I know, you know, he know, we know, they know. Rappers use this feature abundantly, see for example "she know they soft" (Kanye West:

"Homecoming"); "God love us hood niggaz" (Nas in "God Love Us"); "my brain keep movin'" (The Fugees in "Blunted Interlude"); "so yeah she understand me" (Tyler the Creator in "Seven").

Notably, generalizations of *is* and *was* are used with plurals instead of *are* and *were*: *They is some crazy folk* for SAE "They are some crazy folk" or *We was there* instead of SAE "We were there" (Rickford 1999, 7). Some further examples drawn from rappers' lyrics are: "niggas *is*" (Kanye West: "Never let me down"), or "I didn't know all these people at the time *they was* in the room" in West's song "Last Call."

The use of this feature is not as prominent in the lyrics as the absence of third person singular *s*.


### Feature 3.1 *Invariant be* for habitual aspect.


Distinctive differences of Black English from SAE are to be found in patterns using *be* as *invariant be* (sometimes also in these guises: "bees," "beez," or "be's"), i.e when the verbal marker 'be' is used to signal frequent or habitual situations. See for example AAE's *He be walking* for SAE *He is usually walking* (Rickford 1999, 6). These forms of *invariant be* are mainly used to indicate a condition that occurs habitually, in contrast with the function of the zero copula which expresses that the condition or event is not one that is repeated or recurring: in the sentence *The coffee Ø cold*, the meaning conveyed by the zero copula is "today" the coffee is cold. *The coffee bees cold*, instead, means that every day the coffee is cold (Smitherman 1977, 20).

Another example in order to better understand how this rule works, is the following sentence where a son comments on the work of his father: "My father, he work at Ford. *He be tired*. So he can't never help us with our homework" (Smitherman 1977, 20). The *He be tired* means "every day my father is tired." If the speaker had wanted to indicate that the fact applied to one day only, she would have left the *be* out of the sentence; thus *My father, he work at Ford, he tired*, would indicate that although he is tired today, this is generally not the case.

Other examples where the verb *be* is used to indicate habitual aspect are: *They be slow all the time, She be late every day, I see her when I bees on my way to school, By the time I go get my momma, it be dark, The kid always be messing up and everything* (Smitherman 1977, 20).

See also how *be* for habitual aspect operates in *He be actin crazy*, meaning "He usually/ regularly/sometimes acts crazy" (Fasold 1972).

This rule operates with systematic regularity in the Black English speaking community. It is a pattern which was used abundantly in the music of the 60s and 70s as  - for instance - in Nina Simone's and Joe Simon's song "It Be's That Way Sometimes" (1967), which will be analyzed in detail in chapter 2.

*Invariant be* appears consistently in rappers' lyrics: "We *be* crip'n" (Snoop Dogg: "Let it out"); "I just don't *be* feelin' it [...] they just *be* concealin' it." (Kanye West: "Never let me down") and "Rock-a-bye the lullaby he be singin' 'Oh my'" (The Fugees in "Vocab").

## Feature 3.2 *Invariant be* used to express future time.

In addition to the use of *be* for habitual events, there is another important function of *be* that should be noted. AAE speakers can use *be* to convey a sense of future time, as in AAE *The boy be here soon* for SAE *The boy will be here soon* as well as AAE *They family be gone Friday* for SAE *The family will be gone*. The subtle distinctions in the meaning and use of *invariant be* for habitual aspect or future time depend heavily on the context. Probably, the example mentioned in the previous section as regards the use of invariant be in "Let it out" ("Never let me down" by Snoop Dogg and by Kanye West) might also be interpreted as having future intention.

Thus, the listener has to understand the contextual cues in order properly to decode the verb tense and the speaker's meaning. For instance:

She be there late (future)

She be there every day (habitual be)

I be going home tomorrow (future be)

I be going home all the time (habitual be)

## Feature 4. Unstressed been.

*Unstressed been* occurs in present and past perfect tense contexts: AAE speakers use *She been running* instead of SAE's *She has been running* (Green 2011, 100).

It must be kept in mind that *unstressed been* is different from *stressed been*, which is conventionally marked as BIN[74] (Green 2011, 100) in order to differentiate its use from *unstressed been*. To clarify the difference, it might be of help to analyze the following sentence: in *I BIN learning that* (Green 114) the *stressed been* (BIN)[75] is used by AAE speakers to communicate that the storytelling ability has been developing for a long time, whereas in the sentence *I been reading books at home before I come to school* (Green 2011, 113), the *unstressed been* is used in the "perfect tense context" in order to communicate the habitual aspect of the very act of participating in the reading process.

## Feature 5. Imma.

Imma existed in the spoken language for years before making it into written form. The Oxford English Dictionary doesn't have an entry for it yet, but sociolinguist William Labov made note of *Imma* and *I'ma* in a 1967 study of African American English titled *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular.*

*Imma* - also spelled *I'ma, I'mma,* and *Ima* - is not the contraction *I'm* followed by *a,* but a contraction of *I am going to* (Labov 1967, 24-25).

Notably, Imma started appearing in print in the lyrics of rap songs. The earliest example that has been recorded is "I'ma kick your ass" in the track "Fuck tha Police" by American Hip Hop group N.W.A.[76] (1988).

## Feature 6. Ain't.

*Ain'(t)* is the negator *par excellence* in AAE. It substitutes SAE's negators such as "am not," "are not," "is not," "has not," "have not," "does not," "did not" in both their full and contracted forms (Rickford 1999, 8).[77]

See for example "You ain't got hood stripes" in "Quiet Niggas" by Nas, or "Ain't no different when I'm rippin'" (Snoop Dogg: "Let it out"); "See life's got no value if I ain't got no statue" in "Boof Baf"

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[74] Here I follow the convention, in line with Green's choice, of writing the marker stressed been in capital letters BIN to distinguish it from been that occurs in perfect contexts. Stressed BIN indicates that some event started or occurred a long time ago, or that some state has held for a long time (Green 2011, 100).

[75] Stressed BIN explicitly expresses a distant past: "BIN constructions are glossed as for a long time,' and for eventualities that started a long time" (Green 2011, 101).

[76] N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes) from Compton, California, are among the earliest, most significant and controversial figures of the gangsta rap subgenre. They are unanimously considered one of the greatest and most influential groups in the history of Hip Hop music. Gangsta rap will be discussed in Chapter 4.

[77] *Ain't* does not have distinct past or non-past forms (Green 2002, 39).

by The Fugees; "No I ain't no fucking hipster, mister" in "Seven" by Tyler the Creator.  See also James Brown's: "I *ain't* tellin' that he will put you back on the corner, use you like it's in the hat" in the song "*Ain't* it Funky Now."

## Feature 7. Multiple negation or negative concord.

African American English can have multiple negative words in the same sentence, as *I ain't never heard about no riot big as the one we had in LA* for SAE *I have never heard about a riot as big as the one we had in LA* (Alim 2006, 55). As a matter of fact, in AAE speech negating the auxiliary verb and all indefinite pronouns in the sentence is allowed: *He don't do nothing* instead of SAE *He does not do anything* (Rickford 1999, 8).

Black English reaches up to triple and quadruple negatives as it might be inferred by examples provided by Smitherman:

> Don't nobody never help me do my work
>
> Can't nobody do nothing
>
> Don't nobody pay no attention to no nigguh that ain't crazy
>
> (1977, 34)

Despite their reverse word order, these are statements, not questions.

In fact, multiple negatives are also often accompanied by another typically AAE's trait: the negative inversion, i.e. the inversion of the auxiliary and indefinite pronoun subject. See for example *Can't nobody say nothing* inverted from SAE *Nobody can't say anything*; or AAE *Ain't nobody home* for SAE *Nobody is home* (Rickford 1999, 8) as well as *Can't nobody touch E-40!* meaning *Nobody can touch E-40!* (Alim 2006, 55).

Examples of negative inversion constructions and multiple negation are abundant in gospels and songs sung in African American religious services, as in "Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus."[78]

Multiple negation not only appears abundantly in Black rappers' lyrics - see for example "I don't think there is nothing I can do now" (Kanye West: "Jesus walks") - but it has also been adopted by

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[78] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go3O0tuY5TU

White speakers. See for example the case of White rapper Chet Haze – Tom Hanks' son – saying "Can't no one tell me what I can't say."[79]

**Feature 8. Personal Pronoun system: *they* instead of *their*.**

Possessive plural pronouns are also treated differently with respect to SAE: instead of third person plural possessive *their*, AAE-speakers often use *they*, as in *they cars are cheap* for SAE *Their cars are cheap* (Alim 2006, 15) or in *It's they house* for SAE *It's their house* (Rickford 1999, 7).

The personal pronoun system of Black English, in fact, is not as highly differentiated as in White English. Thus, with the third person plural pronoun *they*, the same form serves for subject, possessive and so-called reflexive as in *The Expressway bought they house* and *they should do it theyselves*. See also "First I had *they* ear, now I have *they* heart" (Kanye West: "Never let me down"); "Get *they* first car" (Kanye West in "We major"); "how you take away *they* shine" (Snoop Dogg: "Those gurlz"); "*they* good whisky" (Kanye West: "We major"); "Get *they* first car" (Kanye West: "We major"); "I know some niggas wear their hearts on they sleeves" (Tyler the Creator: "Pigs Fly"); "Got younger niggaz pullin the triggers bringing fame to they name" (Nas: "N.Y. State Of Mind").

This linguistic overview, apart from being crucial to the analysis of rappers' linguistic practices in Chapter 4, also allows for a better understanding of rap's rhetoric and philosophy, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[79] Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGq9siN4p8I

## CHAPTER 2

## RAP IN ACTION: SIGNIFYIN(G) and ANTI- LANGUAGE

*Preface*

*In the present chapter we will engage in an analysis of rap's rhetoric by interpreting it not only as a musical genre, but as both a speech genre and a complex interpretative tool that originates from the art of Signifyin(g).[80]*

*Considering rap's functional and structural affiliation with Signifyin(g), we shall read the practice of rap not simply as an example of verbal artistry and masterful elocution but rather, as a metalinguistic medium through which a philosophy of life is disclosed.*

*Precisely, the aim is that of overlapping rap and Signifyin(g) as being both rhetorical practices whereby the White order of meanings is questioned and reconceived.*

*By doing so, it comes out that rap also functions as anti-language, a term first coined by Halliday in 1976.*

*This discussion also helps lay the foundations for the analysis of the term "nigga" - which will be the focus of the next chapter. No word other than nigga, in fact, could be a better score of this process of linguistic, semiotic, political and metaphysical offensive against the White order of meaning.*

*The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world.*

*-Maurice Merleau Ponty-*

## 2.1 Hip Hop Culture and the Art of Rap

Conspicuously, the interpretation of the practice of rap can be better understood if we take some minutes to consider the whole cultural movement within which rap was born: Hip Hop.

This culture is often considered as a recent movement as well as a new form of music; yet it dates back to the early 1970s when it sprang to life amidst privation and poverty in the Black and Latino neighborhoods of New York City, specifically the South Bronx. Hagedorn and Davis affirm that Hip Hop had "its immediate origins in the music, dance, and art of African American and Latino youth"

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[80] I embrace Henry Louis Gates' choice to capitalize the initial S and to put in brackets the final (g) in order to distinguish the African American term Signifyin(g) from the one pertaining to Standard English Language (signifying).

(94). As an art form, it embraces the following disciplines and expressive realms: graffiti, breaking or b-boying,[81] turntablism[82] or DJing[83] and, finally, rapping[84] (Osumare 2007, 12).

Hip Hop is a street culture which rose literally from the streets, not the studios (Hagedorn and David 95). In addition, it is a lifestyle that comes with appropriate urban-style clothing, dialect (the variety spoken within Hip Hop culture is AAE) and attitude. As famous rapper KRS-One poignantly put it: "rap is something you do, Hip Hop is something you live" (Hagedorn and Davis 99-101).

As regards its name, it is believed that the term Hip Hop was created by Cowboy, a member of the Hip Hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, formed in the South Bronx of New York City in 1976. Cowboy is believed to have created the term while teasing a friend who had just joined the US Army by scat singing the words "hip/hop/hip/hop" in a way that mimicked the rhythmic cadence of marching soldiers.[85] Others maintain that it originated from the 1979 song "Rappers Delight" by American Hip Hop group The Sugar Hill Gang. The song begins with the lyrics "I said a hip hop the hippie the hippie/ To the hip hip hop and you don't stop" (Dalzell 2014, 16). Whoever may have first coined the word, worth noting is that Hip Hop carries the word "hip" into its name. Smitherman claims that hip means "aware, informed, with it" stemming from Wolof[86] "hepi, hipi" literally "to open one's eyes" (1977, 45). According to Tom Dalzell, "hip" is the hardest word in the American slang lexicon. He reports that the 1904 use by author George Hobart in "Jim Hickey, a Story of One-Night Stands" (1904) would be the earliest discovered use of "hip" as an adjective meaning knowledgeable, aware, fashionable, stylish (2014, 16).[87] Even though hip's lineage remains unclear, what is remarkable is the extraordinary voyage the term "hip" has taken through American slang over the last 110 years. Dalzell notes that just as the fruit of the wild rose is known as a "rose hip" or "rose hep," the term "hep" sprang up in the shadow of "hip" in 1908, also

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[81] This art is a dance form known outside the culture as "breakdancing."

[82] It is the art of creating music and shaping and manipulating sounds through the use of turntables and DJ mixers.

[83] DJ (disc jockey) is an all-encompassing term to describe a person who mixes recorded music as it is playing from any sources, including CDds, cassettes, and digital audio files.

[84] The art of rapping is also known as emceeing, MCing, or rhyming. The MC or "Master of Ceremonies" - also called "emcee" - is the host that guides people through staged events, street performances and that draws the attention on the artists he (or she) is presenting. Since rappers identify themselves verbally as MCs to show that they are at the center of the attention on a stage or in a show, in hip-hop the title "MC" switched to the performing artist, i.e. the rapper.

[85] See Fricke, Jim and Ahearn, Charlie's book *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip Hop's First Decade* (2002).

86 Wolof is a language of Senegal, the Gambia, and Mauritania, and the native language of the Wolof people.

[87] Dalzell further claims that "stories of hip's etymology, all of questionable authenticity, abound – tales involving a keenly aware person named Hip or Hep, hip flasks, boots up to the hip, reclining on the hip to smoke opium" (16).

meaning knowledgeable or stylish and in 1938 the term "hepcat"[88] - referring to the stylish jazz lover – came to light. Some years later, in 1953, "came the first hippie, the jazz aficionado, and then in the mid 1960s the second hippie, the flower child members of the post-Beat counterculture. And then in 1979 – Hip Hop" (Dalzell 2014, 16).

When it originated, Hip Hop was not based in middle-class experience but it was an expression of the under-classes' misery, defiance of racism and poverty. In the South Bronx of the seventies approximately 170,000 Black and Latino people had been dislocated because of "urban development" projects (Hagedorn and Davis 94). In this respect, Tricia Rose[89] explains that the efforts during the Post-Civil Rights era in the 1970s to rebuild Black communities were some of the most destructive policies that actually destroyed the rich networks in African American communities. "Urban renewal"[90] as James Baldwin called it, meant in truth "negro removal policies" that transformed communities that were called slums by turning them into Waste Land. In other words, the government took what were network-rich communities but resource-poor communities and turned them into frayed networks with even more limited economic resources (Rose 2008, 45).[91] It is in that economic environment that Hip Hop emerged as a form of cultural resistance. Thanks to Hip Hop, minority youth drew on interconnected musical and social economic histories of dehumanization to create a music grounded in a situation of deep socio-economic struggle where White subjects treat the Black subjects as inferior. Within this context, music for Black people took on a privileged position precisely because through it they managed to suspend the "inferior" Black subjectivity created by racist ideologies and practices, establishing venues for the constitution of new subjectivities.

The music of the Hip Hop subculture, which is based on verbal rhymes over musical beat, is known as rap. Its genealogy is inscribed in these histories of oppression and migrations, cultural movements such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts movement, political movements for

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[88] This term will be discussed in the final part of the present chapter.

[89] See Tricia Rose's observations in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) and *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop - and Why It Matters* (2008).

[90] Baldwin James. "Urban Renewal...Means Negro Removal." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8Abhj17kYU. Last Visited October 22, 2016.

[91] Rose goes on stating that the "pattern of demolishing and not replacing thousands of units of existing affordable housing in poor Black communities had a devastating impact in Black communities all around the country, creating the constellation of symptoms in many major cities that we see today. This was not just a housing problem, although the homeless crisis it produced was immense. The physical destruction of so many buildings was accompanied by the demolition of most of the adjacent venues and stores that served as community adhesive. Corner stores, music clubs, social clubs, beauty parlors, and barber shops were also displaced or destroyed, fraying community networks and patterns of connection. Social psychologist Mindy Fullilove refers to the destruction caused by urban renewal as 'root shock,' the "traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem" (2008, 45).

Civil Rights and Black Nationalism (Forbes 257).[92] Located in a portrait of life amid industrial decline, social alienation, and political corruption, rappers' voice thus interpreted "the cycle of poverty and dehumanization producing limited life options and despair, while speaking to the destructiveness of systemically imposed ghetto[93] existence" (Smitherman 262).

As a consequence, the art of rap[94] can be defined as a cultural form and practice that African Americans constructed via music in the Seventies from marginalized Black ghettos in order to create spaces of resistance to oppression, racism and poverty.[95]

Rap is a "rapid fire street talk" (Shaw 1986, 384), a "rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music" (Jackson and Richardson 188), and a modern form of poetry that "blends a use of the most classic devices in poetic history, namely, rhyme and meter, with the most contemporary views and language of society" (McCarver 17).[96]

It is usually spoken to minimal musical accompaniment of a percussive ostinato, punctuated by an occasional guitar or bass chord. DJs[97] control the record-players and mixers; MCs (masters of ceremony) compose lyrics,[98] picking up inspiration from ghetto life (Remes 130).

At the beginning of the XXth century, the term "rap" was used as a verb meaning 'to inform on' or 'betray someone' while as a noun it meant 'a prison sentence,' 'an accusation or criminal charge,' and 'a person's reputation' (Dalzell 2014, 18). Since the 1940s African Americans had been using the word to refer to 'holding a conversation; a long, impressive, lyrical social or political monologue' as well as 'rapid, clever talk and rhyming monologue' and 'a conversation as a highly self-conscious art-form' (Campbell 2005, 35).

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[92] Rap owes a great deal to Black Arts movement poets and performers, such as Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets, as well as to funk and soul artists like James Brown, Isaac Hayes, George Clinton and Sly Stone.

[93] The ghettos where African Americans lived were impoverished, disadvantaged residential areas, usually troubled by a disproportionately large amount of crime and neglected by the government. They were characterized by poor education and housing, social instability, high unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction, high crime-rates, along with the second-rank position of Blacks and growing racism (Remes 131).

[94] Most rap music aficionados mark the emergence of what became contemporary rap with the arrival of DJ Kool Herc in New York City in 1972. See *A History of Hip Hop: The Roots of Rap* by Thomas Hatch (2005). He was an immigrant from Jamaica, who first distinguished Hip Hop music from other genres, and who led the way for others to follow. DJ Kool Herc is a legend within Hip Hop for introducing massive stereo systems and creating extended instrumental breaks in the music.

[95] One of the first scholars to provide a critical analysis and assessment of rap music and Hip Hop culture is Michael Eric Dyson. Dysons claims for a relationship between rap music, Black Nationalism, and other forms of African American cultural expression such as storytelling, gospel, and rhythm and blues music. See "Performance, Protest and Prophecy in the culture of Hip Hop." (1991): 12-24.

[96] See McCarver's *Poetry Writing for Wanna-Be's: A Writer-Friendly Guidebook Including the Author's Chapbook of Light Verse, Poems Are Such Funny Stuff* (2006).

[97] DJs or discjockeys used two different turntables to switch back and forth between discs (Keeley 2001,10).

[98] As Dalzell (2014) notes, rap lyrics are the central nervous system of Hip Hop culture and its engine-room as a marketable commodity (18).

Rap was a quintessential piece of American slang in the 1960s meaning 'to talk in an informal and unstructured manner,' while starting from the 1970s it meant flirt,[99] fool, and tease (Campbell 2005, 35). Finally, in 1979 "rap" started being used both as a noun and verb describing the music of Hip Hop culture (Dalzell 2014, 18).

As Dyson noted in a special issue of *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*:

> The rap artist, as Cornel West has indicated, is a bridge figure, who combines the two potent traditions in Black culture, preaching[100] and music: the rapper appeals to the rhetorical practices honed in African American religious experiences and the cultural potency of Black singing musical traditions to produce an engaging hybrid. In a sense rappers are truly urban griots[101] dispensing social and cultural critiques, verbal shamans exorcising the demons of hypocrisy and a laissez faire orality that refuses to participate in the media of cultural exploration and social provocation. The culture of Hip Hop has

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[99] African American Professor Hiram Smith confirmed that "to rap" meant to hold a romantic conversation with a woman: "Earlier rap just meant to talk to somebody. Later, especially after the 70s, rap developed another connotation which meant to talk specifically to a female but in a romantic way so 'Can I rap with you for a minute?' still means 'Can I talk to you?' but it was suggestive of talking in a specific romantic kind of way. If we are at a party 'Let me just rap to you for a moment' meant 'I wanna take you to the side, I want to talk to you in private, kind of romantically.' Now when it comes to rap music, it was called that way because they are not singing, they are talking, they are doing poetry and talking over the music and that's why they call it rap. It was like you are not singing, you are talking." (Personal conversation with Professor Smith).

[100] The traditional Black church, with its sermons and preachers, is the "most powerful and influential Black institution" in America, and it has influenced rap music and the way it is delivered today. (Smitherman 1977, 55-57). In her book *Word from the Mother* (2006), Smitherman points out "our preachers continue to be masters of rhetorical, linguistic inventiveness. In his Where Are the Men? sermon, exhorting Black men to step to the challenges facing African American communities, Reverend Dr. Charles Adams, Pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Motown, manipulates repetitive words and phrases and deploys poetic alliteration to drive home his message" (66). Definitely, rap music developed from the great African American oral tradition in the Black Church and borrowed several of his components. Smitherman, for example, found out that a relevant part of Hip Hop's vocabulary comes from the Church language. Just to quote an example, the word "sista" which is overused in Hip Hop, derives from the Black Church pattern of referring to female members of the church family as "sistas" (2006, 43).

[101] According to some sources, the storytelling way of rap lyrics might be related to the traditions of griots in West Africa, who are people that tell stories about people or villages in order to preserve the stories for the future (Campbell 2005, 35; Alim 2006, 21). Abiodun Oyewole, with whom I had the pleasure to have a conversation on Hip Hop music, mentioned the griot figure and its kinship with rappers in his book *Branches of the Tree of Life: The Collected Poems of Abiodun Oyewole, 1969-2013*. (2014). Francis Bebey has also written about the griot in his book *African Music, A People's Art*: "The West African griot is a troubadour, the counterpart of the medieval European minstrel [...] The griot knows everything that is going on, he is a living archive of the people's traditions [...] The virtuoso talents of the griots command universal admiration. This virtuosity is the culmination of long years of study and hard work under the tuition of a teacher who is often a father or uncle. The profession is by no means a male prerogative. There are many women griots whose talents as singers and musicians are equally remarkable" (24). During a conversation with Professor Hiram Smith, we were guessing the possible roots of the term: griot resembles the Spanish word grillo (criquet in English) the Black insect that makes noises at night in the summertime. Because of both its Blackness and its ability to make noises and sing in the night, people might have taken that word to refer to the griots, the wise Black people who pass on the Black oral tradition.

generated a *lexicon of life that expresses rap's Weltanschauung*,[102] a perspective that takes delight in the postmodern practice of demystifying high classical structures of language and celebrates the culturally encoded twists of phrases that communicate in their own idiom. (1991, 22)

The German word *Weltanschauung* combines "Welt" (world) with "Anschauung" (view) and it literally means "world view."

To explore rap's Weltanschauung" is exactly the focus of the present chapter.

Remarkably, rap - the voice of Hip Hop culture - is not only a musical genre, but also a speech genre both deriving from and expanding from African American English.[103]

As Frantz Fanon argued, every dialect and every language is a legitimate way of thinking since "to speak" means to assume a culture. Fanon's observation suggests a deep relationship between the function of language and a philosophical anthropology where the man who speaks a language consequently possesses the world expressed by that language. In *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, George Yancy points out that all languages are inherently adequate for expressing philosophical ideas, i.e. languages are the normative media through which philosophy can best be engaged (297).[104]

Black English rhetoric (which includes rap) is taken in the present study as a legitimate semiotic medium through which a life-world and a peculiar philosophy of life can be represented.[105] In fact, to explore Black English and the art of rap means to enter the dynamic, rhythmic, ritual and cognitive spaces of African American linguistic expressiveness and philosophy.[106] A straightforward example is Nina Simone's song "It Be's That Way Sometime" (1967),[107] where the use of the verb

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[102] My emphasis.

[103]For this reason, the previous chapter has been entirely devoted to its origin and features.

[104] See also Brown, Becky. "Talk that Talk! African American English in its Social and Cultural Context." *Radical Philosophy Review* 4 (1;2) 2001: 54-77.

[105] Unbelievably, among those who still fail to see and understand the importance of African American Language as a rich cultural and philosophical site of expression, is comedian Bill Cosby who still supports the biased assumption that Black English is a broken dialect that does not respect neither the norms of SAE nor the heights of academic professionalism.

In May 2004, he gave the famous Pound Cake speech to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision where he openly criticized the use of African American Vernacular English. See also Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "'This Is How We Lost to the White Man': The audacity of Bill Cosby's Black conservatism." *The Atlantic Monthly*, (May 2008). http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/05/-this-is-how-we-lost-to-the-White-man/306774/ Last Visited February 8, 2017. See also Michael Eric Dyson's insightful book *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* (2005).

[106] See. *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (1996) by Richard Shusterman.

[107] Nina Simone. "It It Be's That Way Sometime" from the album *Silk & Soul* (1967) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MnymOLgmCQ Last Visited February 8, 2017.

form "be's" - a unique grammatical trait of Black English - indicates a recurring event or habitual condition, rather than a one-time only occurrence. In *Black Talk* (2000) Smitherman defines the function of 'bees' (or its contracted form 'be's') as "that's how it is, that's the way it goes, that's life"(3), i.e. as an existential reference to the human condition.[108] Indeed, this most peculiar form of the verb 'be' in Black English reflects Black folks' way of looking at life which sticks to a precise philosophy of accepting the changes that life puts us through, and to accept the changes and bad times as a constant, ever-present reality (Smitherman 1977, 3). Nina Simone's last verse of the song well exemplifies this philosophy: "Don't let the problems of this world/ Drive you slowly out of your mind/ Just smile look at the problem and say/ It be's that way, be's that way sometime."[109]

Along these lines, as Michael Adams suggests, Black English is a language that has an attitude:

> If we take the sentence 'If that's the way it bees,' for instance, we have the word in bees that sounds slow and long because of its vowel and its voiced bilabial (the /b/) and alveolar fricatives (the /z/), thus conveying an attitude of being 'loose' in sound and structure and semantics (2009, 154).

"It bees that way sometime," in fact, clearly points at Black English's phonetically relaxed ways of expressing that specific state of being and that view of life.

In his song "That Way"[110] rapper Soopafly[111] samples Nina Simone's riff "It Be's that Way Sometime" starting from 0.05 seconds. Then the sample keeps going throughout the whole song.

Wanting to identify what "sampling" is, we hold on the discussion of Soopafly's poignant sample for a moment.

The practice of sampling, i.e. digitally borrowing passages of music from previous recordings for use in a new song,[112] is one of the primary methods underlying the creation of rap music[113] as well as one of its central aesthetic techniques. Sampling is the art of stealing musical snippets which

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[108] Similarly loose, at least referentially, is *it ain no thang*, meaning that whatever it is, it's not a problem or obstacle, it can be dealt with. See also Smitherman's article "'It bees dat way sometime': Sounds and structure of present-day Black English." *Language: Readings in Language and Culture*. Clark, Virginia P., Paul A. Eschholz and Alfred F. Rosa (eds). Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998. 328-354.

[109] Nina Simone's lyrics of "It Be's that Way Sometime" are retrievable at http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/ninasimone/itbesthatwaysometimes.html

[110] Soopafly. "That Way," from the album *Bangin Westcoast* (2007) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV_KcIOLEqc. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[111] Priest Joseph Brooks, known as Soopafly, is a Hip Hop producer and rapper from California who played keyboards for Dr. Dre and Ice Cube in the track "Natural Born Killaz." He was further introduced to mainstream audience thanks to his participation in Snoop Dogg's second studio album *Tha Doggfather*.

[112] See *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (2005) by Felicia M. Miyakawa, p.100.

[113] See *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (2002) by Cheryl Lynette Keyes, p. 175.

are later reassembled, a process whereby the appropriation of previous musical events leads to new soundtrack which is produced by the DJ on multiple turntables. This practice constitutes the musical background for rap lyrics. The very act of reproducing portions of a song via digital sampling in creating rap's music soundtrack is a practice which shows how Hip Hop musicians themselves are giving props to respected artists and favorite songs.[114] Concurrently, it is the emblem of a voluntary will to establish a direct dialogue with the historical, linguistic and rhetoric past, which Gates highlights as being an intertextual attempt:

By the time I began my first job teaching at Yale, while still a graduate student in the 1970s, I was hearing about a new music coming out of the Bronx. It was called rap – an old word for those familiar with Black slang, but a new form that combined rhythm and rhyme in a style all its own. Like all art – vernacular or high art – it took the familiar and made it unfamiliar again. Rap's signature characteristic is the parody and pastiche of its lyrics, including "sampling,"[115] another word for intertextuality.[116]

Remarkably, a form of rap's sampling can be traced back at the beginning of the XXth century - in literary guise - in the book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. Du Bois inserted music, precisely some parts of old "Negro Spirituals," within the structure of his text by incorporating bars of the songs before each chapter. This canonical work was the first African American text to incorporate music into its structure[117] and it sheds light on the importance of Black music and, precisely, of Negro Spirituals or "the sorrow songs" - as Du Bois poetically called them. In fact, Du Bois not only recognizes their lyrical and expressive qualities, but he also underlines their importance as sources that record the history of Black people and the way their experiences have been forged out of servitude and oppression.[118]

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[114] See *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* by Cheryl Lynette Keyes, p.104. With this respect, see also "This Is a Sampling Sport": Digital Sampling, Rap Music, and the law in Cultural Production" by Thomas G. Schumacher (2004), p. 443.

[115] My emphasis. Michael Eric Dyson categorized sampling as a post-modernist, transgressive art form that pays homage to African American traditions. See Dyson's *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (1993).

[116] Henry Louis Gates Jr. "An Anthology of Rap Music Lyrics." *Financial Times* November 5, 2010 http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/87cca6b0-e7a9-11df-8ade-00144feab49a.html. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[117] Following Du Bois, many of the formal innovations of the literature of this period relied upon the structural incorporation of music and sound into written texts. Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett, to name a few, used music in their works. See Alexander Weheliye's "In the Mix: Hearing the Souls of Black Folk" (2000), p. 539.

[118] "Both Paul Gilroy's 1993 *The Black Atlantic* and Samuel A. Floyd's 1995 *The Power of Black Music* envisioned musical practices as spaces in which ritualized, socialized memories—of Africa, of slavery and its aftermath—were constructed and performed" (Perchard, 280).

The importance of the tradition of Negro Spirituals - as well as rapper's bond towards the Black past -  is genuinely encapsulated in the first verse of rapper MF Doom's track "Beef Rapp":

> Whether it is animal, vegetable, or mineral
>
> It's a miracle how he get[119] so lyrical
>
> And proceed to move the crowd like an old Negro spiritual.[120]

Indeed, rap - chiefly via sampling - can be seen as an homage to African-diasporic music making practices and oral traditions as well as an intertextual dialogue. [121] Tricia Rose in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* backs this up defining rap's sampling practices as a cross-generational homage, a means of archival research, a process of musical and cultural archeology. Joining Rose's argument, Russel A. Potter - in *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* – underlines that rap's continual citation of the sonic and verbal archives is a re-form of the tradition it draws upon.

Entirely in line with these considerations, Soopafly's sampling of Nina Simone's riff "It Be's that Way Sometime" is highly significant, especially if we consider the content of the lyrics in which it is embedded. In the song "That Way" Soopafly is about to recall the story of his life: "I was the child of a general, son of a preacher man/ Grown actin', there was nothin' you could teach a man/ Hard headed young nigga, blessed with the gift of music/ Held it tight so I best not lose it/ I was ready for the fast life, watch me prove it."[122] Throughout the song Soopafly takes the time to realize the change that his life has undergone: from been "used to broke but/ Now I'm needin' somethin' more than that, fuck bein' poor and Black," he now wakes up and realizes he is rich and living a cushy life thanks to his rapping skills. After having faced difficulties, Soopafly finally made it, and he

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See also Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), 72–110 and Samuel A. Floyd's *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), 35–57.

With this respect, see also Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977).

[119] Notably, these lyrics contain a typical AAE feature: the absence of third person singular -s.

[120] MF Doom. "Beef Rapp." http://genius.com/Mf-doom-beef-rapp-lyrics. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[121] According to William Perkins, rap's practice of sampling establishes an "ongoing link with history and tradition, including all of the African and African American musical genres" (1996, 21).  See William Eric Perkins's "The rap attack: An Introduction" (1996).

[122] Soopafly's lyrics of "That Way" are retrievable at http://genius.com/Soopafly-that-way-lyrics. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

lists in detail his accomplishments in order to rebel against the stereotype of Black people as skilless and inherently inferior.

In Soopafly's song, the relaxed attitude that reflects Black people's posture when they have to face hard times and bad changes - exemplified by Nina Simone's "It Be's that Way Sometime" - is re-visited through re-contextualization. As a consequence, a completely different mindset is displayed. No faithful resignation to a negative change but, rather, a sense of pride because the rapper has won himself this change thanks to his skills. In Soopafly's song, the typically Black attitude towards difficult circumstances expressed by "It Be's that Way Sometime" is revisited, re-adapted, and directed towards a surprisingly positive and self-achieved change.

Through the act of "sampling" Soopafly simultaneously succeeds in two operations. First, he establishes a dialogue with Nina Simone through an intertextual attempt; second, he undoes the sentence's meaning and he assembles it into a new context where it is endowed with a new acceptation.

This brief example allows me to discuss rap and sampling as forms which draw on the skills and linguistic dexterity of the African American oral tradition of Signifyin(g), i.e. as linguistic acts centered on playing with and subverting meanings.

## 2.2 The African American Oral Tradition of Signifyin(g)

It's hard to attach a definition to such an inclusive speech event. Anthropologist Claudia Mitchell-Kernan has suggested that Signifyin(g) is "a way of encoding messages or meanings in natural conversations which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection" (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 81).

According to Mitchell-Kernan, the Black concept of signifying "incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations" (1972, 309). The hearer is thus constrained to attend to all potential meaning carrying "symbolic systems in speech events—the total universe of discourse" (310).

Entering into the spirit of a fuller critique, the purpose of the following section is to introduce origin and mechanisms of Signifyin(g) in order to demonstrate its affiliation to the art of rap. Studies and researches by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.[123] back this up, as it might be assumed from his words:

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[123] The acknowledged leader of African American literary criticism.

> The first person I ever heard "rap" was a man born in 1913 – my father, Henry Louis Gates Sr. Daddy's generation didn't call the rhetorical games they played "rapping"; they "signified" [...] But this was rapping just the same, rapping by another name. Signifying is the grandparent of rap.[124]

For my discussion of Signifyin(g) I will bring to the forefront Gates' theories on this practice exposed in his 1988 book *The Signifying Monkey*. As Gates explains, the tradition of Signifyin(g) dates back to slavery, and even further to the oral traditions of African nations.[125] Even though the concept of Signifyin(g) is a complex rhetorical strategy that must be located within the tradition of African American rhetoric and within its system of interrelation (hermeneutics and semiotics), its origin must be tracked back to Africa. The origins of Signifyin(g), in fact, are rooted in the practice of Ifa divination[126] among the Fon and Yoruba cultures of Benin and Nigeria in West Africa. These people never invented a system of writing, however they possessed a sacred text committed to be passed down orally by the priestly class, as well as a system for interpreting it that was fully developed. Ifa[127] divination is the richly lyrical and densely metaphorical system of sacred interpretation that the Yoruba in Nigeria have consulted for centuries, and which they continue to consult (Gates 1988, 9-10).

Remarkably, if we enter this African discursive and hermeneutic universe, we will realize that the African system of interpretation seems to be a metaphysical challenge to any interpretative system based on binary oppositions.[128] In fact, the African concept of interpretation incorporates a system of differences and traces which leads to the deferral of meaning whereby the signifier is the same, but the signified changes:

> The ultimate indetermination of meaning, however, does not lead the Yoruba to despair; rather, it leads them to return to the text of Ifa, to consult it regularly, to wrestle with its play of differences, not to invent a meaning, but rather to *process a*

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[124] Henry Louis Gates Jr. "An Anthology of Rap Music Lyrics." *Financial Times* November 5, 2010 http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/87cca6b0-e7a9-11df-8ade-00144feab49a.html. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[125] https://africanamericanenglish.com/2010/04/17/the-rap-more-than-just-Hip Hop/. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[126] Whereas the God Ifa is the text of divine will, Esu is the text's interpreter.

[127] Ifa consists of the sacred texts of the Yoruba people, as does the Bible for Christians.

[128] African discursive and hermeneutic universe is not based on sets of binary oppositions; in fact, it is genderless, open-ended, it does not insist upon determinate meanings, and it is wedded neither to binary oppositions nor to the notion of contradiction.

*meaning from among the differences*,[129] sacrifice to Esu and the appropriate deity, only

to return to explore the process once more. (Gates 1988, 41)

Wanting to better understand the African concept of *"processing a meaning from among the differences,"* a brief mention of the Africanist theory of interpretation and hermeneutics is needed, together with an excursus on its origin from the typical African figure of Esu Elegbara.

Signifyin(g) derives from African forms of myth and Ifa divination that survived the Middle Passage, and which were later recombined into the New World's African American culture:

Of the music, myths and forms of performance that the African brought to the Western Hemisphere, I wish to discuss on specific trickster[130] figure that recurs with startling frequency in Black mythology in Africa, the Caribbean and South America. This figure appears in Black cultures with such frequency that we can think of it as a repeated theme or topos. (Gates 1988, 4).

Gates is referring to the divine figure of Esu Elegbara,[131] who belongs to Yoruba[132] mythology. Of particular interest, among Esu's features, is the fact that his[133] mouth sometimes appears

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[129] My emphasis.

[130] Tricksters figures show up in the folklore and creation myths of a number of cultures worldwide, including African, Haitian, Native American (or American Indian) and African American. Trickster tales are a type of folktale in which animals are portrayed with the power of speech and the ability to behave like humans. The dominant characteristic of the trickster is the ability to defeat bigger and stronger animals. A variant of the trickster tale is the escape story, in which the figure must extricate himself from a seemingly impossible situation. Closely linked to the rhetorical practice of signifying, trickster tales generally serve satirical or parodic purposes by poking fun at various types of human behavior. In African and African American trickster tales, the trickster figure is often a monkey, a hare, a spider, or a tortoise. One of the first African American writers to present the trickster figure in literature was Charles Waddell Chesnutt, precisely in his story "The Goophered Grepevine," that appeared in the *Atlantic Montly* in 1887.

[131] These figure is called "Esu Elegbara in Nigeria and Legba among the Fon in Benin. New figuration in the new world include Exu' in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba (pronounced Las-Bas) in the pantheon of the Voodoo gods in Haiti and Papa La Bas in the gods of Hoodoo in the United States. All these are related part to a larger, unified figure, so all of them can collectively be referred to as Esu, or as Esu-Elegbara" (Gates 1988, 5-6). As Gates further explains: "Each version of Esu is the sole messenger of the gods (in Yoruba, *iranse),* he who interprets the will of the gods to man; he who carries the desires of man to the gods. Esu is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane. Frequently characterized as an inveterate copulator possessed by his enormous penis" (Gates, 1988, 6). Despite this, as the myth suggests, he is genderless or of dual gender. Esu, in fact, is "certainly not restricted to human distinctions of gender or sex; he is at once both male and female. Although his masculinity is depicted as visually and graphically overwhelming, his equally expressive femininity renders his enormous sexuality ambiguous and genderless" (Gates 1988, 29).

[132] Dominant language and culture group in Nigeria.

[133] Since Esu is depicted as genderless, i.e. as both masculine and feminine by the myth, each time I use the masculine pronoun for Esu, I could have used the feminine, indiscriminately.

double.[134] Metaphorically, this signals that Esu's discourse is double-voiced. In addition, in Yoruba sculptures Esu is portrayed with a calabash holding Ase, the supreme deity of the Yoruba who created the Universe. Ase can be translated as "logos." Esu, in fact, holds power on the Logos, he is the one who translates, interprets the sacred text, explains and loosens knowledge; he is the sole messenger of the Gods and the ultimate copula connecting truth with understanding, text with interpretation, and the word (as a form of the verb to be) that links a subject with its predicate (Gates 1988, 6). Furthermore, his skills as mediator and as the symbol of unity of opposed forces are combined to a set of other opposing features; namely the fact that he is also considered a mutable figure in line with the nature of the "trickster" whose qualities are irony, satire, parody, magic, indeterminacy, ambiguity, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, encasement and rupture. Robert Pelton, in line with this understanding of Esu's personality, succinctly defined him as "all metaphor, all ambiguous oracle" in his 1980 book *The Trickster of Africa* (Gates 1988, 22). A detailed account of Esu's features is retrievable in what the Yoruba call the Oriki Esu, the narrative praise poems of Esu as well as in the Odu Ifa, i.e. the Ifa divination verses, and in the traditional prose narratives in which the myths of origin of the Universe are encoded (Gates 1988, 6).

Relevant is the fact that Esu – from where Signifyin(g) originates - stands as the figure of the "meta-level of formal language use, of the ontological and epistemological status of figurative language and its interpretation" (Gates 1988, 6). Esu, in fact, is portrayed as the god of indeterminacy who rules the interpretive process while at the same time embodying the ambiguity of figurative language (Gates 1988, 21).

Along these lines, a crucial detail as regards the passage from the figure of Esu to that of the Signifying Monkey, who is the emblem of Signifyin(g) in African American culture, is present in the description of the process of memorizing the Ifa verses and of learning divination as related to cryptograms formed by the sixteen sacred palm nuts of Ifa.

According to West African Myths, Esu receives these palm nuts from the monkeys, who encourage him to find their meanings. This passage is extremely important since the role of Esu and the monkeys becomes crucial for the passage from the African tradition to the African American one. For reasons unknown, during the displacement of African myths into the New World, the

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[134] Interestingly, Esu's most direct Western kinsman is Hermes. As Gates explains, just as "Hermes' role as a messenger and interpreter for the Gods lent his name readily to hermeneutics (the study of methodological principles of interpretation of a text) the literary critics named the methodological principles of the interpretation of Black texts 'Esu-'tufunaalo,' literally 'one who unravels the knots of Esu.' Esu-'tufunaalo, is a Yoruba neologism coined by the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka" (1988, 8).

monkey became a central character in this crucial scene of instructions (Gates 15) and Esu's role as the first interpreter survived the Middle Passage together with both the monkey figure and the tree in which the monkeys lived and from which they selected the sixteen palm nuts that became the sacred characters of Ifa divination (Gates 1988, 16).


It is this monkey figure that crossed over to the United States and became the African American folktale narration character known as the "Signifying Monkey" and who stands as Esu's equivalent in African American mythic discourse. It is necessary to note that this equivalence is drawn neither from archeological nor from historical evidence, but rather from the possible functional equivalence of the two characters as being both figures of rhetorical strategies and of interpretation.

The Signifying Monkey is one of the most famous African American folktale narration characters who exists as "the great trope of Afro-American discourse, and the trope of tropes, *his language of signifying*[135] is his verbal sign in the Afro-American tradition" (Gates 1988, 21).

Signifying, as an African American practice, "luxuriate in the chaos of ambiguity (Gates 1988, 45). Semantic "luxuriation" in this chaos implies that a word might refer to a myriad of other concepts and that a statement might have contradictory meanings. According to Mitchell-Kernan, when African American people are signifying "a particular utterance may be an insult in one context and not in another. What pretends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. Superficially, self-abasing remarks are frequently self-praise" (1972, 311). Thus, we don't necessarily have to think of a prescribed set image of that word, neither of a universal mental representation of it. Each concept to which the word might refer can trigger an infinite chain resulting in a never-ending game that opens and sets in motion infinite mental representations. Signifying in the African American oral tradition implies that words cannot be trusted and that meaning is never stable. To think about the Black concept of signifying is like bumping into a hall of mirrors where meanings are doubled, (re)doubled, denied, hidden, and played upon.

Instead, "signifying" as a Standard English term[136] is univocally defined by any dictionary as "to mean something, to be a sign of something, to show your feelings, intentions opinions."[137]

At first sight one might encounter some difficulties in trying to relate the Black linguistic "signifying" to the standard English "signifying."

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[135] My emphasis.
[136] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/signify. Last Visited February 8, 2017.
[137] See Merriam-Webster's definition of the term.

This level of conceptual dizziness stems from the selection - by African Americans - of the SAE signifier "signification" to represent a remarkably different concept. To summarize: the SAE word is a homonym of the African American vernacular word, yet these "two identical signifiers have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing" (Gates 1988, 45). Their relation of identity at the level of the signifier is opposed by their relation of difference manifested at the semantic level (the signified).

To settle this sense of vertigo, Gates capitalizes the Black vernacular practice of Signifyin(g) drawn from African American oral tradition - and particularly the oral practices that involve trickery through indirection - in order to distinguish it from "signifying" as it is understood in SAE.

The Black usage is thus marked by Gates with capital "S" - Signifyin(g)[138] - whereas the White usage is marked simply as "signifying." This seemingly innocent naming - assigning upper case to Black, lower case to White – represents itself an example of Signifyin(g), whereby the hierarchy and order of meanings are questioned and reconceived.

As Gates himself points out:

> Signification, in standard English, denotes the meaning that a term conveys, or is intended to convey. It is a fundamental term in the standard English semantic order. Since Saussure, at least, the three terms signification, signifier, signified have been fundamental to our thinking about general linguistics and, of late, about criticism specifically. These neologisms in the academic-critical community are homonyms of terms in the Black vernacular tradition perhaps two centuries old. By supplanting the received term's associated concept, the Black vernacular tradition created a homonymic pun of the profoundest sort, thereby marking its sense of difference from the rest of the English community of speakers. (1988, 47)

No other selection could have been as meaningful as the term "signifying" itself. By picking up this word, a profound disruption takes place, precisely because of the relationship of difference that is obtained between the two apparently equivalent terms. This disturbance, of course, has been effected at the level of the conceptual, or the signified" (Gates 1988, 47).

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[138] Gates' choice of putting a bracketed (g) refers to the fact that this word is spoken by Black people as "signifyin'" without the final 'g' (Gates 1988, 46).

A meta-discourse is at work in this process. In fact, Signifyin(g) locates at the level of meta-language as the very play of language upon itself. As Gates explains in fact, "if the signifier stands disrupted by the shift in concepts denoted and connoted, then we are engaged at the level of meaning itself, at the semantic register. Black people vacated this signifier, then—incredibly—substituted as its concept a signified that stands for the system of rhetorical strategies peculiar to their own vernacular tradition" (1988, 48).

Rhetoric, then, has supplanted semantics in this most poignant confrontation within the structure of the same signifier.

Notably, no other linguistic challenge could be more effective than picking up the SAE sign that stands for meaning-creation and representation ("signification") in order to colonize it and disrupt it by turning it into the very emblem of the system of rhetorical strategies peculiar to their African American English oral traditions.

The complex nature of these musings can be better grasped by a close examination of the existing definitions of Signifyin(g) provided by the most acknowledged scholars in the field.

To start with, Rickford and Rickford (2000) define Signifyin(g) as a ritualized wordplay, a highly-stylized lying, joking, and carrying on with such virtuosity as to inject one's message with metaphor and eloquence while elevating one's social status and parodying one's interlocutors or their attitudes and behaviors:

> Signifying is the verbal artistry one is likely to overhear whenever Black folks get together in an informal forum, whether that is a fish fry or a barbershop. It's part of an appreciation for 'rapping,'[139] for fluid speech that brings the speaker and the listener immeasurable pleasure (82).

Roger D. Abrahams,[140] whose awareness of the need to define uniquely Black forms of significations is exemplary, describes Signifyin(g) as the technique of indirect argument or persuasion, a language of implication showing the monkey to be a trickster, a master of technique and style, Signifyin(g) being the language of trickery (1970, 51), while in *Lexicon of Black English*

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[139] As hinted in the introductory part of the present chapter, "rap" meant "to talk."
[140] See Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (1970), pp. 51-52, 66-67, 264. The first edition of the book was published in 1964. See also Abrahams' *Positively Black* (1970).

Dillard J.L.[141] describes Signifyin(g) as "a familiar discourse device from the inner city, which tends to mean "communicating by indirection" (1977, 154; 177).

In *Black Talk* (1994) Geneva Smitherman describes Signifyin(g) as "the verbal art of ritualized insult in which the speaker puts down, needles, talks about (signifies on) someone, to make a point or sometimes just for fun. It exploits the unexpected, using quick verbal surprises and humor, and it is generally characterized by non-malicious and principled criticism" (1994, 206).

Tom Kochman in *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America* (1972) explains that to some people Signifyin(g) means any kind of ritual insult; to others, it must include an element of indirection — i.e. the victim doesn't realize he is being insulted, or you egg the victim into a fight with somebody else. One form of Signifyin(g) is the practice of 'doin' the dozens.'

Indisputably, the African American tradition of Signifyin(g) includes this practice which is also referred to as "Playing the Dozens" and "The Dozens." It is an elaborate insult contest in that rather than insulting an adversary directly, the contestant mocks members of the opponent's family[142] by making fun of them.

In his *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang,* Clarence Major defines it as a "very elaborate game traditionally played by Black boys, in which the participants insult each other's relatives, especially their mothers. [143] The object of the game is to test emotional strength. The first person to give in to anger is the loser" (1970, 104; 46; 34). This practice entails being engaged in a highly motivated rhetorical act aimed at figurative, ritual insult and at demonstrating verbal skill.

Joining this perspective, James Percelay, Monteria Ivey, and Stephan Dweck observe:

> The dozens is the blues of comedy. It is a ritual that crosses generational, regional and
>
> class boundaries. The dozens illustrates the force of the spoken word, and is the
>
> ultimate expression of fighting with your wits, not your fists. This oral tradition is
>
> another example of the originality and verbal innovation that distinguish African
>
> American culture. (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 68)

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[141] One of the sharpest scholars of Black language use.

[142] Some examples are: "Your family is so poor, the last time you had a hot meal was when your house was on fire"; "Your sister is so fat, they had to baptize her at Sea World"; and "Your brother is so ugly, when he sits in the sand the cat tries to bury him" (Rickford and Rickford, 69).

[143] The insults against "momma" typical of Signifyin(g) are mirrored in rap's mysogynist lyrics which are often ludicrously violent against women, hypermasculine, and reflecting hyperbole, traditional bad guys, and ribald fun. The hatred of women that permeates so many rap songs also exposes the insecurities of powerless Black men, seeking to exercise their will in a misdirected theater of misogyny. Masculinity and misogyny are discussed in Chapter 4.

The Dozens has its origin in the slave trade of New Orleans where deformed slaves—generally those punished with dismemberment for disobedience—were grouped in lots of a "cheap dozen" for sale to slave owners. To be sold as part of the "dozens" for a Black person was the worst offence possible.[144]

In an effort to react and toughen their hearts against the physical and verbal assaults inflicted on them as part of the bunch of "dozens," Blacks practiced insulting each other indirectly by attacking the most sacred mother of the other. The person who loses his temper and comes to blows loses the contest, whereas the one who outwits and out–insults the other while keeping a cool head is the winner.

Insulting the adversary's mother, also known as "Yo Momma jokes" is at the heart or rap battles.[145]

In his book *The Ice Opinion* (1994) Rapper Ice T dedicated an entire chapter to rap as "The Art of Shit Talkin.'" A beloved trope within rap, "Yo Momma" jokes are meant to humiliate and infuriate the other. From 2006 until 2007 there was even a television show on MTV called "Yo Momma," where verbal battles were fought using insulting references to each other's mothers.[146]

Some examples of "Yo Momma Jokes" are: "Your mother is so fat, she broke her arm and gravy poured out (From the movie White Men Can't Jump)"; "Your mother is so fat, she puts on high-heel shoes in the morning, and by the end of the day, they're flats" (Rickford and Rickford, 69).

Precisely for these reasons, in *The Psychology of Black Language* (1973) Jim Haskins and Hugh F. Butts defined Signifyin(g) as the clever and humorous wordplay that can be used, among other purposes, to put down another person (86).

On this subject, an interesting point was raised by Professor Hiram Smith who recalled:

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[144] For a fuller discussion on Toasts and Playing the Dozens, see *Talking about Your Mama: The Dozens, Snaps, and the Deep Roots of Rap* by Elijah Wald p.108 -112.

[145] According to Kochman during rap battles "what you try to do is totally destroy somebody else with words. It's that whole competition game again, fighting each other. There'd be sometimes forty of fifty dudes standing around and the winner was determined by the way they responded to what was said" (1972, 205-206). The term comes from the idea of fighting with words. A battle, in fact, is set up like a fight. One contender takes one side and the other takes the other. They rap at each other (in turn, though) until one gives up or a specific winner is announced. It is usually done by males, specifically those who tend to be street affiliated. The practice of battlin' has always been a form of Black verbal dueling associated the art of rhyming and it highlights the value placed on verbal creativity and competition in the Black speech community. During these battles rappers have to demonstrate their skills in "freestyling." In a rapping contest, "freestyling" means that rapper don't write the lyrics; they say them as they think of them off the top of their heads. As they take turns rapping back and forth, they are actually competing. In the end, the judges or the people watching the competition vote who won the competition and who had the better lyrics. It is also judged by who had the better meaning behind his/her words (Alim 2006, 63-65).

[146] See "The Best on MTV's 'Yo Momma Jokes' at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKTVLeUpnTw. Last Visited February 16, 2017.

I had a friend of mine, he was Mexican American, his mother was from Mexico but he knew a lot of Black people and so he and I we used to play the dozens like "your mother so ugly, your mother so fat." Well, one day his mother overheard us and she got very offended because she thought we were being serious, but playing the dozens it is not that! The ideas behind playing the dozens is, I say the best insult about you, your mum, your sister, but the way the game is played is that you can't get mad, you can't get your feelings hurt. If you get mad, you lose because the whole objective is that we are all supposed to laugh, that's the irony.

This story makes clear that such a linguistic practice can be misunderstood by non-Blacks not familiar with Black culture and language gaming.

An issue that is often not taken up by studies of intercultural communication, but which is certainly central to them and would be worth researching, is the fact that Black verbal competition is often misinterpreted as a form of violence. This biased interpretation should be read in relation to White racist views on Blacks as violent and aggressive, despite the fact that it is Whites who often commit violent crimes against Blacks in American society. The topic of violence within rap music is confronted in Chapter 4.

Another African American oral practice that has its roots in the older traditions of Signifyin(g) and playing the dozens is toasting. [147]

A modern urban form of Black oral lore, a toast is a lengthy, recited narrative or poem describing a series of feats by a central character. Toasts are commonly recited on street corners, front porches, prisons, or wherever men and groups of Blacks gather. Focusing on the main character's heroic acts and exercises of wit, the toast presents values through actions. Toast characters include recognizable and popular figures, the most recurrent being the Signifyin(g) Monkey.[148]

As the tradition of the Signifyin(g) Monkey tales[149] demonstrates, the Signifyin(g) Monkey stands as the perfect epitome of the practice of Signifyin(g) where even the most literal utterance allows

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[147] See *Yo Mama! New Raps, Toasts, Dozens, Jokes, and Children's Rhymes from Urban Black America* (2003) by Onwuchekwa Jemie (ed).

[148] Roger Abrahams in 1960s and Rudy Ray Moore in 1970, chief experts of this practices, were the first to collect and record these folk-tale tradition poems.

[149]"Tales of the Signifying Monkey seem to have had their origins in slavery. Hundreds of these have been recorded since the early twentieth century. In Black music, Jazz Gillum, Count Basie, Oscar Peterson, the Big Three Trio, Oscar Brown, Jr., Little Willie Dixon, Snatch and the Poontangs, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Smokey Joe Whitfield, and

room for interpretation and language becomes a minefield. Remarkably, the role of the Signifyin(g) Monkey is that of creating dizziness and giddiness by triggering direct or indirect misunderstandings, as well as igniting fights between other animals.

It is not my intention to recapitulate on the various existing versions of the Signifying Monkey tales or on the Signifyin(g) Monkey figure itself.[150]

The reason why I won't linger on the Signifying Monkey tales[151] lies in that they treat Signifyin(g) as a practice that sticks closely to verbal play and artistry, rhetorical competence, entertainment, mental exercise, or preparation for interacting with friends and foes in the social arena, while neglecting its meta-rhetorical structures. What we want to underline is that Signifyin(g) unveils a much deeper hermeneutic challenge at work and, as an extraordinarily complex speech genre, it can bring to light a confrontation between African American culture and American culture that is both political and metaphysical.

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Johnny Otis—among others—have recorded songs about either the Signifying Monkey or, simply, Signifyin(g)" (Gates 1988, 51).

Rappers, as well, have recorded songs on the Signifying Monkey. One of the most famous reworkings of the Signifying Monkey" folklore is Schooly D's song "Signifying Rapper." The "Signifying Monkey," as folktales report, in interactions with the Lion and the Elephant will most typically trigger misunderstandings and fights by claiming to "repeat" – while actually inventing – the Elephant's harsh words against the Lion. Looking for vengeance, the Lion goes to see the Elephant and gets his ass soundly smacked down. In Schoolly's version of the tale, the "Signifying Rapper" – the substitute for the character of the Signifying Monkey - is joined by the "Badass Pimp" and the "Big Bad Faggot", who fill respectively the roles of the Lion and the Elephant. The beat of the song samples Led Zep's "Kashmir."

[150] The Signifying Monkey's Signifying is an exhibition of aggressive wit and indirect verbal assault on a victim.

[151] Dillard and the others seems to concentrate more on the relation of signifying with the tradition of Playing the Dozens and toasts, rather than on Signifying itself.

## 2.3 Signifyin(g) in Slavery Times

Considerably, Africans enslaved and forcibly transported to the New World would be suspicious of a language that defined them as less than human and gave them the status of slaves. It is no wonder that the origin of signification is to be traced precisely in slavery - as does the allegorical structure of the Monkey poems and the nature of their figuration (Gates 1988, 68).

The mastery of the White language and the consequent destruction of its meanings' hierarchy first entailed a process of internalization of the master's values and language, that would be then turned into tools of resistance against the White system itself. An example of such a form of resistance was for slaves to say to themselves and to each other a different version of the new tongue. As Gates notes, in fact, the language of Blackness encodes and names its sense of independence precisely through the rhetorical process of Signifyin(g) that challenges the standard mainstream order of meaning (1988, 66).

As far back as slavery times, slaves in the cotton field already used lyrics to signify upon their oppressor: "Their verse was their own, abounding either in praise or satire intended for kind and unkind masters" (Faux 1823, 77-78). [152]

Since slaves were forced to talk using their White master's language, their condition of servitude and oppression pushed them to code or disguise English from the White man: "they had to devise ways of runnin' it down that would be powerful and meaningful to the Black listener, but harmless and meaningless to any Whites who might overhear their rap. Therefore, slave song lyrics and spirituals had a double-edged meaning" (Smitherman 1977, 47).

For instance, the slaves used other-worldly lyrics in their old Testament-based Negro Spirituals to talk about their current life and not about the afterlife, as it could appear at first hearing to a White listener. The moaned "Steal Away to Jesus,"[153] for instance, meant stealing away from the plantation to freedom. When slaves sang "this train is bound for glory" they were talking about the freedom train that ran on the Underground Railroad. The symbolic Underground Railroad was in truth a revolutionary network of escape routes conceived to assist slaves fleeing away from

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[152] See also John Dixon Long, *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State* (1857), pp. 197-98.

[153] "Steal Away to Jesus. African American Spiritual." *Youtube* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sFefBWcypo. Last Visited October 20, 2016.
One ex-slave, Wash Wilson, in an interview he granted a member of the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s, implies that "sig'fication" was an especial term and practice for the slaves: When de niggers go round singin' "Steal Away to Jesus," dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. Dat de *sig'fication* of a meetin'. De masters 'fore and after freedom didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's, so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewheres. Sometimes us sing and pray all night." From George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,* Vol. 5, Part 4, p. 198.

the plantations. Curiously, in "Go Down Moses and Tell Ole Pharraoh to Let My People Go," Black people were referring to Moses in order to talk about Black freedom fighter Harriet Tubman.[154] Harriet was the conductor of the Underground Railroad, who assisted more than three hundred slaves in their escape during her lifetime. The equivalence present in the above-mentioned lyrics indexes that she would tell White slavers (Old Pharraoh) to let her people go. The Old Testament, with its themes of oppression, fight, and the tormented wanderings of God's chosen people, became a "rich source for Black songs and sermons of freedom to draw biblical analogues to talk about their current state" (Smitherman 1977, 48).

Not all spirituals of course represented conscious disguises for escaping from slavery. But if the code did not speak to escape as such, the lyrics were nonetheless expressions of feelings about enslavement.

Relevant are Frederick Douglass's observation in his *Narrative* (1845), when writing about the lyrics of Black songs and while observing that slaves would sing words which to many people could seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves.[155]

Another recorded Black usage of signification can be traced as early as the eighteenth century, precisely when commentator Nicholas Cresswell wrote the following entry in a journal between 1774 and 1777: "In songs they generally relate the usage they have received from their Masters or Mistresses in a very satirical stile and manner."[156]As Gates notes, in fact, Black people "enounce their sense of difference by repetition with a signal difference" (1988, 66).

"Repetition with a signal difference" is a highly revealing sentence. It points at the fact that the complex relationship of simultaneous identity and difference triggers a confrontation defined by the politics of semantics. Precisely, we are standing in front of two different and yet inextricably bound orders of meaning mutably dependent on their simultaneous identity and difference.

To resume the thread of the previous section, what Black people do when they signify is to mark the Black difference through a provoking and sophisticated renaming ritual whereby received concepts are emptied and re-filled with their own meanings:

By doing so, by supplanting the received, standard English concept associated by (White) convention with this particular signifier, they (un)wittingly disrupted the Saussurean nature of the sign as signified/signifier equation. [...] Their complex act of

[154] See Catherine Clinton's *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom.* New York: Little, Brown Company, 2004.

[155] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845; New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 13-14.

[156] *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777,* ed. L. MacVeigh (New York: Dial Press, 1924), pp. 17-19.

language signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions, conventions established – at least officially – by middle-class White people. (Gates 1988, 46-47)

The present analysis on the nature of Black's people practice of disrupting the sign's meaning - which is at the heart of Signifyin(g) - allows us to realize that this same logic is applied to the term "nigga," which will be the focus of the next chapter. No word other than nigga, in fact, could be the perfect score of this linguistic, semiotic, political and metaphysical offensive against the White order of meaning.

"Nigga," as we shall see in Chapter 3, has been re-signified into a term of empowerment, thus testifying how a change in a word's meaning can short-circuit the stereotyped thinking patterns that undergird the system of racism in America.

In addition, it testifies that to occupy a space – in this case the sign that outwardly seems to be the same, but is inwardly different - unfolds the possibility to resist and subvert the dominant system of representation, to adopt its structure in order to exploit it for different and, often, opposing ends.

The principal counter-strategy at work when Black people signify is to bring into being that which is unacknowledged by the standard regimes of representation, to subvert the canonical interpretative structures and to "turn the mechanisms of fixed racial signification against themselves, in order to begin to constitute new subjectivities, new positions of enunciation and identification" (Hall 1996, 23).[157]

## 2.4 Signifyin(g) Rappers

In light of these considerations, what is suggested here is that rappers, as well, question, tease and dismember the White order of meanings. In fact, when they build metaphors that can be understood only thanks to an in-group knowledge, they are Signifyin(g) and, by so doing, they are excluding "outgroup" members from their interpretative universe.

A remarkable example of this assertion is the song "Str8 Ballin"[158] (Straight Ballin) by rapper Tupac Shakur (1971-1996)[159] who, in 1994, founded the group called *Thug Life*.

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[157] See Stuart Hall "The After-Life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why Black Skin, White Masks" *in The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* edited by Alan Read (1996): 13-37.
[158] The song is part of the 1994 album *Thug Life Vol. 1* LP. Full lyrics retrievable at http://genius.com/583235. Last Visited October 25, 2016.
[159] Also known by his stage names 2Pac and Makaveli, he was an American rapper, record producer, actor, and poet. Further references to Tupac and his relation to gangsa rap are provided in Chapter 4.

The song's incipit recites:

> I would share the definition of ballin'
>
> With you White folks, but no
>
> The game is to be sold not told, so fuck you

This refusal of unveiling the real meaning of "ballin" is a challenge against the possibility for White folks to enter the Black's hermeneutic universe and a mockery of White people's inability to understand the real meaning of words to which only Black people are privy. In fact, what White people might think the word means, is just a biased version.

If we look up "balling" on urbandictionary.com, [160] we get a partial definition which is informed by the perspective of White's knowledge only. What White people know about ballin' is that it can be defined as being rich and blowing money on expensive things like gold chains instead of buying essential things that are needed to survive. But Tupac is suggesting that "balling" means a lot more than just owing or showing off nice things, and that unless you experience it yourself, you are excluded from its real meaning. In such a way, Tupac is keeping out White folks from his interpretative universe.

For the real meaning of the term I asked African American Professor Hiram Smith who, unlike Tupac, was indeed inclined to uncover the meaning of the term. Ballin' is an expression that came into use in the 1990s in relation to the discipline of basketball.

Within that context, if a basketball player was famous and rich, people would say "Man! that guy's ballin',"[161] and that meant to make a lot of money, because all basketball players make a lot of money.

The term "ballin" was then extended to drug dealers and other people who make a lot of money. Why then Tupac further says "the game has to be sold, not told"? The reason behind this statement is that you have to sell drugs, i.e. you have to experience it first-hand if you want to know what it really means. Therefore, Tupac gives out a "fuck you" to those who try to define it without experiencing it in person. Professor Hiram Smith thus paraphrased Tupac's words for me:

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[160] Confront the biased definition of the term to be found at urbandictionary.com http://it.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ballin. Last Visited October 25, 2016.
[161] Personal conversation with Professor Hiram Smith.

The definition of balling in that context means to sell drugs and make a lot of money, so paraphrasing Tupac's word, what he is saying is 'All I have gotta tell you is that if you wanna know what ballin' is, then we are going to sell drugs or I am gonna sell you drug, that's how you gonna know, the only way you gonna know what I am doing, I am not gonna tell you because I am not a snitch, I am not gonna go on the international record and tell everybody what drug dealing is, tell all the police and White people and White America. No! If you don't know, screw you! Because the game has to be sold, so I am going to sell this, I am not going to tell this, if you wanna know, the only way you gonna know is to be involved, whether that means drug, prostitution, game banging, whatever, the game has to be sold, not to be told.[162]

As a matter of fact, a level of metadiscourse is at work in this process: the White language is colonized and appropriated in order to unveil a simultaneous, parallel and opposing ontological universe.

In light of this, what we find remarkable in this example is the way Tupac signifies on words and concepts, thus providing evidence in support of our hypothesis whereby Signifyin(g) is an interpretative practice which is much deeper than mere verbal artistry. Thus, to grasp the meaning of Signifyin(g) is to transcend its interpretation as mere "elocution," or "verbalization," and to unearth the significance of the political and philosophical structures entailed within this practice which disclose a whole hermeneutic universe.

Food for thought, indeed, was Professor Hiram Smith's first-hand testimony on the concept of Signifyin(g) transposed in an every-day life situation:

Signifyin(g) means you say something with a double meaning or also, you say something and you are not saying what you are saying, you are saying something else. So, if I call up to a friend and say "Hey, I saw your husband yesterday!" I am not telling that I saw her husband walking down the street or at the store. I am telling her that I saw her husband with another woman. And if I say that to her in a certain kind of way and with a certain tone of voice, she will certainly know that I mean with another woman, or gambling, or doing something that he was not supposed to be doing and I am Signifyin(g) because I am pretending just to talk normal, but, in truth, I am saying

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[162] Personal conversation with Professor Hiram Smith.

something else that has a different meaning. And so, the other person would answer "Quit Signifyin(g)! Just tell me what you mean. Just to give you another example: you come up to me and say: "How are your kids?" so, anybody who does not know what Signifyin(g) is would just say "Oh they are fine, thanks." But somebody who knows, knows that you are telling me that you saw my kids on the corner maybe selling drugs or smoking a cigarette and you are investigating whether I know it, and you are trying to tell me that you know something about my kids, you are Signifyin(g), it is very subtle, and if you don't know Signifyin(g) you won't understand, but the people who know, *they are Signifyin(g) because you have a different meaning with respect to the meaning that you are pretending to come across*.[163]

As it might be inferred from this example, Signifyin(g) acquires a certain kind of in-group meaning, from which White folks are excluded.

Therefore, listeners who aren't already activated by this coded political or artistic or cultural message still feel privy to a sort of forbidden access thanks – as it is the case of Tupac Shakur's song - to the clandestine nature of certain lyrics.[164]

## 2.5 Semantic Inversion

To briefly recapitulate the point of the previous section, Tupac's signification on the word ballin' can be read as a form of Signifyin(g) at the semantic level (i.e., the signifier appears to be the same, but the signified changes. In addition, this brings further evidence of the way Black people appropriate English language items as well as how they fill them with their own acceptations.

What is basic here, is that the way Signifyin(g) operates on semantics represents Black American's long-standing historical trend to appropriate English for themselves and their purposes. Any previously all-White activity or field that Blacks enter is colored by a Black conceptual approach and terminology, as if to say, 'this can only be ours if we put our special linguistic imprint upon it.'

As a matter of fact, the semantics of many Americanisms derive from AAE's speakers' African perspective on language; in other words, the AAE speakers in the New World does to

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[163] My emphasis, personal conversation with Professor Hiram Smith.
[164] The attractive dissonance between these two realms of mutual inclusion and exclusion draws to the larger scope of the present study. Namely, the investigation in Chapter 4 on whether an actual intercultural communication and exchange between Blacks and Whites via rap is viable or not. Namely, this issue will be confronted in Chapter 4 through the comparison of Black and White rappers' language and lyrics.

English what West African speakers are used to do to Wolof, Mandingo, Ibo, or Yoruba: the linguistic processes used are the same, just the language of application is different.

An example of this process is the word *bad*, meaning *good* in Black semantics. This linguistic reversal process, whereby negative terms are used with positive meanings, is present in a number of African languages - for example the Mandingo 'a ka nyi ko-jugu' which literally means "it is good badly" i.e., "it is very very good" (Smitherman 1977, 16).

This is called semantic inversion, and it is a way to expand the semantic realm through the shifting of word meanings (Major 1970, 1994; Holt,1972).[165]

Another example of semantic inversion can be witnessed in the word *mean* – an adjective which in Standard American English refers to an "unkind, spiteful, or unfair person" as well as somebody who is "vicious or aggressive in behavior."[166] According to Smitherman (1977) in AAE, instead, it is "a positive reference to an extraordinary person or event; as with the Black English use of *bad*, this is derived from the African process of using negative terms to denote highly positive qualities" (43).

A further example is the word *cool*,[167] which in SAE used to mean *cold*, not friendly, whereas in Black English it means something excellent. SAE speakers have later adopted this new usage of the word *cool* with such a positive acceptation. Cool also means a form of approval or a mellow, relaxed attitude. Cool is one of the oldest and most used slang expressions, the word dates back to the early 1930s and was popularized by jazz musicians who often described each othe as "cool cats." Cats, being naturally mellow and relaxed animals, became a symbol for a generation of hipsters who also referred to each other as cats, as in "A copule of cats stopped by the club for a jam session lady night. It was really cool" (Brathwaite 1992, 14-15).

## 2.6 Anti - Language

This highly structured language ideology is nothing but a strategic "in-your-face anti-language" (Morgan 2002, 115) where AAE words mean the opposite of at least one definition of the word in dominant culture and in SAE.

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[165] Grace Holt (1972) refers to the case where a word or sign can have opposite referential meaning as "inversion" in the article "Inversion in Black Communication" (1972), pp. 152-159.

[166] See the definition of "mean" at https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mean Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[167] See Lighter's definition of "cool" in *Random House Dictionary of Historical American Slang* (1994, 473): 3.a. Orig. Black E. superlative; exciting; enjoyable; (esp. later, with weakened force) satisfactory; acceptable; OK. [Pop. By jazz musicians after WWII]. See also Cagliero's 2013 article "The Publishing and Academic Politics of Slang Dictionaries." *American English(es):* 182-194.

The term "Anti-Language" was coined by Halliday in 1976 to describe a sociolinguistic situation where a minority group uses a particular language in order to separate itself from the mainstream speech community. According to Halliday an anti-language is "nobody's 'mother tongue'; it exists solely in the context of resocialization, and the reality it creates is inherently an alternate reality, one that is constructed precisely in order to function in alternation" (1976, 575).

Anti-languages stem from a complex sense of the need for a separate identity - or anti-identity - which is constructed via an active interplay between language, identity, culture and power. A common characteristic of anti-languages is the sense of resistance among a specific ethnic group against the dominant powerful group. An anti-language underscores an attitude of "anti-society" which Halliday describes as "a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it" (570). As a mode of resistance, anti-language is not only parallel to anti-society, but, rather, it is a fact generated by it. Halliday cites as examples of anti-languages Cockney Rhyming Style and African American English.

AAE resulted from a contact situation characterized by subjugation and marginalization where different communities (Black and White) shared the same geographical space but represented different language ideologies. In such a situation, according to Morgan: "depending on the relationship of the groups, the ideology of those in power can include denigrating the language and speech style of others" (2002, 24). This is especially true if we think about US master - slave relationship where all behavior as well as speech and style of speaking were greatly regulated.

It is such total institutions - as plantation slavery - that often lead to anti-societies and underground institutions where people resist subjugation (Goffman 1961; Halliday 1978).

Anti-societies typically emerge when those in power require that "the subjugated display an attitude that reaffirms the dominator/dominated relationship in the presence of others by verbal or physical confirmation, e.g. bowing heads or saying, 'Yes sir/ma'am'" (Morgan 2002, 23).

On this subject, Labov (1972) observed that African American speakers both ignored and responded to dominant society's attempt to stigmatize and marginalize AAE usage by their continued innovations within the norms of both varieties, AAE and SAE.

African American discourse is the perfect epitome of anti-language and Hip Hop culture can be ascribed within this category, as well (Morgan 2002, 25).

As a consequence, we can say that Hip Hop culture stands as an anti- society and that its language "is constructed to function as an anti-language" (Dalzell 2014, 18).

Definitely, processes of anti-language as well as semantic inversion and expansion are central within Hip Hop music. In addition to the earlier mentioned term "ballin," another such example is the word "ill."

In its first Hip Hop stage it bore a negative meaning and it referred to hostility and bad attitude, and was often used in relation to its opposite "chill," i.e. to be cool (Morgan 2002, 121). Thus, it originally retained SAE's original meaning: "poor in quality [...] bad or harmful."[168] However, in its second stage of usage, "ill" was expanded by rappers to include simultaneously adjectival and verbal usage and its meaning became the opposite of its original one (Fab 5 Freddy, 1992).

The term, in fact, evolved by acquiring a positive acceptation, as illustrated by Chris Rock's excited promotion of his upcoming comedy special by stating: "It's gon be ill y'all!".

Below are some examples of "ill" with positive meaning both in the form of adjective and predicate:

"Who's the illest shorty alive, I confess" (in Jay-Z's song "It's Alright");

"Some of the realest, illest, chillest cats you may see" (in the track "Thisisme" by Common);

"I be illin', parental discretion is advised still" (in KRS-One's song "Ah - Yeah");

"Bust and rushed and illed and peeled the cap" (in "You Can't Fade Me" by Ice Cube).


Another example of anti-language is the term "dope," which is an informal SAE expression that refers to "a drug taken illegally for recreational purposes, especially cannabis"[169] whereas in Hip Hop language it is used as a high form of praise, meaning excellent.

Dope, like bad, is another example of the way AAE has turned the negative into positive as well as the way it makes that which is unpopular in the eyes of mass culture, popular in the eyes of underground                                                                                                                                      culture.

Dope is one of Hip Hop 's most commonly used expressions and was introduced around the mid 1980s by one of rap's pioneers, the Chief Rocker Busy Bee. Brathwaite, in his book *Fresh Fly Flavor: Words & Phrases of the Hip Hop Generation* (1992), recalls a personal experience where he heard Chief Rocker use that word at a rap battle as Melle Mel, a member of Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five M.C.s was about to take part: "Yo Mel, kick that dope shit, homeboy. Let me see you get                                                                     busy"                                                                     (21).

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168 See The Oxford English Dictionary's definition: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ill Last Visited February 8, 2017.

169 See Oxford Dictionaries at https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dope Last Visited February 8, 2017.

What is worth noting, again, is the fact that the word "dope" is used within the Hip Hop language in an extremely radical fashion: one of society's ultimate references to wrong-doing (dope) is thus elevated to a positive meaning.

On a larger scale, all these examples point to the fact that contemporary counter - youth culture tends to "flirt with what is wrong, take the negative vibe and power, and turn it all the way around to make it serve a new purpose, yet with the shock value still intact" (Brathwaite 1992, 22).[170]

Before devoting the next chapter entirely to the analysis of the term "nigga" - which is the emblem of this articulation - some further remarkable considerations as regards the AAE lexical field should be taken into consideration.

First of all, it is worth noting that many English words are erroneously believed to have been coined by Whites when, instead, they are words of African origin that have entered SAE via Black English. Smitherman has identified the following items as Black lexical items that come directly from the West African language background: gorilla, elephant, jazz, oasis, sorcery, juke (in juke-box); cola (in the term coca cola), banana, and banjo[171] (1977, 43).

Surprisingly, it also came out that the word "okay" - one of the terms used mostly not only in the Unites States, but all over the world - is of African origin. In an updating of the African origin of American words, British linguist David Dalby published an article titled "Americanisms that may once have been Africanisms" in the *New York Times* (1969), where he stated that the term okay - in the sense of "all right" - derives from West African language form "kay" meaning "yes," "of course," "indeed," as in Wolof "waw kay" and "waw ke"; in Mandingo "o-ke"; in Fula "eeyi kay" (Smitherman 1977, 45).

In addition, it must be pointed out that a striking number of Black English terms have entered SAE via music - especially in the 1920 thanks to jazz music and in the 1930s, with the outburst of swing[172] and jive.[173] This is a signal of both how relevant Black English is to American popular culture, as well as of how an actual linguistic Black and White exchange is at work.

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[170] For further examples of Hip Hop lexical items and expressions see Major's *Juba to Jive (*1994) Brathwaite's *Fresh Fly Flavor: Words & Phrases of the Hip Hop Generation* (1992); Dalzell's *Flappers 2 Rappers: American Youth Slang* (2010), *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* by Alim (2006).

[171] A banjo is a stringed instrument of the guitar family, with a round open-backed soundbox stretched over a metal hoop.

[172] By the late 1930s, "swing" was one of the most important slang words in a young person's vocabulary, used to describe a style of jazz that swept the nation and held the attention of young people for close to a decade. The first

We only need to think about the jazz era with musicians such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and John Coltrane, who brought the advent of the "cool." What these extraordinary jazz musicians did, was to take the Queen's English and play with it. They twisted and churned it. Let's think about Lester Young when he said *bread* when he meant *money*, or when Cab Calloway used *cool* when he meant really good, and when he used *dynamite* to mean "really really fine" (Brathwaite 1992, 1)

In their hands, language became a tool for liberation that they "flaunted as defiantly as they flaunted social conventions, creating their own smoky, hep-cat[174] world in those late nightclubs where they could roam freely and shutting out the 'square' world with its tight-assed artificial walls where they couldn't" (Brathwaite 1992, 1).

Later on, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, youth slang was influenced to a great degree by swing music. The 1930s were chaotic years in the United States. The national banking system collapsed, industrial output was drastically depressed, unemployment mounted without respite, and hourly wages plunged.

As President Roosevelt verified, one third of the nation was "ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished" (Dalzell 2010, 23). However, popular youth culture was in many ways undaunted by the nation's troubles and the 1930s were the glory years for the escapes of radio, movies, and music notwithstanding the Great Depression. The youth culture of the 1930s exploded with swing, big-band jazz, and in 1932 Duke Ellington released "It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing." In 1935 swing took off with the hit song "Music goes round and around" by Edward Farley and Michael Riley.

America slowly began to come out of the depression and by 1938 and 1939 the nation was defined by jitterbug (a swing dance style), swing and jive.

Together with swing music, in fact, the jive of urban Black America (primarily New York, Chicago and New Orleans) influenced the idiom of America's youth and the infusion of jive began to creep into youth vernacular.

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highly public use of the word swing would have been in 1932, with Duke Ellington's "It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing."

[173] According to Lighter, "Jive" means: Esp. Jazz banter or talk, esp. a flippant, self-assured, or bantering style of diction, prob. Arising from the DOZENS and associated with urban Black youths, some jazz and swing musicians, disc jockeys, etc., that makes use of much slang and other wordplay and sometimes of rhythm or rhyme; also (broadly) Esp. Journ. Slang, esp. the slang and jargon of swing musicians and fans (1994, 286).

[174] Hep cat (N) – a guy who knows all the answers, understands jive (Cab Calloway's *Catalogue*, 1938).

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* a hepcat is a person who knows about the newest things in music, fashion, etc.: a hip person. Generally speaking, hep cat was the way musicians were called during the 1930s and 1940s (Dalzell 2010, 55).

Jive is the lingua franca of the streets, Black vernacular that began to migrate into broad popular youth culture with the swing music and jitterbug craze of the late 1930s. Swing musicians themselves were the primary bearers of jive to mainstream youth, even though in the 1940s disc jockeys did their part, as well, in order to bring jive to youth with blasts such as "Hiya cat, wipe ya feet on the mat, let's slap on the fat and dish out some scat" (Dalzell 2010, 38). Self-evidently, jive[175] can be considered the predecessor of rappers' verbal artistry.

The patois of jazz musicians had appeared in print and had been used in the lyrics of popular recordings since the 1920s, but it did not begin to move out of the jazz world until the mid 1930s. The first wave of jive to spread across popular youth culture was the vocabulary of swing music.[176] The language used by the jazz musicians to describe their craft was quickly adopted by swing fans, known as cats[177] (Dalzell, 2010, 35).

No doubt, by the end of the decade, jive would define the slang of American youth. In July 1941, the *Pictorial Review* reported that "The esoteric terms that were once intelligible only to musicians have become common colloquialisms, bandied about by swing aficionados from coast to coast" (Dalzell 2012, 34).

Jive reached its apex in the 1940s, but was revived by the hipsters of 1950s, adjusted by the hippies of the 1960s, and revised by the rappers of the 1980s.

In the 1940s several jive and slang dictionaries were published, among them Cab Calloway's *The New Cab Calloway's Hepster's Dictionary: Language of Jive* (1944); Dan Burley's *Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* (1944); Robinson's *The Slanguage Dictionary of Modern American Slang* (1944); Shelley's *Hepcats Jive Talk Dictionary* (1945); Durst's *The Jives of Dr. Hepcat* (1953).

The influence of jive continued in the 1950s, and it was the dominant influence of Beat Speech, as Kerouac himself attests when describing the patois of the late 1940s as "a new language, actually Negro jargon, but you soon learned it" (Dalzell 2010, 85).

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[175] A poignant source that contains *jive* is Zora Neale Hurston's *Story in Harlem Slang* (1942) where the characters spill out their fantasies and fabrications on a Harlem street corner - in fantastic jive talk. This seven-page story includes a three-page glossary of Harlem slang, as well, in order to explain the language used in the story.
I have written on Hurston's storytelling in the article "Retrieving the Voice of the Ancestors: Folktale Narration in Hurston´s Mules and Men" *Iperstoria 4* (Fall / Winter 2014): 59-65.

[176] In 1938, Cab Calloway issued the first of his celebrated masterpieces of jive lexicography, the *Cat- alogue, a 'Hepster's' Dictionary*. New York: Mills Artists, 1938. Later on, in 1944, Calloway reprinted it as *The New Cab Callo- way's Hepster's Dictionary, Language of Jive*. Among swing glossaries who dealt with music-specific jive vocabulary see also "The Language of Swing – November 1935." In *Down beat*, 61(7): 1994, 20-40, and "It's Swing!" by Holman Harvey in the *Delineator*, Nov. 1936: 10–11.

[177] Cat: 1.b: Esp. Black E. a fellow; a man or boy; (also, in recent use) a person of either sex. [popularized by swing musicians after ca 1935]; 1.c.: Jazz. A usu. Male performer or avid devotee of jazz or swing music (Lighter 1994, 367).

Assuredly, since the times when sorrow songs were chanted in cotton fields,[178] African American musicians have presented their gift to America's musical and linguistic scene.

Nowadays, Black English continues to enrich SAE vocabulary from the inputs of rap music. Not only Hip Hop artists use their lexical choices to mark their identity but by so doing, as Cramer and Ward note, they also perpetuate "local indices of identity on an international scale" (2010, 1). Hip Hop terms and expressions are entering the mainstream speech and slang, especially of younger generations, enriching the international English vocabulary. To mention a few, below are some examples in the form of a reduced glossary:[179]

- **"9"**: nine-millimeter gun;
- **"Ain't no thang"**: not a big deal;
- **"Beef"**: a disagreement with someone that is on the verge of getting violent;
- **"Benzo"**: A Mercedes Benz;
- **"Bitin'"**: to copy someone;
- **"Blasted"**: very high on drugs or alcohol;
- **"Blow"**: cocaine;
- **"Blunt"**: Marijuana rolled in an emptied-out cigar wrapping;
- **"Bombed"**: drunk or high;
- **"Bonin'"**: the act of sex;
- **"Box"**: a portable stereo cassette radio;
- **"Buckin'"**: shooting a weapon;
- **"Bucks"**: money;
- **"Bumpkin'"**: good/ good throbbing funky music;
- **"Bum rush"**: to forcefully enter when not invited. Clarence Major records that in the 1980s and the 1990s "bum rush" was used as a noun to indicate a sudden police raid (1970, 73);
- **"Burned"**: to be cheated or to catch a venereal disease. Major records a use of "burn" as a verb as early as the 1920s when it was used to refer to someone who cheated at cards (1970, 73);

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[178] As regards sorrow songs, see Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass (1845); and Portelli's *Dei Canti di Colore* (2003).

[179] The definitions of this list have been created through the direct study of Hip Hop lexicon as well as with the support of explanations from African American Professor Hiram Smith and written sources such as Clarence Major's 1970 *Juba to Jive*; Smitherman's 1994 *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner;* Braithwaite's 1992 *Fresh Fly Flavor: Words and Phrases of the Hip Hop Generation*; Dalzell's 2010 *Flappers 2 Rappers: American Youth Slang*; and Lighter's 1994 *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang.*

- "**Bust**": to do something;

- "**Bust a cap**": to shoot a gun;

- "**Busted**": arrested;

- "**Bust the move or bus it**": Check this out;

- "**Bust you out**": to have sex;

- "**Caddy**": Cadillac;

- "**Cali**": California;

- "**Can you relate?**": Can you understand?;

- "**Cappin'**": shooting gun. This acceptation derives from the fact that cap is a slang word for bullet. See also Major who records cap as a verb meaning "to kill or murder someone" (1970, 81);

- "**Chump**": a weak, scared timid individual in the eyes of those who are otherwise. According to Major it derives from the 1950s and 1960s slang when the term meant "victim" (1970, 96);

- "**Clean**": to be well dressed. Major also adds that it can refer to "a performance which is technically precise" and he attests that since about 1925, "clean" meant having no money, while in the 1930s it came to mean "not using drugs" (1970, 98);

- "**Crackulatin**": happening, an extended form of "crackin";

- "**Crib**": home. It is a term that entered the Hip Hop language from the 1940s slang when it was already used to mean one's home or room (Major 1970, 121);

- "**Crookland**": used to describe the dangerous areas of Brooklyn, New York. Major adds that the term derives from "Crooklyn", a slang variant of "Brooklyn" (1970, 122);

- "**Dead Prez**": money. The term derives from the expression "dead presidents" meaning money, due to the fact that American cash bears images of dead presidents. "Dead presidents" is an expression which has been in use in the Black American community since the 1930s (Alim 2006, 74). In the late 1990s, Hip Hop duo Dead Prez shortened the term and adopted it as band name. From that moment on, "dead prez" officially entered the Hip Hop lexicon.

- "**Def**": in Hip Hop is a high form of praise. As Fred Brathwaite reports: "the term was originally pronounced 'death,' but constant usage caused its evolution to the current pronunciation" (1992, 18). According to Major (1994) the adjective "def" was used in the 1980s and 1990s as a shortened version for "definitely" and it means anything wonderful and excellent. American Hip Hop recording musician, activist and actor Mos Def (short for most definitely) adopted this term as his artist name.

- **"Don't believe the hype"**: Introduced by Public Enemy, it means don't believe everything you read, see or hear in the media. See their song bearing the same name released in 1988;

- "**Dough**" money;

- "**Down**": to get closely involved with a person or a situation, as for example in "I'd love to be down with this situation";[180]

- **"Ends"**: money;

- "**Fat**": living well, being successful;

- "**Five - O**": police;

- "**Flavor**": the tone or vibe of a person; something good; the name of one of Hip Hop's stars: Flavor Fav from Public Enemy;

- "**Ph.D**": in Hip Hop, a Ph.D. is an insult suggesting envy and refers to Player Hater Degree (see the definition of "player"). This usage has in turn led to the phrasal verbs hate on/hating on to refer to envy as in Don't be hatin' on my hair (Morgan 2002, 122).

- **"Pimp"**: within Hip Hop, it refers not only to one who solicits clients for a prostitute, but it is also used in expressions such as "record company pimpin," i.e. the means by which record companies take advantage of young Black artists lacking knowledge of the music industry (Alim 2006, 75).

- "**Player**": originally, in Hip Hop the noun player defined someone who exploited people (especially women), but it has then been re-signified in order to indicate a person who has extreme and enviable success (Major, 1970; Smitherman, 1970). This meaning has led to the compound noun "player hater," a term that refers to envious people who criticize other's success.

- **"Playa-potna"**: partner, friend;

- **"Rocks"**: within Hip Hop it can refer to a girl's best friend (diamonds) or a community's silent killer (crack cocaine), while "to rock" can mean to liven up a party, to wear a fashionable article of clothing, or to have sexual intercourse. If you really wanna liven up a party, you would "lean widdit, rock widdit" (Alim 2006, 76).

- "**Thug**": someone who has gone through hardships in life and makes money by any means available;

- "**Tude**": attitude.

- **"Underdig":** understand;

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[180]     When I first entered the USA last November 2015, I came across this word at a Conference, where the term was used by everybody even within that context. This testifies how vocabulary of Hip Hop influences linguistic attitudes in everyday speech, as well.

To summarize, rappers, as well as jazz and swing musicians before them, used their linguistic inventiveness to create an entire subculture based on hijacking the English language. African American English and Hip Hop language can certainly be considered anti-languages based on Signifyin(g) where words and phrases can have multiple meanings beyond traditional SAE interpretations. The word nigga is the foremost representative of this articulation.

CHAPTER 3

NIGGA: A HISTORICAL, LINGUISTIC AND SEMANTIC OVERVIEW

A comprehensive understanding of the term 'nigga' cannot be achieved without first addressing the sociohistorical factors that gave rise to its development, the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that condition its use and meaning, as well as its controversial relationship with the word nigger.

Historically, both nigga and nigger have been used as racial slurs, as the alpha words of White racism and hatred towards Black people.

It is remarkable that Black people seek to appropriate the very slurs that they had themselves felt hurt by. The appropriation of the slur can function - in the perspective of anti-languages - as an active engagement with the oppressive history of the society, where simultaneously the slur is denounced as taboo were it to be invoked conventionally, but can become a symbol of active engagement against that very marginalization without sidelining the history of that very oppression. The appropriation of slurs would thus be a way of not cutting oneself off from the history of racism while simultaneously challenging it.

Rappers define themselves as niggas precisely in this perspective, and in defiance of the dominant White society. Nigga, in fact, has been re-visited and appropriated by Hip Hop culture as the emblem of a unique identity. The ghetto poverty, criminalization, surveillance, incarceration of black youth especially in the 1970s and 1980s constituted the primary experiences from which this cultural identity could be constructed and, precisely, a new ghettocentric one in which the specific class, race, and gendered experiences coalesced to create a new personality: the nigga. (Kelley 1996, 147). The way the term has been re-imagined within Hip Hop culture[181] reveals the dynamics whereby Hip Hop functions as an anti-society with an anti-language.

African American linguist Arthur Spears has explained this phenomenon of re-appropriation with the term "uncensored mode" whereby expressions that in censored contexts are considered obscene or evaluatively negative are used in an almost or completely evaluatively neutral or even positive way (Spears 1998, 232).

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[181] Just to mention a few examples: see N.W.A. Niggaz Wit' Attitude's "Niggaz for Life" and "Real Niggaz"; 2Pac Shakur's "Crooked Ass Nigga," "Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.," and "Ratha Be Ya Nigga"; A Tribe Called Quest's "Sucka Nigga"; Notorious B.I.G.'s song "The Realest Niggaz"; Jay-Z's "Jigga That Nigga," "Nigga What, Nigga Who" and "Niggas in Paris." See also Snoop Dogg's "Down 4 My Niggas" and "For All My Niggaz and Bitches". As early as 1983 Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five already used the word nigga in the song "New York, New York."

In addition, nigga and nigger both exemplify the semantic inversion characteristic of Black communication that extends the meaning of words on multiple levels, as verified in Chapter 2.

This Chapter will take on these issues by providing a detailed historical, linguistic, and semantic comparative overview of nigga and nigger, in order to shed light on the ways they are interrelated. Some claims they are the same word, thus referring indistinctly to both with the generic and euphemized substitute 'N-word,' while others claim that they are two completely different words.

In particular, the aim is to question and criticize certain erroneous commonly shared beliefs concerning the two terms.

For some, the use of an 'a' on the end of the expression marks a distinct contrast with the 'er' ending, the former denoting endearment or camaraderie and the latter racism, exclusively. Furthermore, it is believed that the spelling with the final 'a,' also called schwa ending nigg(-a), is a recent respelling by Blacks, a phenomenon to be ascribed to contemporary generations under the influence of Hip Hop culture, whereas nigg(er) would be exclusively the racial historical pejorative.

It will be taken objection to this by bringing evidence that Blacks have been using the term nigg(-a) since slavery times, hence the respelling is not new at all. What is more, the belief that the pronunciation 'nigga' has been prerogative of Black usage only will be problematized. It will be shown that this spelling was first introduced via the schwa pronunciation of White colonists in the American South under the influence of the dialect of London aristocrats in the 18th century, who developed a 'non-rhotic' speech variant.

Also the claim that nigg(-er) would be a White racial slur, exclusively, will be questioned.

Historically, we have attestations that prove how nigger was used among Blacks as a self-referential term, as a term of endearment and as a neutral term.

Hence, the first aim will be to show what produced this double form by tracing the origins behind the two different pronunciations. Second, to investigate why and to what extent the perceived difference in pronunciation is related to different semantic usages, i.e. why one pronunciation is perceived as solely close to Black folks and why the other, instead, is perceived as related to Whites and, by extension, to racism only.

The linguistic, historical and semantic overview provided in the present chapter is thus intended as a baseline background against which the abovementioned beliefs can be questioned in order to move to a deeper historically and linguistically objective analysis of the terms.

While some people have claimed that the respelling (nigga) is new, or that its meaning can be described as simply a new positive use by rappers, this analysis will distinguish more specifically that the new usage of the term by rappers can be seen as a coming out of a particular socio-political context and embodies a particular (not simply positive) socio-political stance. The novelty will be shown to rest neither in a new pronunciation nor in a positive meaning attached to the word, but its public mobilization as a tool for the articulation of a self-conscious assertion of identity which is constructed through an act of anti-language.

The present study is not meant to undermine the evidence that Hip Hop had indeed a revolutionary impact, it rather suggests that the impact is not a matter of the emergence of a new respelling, but a new way that an old spelling came to be re-used. Second, the fact that both 'nigger' and 'nigga' have been used for centuries among Blacks themselves should not be thought of as a homogenous description of Black attitudes today, because there is still some resistance towards the use of both words on the part of many Blacks. Blacks, as any other group of people, in fact, are not a monolithic, homogeneous group.

## 3.1 Nigg(-a) and Nigg(-er)

*My earliest recollection is that my grandmother's boyfriend said*
*"Hey little nigga" And I remember even being five years old,*
*it kind of hurt my feelings but I did not understand why, you know,*
*I did not know anything about racism by that age[182],*
*and I knew that he loved me, he was not saying anything mean to me intentionally,*
*but I remember that I did not like it,  but nevertheless, I grew up using it in a variety of ways.*
*-Hiram Smith - [183]*

Tinkering with the words nigga and nigger surely proves problematic. The inherent difficulty in the interpretation of the terms lies in that language as a product and instrument of cultural practice is susceptible to another culture's interpretative machinery (Morgan, 2002).

We suggest that it is an oversimplification to say that nigger is only a pejorative whereas nigga only a positive reappropriation of the term by Blacks. This is a speculation stemming from both White and Black people's tendency to reduce a complex subject into an oversimplified, standardized and commodified vision.

It matters in what context both words are said and who says them. Therefore, generalizations and categorical, subjective perceptions should be avoided in favor of an empirical analysis of what data themselves actually show.

The mistaken claim is that the form "nigga" has been recently respelled by rappers, via the influence of the widespread phenomenon of Hip Hop.

Evidence of this perception can be traced in the words of rappers themselves, who claim that this new respelling is to be ascribed to the revolutionary linguistic appropriation of the term in Hip Hop culture. As a consequence, since Hip Hop is a worldwide phenomenon whose impact and influence are significant among large audiences, both Black and White people have internalized this notion of the 'recent' appropriation of the term nigga.

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[182] As regards the complex and appealing topic of memories of slavery, see *Transatlantic Memories of Slavery* edited by Elisa Bordin and Anna Scacchi*,* http://ilmanifesto.info/dolori-transatlantici-e-traumi-ricorsivi/, Last Visited February 6, 2017.

[183] Many thanks to Professor Hiram Smith from Pennsylvania State University for his insightful teachings on the terms 'nigger' and 'nigga.'

An emblematic example showing how nigga is believed to be strictly related to Hip Hop culture is Tupac Shakur's famous statement: "Niggers was the ones on the rope, hanging off the thing; niggas is the ones with gold ropes, hanging out at clubs" (Silverton 2011, 181). Tupac, [184] the celebrated gangsta rapper who continues to attract a huge following several years after his violent death, formulates a definition which seems to tell a lot about the difference between nigger and nigga. From his formulation one might infer that nigger belongs to a long-standing White racist discourse, whereas nigga refers to the contemporary Hip Hop reappropriation of the term.

Further evidence of rappers talking about the novel reappropriation can be seen in Jay-Z's interview on the Oprah Winfrey[185] show, where he justifies the use of the term in Hip Hop and he maintains Hip Hop culture's pioneering appropriation explaining the process by which he took the ugly word and turned it into something positive:

**Oprah Winfrey**: You know I have been known for not being a big fan of that music because of misogynist lyrics and because of the use of the N-word. You obviously feel differently and…

**Jay-Z**: Little bit.

**OW**: Little bit. (pauses) And tell everybody why-

**JZ**: What we're discussing is more than words: people give words power and for our generation[186] what we did was we took the word and we took the power out of that word. You know, we turned a word that was very ugly and hurtful into a term of endearment,[187] so I mean even when someone says it there is still intention behind it, behind what you say. So, we pretty much took the power out of the word because if we just start removing words from dictionary, just make up another word the next day so we don't address the problem.[188]The problem is racism, right? That's really the problem.[189]

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[184] Tupac Amaru Shakur (1971-1996) is also known by his stage name 2Pac. He was an American rapper and actor ranked as one of the greatest rappers ever. With his over 75 million sold copies worldwide, he is still considered to be one of the most influential rappers of all times.

[185] Jay-Z on the N-word: http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/jay-z-on-the-n-word-video. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[186] Our emphasis.  By saying "Our generation" Jay-Z implicitly conveys the false notion that the word nigga is a 21st century appropriation.

[187] Our emphasis.

[188] Jay-Z here adds a subtler point about the nature of pejorative terms in general. By the end of his statement, he is arguing that maintaining a stigma on the word to the point of taking it out of any usage and dictionaries creates a recognizable vacuum for similar and new slurs to be created. Worth noting, his view contains an implicit criticism towards Oprah's use of a euphemized version of the word: by not addressing the word directly, the problem cannot be directly addressed. Using an expression such as 'N-word' to keep the pejorative hidden makes it harder to confront the

Jay-Z's thus perpetuates the myth of an unprecedented endearing usage of the term, and that rappers are responsible for such a recent transformation.

In line with Tupac's quote, the two different terms are emphasized as a locus for two different meanings. Such perceived difference in pronunciation as fundamental is a wide-spread belief even outside the Hip Hop world.

In this respect, Rachel Jeantel,[190] during a recent interview on CNN with Piers Morgan soon after the George Zimmerman not guilty verdict,[191] explains the use of the word 'nigga,' breaking down the difference in the 'er' and 'a' versions of the word.[192] Jeantel told Piers that 'nigg-er' is the historically-forbidden version of the word, whereas 'nigg-a' has been coined by a more recent generation to mean 'my friend' or 'my homie.'[193] Moreover, she goes on saying that 'nigga' can be used to describe any male regardless of race,[194] and that it was around year 2000 that people started spelling the word with the final 'a.'

Also comedian Eddie Griffin (2003) makes this observation: "You got it mixed up. We don't say 'nig-*ger*.' We say 'nig-*ga*.' That's two different words" (Rahman, 2012, 138).

Having now seen a couple of statements showing a prominent view of how the terms themselves are perceived and from what context they are understood to have originated, these claims can now be closely examined.

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usage of the problematic term itself. With this respect, see bell hooks discussing internalized and institutionalized racism in *Talking Back* (1986), *Reel to Reel* (1996), *Outlaw Culture* (2006), and *Writing Beyond Race* (2013). As hooks states, "one of the sad ironies of racism in the United States is that so many Black people/people of color, unwittingly collude in the perpetuation of White supremacy while simultaneously denouncing racism and actively speaking out against justice" (2013, 5).

[189] My transcription of the speech. See full conversation at the following link: Jay-Z on the N-word http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/jay-z-on-the-n-word-video. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[190] Rachel Jantel is the woman who was on the phone with Trayvon Martin before Martin's death, therefore she is considered to be a prosecution's star-witness. We already mentioned Jeantel's testimony in Chapter 1 while discussing her African American English. While talking to CNN's Piers Morgan during a discussion about the George Zimmerman not guilty verdict, she made a number of surprising statements as regards Black culture, the terms 'nigger' and 'nigga' and her relationship with Martin.

[191] George Zimmerman walked away a free man due to Florida's controversial Stand-Your-Ground law. See Arian C. F. and Waddel L., "Jury acquits Zimmerman of all Charges," *The Wall Street Journal*, 14th July 2013 at https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324879504578603562762064502. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[192] Rachel Jeantel live on CNN, see full video: "Rachel Jeantel. The N-Word's New Meaning" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UEahlp0gMg. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[193] 'Homie' is another term for 'friend'. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dana-t-Blackmore/oprah-jay-z-n-word_b_3740870.html. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[194]CNN refused to redact (bleep) the use of any variation of the word http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/07/15/star-witness-rachel-jeantel-speaks-out-for-first-time-after-trial/. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

The main focus of the next sections is to challenge the idea that the word "nigga" is being recently re-spelled by rappers.

In addition, we intend to demonstrate that another erroneous formulation is to think that the alleged epithet has been 'disinfected' by rappers. We will prove that in many contexts and much further back in time it already existed as a non-infected, neutral or even positive and affective term both in the form of 'nigger' and 'nigga' (Asim 2007, 223).

## 3.2 The 'Recency Illusion' Theory and the Role of Non-Rhotic Speech (r-lessness) in American Southern Dialects

The 'Recency Illusion' is the belief that a word, phrase, grammatical construction, or word meaning is recent, when in fact it has existed for a long time. American linguist Arnold Zwicky first introduced the term in 2005, by defining it as the belief that things people have noticed only recently are in fact recent. He claims that this is a selective attention effect and that impressions are simply not to be trusted: facts must be checked (Zwicky 2005). If the perceived change in usage and meaning has been associated of late with a perceived recent change in distinct terms, the question now is: what really produced the difference in pronunciation - *nigger* vs. *nigga*? Why do people think that the schwa ending is a pronunciation that Hip Hop has introduced?

Considering the role of non-rhotic speech (r-lessness) in American Southern dialects is a critical first step in understanding the nigger/nigga relationship. Linguists have attested that until World Wars I and II, 91 % of all Black people in the United States lived in the South (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006), and also that in the American South, at least in most parts of it, a non-rhotic dialect predominated. So, how did the American South speech become a non-rhotic dialect? Wolfram and Schilling-Estes have provided evidence that the r-lessness (also called non-rhotic speech) can be traced in the American South because of the influence of London's dialect.

To make a step back: in 1607 when the British colonized Jamestown in the United States, they used to pronounce their 'r.' Randall Kennedy quotes the example from Jamestown colonist John Rolfe who, as far back as 1619, is cited to have referred to the first shipment of slaves as "twenty negars" (2002, 4). Considering this, it might be inferred that by that time the /r/ was certainly pronounced. However, as Wolfram and Schilling-Estes attest, later on in certain parts of England, in particular in the London area, speakers gradually lost the /r/, especially post-vocalically, and this feature ended

up becoming an indicator of social prestige (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 104-107). What emerges from historical data is that White planters and White American slave traders in the South had dealings with the London aristocrats and, consequently, language contacts with the British dialect. Since by that time the British dialect had acquired social prestige, and since that dialect was marked by the 'r-lessness,' White southerners began to copy their speech, thus adopting the non-rhotic phonological feature. As a consequence, by the end of the 18th century White southerners took on this speech trend (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, 105-106).

In such a way, a regular phonetic sound change that took originally place in certain parts of England ended up changing the speech habits of American Southerners, as well.

Just to give a few examples, American southerners started saying 'shugah' (sugar) and 'brothah' (brother), 'sistah' (sister), 'kone bread' (cornbread), 'poke chop' (porkchop), 'suthun' (southern) and for 'nigger' the same linguistic process was applied, i.e. 'nigger' was treated no different than any other post-vocalic 'r' word and transformed into 'nigga.'

Henceforth, Southern Whites and Blacks alike would say 'nigga,' not 'nigger,' and they would use that pronunciation simply because of their speech habits as southerners.

What is more, any of the old archival footage from the 1950s and the 1960s features some racist majors and governors such as Old Connor and George Wallace saying on national television "we don't want no niggas here" (Asim 2007, 224).

On account of this, the logic behind the new spelling breaks down if we wink at all those segregationist senators – Helms, Thurmond, Stennis, et al. – who used to say 'nigga' with their Southern accent (Asim 2007, 224). In their mouths 'nigga' was not a term of endearment, but a racial slur, therefore the idea that to say nigg(-a) has no white racist implications whereas nigg(-er) does indeed, is misleading.  In fact, White southerners adopted this linguistic trend (nigga) before Black people did,[195] and this pronunciation, therefore, reflects a southern speech dialect and, primarily, a White one.

Reportedly, the majority of U.S. Blacks inhabited the South and they shared many linguistic characteristics with Southern Whites (Bailey 2001, Cukor-Avila 2001), and they still do. Since White planters and slave traders were in everyday contact with Black people, Black people themselves started taking on this trend because of the influence of their masters' speech.

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[195] While discussing the problematic nature of the term's pronunciation, we also have to take into consideration that not the entire South is non-rhotic, most of the South is non-rhotic but there are some parts like, for example, North Carolina, where people still pronounce their 'r' because they did not have the influence of the British, but they had the influence of Scot Irish and of other European groups, instead.

Ultimately, in the South White folks started to imitate the London accent introducing the non-rhotic feature, and then Black people took on this trend, as well. Since 91 % of Blacks were southerners, the majority of Black people in the South ended up pronouncing the word 'nigger' as 'nigga.' As a matter of fact, the schwa pronunciation reflected the southern pronunciation and not necessarily a Black one – rather a White one, *in primis*.

### 3.3 A Matter of Pronunciation: Why People Think that the Schwa Pronunciation is a Typically Black One - The Great Black Migration

Until World War I and II, 91% of all Black people lived in the South (Appiah and Gates, 2003, 247, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 224).

However, over a million of Black people fled the South to escape domestic terrorism and racism and migrated North in search of jobs, thus creating what is known as the largest inland migration that the country had ever seen (Lemann 1991). Black people ended up fleeing the South because they wanted to escape Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan, domestic terrorism. A third reason why they left the South was that during the industrial boom northern factories wanted Blacks for factory jobs since Blacks would have been paid less than the European working class immigrants who were currently working there (Gates and Burton, 2011, 249).

Self-evidently, when Black people moved North, they took their speech habits with them, and being southerners, they brought with them the typically non-rhotic southern pronunciation (brotha, sistah, nigga) which is not a part of their ethnolect, but a constitutive feature of their original dialect as southerners. Since that was the first time that White people from the North had ever heard that pronunciation in mass by Black speakers, they erroneously subsumed that the -a ending was ascribable to a typical Black usage.

As it turned out, Black southerners began leaving rural areas in large numbers for the economic opportunities offered by the nation's large cities, so dialect features that were formerly markers of regional speech were then transformed into markers of social class and ethnicity. Literally, some of the Southern regional features which had been passed into African American English (like r-lessness), became markers of ethnic rather than regional identity in the large Northern cities where AAE was transplanted (Wolfram and Schilling Estes 2006, 128).

Conversely, Black southerners discovered the pronunciation 'nigger' in the North, which had not undergone the non-rhotic change (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 31, 110-111; Appiah and Gates 2003, 348).

As a result, 'nigga' – which in reality originated as a phonological feature typical of Southern White dialects, subsequently became to be perceived as an ethnic Black feature.

This is the reason why people today maintain that 'nigga' is typically Black when it stemmed, instead, from a White pronunciation.

What might be inferred is that both the development of r-lessness in the American South and the Great Black Migration of African Americans from the South played a pivotal role in the creation of the *nigger*/*nigga* perceptual pronunciation dichotomy.

However, those who defend the schwa ending of the word might here argue that, apart from the pronunciation test, there is an actual qualitative and psychological difference between 'nigger' and 'nigga.' As previously mentioned, they claim that the significant difference lies in that contemporary rappers have associated that schwa ending pronunciation to a positive, endearing and self-referential use.

Yet, even semantically, the idea that rappers have actually endowed 'nigga' with positive/endearing meaning (as Jay-Z stated) is deceptive.

We will now enter the field of semantics to confront this reductive and biased belief by analyzing the multifarious meanings attached to both nigger and nigga over the course of time.

## 3.4 A Matter of Semantics: Multifarious Meanings Attached to Nigga and Nigger

The present section investigates the ways nigga and nigger were used and with what meanings. What is claimed here is that we only think one word (nigga) is the positive Black variant and the other (nigger) is the negative White slur because of our categorical perception. Yet, we must not engage in categorical perception, but must dig deep into historical and linguistic data in order to observe speakers' actual use. As Spears maintained, in fact, when approaching words as linguists it is necessary to consider them as evaluatively neutral objects of study. It is human beings that attach different meanings to words, depending on several extra linguistic factors such as, for example, the context within which words are uttered. In Spear's view, words are contextually

dependent. Therefore, we have to study their appearances within different contexts in order to judge and provide statements concerning the whole range of their meaning:

> Nigger is evaluatively neutral as to its inherent meaning; it may express positive, neutral or negative attitudes. Neutral evaluation in this sense, also characterizes a series of controversial words, among them muthafucka, bitch, and ho. I say this based on empirical observation of speech behavior. The feelings, wishes and opinions of individuals are NOT[196] what determines speech use. Speech use in communities is out of the hands of social commentators, moral guardians and others. Some uses of language and of specific words develop in certain ways, whether we like it or not. (Spears, 2001, 241)

Many people would like to argue that nigger is always a racial slur, that they don't care, it is only a demeaning offensive term and nothing else, but that's not the truth. Linguistic data show a different story. Nigger is always, like every other word, contextually dependent.

The other thing that Spears points out is that we should look at language through empirical analysis and not through our *a propri* perception. Spears suggests that the word 'nigger' should not always be negatively evaluated; rather, it should be 'understood,' and he adds: "My claim is that we must approach this material free of biases in order to understand its true nature, role, and function in African American communities." (Spears 2001, 241).

Consistent to Spears' theory is Randall Kennedy's book: *Nigger, The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (2002) which provides a detailed description of nigger's multiple meanings. After tracing its origin, Kennedy states that the word which had been used to degrade Blacks by Whites is paradoxically also being used by some Blacks as a term of endearment, affection and solidarity.[197] Kennedy's statements are backed up by Jonathan E. Lighter's definition. In 1994, in his *Random House Dictionary of Slang*, he commented on the neutral (for centuries nigger was simply an identifying label for African and African American people), positive, and negative acceptations of the word:

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[196] Emphasis in the original.
[197] Aldridge, Kevin, Richelle Thompson and Earnest Winston. "The Evolving N-Word." *The Cincinnati Enquirer* August 5, 2001 http://enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/05/loc_1the_n-word.html. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

Nigger: Black in color, […] 1. A black African person or person of black African descent. […] 1.a. Now Black E. (used formerly in Early ModE and later in nonstandard speech as a racial designation apparently without rancorous intent, and now surviving among black speakers as an affectionate, ironic, jocular, or occ. complimentary ephitet. […] the high degree of offensiveness attached to this term *per se*, particularly in the discourse of Whites, has increased markedly over time, perh. esp. during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. […] (b) used, esp. by whites, with dismissive, abusive, or contemptuous force. – usu. Considered offensive. (1994, 656-657)

The precise historical moment when nigger became a term of racial disrespect in White American discourse is unknown. One possibility is that the negative connotation emerged during the beginning of the separate but equal Jim Crow era (approximately 1877, end of Reconstruction). Following the Civil War (1861-1865), although Blacks were freed from slavery thanks to the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution,[198] their liberties were again taken away by a set of new laws called Jim Crow laws, which legally separated Whites from Blacks. Jim Crow laws limited all contact between Whites and Blacks, separating drinking fountains, railroad cars, schools, and more.[199] It is probably in this socio-political context following the end of the Civil War – the Reconstruction Era – that the previously neutral racial label nigger would have been recast as a term to linguistically re-enslave African slave descendants (Smitherman 2006, 55). Therefore, within that context the word was designed to cause pain and to keep a group of people oppressed. Paradoxically, it was when slaves began to get their freedom that the word really began to take more and more negative connotations and it was used as a weapon to create a whole racist rhetorical environment to keep Blacks in a place of second class citizenship.

In those years, the intentional and deliberate propaganda to spread the belief that Black people were racially inferior grew more and more, even though there was no and there is still no biological evidence to say that such things exist as 'race' from a biological point of view (Appiah 2014).[200] So White people started propagandist campaigns to denigrate Black skin, and the social stigma of Black skin's association with the basest and vilest part of human society was so powerful that it became indecipherably encoded into language by the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The hatred for everything that was Black seeped through language and it affected the word 'nigger,'

[198] Adopted on July 9, 1868.
[199] These "separate but equal" laws were eventually overturned in 1954 after the landmark case *Brown vs. The Board of Education,* (1954), the Supreme Court decision that precipitated the dismantling of racial segregation.
[200] For a discussion on the notion of race, see Chapter 1, note 38.

that became associated not only with Black skin but also with notions such as inferiority, bestiality and even Black lust. Just to give an example of such combinations of Blacks and ideas of beastliness, one just need to read Thomas Jefferson's book *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781)[201] where he formulated the theory of superior Whites' beauty as evidence of the inferiority of Black men. He reported that the brain of a Black man is comparable to that of an orangutan by way of the following reasoning: since the orangutan naturally prefers the superior beauty of a Black woman over his own species, by analogy, the inferior Black man prefers the superior beauty of the White woman:[202]

> The difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? […] Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favor of the Whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the orangutan for the Black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention. (Jefferson, 1781)

The discussion on the inferiority of the African race in Jefferson's *Notes* followed a description of failed legislation in Virginia that was intended to eventually emancipate young, enslaved African Americans. Jefferson, in fact, favored a limited policy of emancipation, yet, he strongly believed that the freed slaves would have to migrate out of Virginia, not only because of hostility between Whites and Blacks but also because of important differences that he perceived between the two races. Jefferson, as demonstrated above, overtly made it clear that he strongly believed in an actual difference between Blacks and Whites where Blacks, in his view, are supposed to be the inferior race. It is worth remembering, however, that in the original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson described slavery as a cruel war against human nature itself, which violated sacred rights of life and liberty. Therefore, evidence suggests that "Jefferson believed that God created Africans with the same 'inalienable rights' as deserved by Whites. Yet, he emancipated

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[201] Thomas Jefferson's only book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was primarily written in 1781 and first published privately in 1784.

[202] See the article "Thomas Jefferson: Radical and Racist in The Atlantic" at http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/10/thomas-jefferson-radical-and-racist/376685/. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

only a small number of his many slaves and he kept believing in a biological difference between the two alleged 'races'" (Voelker, 2006).

What is shocking is that three hundred years have now passed since Jeffeson's statements and yet some people today still partake his biased views. Last April, 2016 an article went out by the title "Racial and ethnic disparities in pain and pain treatment: causes and consequences of unequal care."[203] What emerged from the study is that a group of medical students went out with the statement that Black people are more pain resistant than White people, hence they could receive less anesthesia during medical procedures. Alarmingly, the belief in a biological difference between Black and Whites is still a current fact in our contemporary society, and, even more worrying, within certain medical troupes who are oriented towards racial bias in pain perception and treatment recommendation.[204]

Notwithstanding the racist socio-political background they were experiencing and despite the racist propagandist campaigns, Blacks used the words 'nigger' and 'nigga' among themselves. As Smitherman points out, it is a fact that nigger and nigga belong to the lexicon of the counterlanguage that African Americans have created over the centuries, turning the White man's language upon its head, transforming bad into good. The impact of words depends on who is saying what to whom, under what conditions, and with what intentions:

> Meanings reside in the speakers of language. I first described the meaning, pronunciation and use of nigger and nigga/nigguh nearly three decades ago. Another Black Semantic term that aptly demonstrates the multiple subjective association process is the oft-used word nigger. Whereas to Whites it is simply a way of calling a Black person outa their name, to Blacks it has at least four different meanings. [For Blacks] it may be a term of personal affection or endearment, as 'He my main nigguh (He's my best friend). [...] Sometimes it means culturally Black, identifying with and sharing the values and experiences of Black people. At a Black rally, when the sister shouted out, 'Nigguhs is beautiful, baby' she was referring to 'shonuff nigguhs,' as contrasted to Negroes, who aspire to White middle-class values. [...] [It] may also be a way of expressing disapproval of a person's actions. In this respect, even White folk,

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[203] See the full article "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Pain and Pain Treatment: Causes and Consequences of Unequal Care" at the following link: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19944378. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

[204] http://college.usatoday.com/2016/04/05/uva-report-med-students-Black-people-feel-less-pain/. Last Visited February 9, 2017.

when they are acting inappropriately, are called nigguhs. Finally, the term may simply identify Black folks - period. In this sense, the word has neutral value. 'All the nigguhs in the Motor City got rides' means simply, and not pejoratively, that all persons of African descent that live in the city of Detroit have automobiles. (1977, 62)

Self-evidently, the term was not used merely as a racial pejorative within the White racist discourse, but also with a self-referential, and even positive acceptation within the Black cultural experience.

Smitherman's definition raises at least three observations: first, she points that the term 'nigger' (also pronounced nigga) can have a neutral usage, in particular when she affirms that "the term may simply identify Black folks." She thus confirms that the word in that case can indeed have neutral value. Second, she points at the fact that there is a difference between the words nigger/nigga and the term negro (A brief history of the term will be provided in the Appendix to the present chapter).

Third, it shows that Black people are aware of its negative usage to such an extent that they appropriate the negative hue turning it, ironically enough, towards bad behaving Whites: "It] may also be a way of expressing disapproval of a person's actions. In this respect, even White folk, when they are acting inappropriately, are called nigguhs" (in the above quote).

While discussing the term in *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America,* Smitherman claims that for Black people English words can have potentially two levels of meaning, one Black and one White. This double standard - which we discussed in the previous chapter - clearly borrows from Du Bois' concept of double consciousness: "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks*). On one level, in fact, a word's referent is the same for Blacks and Whites since Blacks share the consensus mainstream dialect of the White American mainstream culture. Yet, Blacks also share a linguistic subculture outside the White mainstream: on the Black semantic level the word has multiple meanings and associations. Hence, within the Black level of meaning, many other sublevels emerge. As verified in Chapter 2, when White English words are given a Black semantic interpretation, their range of referents increases (Smithermann, 1977, 59). This typically Black logic of giving a word many meanings also applies to 'nigger.'

Nigger thus belongs both to the racist discourse and to the anti-language African American have created over the centuries, allowing for a multiplicity of meanings and evaluations ranging from pejorative, to neutral, to positive-affective.

The same can be said for nigga. Smitherman observes: "Truth to be told, Blacks done been using nigga in they everyday conversations since enslavemet" (2006, 53) and as Samy reports, we have indeed examples that already by those times the usage of the term was accompanied by a positive semantic acceptation: "Many older Blacks have childhood memories of hearing folk ditties like 'you my nigga if you don't git no bigger, and if you get bigger, you gon be my bigger nigga' (Alim and Smitherman 2012, 115). From slavery times to the contemporary cultural scene, both terms have been versatile and complex containers that have served many purposes, depending on contexts and on speakers.

What has no-doubt happened is that Black slaves internalized the terms and by way of internalizing them, they came to co-own them so that they could do what they wanted with them, even though both terms had been applied to them negatively. So, it is a matter of ownership and that is what language basically is.

Lewis Carroll well exemplified this concept in the famous speech taken from *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice Found There:*

"When I use a word […] it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "'whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master, that's all." (1871, 46)

Therefore, the controversial interpretation of language in any given society over time reveals the nature of social relationships between groups, attempts at social control, and the struggle for power.[205] Alim and Smitherman, in *Articulate While Black*, define languages as social phenomena

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[205] On this subject, see Norman Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989). The book focuses on how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in modern society.
See also Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze's article "Intellectuals and Power" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews* (1977). A crucial book is also *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) by Stuart Hall where he takes a closer look at Michel Foucault's perspective on discourse and power. Hall gives readers an understanding of the difference between language and discourse by stressing how Foucault put a new meaning on the latter term, conceived as the production of knowledge through language. Foucault's approach took as one of its key subjects of investigation the relations between knowledge, power, and the body in modern society: "He saw knowledge as always inextricably enmeshed in relations of power because it was always being applied to the regulation of social conduct in practice, i.e. to particular bodies" (Hall 1997, 75)

tied up in a world of unequal power relations, gaining or losing status grounded not on technical linguistic grounds, but on social judgments, biases, and stereotypes that are based on the status of their speakers  (2012, 122).

This is what happens with language all the time and the story seems to go in this direction for nigger and nigga as well: hijack a word to then use it as a sword. So, initially nigger and nigga were terms used to denigrate Black people who, later on, internalized them, embraced them, and then used them as something affirmative and self-referential.

Given the fact that nigger is and has been, in many contexts, a strong pejorative, a term of institutional contempt, hate and abuse, the discussion of its multifarious nature might raise contradictory reactions. Therefore, what is suggested here, is that it is the very historical approach to the term that suggests how 'nigger' has not been, historically, merely a racial pejorative, since a Black positive usage of the word can be recorded as consistent and frequent over time: "Black people frequently refer to themselves and to one another as 'niggers'" (Asim 2007, 60).

In light of this, some literary, historical, and oral resources will be now provided.

The data will show how Blacks have been using both 'nigger' and 'nigga' as self-referential terms.

It is attested[206] that as far back as 1859, Black author Harriet E. Wilson[207] wrote a book entitled *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North*. In that book the word 'nigger' is used at least twenty-one times by both Black and White characters alike. What is noticeable is the fact that in the novel the word 'nigger' does not appear merely as a racial slur, but also as a self-referential noun of address when pronounced by Blacks, as it can be inferred from this sentence uttered by Jim, a Black character in the novel: "Get out, Pete! And when you come in dis shop again, let a nigger know it" (Gates and Mckey, 2004, 476). In this case, it is clear that Jim is using the term 'nigger' self- referentially: what he means, here, is 'let *me*[208] know', thus using the term 'nigger' self-referentially. Henry Louis Gates reported that the usage of the word 'nigger' in Wilson's novel is "one of the Black traditions' earliest recorded usages" (Asim 2007, 113).

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[206] Jabari Asim - in the book *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who shouldn't, and Why* (2007) - documents some early instances of the use of nigger by Black and White authors and by Black people in general.

[207] *Our Nig* (1859), is a novel written by Harriet E. Wilson (an African American woman). The book is undoubtedly based on Wilson's actual experience as a working-class woman living in the North. Wilson, through the novel, reveals that "slavery's shadows fall even there." (Gates and McKey, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* 2004, 472).

[208] Our emphasis.

Another self-referential use of the word nigger can be tracked in the autobiography of Harriet Jacobs,[209] *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). The book portrays a scene where a girl, hiding after having escaped and outwitted her White pursuer, says to herself: "Dis nigger's too cute for 'em this time'" (Jacobs, 1861, 72). The girl clearly uses 'nigger' self-referentially in order to tell the reader 'I was really smart, I outwitted my pursuer.' These examples prove that in slavery times the term 'nigger' was used with meanings other than the racial pejorative.

There are many other examples of works of fictions by both Black and White authors in the nineteenth and twentieth century where the polysemous nature of the words 'nigger' and 'nigga' emerges, and where the word can be recorded as used with a wide range of meanings by both Black and White characters alike, as for example Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852), *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, (1899), *Native Son* (1940) by Richard Wright, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) by James Baldwin, and *Roots* (1976) by Alex Haley, just to quote a few.

In the 1960s we even have Dick Gregory's[210] outstanding use of the word 'nigger' in his well-known autobiographical book *Nigger, an Autobiography by Dick Gregory*. The book opens with Gregory's words to his mother: "Dear Momma - Wherever you are, if ever you hear the word 'nigger' again, remember they are advertising my book" (Author's *Preface*).

Later on, in the XXth century, we detected another example of a White speaker using the word without any racial implication and, what is even more striking, with no reproach in an all-Black context. This example can be recorded in the *Autobiography* of Malcolm X:

> One of [Sammy's the Pimp's] White women, known as 'Alabama Peach,' a blonde, could put everybody in stitches with her [Southern] drawl… What made lot of Negroes around the bar laugh the hardest was the way she would take three syllables to say 'nigger.' But what she usually did was saying 'Ah jes' luv-uv nig-uh-guhs[211]' (Haley and Malcolm X, 1964, 91-92).

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[209] Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), in the Preface to the book, states "Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that some of my adventures may seem incredible; but they are, nevertheless, strictly true. I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my description fall far short of the facts." (Gates and McKey, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* 2004, 224).

[210] Dick Gregory (born October 12, 1932) is an American writer, civil rights activist, and social critic.

[211] 'I just love niggers.'

Within this context the word is not used in a pejorative way, but rather, with a neutral and even affective acceptation.

However, some may claim that these are simply hypothesized literary versions of the term and argue that the above-mentioned examples are just fictional depictions of 'nigger' and 'nigga' which might not reflect the actual slave talk or the actual usage by Blacks among themselves. For this reason, and since the quest for reliable linguistic data has been one of the leitmotifs of the history of linguistic research (Mietnaher, 2005), we did an exhaustive search through the Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR), [212] that actually represent real talk by slaves and that are housed at the Library of Congress.gov.[213]

In the 1940s, in fact, a group of researchers interviewed and recorded former slaves in order to get the stories from Pre-Civil War life and to know from fist-hand testimonies how it was like to be a slave. These recordings were not made for linguistic purposes, but linguists have later on found them of interest because they represented the only actual language use by people who were previously in bondage. As regards the terms 'nigger' and 'nigga,' we extracted some examples from the ESR and we found that former slaves used both terms and that they even used the expression "my nigga," which is now erroneously believed to be a contemporary expression originated from the lyrics of contemporary rappers such as, for example, Tupac Shakur.[214] The ESR prove, on the contrary, that this use calls all the way back to slavery times.

Some example from the Ex-Slave recordings are: "All the *niggas*[215] gathered around to see the old master again. You know, and old master didn't tell you know, they was free" (Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1940). [216] Laura Smalley uses the word as a substitute for the term '*people*,' in fact, if we substitute the term *'nigga'* with the term *'people,'* the sentence's meaning remains intact ('all the *people* gathered around'). Smalley might be even referring to *'niggas'* as a general term for *slaves*, so 'all the *slaves*.' In either case, the term is used in a neutral, general way.

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[212]Access to the Ex-Slave Recording is free to anybody at Libraryofcongress.gov. See https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/title.html. Last Visited January 5, 2017.
See also Bailey, Maynor and Cukor Avila (eds). *The Emergence of Black English: Text and Commentary* (1991), pp. 173-189.
[213] See https://www.loc.gov/. Last Visited January 5, 2017.
[214] I am referring to Tupac Shakur's second studio album *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z*, released in 1993, where he uses the expression "My nigga.".
[215] Italics added.
[216] File audible at The Library of Congress: https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/afcesnbib:@field(TITLE+@od1(Interview+with+Mrs++Laura+Smalley,+Hempstead,+Texas,+1941++part+1+of+5+)). Last Visited January 5, 2017.

And also: "That wasn't her *nigga*, she wouldn't let Uncle Saul whup her, that way." (Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1940). Here, *nigga* is used as to signify *'her man,'* therefore we have again a neutral, affective usage of the term.

Another example can be found in "You hear them *niggers* hollering and praying on them logs."[217] (Ex-Slave Recordings, Uncle Billy McCrea, Jasper, Texas, 1940.) So, here, too, we can substitute the word *niggers* with *'people'*: 'You hear *those people'*.

We found another self-referential use of the term in the sentence: "What you get, here, hee, hee, hee you going out shine all them *niggas* (folks) in Oak Grove church today. Ma'am, you sure is going out shine *us all*" (Ex-Slave Recordings, Irene Williams, Rome, Mississippi, 1940).[218]

All the aforementioned uses well match with Folb's definition of the term in *Runnin' Down Some Lines: The Language and Culture of Black Teenagers* (1980) where she describes nigger as a form of address and identification among Blacks that can connote "affection, playful derision, genuine anger, or mere identification of another Black person; often used emphatically in conversation" (1980, 248).

Aslo Keith and Burridge in *Forbidden Words* recognize this nature of the word stating that nigger is used among African Americans as a badge of identity and solidarity (2006, 84).


A few more historical evidences to the fact that both 'nigger' and 'nigga' were used in real life by Blacks as far back as the 19th century can be traced in the studies of American historian Leon Litwack, who reports an exchange between two Black porters and a customer in Philadelphia in 1846 where one of the two promotes his talents at the expenses of the other with these words: "Neber mind him, Sa; he's only a *nigga*[219] from Baltimore, just come to Philadelphy" (Asim 2007, 41). Self-evidently, the Black porter uses the term *nigga* to mean 'man,' 'dude.'

Even further back in 1825 the nation's first Black African American newspaper - called *Freedom's Journal*[220] - reported that Black people used the term nigger among themselves. In particular, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm lamented the "adoption of racist epithets by Blacks themselves" as "evil" (Asim 2007, 41).

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[217]https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/afcesnbib:@field(TITLE+@od1(Interview+with+Uncle+Billy+McCrea,+Jasper,+Texas,+1940++part+1+of+2+)). Last Visited January 5, 2017.

[218] See interview with Irene Williams at http://wwnorton.com/college/history/give-me-liberty4/ch/15/audio-video.aspx. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[219] Italics added.

[220] *Freedom's Journal*, the nation's Black newspaper, was published for two years between 1825 and 1827 (Asim 2007, 41).

This concern, which is ironically the same expressed by Oprah Winfrey during her conversation with Jay-Z, signals two important things: first, that the use of nigger and nigga among Blacks themselves is still controversial today as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and second, that there is documentary evidence dating back to 1825 that Black people used the terms freely among themselves as well as self-referentially.

On account of this, we are not suggesting that the term nigger is not a racial slur. It has been indeed, a racial slur historically, and it still is. The abovementioned evidences were brought to widen the frame and to suggest that the term had also been used with a variety of other meanings since slavery times.


Notably, oftentimes it surprises Whites more than Blacks that the term can have other acceptations beyond the negative one.

Emblematic of this is the case of famous British actress Fenny Kemble. In fact, she reported encountering a "Black-on-Black usage during her visits to Georgia slave plantations in the late 1839s" (Asim 2007, 42). Much to her surprise the actress described a scene she personally witnessed where a female slave displayed her children saying "Look, missis! Little niggers for you and massa; plenty of little niggers for you" and the actress adds to her recount "no contemptuous intonation ever equaled …the despotic insolence of this address of these poor wretches to each other" (Asim 2007, 42). Historian Sterling Stuckley suggests an interpretation of the abovementioned scene maintaining that Kemble failed completely to understand the variation of the term 'nigger' in the slave woman's mouth. Stuckley's explains that slave children in the nineteenth century used the term among themselves with glowing affection and that they even sang the word freely 'Run nigger run, de Patrol catch you/ Run nigger run, tis almos the day' (Asim 2007, 43).

Actress Kemble's episode shows that Black people used it because it was part of the language they were in contact with since their childhood, as demonstrated in the abovementioned case where we have historical evidence that children themselves used the word. Moreover, as Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman suggests, it should not be surprising that slaves were using the term since they heard the word nigger, if not on contact with slave traders, then upon arrival in The New World (Rahman 2012, 144).

An even subtler point is put forward by Asim, who suggests that Blacks who were using the term 'nigger' were maybe also playing into the hands of those who opposed their cause (Asim 2007, 43).

To sum it up, the results stemming from an extensive search through linguistic, historical, literary, and oral sources (Ex-Slave Recordings) show how nigga was first introduced to America by Southern White speakers, and later adopted by Blacks, who then endowed the term with a variety of semantic meanings, from neutral, to self-referential, to positive.

Historical as well as literary evidence shows that Black people have been using the schwa ending variant with positive as well as neutral and self-referential meanings since slavery time, i.e. centuries before rappers like Tupac and Jay-Z came on to the scenes.

In the other case, 'nigger' has been no doubt a White racial slur, but Blacks have been appropriating the term and using it themselves for as long as it has been around, with a wide range of meanings ranging from neutral use, to self-referential, to positive. Therefore, there is ample evidence that Blacks have used both nigga and nigger for centuries, a fact that escapes the notice of those who make the "recency" claims.

## 3.5 Nigga and Nigger in Hip Hop

Further examples of the positive acceptation of the term 'nigger' can be found in the production of The Last Poets,[221] a group of lyrical activists in the 1960s considered to be one of the earliest influences on Hip Hop music.

The Last Poets used nigger in semantic solidarity with their people rapping: "I love niggers/ I love niggers/ Because niggers are me/ And I should only love that which is me,"[222] but they also used the term to articulate their socio-political wake-up call campaign. As Abiodun Oyewole[223] states:

> Well, first of all the one thing that The Last Poets did, we dealt with the issues of the
> government and the system [...] so you know we go through the whole discography of
> the Last Poets and you see we have poems called "Wake Up Niggers," "Niggers Are

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[221] The Last Poets were a group of poets and musicians that gathered in the late 1960s during the years of the African-American Civil Rights Movement and the Black Nationalist Movement. The members of the group changed several times through the years, but the original group actually consisted of Gylan Kain, David Nelson and Abiodun Oyowele, who performed on May 19, 1968 (Malcolm X's birthday), at Marcus Garvey Park in East Harlem (this concert is considered to be the genesis of The Last Poets).

[222] These lyrics are from the Last Poets's well-known poem, "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution" in their self-titled album, *The Last Poets* (1970).

[223] Abiodun Oyewole (born Charles Franklin Davis in 1948) is a poet, teacher and founding member of The Last Poets.

Scared of Revolution," "Die nigger!", "Run Nigger."[224] We were niggerfying[225] everything, it was crazy.

We are trying to take that negative take on nigger and spin it around and normalize it, we take this word and now it's ours, we're gonna take it.

I mean we were niggerfying everything and it was crazy because I think that many of the later Hip Hop artists who at that time did listen to us, and they were quite a few, they did not hear what we were saying about niggers they just heard the word nigger and got carried away and got stuck and called everybody nigger. And the nigger has become the nigger because of Hip Hop. The nigger has become the rebel on planet earth. That's what the nigger is seen as, that person that you cannot put in a box, that person that's gonna break all rules and do what they please.[226]

 

As it might be inferred from their lyrics, for an articulation of their socio-political message The Last Poets took nigger whereas new generations of rappers have chosen to ground their stances on the schwa spelling: nigg(-a).

We have thus far demonstrated that rappers were neither the first to use the term 'nigga,' nor the pioneers of its respelling.

It is now time to understand why is there a widespread belief that they were the first to do so. The illusion that they were among the first to do so is due to the fact that the positive and self-referential usage of nigga had been for a long time kept within a private Black social context, so when rappers staged it on large public arenas for mixed audiences, the latter found the term new and shocking, believing that it had been newly reappropriated.

In this the rappers' activity can be seen as pioneering and new: they were among the first to bring 'nigga' to large mixed audiences' ears.

In other words, the reason why some people view it as recent phenomenon is that mass media and pop culture (via Hip Hop) have made large mixed audiences privy for the first time to what otherwise used to be in-group talk[227] among Black people. Hip Hop was primarily a Black

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[224] All renowned songs by The Last Poets.

[225] 'Niggerfying' is a term invented by Abiodun.

[226] These words were spoken at the international Conference on Hip Hop *Teach-In. Words Beats & Life, Remixing the Art of Social Change: Expanding the Cipher* in Washington DC where I had the privilege to interview Abiodun. This is part of what had been discussed on that occasion.

[227] For a discussion of in-group talk and out-group talk see Giles and Watson (2008).

phenomenon in the 70s and 80s and even into the mid 90s. And it was precisely in those years that public Black usage of the word and large mixed audiences have been prominently put together.

If we go even a little further back in time, we have stand-up comedians like Eddy Murphy in the 80s, Richard Pryor in the 1970s, Red Foxx in the 1930s, who already used the schwa ending of the word, thus preceding rappers in the use of that term in public arenas. Yet, it is undeniable that Hip Hop's revolutionary impact worldwide in an unprecedented large scale is unparalleled by any other previous comedian or artistic movement.

Moreover, the language ideology and practices of urban youth affiliated with the social organization, culture, and politics of Hip Hop music is unique, not to mention Hip Hop's significant influence on adolescent social networks and value systems of all ethnicities, in the construction of crew and speech community formation, style, language and identity through the term nigga.

Rap's passion, in fact, has attracted millions of music fans who are not Black or who don't live in urban areas. Rap fans are both male and female, and are found across all racial lines. Rap fans live in the inner city, as well as in the suburbs, and can be in their early or late teens just as easily as their twenties or even well into their thirties, forties and fifties. Hip Hop, the fashion, humor, attitude and lifestyle that surround the music, is more than funky beats and clever rhymes. Hip Hop is a cultural movement that ties together people from all over the world.[228]

Therefore, what is striking is Hip Hop's merit to have contributed to the public and overt circulation of the term in the contemporary multiethnic linguistic and cultural scene. Moreover, what rappers did, and still do, is to put the term to the public table in order to assert their identity through the very term that had also undoubtedly signified their debasement.

The use of the term ''nigga'' in Hip Hop is unique in that it is the result of conscious, cutting-edge, free-thinking new generations of the 70s, 80s, 90s, 20th and 21st century who use 'nigga' as a term of pride.[229] 'Nigga' within Hip Hop has become the emblem of the profound socio-cultural changes that affected those generations.

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[228] A discussion on Hip Hop globalization and especially on White audiences approaching the genre is provided in Chapter 4. In the Introduction to *Dizionario di slang americano*, Cagliero and Spallino address such an issue, stating that the language of Hip Hop has spread out from the Black communities to the entire world, and that it has overcome ethnic barriers to such an extent that it is now fully included in the contemporary slang panorama (Cagliero and Spallino 2005, 6-7).

[229] As regards racial pride and identity see Elisa Bordin's article "Looking for Kunta Kinte, Alex Haley's Roots and African American Genealogies" *Iperstoria* 4 (Fall / Winter 2014): 3-9.

It would be interesting to draw a parallel between Kunta Kinte's self-determination attempt, whereby he refused to deny his African name in the face of the slave traders, while Malcolm X articulated a self-determination of his identity by choosing an X instead of his surname, as a symbolic challenge to the practice by slave traders of giving new names to

As Kelley writes in *Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics* (1996): "The criminalization, surveillance, incarceration, and poverty of black youth in the postindustrial city have been the central themes in gangsta rap and thus constitute the primary experiences from which cultural identities are constructed" and, precisely, "a new 'ghettocentric' identity in which the specific class, race, and gendered experiences in late-capitalist urban centres coalesce to create a new identity: nigga" (147).

In the article "The Nigga You Love to Hate" (2004) Davarian Baldwin affirms that rappers "saw no inherent negativity in the term 'nigga,' defining themselves as niggas in defiance of the dominant society, both black and white" (165) and he adds that "nigga does not mean black as much as it means being a product of the post-industrial ghetto" (210).

In a press conference concerning the violent lyrics of NWA songs Ice Cube stated, "Our art is a reflection of our reality."[230] In this light, the term nigga, by way of absorbing the peculiar events accompanying the raise of Hip Hop, has come to signify and embody rappers' and Hip Hop culture peculiar identity, and it has become a primary site of their cultural protest as well as an articulation of their Anti-Language.

In this position of rebelliousness, rap and the nigga became idealized as a counter move to the white supremacy of the day as well as the embodiment of black defiance through a highly masculinist imaginary.[231]

On account of this, rap can be understood as resistance, where the nigga is seen as a performative identity willingly used in defiance to mainstream society. While White as well as mainstream African-American leaders have struggled to eradicate the use of the word, even threatening to boycott dictionaries that acknowledged the word's existence, rappers took nigga to make visible the multiple registers through which it could be actualized.

The group NWA (Niggas With Attitude) pioneered Hip Hop defiant, self-empowering use of nigga as a powerful indictment of racism in their song "Niggaz 4 Life" (1991) which is built around the refrain: "Why do I call myself a nigga?"

The opening dialogue of the track feats people's reproaches to the way NWA use the word: "Why you brothers insist on usin the word nigga? Don't you know that's bringin down the black race?

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the slaves: "For me, my 'X' replaced the White slavemaster name of 'Little' which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears" (Malcolm X, *Autobiography* 1965, 229).

[230] http://music.mxdwn.com/2015/02/10/news/watch-nwa-releases-trailer-for-straight-outta-compton-documentary/. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

[231] A more detailed discussion on masculinist imagery will be provided in Chapter 4.

Nigga nigga nigga that's all I hear you motherfuckers talk about is nigga. (...) Does everything come out your mouth got to be a 4-letter word? (...). How can you call yourself a nigga and be proud of it?" Obviously, N.W.A don't care, and in the opening line of the song they reply: "Why do I call myself a nigga you ask me?" The song then goes:

> I call myself a nigga 'cause my skin won't whiten
>
> I call myself a nigga 'cause the shit that I'm writing
>
> Hypes me, hypes other motherfuckers around me
>
> And that's the reason why they want to surround me
>
> And ask me: why do I call myself a nigga
>
> Ain't none of their fuckin' business …
>
> You're a nigga 'til you die.

What characterizes rappers is a conscious rhetorical effort, a linguistic mastery, a sense of being oneself, proudly, truthfully and loudly. Ice cube stated: "We take this word that's been a burden to us… digest it, spit it back out as…a badge of honor" (Smitherman 2006, 58).

Through clever wordplay and skillfull delivery, which are at the core of rappers' abilities, the word nigga turns into a container where the rapper's stories are written. The quest to find their way through a hostile society can be traced through the words and phrases that they have mutated or invented. Rap is both storytelling and poetry, it tells the story of a post-Civil Rights Movement young generation, which has been afloat, lost to deteriorating communities and low self-esteem. What rappers did was taking their anger and experiences to empower an entire generation, reaching young people in ways that the school system, the church, and mainstream political organizations had failed. As Hip Hop scholar Fred Brathwaite states, Hip Hop is much more than mere dance music, it can be said to be a cultural movement analogous to the Harlem Renaissance (1992, *Preface*).

The lyrics, lush, aggressive, violent, provoking, with double (and often triple) meanings[232] took flight on new paths towards a unique, original, revolutionary and sometimes perverse reinterpretation of their reality. Hip Hop has made room under its umbrella for music ranging from NWA and Public Enemy's political assaults, to Tupac Shakur's explicit and controversial lyrics, from Heavy D's new

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[232] On multilayered meanings hidden in rappers' lyrics see the definition of 'balling' provided in Chapter 2. For an analysis of aggressive and violent lyrics, see the discussion on gangsta rap in Chapter 4.

jack swing, and Yo-Yo hardcore womanism to Queen Latifah's R&B romance, from Ice Cube's bass-slathered, street-isms, to Tyler the Creator's ironic and playful attitude.

Considering the vast range of different articulations, it follows that the word 'nigga' within the Hip Hop world, as well as in the past, is to be confronted as a protean, polysemous term.

To summarize a few acceptations that the term can have in Hip Hop culture, I will take as a baseline Smitherman's (2006) definition of 'nigga.'It will be shown that most acceptations in Hip Hop culture are borrowed from usages dating back to the times of slavery, as previously demonstrated, while other acceptations are completely new and ascribable to the peculiarities of Hip Hop.

The most common acceptations of the term 'nigga' in Hip Hop lyrics are:

**Meaning 1**: It can be used as a generic, neutral reference to African Americans. For instance, Tupac Shakur, in the song "Young Niggaz," uses the word as a neutral term which could be substituted with the word 'people': "I didn't bang but I was hangin' with the homies 'Til them niggas started slangin', now they don't know me." Here he clearly uses 'nigga' to refer to a generic group of people.

**Meaning 2**: It can refer to the sexual partner/ lover. [233] Tupac Shakur will be here quoted again as to signal how the same artist can articulate a variety of different meanings around the same term. In the song "Ratha Be Ya Nigga," he is rapping to a woman, telling her that he wants to be her 'nigga,': "I don't want to be yo man. I wanna be yo nigga.[234]" In this sense, Tupac refers to himself as not such a type of man to be a woman's partner for life, he just wants to be her sex partner.

**Meaning 3**: "My nigga": it is a peculiar expression which indicates a close relationship in the forms of either close friendship, camaraderie, or pure love. Along these lines, in an interview rapper DMX says: "I tell my wife shit I don't tell nobody. Cause that's my nigga…She's like everything to me."[235]
An outstanding use of this expression came out during comedian Larry Wilmore's speech at the 2016 White House Correspondent's dinner. At the end of his entertaining communication replete of jokes, laughter and applause, Willmore concluded addressing President Barack Obama: "Words

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[233] See also Cagliero e Spallino (2007).
[234] 2Pac rapped these lines along with Richie Rich in "Ratha Be Ya Nigga," from the album *All Eyez on Me* (Death Row/Interscope, 1996).
[235] The interview is quoted in Alim and Smitherman's book *Articulate While Black* (116).

alone do me no justice. So, Mr. President, if I'm going to keep it 100: Yo, Barry, you did it, my nigga. You did it." [236]

This episode caught a firestorm of criticism, thus being a wake-up call to the fact that the usage of the term outside of the Hip Hop circle is still a matter of significant controversy.

Worth noting is that the Washington Post Staff provided a full transcription of the speech and when it came to transcribe the final lines, they reported "you did it, my n—-," willingly omitting the word 'nigga.' [237]

**Meaning 4**: It can refer to the archetypal defiant, unconventional, fearless Black man, the typical stereotype of the disrespectful bad boy engaged in inappropriate, provoking and often negative behavior.

This alludes to the rebellious "do-what-the-fuck-I-wannuh" pose, an attitude which could better be defined with the word "tude" (Smitherman 2006, 49). Tude, in fact, is not only an abbreviation of attitude, but it includes that the pose is an aggressive and defiant one (such a pose and attitude will be discussed in Chapter 4). This kind of nigga is commonly believed to "represent the return of the 'bad nigger.' In this respect, Hip Hop recovers the Black tradition of the folk tales[238] nigger, the one who was non-conformist, daring, who broke the rules established by White folks; the one who, in the words of rappers, 'did't take no shit from nobody'" (Smitherman 2006, 49). Notably, the typical bad nigger can only be a male. It is not a matter of gender equality or inequality, it is as simple as that: the archetypal bad nigger or nigga is a male (Smitherman 2006, 50).[239]

A contemporary embodiment of this character in the Hip Hop scene is the group NWA. Their defiant attitudes are evident in their open and direct confrontation with police brutality and injustices – see for example the song "Fuck Tha police". This song will be discussed in Chapter 4.

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[236] Larry Wilmore says "You did it my nigga" at minute 22.03 in the following speech: "Larry Wilmore COMPLETE REMARKS at 2016 White House Correspondents' Dinner (C-SPAN) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IDFt3BL7FA. Last Visited April 30, 2016.

[237] See full transcription at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/reliable-source/wp/2016/05/01/the-complete-transcript-of-larry-wilmores-2016-White-house-correspondents-dinner-speech/. Last Visited February 10, 2017.

[238] The bad nigger is a crucial figure in in the Black folk oral tradition. A depiction of this figure can be traced back in the tales regarding the 'bad nigger' character in Zora Neale Hurston's 1935 book *Mules and Men*. I discussed this topic in my article "Retrieving the Voice of the Ancestors, Folktale narration in Hurston's *Mules and Men*" *Iperstoria* 4 (Fall / Winter 2014): 59-65 at http://www.iperstoria.it/joomla/images/PDF/Numero5/Saggi_monografica/fascina_ mulesandmen.pdf. Last Visited February 10, 2017.

[239] In this respect, see the discussion of masculinity in *Behind Blue Eyes: Manhood and the Western at the Turn of the Millennium* (2012) by Elisa Bordin.

**Meaning 5**: Last, nigga can refer to a close friend, thus representing a term that conveys profound connection. Among Hip Hop aficionados, nigga signifies a relationship of friendship and allegiance. In Hip Hop culture this acceptation is so crucial that 'nigga' has come to refer to a cool person regardless of his race, and it is used either by Blacks and non-Blacks to refer to a Black or non-Black cool person. Of this latter use of the word I had second-hand testimony, since a friend's mother, during a round-table discussion on the word 'nigga,' recounted how in the New York school his son is attending, both Blacks and Whites use 'nigga' to refer to a skilled and cool person. Precisely, her son Zac who is the stereotyped White, red haired and blue-eyed 17-year-old boy, is addressed as "my little nigga" by his Black basketball team mates when he is successful in the match.

There is another aspect to be underlined here, i.e. the fact that this specific use of 'nigga' is generational. This use might be accepted among teens of the 21th century generation, whereas middle-aged and elders would not find it tolerable since most of them are contrary to the use of the word *a priori*, in any form and in any context.

I had a personal discussion[240] on this subject with Abiodun Oywole, a member of The Last Poets. His observations are worth transcribing:

> Well, it depends upon what context we are talking about, because it is a word that can be used but it needs to be understood, because people still use it in negative ways. And for a lot of the young hip-hoppers the nigger has become a rebel, and so you've got kids in Rome, white kids, Italian kids, people referring to themselves as niggers, so it's not that edge of being strictly a word to jab you in your heart. It can exist, depending whom is saying it and how they are saying it. A lot of times things really depend upon how you say them as opposed to what you say, and tone has a great deal to do with everything. Now, if you say something in a way that has a negative tone, then it is going to come across in a negative way but when you say it from a level of understanding, and I mean I know a lot of white folks that will shy away from ever saying the word because they know it's been something that is taboo for them to say, but then I have some white friends who know how to deal with it and say it in a way that is not an insult to other black people.  Normally speaking, you are not going to find too many white people

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saying that word because they know that that's one of those words that was created to dehumanize black people, but because of Hip Hop popularizing it you are gonna find some white kids saying it because it's in the rap and you can't get around it, and we have to understand that we poets have actually advertised that word over time and the entire world is saying nigger. For example, we were playing in Fes, Morocco five years ago, and Moroccans came up to me and said "Can I be a nigger?" and I said "I don't know."[241]

Certainly, the use of the word is still a hot button issue.

Before moving to the next chapter, we would like to raise another last issue relevant to our discussion of Black and White interracial communication in Hip Hop. It is surprising that Black rappers are starting to use the word "nigga" to address Whites if we consider that the term has primarily been perceived as an in-group marker for African Americans. This unexpected trend stroke my attention and hit me personally.

In 2015, I was in Berlin doing research at the J. F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies.

One night, precisely on May, 27, I went to the concert of black rapper Tyler, The Creator.

During the gig, I obviously expected him to sing either the word "nigger" or "nigga" since his lyrics are based on those words. However, what I did not expect at all, was him addressing all of us as "niggas" (we were a white audience mainly).

Then, the second thing that I did not expect at all was that the young people around me, either black and white, replied unanimously and approvingly to Tyler's "call and response play" pronouncing out loud the word "nigga" while readdressing it to Tyler. That was the first time I started thinking about the possibility of me being, momentarily, a "nigga", even though being white and European. How could that be?

The answer came again from Abiodun Oyewole. I told him what had happened at Tyler's concert, and asked him whether that could possibly happen also outside of the world of Hip Hop. He answered: "It is the magic of Hip Hop primarily. Outside that, you just can't do it."[242]

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[241] This statement is crucial to the discussion, and it openes up a set of new reflections I am still working on. In fact, the black guy from Africa, not having first-hand experience of American racism, is asking whether he is entitled or not to be called "a nigger."

[242] Another Black rapper addressing a White by calling him "nigga" is Hip Hop recording artist J. Cole. In the song "Adolescence" he raps: " Whispers that he got it for the low low, sell a/ Dime for a dub, them White boys ain't know no better/ Besides, what's twenty dollars to a nigga like that?/ He tell his pops he need some lunch/ And he gon' get it right back." In the song, he recalls selling some weed to a White boy by comparing himself, African American and "hustlin"

Cecilia Cutler's research (2002) also paid attention to the word "nigga" as a solidarity marker, which she perceived as quite common also among some white teens. However she concludes that the use of "nigga" in biracial social interaction remains problematic, especially outside Hip Hop. Moreover, it is safe to say that even though it is a fairly new tendency to address Whites as niggas, reciprocity by a White person is still not accepted.

The use of "nigga" is a double standard due to the separate cultural repercussions experienced by Black and non-Black speakers of the word. We can find the term "nigga" ninety-two times in Snoop Dogg's track "Down 4 My Niggaz," whereas White rapper Eminem ignited controversy with only one use in "Biterphobia" (1995). [243]

However, it is undeniable that Hip Hop music and culture contributes to the global diffusion of the term, allowing for a debate on the possible evolutions of its meaning in interracial encounters.

In this respect, Tyler the Creator talked about such a delicate topic during an interview with Arsenio Hall. While discussing the use of nigga, he light-heartedly recounted: "Anybody could be that, I call the White dude in the back N-word earlier (giggles from the audience) and he got nervous (giggle) if you call a White people N-word they get nervous, Oh my God! This is amazing."[244]

This statement proves Tyler the Creator's defiant usage of the term to address Whites while simultaneously testifying to the fact that the word 'nigga' is currently being discussed in the broader perspective of a potential interracial use.

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for money, to the financially spoiled White boys who do not know a lot about drugs and who just need to go to their parents who will give them money.

[243] With the approval from Proof (rapper), Eminem called him "nig" in the song "Biterphobia" (1995). He didn't even explicitly use the word nigger or nigga, but only hinted at it by rapping "So I'm bringing my nig' Proof for backup when I sing at my gig." By this he means he is bringing rapper Proof to defeat the biters in battle. This may be the only time Eminem has used anything similar to "nigga" on a deliberately released record. Despite this, he was highly critized, especially by *The Source Magazine* (Hess 2005, 383).

[244] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGhlkhNCh_w&feature=youtu.be&t=5m31s. Last Visited February 16, 2017.

## 3.6 Appendix

### The term "Negro"

The word 'Negro' developed independently from nigger and nigga.

In Portuguese 'Negro' simply meant black. The term started being used towards the end of the fourteenth century, precisely when Portugal became the first European country to make its entrance into the African slave trade. Portuguese, and later on also Spanish, slave traders used this adjective to designate the African men and women whom they captured and transported to the slave market of the New World (Smitherman 2006, 54). As psychiatrist Frances Welsing notes, to the "color deficient" Portuguese and Spanish alike, the black-hues skin of African people must have been the determining phenomenon to underline blackness as paramount index of Africanness, despite the fact that there were and there still are non-black Africans, like Egyptians for example" (Smitherman 1977, 35).

This mindset was later interiorized by the British and American slave traders as well. Within a short time, the Portuguese word *negro* (no capital) became the English noun-adjective "negro." In its original Portuguese and Spanish form negro was in fact an adjective and not a proper noun. When English people took it on, they treated it as all adjectives of color in English language which are not capitalized.  It was only during the XX century that a huge campaign was raised in order to have the term "Negro" capitalized (Smitherman 1977, 35).

For decades, Negro has been an acceptable label for Black people: "Negro, at least until around mid-1960, was a perfectly acceptable label for the race – well, at least for the male members of the race, ah the world of patriarchy!" (Smitherman 2006, 55). In literature it was accepted as used either by Black and White writers. What is more, Black writers have proudly used the word.

Just to quote a few examples, Langston Hughes (1902-1967) used the term in his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1920) and he used the word as the title for his Anthology on African American writing called *Poetry of the Negro* (1949). See also the eloquent title *I am the American Negro* (1937) by Frank Marshall Davis.

In addition, James Weldon Johnson (1869-1917) in the Preface to his 1922 work *The Book of American Negro Poetry* proudly uses the term and he underlines the crucial cultural contribution of Black people in the United States: "I make here what may appear to be a more startling statement

by saying that the Negro has already proved the possession of these powers by being the creator of the only things artistic that have yet sprung from American soil and been universally acknowledged as distinctive American products. These creations by the American Negro may be summed up under four heads. The first two are the Uncle Remus stories [that constitute the greatest body of folklore that America has produced] which were collected by Joel Chandler Harris [Harris (1848-1908) popularized African American folk tales in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1881)], and the spirituals or slave songs, to which the Fisk Jubilee of Singers [A nine-person traveling singing troupe founded in 1871] made the public and the musicians of both the United States and Europe listen. […] The other two creation are the cakewalk [Cakewalk is a dance that developed from an African American contest in stylish walking. A cake was offered as a prize] and ragtime [African American instrumental musical style of the 1890s, characterized by a syncopated melodic line and regularly accented accompaniment]. We do not need to go very far back to remember when cakewalking was the rage in the United States, Europe and South America. […] Paris pronounced it the poetry of motion. […] The influence which the Negro has exercised on the art of dancing in this country has been almost absolute" (Preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*).

Also White writers used the term Negro as a form of praise.

In 1921, the work *Contemporary Poetry of the Negro*[1] was released by Robert Thomas Kerlin (1866-1950). In this book, we can find sentences such as "These stanzas are from our Negro Poets whose voices have but lately been lifted in song – still living and youthful voices" (4) and further "Sweet music in the soul – that is the Negro's boon from Heaven" (4).

Another white American writer using the term Negro was Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964) in the essay "Negro Blues Singers" published in *Vanity Fair* in 1926. He was convinced that "Negro culture" was the essence of America and he was interested in black writers and artists to such an extent that he personally promoted many of the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston and Wallace Thurman.

Worth noting, W.E.B. DU Bois fought in order to have the term "Negro" capitalized in the 1920s. However, in the 1960s and 1970s this label fell out of favor during the Black Liberation Movement when "Negro" was replaced by "Black" (Alim and Smitherman 113). With the Black Liberation Movement's philosophy of Black Pride, as well as with the celebration of Blackness and Black Culture, Negro became a term that indicated those who were not brave enough to engage with the 'Black Cause.' Back then, Negro turned into a term synonymous with racial disloyalty and rejection of Black people's racial heritage.

# CHAPTER 4

# WHITE RAPPERS CROSSING TO AAE:

# MAKING A BRIDGE OR MAKING A BREAK?

## *Preface*

*Ben Rampton (1995) would call the use of AAE by non-African Americans "crossing." This concept focuses "on the code-alternation by people who aren't accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ. It is concerned with switching into languages that aren't generally thought to belong to you" (270-271).*

*White rappers are no-doubt outsiders of the African American culture, yet they resort to the use of AAE to show their appreciation for it and to be authenticated as in-group members of the Hip Hop community.*

*In light of these considerations, this chapter explores White rappers' crossing to AAE, as well as the complications associated with using features of an ethnic style that is not one's own. AAE, in fact, is still a very distinctive, unique, and ethnically marked variety of English.*

*Considering the presence of AAE morphosyntactic features in the speech of White rappers, this chapter tries to explore whether their linguistic crossing to AAE can open up the possibility to talk about Hip Hop as the ground where a genuine interracial linguistic exchange is indeed possible, or whether this linguistic phenomenon triggers resistance and rejection on the part of the Black community.*

## 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 we discussed the negative stigma attached to AAE by mainstream White supremacist society, and the way this mistaken viewpoint leads many African Americans to set aside their mother tongue variety (AAE) in favor of SAE as a tool for gaining White mainstream approval.

Finally, we verified that despite White America's longstanding disapproval,[245] Hip Hop stands out as the primary domain where Black English is proudly celebrated. As Jeffries puts it, unique for Hip Hop is the incorporation of AAE in the "product" itself (2011, 120) where rappers claim their Black identity precisely by choosing AAE for their musical content.

Instead of White mainstream SAE being the dominant norm from which African Americans differ, Hip Hop is indeed the realm where everything "Black" becomes the standard. It is the territory where Whites are being pushed to the periphery and African Americans can "experience the self-confidence that belonging to a dominant culture entails" (Alim 2009, 91).

Given these premises, it is worth noting that in the academic field there is hardly any discussion of situations where speakers of the mainstream - in this case White - variety (SAE) adopt the language features of a marked ethnic variety such as AAE. This is exactly what happens in Hip Hop when some White rappers - which are mainstream speakers of standard English (SAE) - have been observed to cross to AAE.

Until recently there was no term to describe this phenomenon. However, since Ben Rampton insightfully labeled it "Language-crossing" in 1995, the term (as applied to both individuals and groups), has caught up into academic linguistic discourse.

Namely, "language crossing" is the term coined by Rampton in order to describe codeswitching by linguistic outsiders, a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon that takes place when speakers use language features or linguistic styles associated with another ethnic group, i.e. when "speakers freely opt to adopt the speech variety of another ethnic group" (1995, 115-116).

Crossing includes a wide range of varied sociolinguistic practices of widely differing kinds, ranging from the mocking use of a foreign accent to convey distance from a particular ethnic group (pejorative secondary foreigner talk),[246] to practices such as "marking," i.e. copying a language

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[245] Black rappers' use of AAE variants provides an emblematic example of an explicit rhetoric of racial resistance against the long-standing linguistic disapproval towards AAE (Smitherman 2000, 272).

[246] In "Junk Spanish, Covert Racism, and the (Leaky) Boundary between Public and Private Spheres" (1995) Jane Hill discusses "Mock Spanish" or the purposeful misuse of Spanish (such as when Arnold Schwarzenegger says "No problemo" in the film "Terminator"). This, for instance, is a negative example of language crossing: in fact, "No problem"

variety out of context to index a type of person who is different from the speaker and/or the intended hearers (Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 1998); but it also includes the outgroup use of prestigious minority codes, which is precisely the case the present study will examine.

We suggest as a starting point that White rappers use African American English speech markers to show their affiliation with Hip Hop culture, enacting a form of linguistic "crossing" as described by Rampton (1995).

It must be noted that although crossing is usually not an all-out claim to another ethnic identity, it can indeed evoke a distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries by involving momentary instances of outgroup language use. In fact, Rampton (1996) describes crossing as part of a complex process in which speakers signal their orientation towards the different voices they adopt, as well as towards the language and the social imagery they are evoking.

The results stemming from Rampton's study brought to light that language crossing, in many instances, constitutes an anti-racist practice and it is emblematic of the birth of a mixed code. As Mary Bucholtz points out in *Language and the Socially Constructed Self* (1995), language plays a key role in transgressing racial boundaries.

Rampton's research proves that this linguistic "transgression" – in Bucholtz terms - can bear positive outcomes. In fact, he studied and described how groups of multiracial adolescents in a British working-class community mix Creole, Punjabi, and Asian English.[247] The young people he observed used this mixed code to overcome racial boundaries and assert a new "de-racinated" ethnicity. Rampton observed that crossing generally develops in solidarities and allegiances that are based on a range of non-ethnic identities – identities of neighbourhood, class, gender, age, institutional role, recreational interest - and that for a lot of adolescents, ethno-linguistic crossing goes towards symbolizing a multi-ethnic community. Similarly, in taking up linguistic forms and cultural references associated with street conscious urban African American culture, crossing into AAE by White rappers can be seen as a means of claiming membership in a multiracial, multinational Global Hip Hop Nation (GHHN) a transcultural, multilingual, and multiracial community, as Alim defined it (2003,

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not only reflects incorrect gender marking on the noun (it should be "problema") but also is not an expression that native Spanish speakers would use. Hill claims that Anglos in the Southwest and California use Mock Spanish as a racist strategy to distance themselves from Latinos (197-212).

[247] See Mary Bucholtz, "You da Man: Narrating the Racial Other in the Production of White Masculinity" *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3.4 (1999): 443-460. As regards the mixing of Punjabi and other languages within the British working-class community see Eames and Robboy's article "The Walfrunian and the Punjabi: Conflict, Identity and Adaptation" *Anthropological Quarterly* 51.4 (1978): 207-219.

Eventually, with respect to Indian English see Raja Ram Mehrotra's book *Indian English. Texts and Interpretation* (1998).

2004, 2006, 2009). In his discussion of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) Alim identifies HHNL as the linguistic expression of a street conscious identity that offers speakers a way to "connect with the streets as a space of culture, creativity, cognition and consciousness" (54).

Alim claims that HHNL includes all of the features of AAE and that the use of AAE is fundamental to "the strategic construction of a street conscious identity through which the artists claim authenticity as members of the Global Hip Hop Nation" (2003, 51).

He underlines that there is a discourse of authenticity within Hip Hop that privileges the urban Black "street" experience and places the participation of Whites, particularly middle class Whites, on the periphery. Yet, he also confirms that the ideology of multiculturalism within Hip Hop simultaneously gives many young people from the most disparaging ethnic backgrounds the license to adopt speech practices that have their roots in African American English.[248]

It is precisely in this perspective that the present chapter investigates three White rappers within the Hip Hop community that have been observed to mix their use of SAE with AAE, namely Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Paul Wall.

It will be discussed whether linguistic crossing from SAE into AAE on the part of White artists can be regarded as a cross-racial move, i.e. as an attempt to align themselves linguistically to Black rappers, and to claim membership within the Global Hip Hop Nation as well, going against the idea of ethnic absolutism [249] - a reductive understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture. According to Paul Gilroy, such a notion is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable (1990, 115). Ethnic absolutism neglects the ways in which culture can be created afresh in the processes of linguistic practices, and it conceives instead of 'cultures' as a set of rather static, separate, ethnic units.

In Rampton's views, antiracism and anti-ethnic absolutism is evident in ethnolinguistic crossing as a way of transgressing ethnic borders and eventually making them fade (2005, 299). [250]

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[248] As Brathwaite (1992) underlines, rap's passion has attracted millions of music fans who are not Black or who don't live in urban areas. Rap fans are both male and female, and are found across all racial lines.

[249] The act of "crossing" itself challenges the notion of ethnic absolutism. In a society where ethnic absolutism would be the norm, appropriation of any sort would not be accepted. However, if we think in musical terms, it is a matter of fact that some audiences simply do not care about an artist's provenance. Not everybody estimates the ethnic category to which a rapper belongs as being the most important element of their music. Moreover, going against ethnic absolutism would imply that music can rise above the demanding racial categories and still be aesthetically pleasing and accepted.

[250] Similarly, in taking up linguistic forms associated with street conscious urban African American culture, crossing into AAE by White rappers can be seen as a means of claiming membership in a multiracial, multinational Global Hip Hop Nation (GHHN) (Alim, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2009), a transcultural, multilingual, and multiracial community.

In my own research, I increasingly concentrated on White rappers' crossing and switching from AAE to SAE. Such linguistic behavior is crucial for several reasons.

First, because of the history of complicated power relationships between the two varieties (i.e. AAE ad SAE) - as extensively examined in Chapter 1; second, because White rappers attempt to cross to AAE enters the problematic terrain of cultural appropriation and of White musicians' appropriation of Black music forms perceived as theft and robbery by the Black community; third, the fact that Whites are linguistically engaged in a genre that is anti-White par excellence is a paradox worth-researching.

## 4.2 Anti-White Sentiments in Hip Hop

How can Whites be attracted by and engaged in a genre and in a language (AAE) that regularly expresses anti-White sentiment?

Hip Hop is no-doubt a genre that is predominantly an expression of anti-White sentiment,[251] chiefly against a long history of injustices and racist attitudes by White people. In the words of Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Hip Hop seems to be almost antagonistic "if not antithetical" towards White culture (2011, 33).[252]

When rap originated, African American artists intentionally chose to perform in AAE instead of SAE in order to express solidarity with other African Americans and resistance to White culture.

Smitherman (1997) notes that many Hip Hop artists are college-educated and most can switch between AAE and SAE, yet the lyrics nonetheless are in AAE because that is the language of their intended audience.

Dyson (1993) explains that Hip Hop "takes delight in undermining 'correct' English usage" (12). Indeed, the use of AAE forms in Hip Hop is a fundamental part of the genre, as Smitherman points out:

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[251] This anti-White sentiment is expressed predominantly by gangsta rap. However, it is misleading to think that only gangsta rap exists as a genre. In fact, it is important to stress that gangsta rap is only one type or subgenre, of rap. De Prez (2014) differentiates between conscious or message rap, personal or status rap and party - joke rap (14-15).

[252] See Brandi Wilkins Catanese (2011) *The Problem of the Color(blind): Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*.

In a similar fashion, Alim confirms that it is well documented that Hip Hop Culture in the 1980s and 90s in the United States was driven in large part by an ideological commitment to Black Nationalism, various forms of Islam and Afrocentrism (Alim, 2006), and a race-consciousness that centered Blackness and pushed Whiteness to the periphery (see Spady & Eure, 1991, Chang 2005; Decker 1993; Perry 2004; Rose 1994). The group Public Enemy stands out in the global Hip Hop imagination as the greatest advocate of a Black-centered ideology of race, with their albums *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988) and *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990) hailed by Hip Hop heads around the world as two of the most important Hip Hop releases of all times.

[rappers] deliberately and consciously employ the 'antilanguage' of the Black speech community, thus sociolinguistically constructing themselves as members of the dispossessed. Even when the message in the music does not overtly speak to racial resistance, the use of the Black speech community's syntax covertly reinforces Black America's 400-year rejection of Euro-American cultural, racial-and linguistic-domination (1997, 274-275).

What is more, rage and defiance towards the White man are overtly expressed via the lyrics. Just to mention a few examples, the album *Straight Outta Compton*[253] (1988) by NWA (Niggaz With Attitude),
and especially the track "Fuck Tha Police"[254] (1989), have become the anthem of activists fighting against White police brutality and racism around the country. Via rap music, NWA pointed out the manner in which White "law and order" operated on principles that encouraged the victimizing of young people based upon skin color: "Fuck the Police (…) Some police think/ They have the

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[253] The living conditions of many L.A. lower-income residents during the late '80s were dreary: 45% of African American males in South Central L.A. were left unemployed. Moreover, the level of White police brutality raised to extreme: Los Angeles Chief of Police Daryl Gates launched "Operation Hammer" in 1987 which consisted in a large-scale attempt to enforce gang violence. On August 1, 1988, one week before the release of *Straight Outta Compton*, 88 LAPD officers broke in two apartment buildings in southwest L.A. to deliver a strong message to the gangs by smashing furniture, destroying family heirlooms, ruining food and clothing, and humiliating and beating residents of the buildings, causing so much damage that the Red Cross stepped in to provide aid to the survivors.
By the 1990s, when Tupac released "To Live and Die in LA" (1996), homicide rates in U.S. cities reached record highs as gangs competed for drug markets and for the chance to "get rich or die trying," striving to turn their daily nightmares into the American dream. In light of this portrait, it emerges how "Straight Outta Compton" (1988) by N.W.A. embodies the sense of entrapment felt by African Americans living in South Central Los Angeles both musically and visually (much importance in the analysis of this song is in fact given to its music video). The video, as Loren Kajikawa observes in *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (2015) features N.W.A.'s members while walking on foot, emphasizing their proximity to the street and their connection to the place, whereas their LADP adversaries always drive in police cars. The members of the band become easy targets for the police, who eventually lock them up inside a police van. In the video, urban space becomes a place of conflict and the image of the map, which returns as the song's chorus breaks in again, highlights the circumscribed area of Compton and the "sense of surveillance and limited mobility felt by its inhabitants" (Kajikawa 98). Spatial relations and the police' oppressive presence are underlined both by sound and imagery.
See https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Crime+in+Los+Angeles&item_type=topic and https://www.revolvy.com /main/index.php?s=C.R.A.S.H.&item_type=topic. Last Visited January 9, 2017.
[254] "Fuck Tha Police" is N.W.A.'s most courageous song and iconic track which remains a rallying cry for protest against police brutality. Upon its original release on N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* LP in 1988, the song was safely titled with the blanks: "_ _ _ _ Tha Police" and the album cover was among the first to feature the infamous "Parental Advisory" label, that warned parents about the album's explicit lyrics. The use of stickers on album covers saying "Parental Advisory" and "clean" CD versions with the profanity bleeped out are results of the censoring wars declared by the media, politicians and conservative parents against gangsta rap.
A censored version of the LP even omitted the song entirely. In spite of the controversy the record caused, it went double platinum, the first album to do so without the support of mainstream radio. See http://massappeal.com/fuck-tha-police-nwa-most-courageous-song-is-still-as-relevant-as-ever/

authority to kill a minority/ Fuck that shit." NWA from the West Coast[255] firmly established a style of rap based on the hard facts of LA gangs[256] featuring the inflammatory chronicles of gang life[257] in Compton, Los Angeles (Toop 2012), and are therefore considered to be among the first major gangsta rap groups. [258]

Granted, Schooly D and KRS-One on the East Coast and Ice-T on the West Coast had already pioneered this hard-life form of rap music. Yet, it was not until NWA recorded Straight Outta Compton (1988), successfully adopting "gangsta" personae, that this style gained large audiences (Forbes 258). [259] Gangsta rap is a subgenre of rap that is characterized by a macho attitude and explicit lyrics. *Gangsta*, or "*gangster*" in African American English pronunciation[260] originally

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[255] The raw aggression and reckless lifestyle portrayed by this form of rap caught the attention of rap fans and defined the West Coast as the center of "realism rap" or "gangsta rap." Historically, Hip Hop scene has always been dominated by the competition between West Coast Hip Hop and East Coast Hip Hop, namely, Compton (on the West Coast) was in direct competition with the Bronx (East Coast), where Hip Hop was born. Although Hip Hop originated and was most successful in urban New York and on the East Coast, the emergence of gangsta rap shifted the focus to the lived experience of the post-industrial city on the West Coast, particularly Los Angeles (Baldwin 165).

Rap music's narratives of the mid 1990s are dominated by this bitter rivalry between the rap scenes on the East and West coasts of the United State: "The East coast crew lead by Puff Daddy (Bad Boy Records) and the West coast crew lead by Suge Knight (Death Row Records) engaged in a war of words which escalated and culminated in the fatal shootings of two of rap's biggest stars, Tupac Shakur [i.e. 2Pac] and the Notorious B.I.G." (Toop 2012; Baldwin 159).

[256] An insightful definition of gang is provided by John M. Hagedorn in his 2008 book *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*: "Gangs, in the most straightforward sense, mint power for the otherwise powerless from their control of small urban spaces: street corners, slums, playgrounds, parks, schools, prison dormitories, even garbage dumps. For poor youth lacking other resources, these informal spatial monopolies, if successfully defended and consolidated, provide some measure of entrepreneurial opportunity as well as local prestige and warrior glamour. Gangs also frequently act as neighborhood militias to police public space, enforce (or resist) ethnic and racial borders, and, thereby, control access to jobs and housing" (XI).

[257] It was precisely the destructive gang violence that led to the Hip Hop Movement. As Remes (1991) explains, in the late 1960s, the Civil Rights movement lost such charismatic leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. At such a time the movement was overshadowed by violent race riots across the country and among the people in the ghettos there was discontent, rage and despair. It is in this political vacuum that street gangs began to flourish.

Originally, the goal of these gangs was to defend the territory against rival gangs. Afrika Bambaataa, from the South Bronx, is one of the central figures in the development of the rap movement, who at that time was a member of the powerful Black Spades, the largest Black gang in New York. As Remes attests: "Between 1968 and 1973 the violence culminated: internal destruction, pressure from the city authorities, drugs, and the reaction of Black women to male violence eventually led to the downfall of gangs-although later on new and more violent gangs erupted as a result of the growing drugs trade. Gang leaders tried to produce alternatives for the Black ghetto youth. Slowly, the hierarchical gang structures mutated into more peaceful groups. Bambaataa started the Zulu Nation, initially The Organisation. Activities shifted from street violence to street music and dance. Hip Hop started as a collective and positive reaction against the spiral of violence of the street gangs" (130-131).

[258] Among NWA's predecessors considered to be the founding fathers of "gangsta rap" are: Schoolly D, the first who used the word "gangsta" when in 1984 he released the single "Gangster Boogie" and Ice-T's song "6 n the Mornin" released in 1986, which is considered to have officially initiated and launched "gangsta rap" as a sub-genre of rap music. "6 'N the Morning" is in fact one of the early entrances in the still-in-construction genre of gangsta rap at a time when, in fact, it wasn't even called that way. This song is now regarded as a classic and is referenced very often. It recounts the story of an escape from the police where, after having the police arrive at his house at 6:00am, Ice-T escapes out of the back window of his bathroom and takes to the city streets.

[259] In the words of Morgan, this subgenre of rap boomed commercially from the mid-1990s onwards (2009, 3).

[260] African American English respells and vocalizes in -*a* many words that exceed two syllables and that end with the -*er* suffix. Henceforth, the same pronunciation rule is applied to gangst-er/ganst-a as well as to nigg-er/ nigg-a, broth-er/broth-a; reef-er/reef-a; ev-er/ev-a; teach-er/teach-a; preach-er/ preach-a and, finally, rapp-er/rapp-a. See also King

referred to a member of a gang, but then came to refer more broadly to a particular lifestyle. Its central themes are violence, drugs, and a tough lifestyle, as well as the criminalization, surveillance, incarceration, and poverty of Black youngsters in the postindustrial city (Hagedorn and Davis 2008, 100).[261]

Gangsta rap deals with rap music's most controversial subject matter such as the glorification of street life violence (Toop 2014).[262] As a consequence, the style is often described by the media as vulgar and violent.

It should be pointed out here that rappers portray themselves as dominant aggressors. As Kajikawa underlines, N.W.A's members open their song "Straight Outta Compton" with a verse from Ice Cube describing himself as a "crazy motherfucker with a sawed off shotgun who will destroy anyone who gets in his way: squeeze the trigger, and bodies are hauled off" (2015, 101). Hence, the central matter is, does Hip Hop generate violence, or does it merely reflect a violent ghetto? The debate is still open, as Tricia Rose explains in *The Hip Hop Wars* where she brilliantly discusses, among other things, how Hip Hop has become increasingly saturated with blames of being a source of violence.[263]

With this respect, gangsta rappers claim that they illustrate life in the streets as they experience it. Specifically, according to NWA, anger and violence[264] expressed in gangsta rap are reflective of American society in general. In other words, violence and crime do not originate within rap music, but are part of the American fabric[265] and merely magnified by rappers' musical expression.

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and Turner's *Contemporary African American Literature: The Living Canon* (2013). As extensively demonstrated in chapter 3, this peculiar AAE pronunciation actually derives from an early influence of American Southern dialects spoken by White Americans. These dialects were characterized as non-rothic, i.e. they developed the r-lessness which is the ultimate cause of the schwa ending of the abovementioned words.

[261] As Kelley writes in *Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics*: "The criminalization, surveillance, incarceration, and poverty of Black youth in the postindustrial city have been the central themes in gangsta rap and constitute the primary experiences from which cultural identities are constructed" (147).

[262] Gangsta rap upsets critics with its hypermasculine, ultraviolent tales that often engage in misogyny and homophobia' (Toop 2012).

[263] In this regard, scholar Tricia Rose observes: "Too many attacks use Hip Hop as an easy scapegoat for much larger social issues—issues that require our sustained empathetic attention and commitment" (2008,78).

[264] On this topic, an interview was released by rapper and producer Dr. Dre, who has also been the mentor of other outstanding rappers such as Snoop Dogg, Eminem, and 50 Cent and who brought gangsta rap into the mainstream, particularly out of the South Central area of Los Angeles. Dr. Dre states that g*angsta rap* offered a window into the violent life of African American street gangs, often including criminal, profane, and anti-establishment themes and he explains the uses of his gangsta rap's lyrics to justify the violence of his album *The Chronic* (1992). In an interview with *Rolling Stones* Dr. Dre says: "People are always telling me my records are violent, that they say bad things about women, but those are the topics they bring up themselves. This is the stuff they want to write about. They don't want to talk about the good shit because that doesn't interest them, and it's not going to interest their readers. A lot of the motherfuckers in the media are big hypocrites, you know what I'm saying? If I'm promoting violence, they're promoting it just as much as I am by focusing on it in the article. That really bugs me out — you know, if it weren't going on, I couldn't talk about it." http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rolling-in-compton -snoop-and-dre-20101029

In a press conference concerning the violent lyrics of NWA's songs, Ice Cube stated: "Our art is a reflection of our reality."[266] The statement is also featured in the NWA documentary *Straight Outta Compton* (2015),[267] namely in a poignant scene when NWA are ambushed by reporters at a press conference, including one who suggests that N.W.A. is glamorizing gangster lifestyle and glorifying violence. Along these lines, Ice T in the song "Freedom of Speech" states:

> We ain't the problems, we ain't the villains
>
> It's the suckers deprivin' the truth from our children
>
> You can't hide the fact, Jack
>
> There's violence in the streets every day,
>
> Any fool can recognize that
>
> But you try to lie and lie
>
> And say America's some motherfuckin' apple pie.

Along these lines, in his work called "Between God and Gangsta Rap" (1996) Dyson stresses that one cannot "continue to blame gangsta rap for ills that existed long before Hip Hop uttered its first syllable" (186). In addition to this, John Hagedorn and Mike Davis (2008) underline the true-to-life storytelling aspect of Hip Hop music, whose goal is to paint credible pictures of life in impoverished neighborhoods (104 - 105).

Rappers' aim was in fact to report what was happening in their neighborhoods, speaking out against violence, racism, and police brutality on the part of White people and to bring to larger audiences the dreary conditions in which they had to live. Public Enemy's "911 Is A Joke," for instance, reports the lack of response to emergency calls in a Black neighborhood. The "911" in the song title refers in fact to the emergency telephone number in the United States: "You better wake up and smell the real flavor/ Cause 911 is a fake life saver." In 1985, before NWA hit the scene, Toddy Tee released

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[265] As a matter of fact, since the genre's birth in the late 1970s, rappers mirrored exactly what was happening to young people of color in their country, carrying on the tradition of protest music that supported the Civil Rights movement in the '60s and early '70s (Remes 129-131).

[266] Ice Cube tweeted this statement in his twitter profile at https://twitter.com/icecube/status/62645217181962 6496?lang=it. Last Visited January 9, 2017.
See also: http://music.mxdwn.com/2015/02/10/news/watch-nwa-releases-trailer-for-straight-outta-compton-document ary. Last Visited January 9, 2017.

[267] An American biographical drama telling the story of the rise and fall of N.W.A. and how they revolutionized Hip Hop culture. The film clearly borrows its name from the title of N.W.A's debut studio album, and from the album's title track.

"Batterram," concerning the story of the B100 armored vehicle that the LAPD[268] officers used to batter down the front doors of suspected crack houses in the city during the crack epidemic in 1985.

"Batterram," along with Ice T's "6 in the Mornin'" was one of the first West Coast gangsta tracks.

Even before these tracks, as early as 1982, Melle Mel,[269] lead rapper and songwriter for Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, was letting listeners know what life was like as a young Black man in the South Bronx via the song "The Message," title track of their 1982 album. It offered an upclose view into the devastation and deprivation experienced by many urban working-class people of color: "God is smiling on you, but he's frowning too/ Because only God knows what you'll go through/ You'll grow in the ghetto living second-rate/ And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate."[270] This song by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, marks an important transition for the content of rap texts, revealing the potential of rap music for the creation of a cultural identity. The song, in fact, set a new agenda for rap, giving birth to "message rap"[271] or conscious rap (Toop 2012), a genre based on sharp criticism of White racism and ghetto conditions. As it can be inferred from the abovementioned lines, Blacks living in poor communities in the early Reagan years were treated as a caste apart, second-class citizens. The crises in the industrial sector in the 1970s, in fact, had left a lot of Americans workers, a great number of which African Americans, unemployed and demoralized. In the 1980s American president Ronald Reagan introduced his "Reaganomics,"[272] which stopped for a great part social spending programs.

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[268] LAPD stands for Los Angeles Police Department. Facing discrimination and brutality at the hands of LAPD cops was an everyday reality for minorities, and suburban America still refused to believe that this discrimination was happening. According to the magazine *Mass Appeal* all changed in 1992 when the beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers was caught on video: "After the cops who beat King were found innocent, the city exploded into violence, quickly escalating into the largest urban uprising in U.S. history, causing $1 billion in damage. The unrest finally got the attention of CNN and world news, and former L.A. mayor Tom Bradley was at last forced to launch an investigation into the LAPD." See http://massappeal.com/fuck-tha-police-nwa-most-courageous-song-is-still-as-relevant-as-ever/
On this subject, see also my translation for *Ácoma. Rivista Internazionale di Studi Nord-Americani*. Essay: "Sounds from the Belly of the Beast: Rampart Police - (Dis)Order and the Psycho Realm Blues" by Steven Osuna (Ácoma, Anno 2014 – n.6) pp. 41-59.
[269] Melle Mel is an American Hip Hop musician – one of the pioneers of rap and lead rapper and main songwriter for Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, an American Hip Hop group formed in the South Bronx of New York City in 1976. He is considered to be the first rapper to call himself MC.
Other Furious Five members included his brother Kid Creole (Nathaniel Glover), Scorpio (Eddie Morris), Rahiem (Guy Todd Williams) and Cowboy (Keith Wiggins).
[270] This song is considered a classic of rap music.
[271] Message rap is another subgenre of rap considered to be born with the song "The Message."
[272] Reaganomics, a blend between the words [Ronald] Reagan and economics, refers to the 40th US President Reagan's economic programs and policies during the 1980s. The pillars of Reagan's economic policy were to call for widespread tax cuts, to reduce the growth of government spending, reduce the federal income tax and capital gains tax, reduce government regulation, and to reduce domestic spending in favor of an increase of military spending. See also *Reaganomics: An Insider's Account of the Policies and the People* by William A. Niskanen (1988).

Subsequently, "Public spaces where African Americans spent a lot of time gradually transformed into drug economies" (Dyson 1996, 177), where economic frustrations led African American rappers to resent rich White people in their lyrics.

The glorification of the overt criticism against White power continued full force with Public Enemy's 1989 song "Fight the Power": "Our freedom of speech is freedom or death/ We got to fight the powers that be/ Lemme hear you say/ Fight the power/ (…) Cause I'm Black and I'm proud." The song incorporates several samples and allusions to African American culture, including civil rights exhortations, Black church services, and the music of James Brown, namely his 1969 song "Say it loud I am Black and I am proud."[273]

What is more, in the abovementioned song they also overtly criticize Whites' position in the show business: "Elvis was a hero to most/ But he never meant shit to me you see/ Straight up racist that sucker was/ Simple and plain/ Mother fuck him and John Wayne."

Public Enemy, in line with many African Americans, feel that Elvis stole traditional Black musical elements in his rise as a rock icon. In later years, Chuck D, one of Public Enemy's members, would moderate his views on the King: "As a musicologist — and I consider myself one — there was always a great deal of respect for Elvis, especially during his Sun sessions. As a Black people, we all knew that. My whole thing was the one-sidedness — like, Elvis' icon status in America made it like nobody else counted. My heroes came from someone else. My heroes came before him. My heroes were probably his heroes."[274] Worth noting is that the politically charged lyrics of groups such as Public Enemy[275] not only criticized the establishment for racist laws and institutions. They also popularized

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[273] More broadly, Black music as a whole - and not only Hip Hop – is concerned with race and Black identity. We only need to think about the slave era with the Negro Spirituals or "the sorrow songs" as Du Bois called them in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) - as exposed in Chapter 2. Notably, also the essence of the Blues is imbued with these issues. The Blues likely originated in the decades after the end of slavery, when Jim Crow laws were first enacted in the South (Haralambos 1979, 129). As a matter of fact, while there were no Jim Crow laws in the North, African Americans who moved to Northern cities frequently found themselves in ghettoes, where they were once again segregated. The urban Blues of the 1940s and 1950s reflects Black people's conditions. Several scholars have noted the similar paths of development and related lyrical themes of Blues and Hip Hop. Both genres developed in times of great social upheaval (Washington and Shaver 1997). Blues emerged in the context of the end of slavery and the establishment of Jim Crow laws in the rural South. Hip Hop developed in a time of major changes in urban America when African Americans were leaving the inner city, housing conditions were deteriorating, unemployment was increasing, and gang wars fueled by the drug trade were on the rise. The lyrics of both genres provide a documentation of the lives of their performers and listeners. Dyson (1993) argues that Blues and Hip Hop served similar functions for their performers: "The blues functioned for another generation of Blacks much as rap functions for young Blacks today: as a source of racial identity, permitting forms of boasting and asserting machismo for devalued Black men suffering from social degradation, allowing commentary on social and personal conditions in uncensored language, and fostering the ability to transform hurt and anguish into art and commerce" (9).

[274] See http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/08/13/1029113925299.html. Last Visited January 9, 2017.

[275] Public Enemy carry Allah and Islam on their banner. In fact, they are linked with the Nation of Islam, led by Minister Louis Farakhan. Through schooling and education, they try to boost the self-respect of the youth and plead on behalf of Islam and they try to recreate the Black consciousness that existed in the 1960s (Remes 146).

an antagonistic and intelligent form of Hip Hop music that simultaneously challenged the *status quo* as well as engaging Black communities for the better, trying to change the conscience of the younger generations and trying to boost self-respect.

Along these lines, a most recent example is Kendrick Lamar's statement "You're fuckin' evil I want you to recognize that I'm a proud monkey" in his racially charged song "The Blacker the Berry"[276] (2015) where he proudly celebrates his African American heritage:

> I'm African American, I'm African
>
> I'm Black as the moon, heritage of a small village
>
> Pardon my residence
>
> Came from the bottom of mankind
>
> My hair is nappy, my dick is big, my nose is round and wide
>
> You hate me don't you?
>
> You hate my people, your plan is to terminate my culture
>
> You're fuckin' evil I want you to recognize that I'm a proud monkey[277] (…)
>
> You sabotage my community, makin' a killin'
>
> You made me a killer, emancipation of a real nigga

In this song, Lamar directly confronts Black stereotypes. Lamar's explicit display of the stereotypes White folks attach to Black people resounds Barack Obama's words: "None of us—Black, White, Latino, or Asian—is immune to the stereotypes that our culture continues to feed us, especially stereotypes about Black criminality, Black intelligence, or the Black work ethic. In general, members of every minority group continue to be measured largely by the degree of our assimilation— how closely speech patterns, dress, or demeanor conform to the dominant White culture" (Alim and Smitherman, 1).

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[276] The song shares both the title of the famous novel *The Blacker the Berry* (1928) written during the Harlem Renaissance by American author Wallace Thurman, as well as its themes concerning racism.

[277] Interestingly, Lamar uses one of the most infamous stereotype that Whites have elaborated against Black people. On the subject of stereotypes, we can go back as far as the ministrel shows as evidence of how "White performers – in an act that expressed both fear and desire towards Black people – painted their faces Black with burnt cork and put on highly essentialized (caricaturized) burlesque performances of Black people for largely White audiences, and served to reinforce White racist stereotypes about Black people" (Cutler 2014, 20). The minstrel shows were later taken over by Blacks, who were then effectively re-presenting images of themselves that fit in with prevailing stereotypes about Black people. Starting from the 1840s and '50s, William Henry Lane and Thomas Dilward became the first African Americans to perform on the minstrel stage, paving the way for Black Ministrels as a genre. All-black troupes followed as early as 1855. See the volume *Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes* by Niemann and Rodriguez (2003) and *The Black & White Minstrel Show* by *the* British Broadcasting Corporation (1962).

Degrading racial features usually ascribed to Black people are proudly taken on by Lamar who celebrates his African American identity. Lamar's song thus becomes an explicit charge against racial prejudices by Whites.[278]

To make a somewhat crude distinction, Whiteness outside of Hip Hop operates as the norm, a canvas upon which minority groups such as African Americans are still painted as inferior. Hip Hop, instead, is a genre whose modes of representation have become so thoroughly committed to the production of Blackness that Black identity and language is defined as the norm, whereas White identity is highly and overtly criticized.

To cap it all, we have verified that Hip Hop as a culture seems to be overtly critical about Whites and clearly centered around African Americans (Cutler 2014, 4). As Tricia Rose said, it is a "Black cultural expression that prioritizes Black voices from the margins of urban America" (Lamont 1999, 322). However, we must take into account that over a time span of about 45 years, Hip Hop has moved from the disadvantaged neighborhoods and streets of New York to radio stations and living rooms all over the world. Initially an obscure subculture, strictly bound to African American culture, it has gradually transformed into a global phenomenon.[279]

Definitely, the globalization of Hip Hop gave White audiences[280] the opportunity to get in touch with this musical genre and its language.

Today, in fact, AAE has attracted a broad audience of users since it entered the mainstream via commercial Hip Hop, becoming "an international language, a style that connects and defines the self- image of countless teenagers" (Alim 2009, 15). Whites' exposure to this language took place principally through electronic media such as MTV, rap music CDs, and Black Entertainment Television (BET).[281]

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[278] For a lot of African Americans, rap symbolizes resistance against White America as a hegemonic society often deeming Black people and the variety they speak as inferior.

[279] Known as a predominantly Black culture, Hip Hop is by far the most influential musical genre and culture in the U.S. and beyond. Just like the rappers that span the globe, rap fans are all races, colors and creeds. Hip Hop luminaries such as Afrika Bambaataa, NWA, and Public Enemy popularized Hip Hop abroad through concerts and other forms of consumable media, such as CDs, helped Hip Hop spread, almost at the same time, globally as well as nationally. Their efforts made gangsta rap among the most vital pop genres to come along in the last few years. In a similar fashion, Levy (2001) suggests that Hip Hop constitutes a global urban subculture that has entered people's lives "from a local fad among Black youth in the Bronx" and that "it has gone to become a global practice, giving new parameters of meaning to otherwise locally or nationally diverse identities" (134).

[280] Riley (2005) argues that White, suburban middle-class consumers have a strong affiliation with the gangsta rap style and that they played a key role in its expansion: "It is no secret that this audience of predominately White, suburban consumers exists, and that indeed the explosion in the 1990s of gangsta rap would have been impossible without it" (299).

[281] Worth noting is also the key role that cinema played. In this regard, see the book *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (2015) by Allyson Field et al., editors. The L.A. Rebellion film movement, sometimes referred to as the "Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers" or the UCLA Rebellion, refers to a group of African, Caribbean, and African

As a matter of fact, the revolution in information technology transformed Hip Hop into a global music business and led non-Black audiences to the "discovery" of rap.

In 1991 the music industry relied on a computerized count of sales called SoundScan, and the results shocked both insiders and outsiders: rap music was incredibly popular. Based on actual sale, SoundScan reported that "Niggaz 4 Life" by N.W.A. had sold 900,000 copies in the first week it was out, and that "Chronic" by Dr. Dre sold 3 million copies (Kitwana 25). As Ice Cube observed in 1996, all the top SoundScans are actually hardcore rap.[282] What is striking is that by 1991, suburban Whites reportedly made up the largest customer base for rap music (Kitwana 25).[283]

Notably, rap is a cultural arena in which the most prominent actors are Black even though the majority of its spectators are not (Kajikawa 9).

It is extremely compelling to discover that whites exemplify the target audience in Hip Hop, especially many young people from economically privileged families who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods, drawn to a cultural form almost diametrically opposed to their own in terms of class and opportunities.

In a similar fashion, as Hip Hop became more mainstream, it welcomed practitioners from all over the world, and non-Black rappers started populating the Hip Hop scene, entering a realm that had previously been the prerogative of Blacks. A central point to make is that thanks to the global spread of Hip Hop, features and patters of AAE got to be known, used and sung all over the world, in places far from the home of US slave descendants (Scott and Cobb 24-25).

Black rappers are well aware that many non-Blacks purchase their music and that globalization[284] caused hundreds of thousands of White kids and teenagers to sing along with their beloved Black

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American independent film, video artists and filmmakers who formed at the UCLA Film School in the late-1970s to the late-1980s. The group included Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Haile Gerima, Billy Woodberry, Jamaa Fanaka, and Zeinabu irene Davis, who all shared a desire to create alternatives to the dominant modes of narrative, style, and practice in American cinema. As a matter of fact, they succeeded in creating a Black Cinema that provides an alternative to classical Hollywood cinema. Their works reflect the full complexity of Black experiences. Based on extensive archival work and preservation, the book includes a complete filmography of the movement and it is a crucial sourcebook that reports the key role played by the L.A. Rebellion within the histories of cinema, Black visual culture, and postwar art in Los Angeles.

[282] See Bruce Haring, *USA Today* (1996) http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/music/ lem576.htm. Last Visited January 15, 2017.

[283] Two-thirds of Hip Hop's fan base are suburban White teenagers (Keyes 2002, 5). Tricia Rose goes even further, reporting that "For Hip Hop White consumption is significantly higher than Black consumption: in 2002 Whites made up 64 percent while Blacks made up 31.9 percent. Over the next four years, this racial consumption gap in Hip Hop widened: in 2004, Whites were 60.6 percent of the consumers and Blacks were 24.8 percent; in 2006, Whites were 60.1 percent and Blacks were 25 percent. The racial consumption gap for Hip Hop was 32.1 percent in 2002, 35.8 percent in 2004, and 36.1 percent in 2006" (Rose 2008, 88).

[284] According to Tricia Rose, Hip Hop is by far the most disproportionately White consumed popular Black music genre, White consumption being the biggest market for Hip Hop since gangsta rap emerged as commercial Hip Hop's front runner (2008, 87-88).

idols, chanting rap hits.[285] Without doubt, through globalization rap music has crossed lines of race, class and nation.

In this regard, Kajikawa has discussed the new ideological dimension of rap in relation to the concept of "colorblindness."[286] Kajikawa agrees with Anthony Kwame Harrison that Hip Hop is the means through which "young people have constructed their own standards of belonging and authenticity that render rigid notions of race obsolete. By mastering Hip Hop's formal elements and knowledge of its history, White rappers find common ground and create new forms of community by sharing their passion for the same musical genre" (Kajikawa 152). Although Harrison points out that race continues to be significantly problematic in relation to Hip Hop, he also says that for its practitioners it is a meritocratic field, very much like jazz beforehand, because Hip Hop "status" is awarded by skills and achievement alone (as in the case of White rapper Eminem). "Color-blindness" in Hip Hop is seen this way because of this discipline's inherent openness to anyone who can demonstrate significant mastery of its formal elements to appeal to fans and practitioners from all ethnic backgrounds. Kajikawa backs this up by citing Joseph Schloss's criticism in *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip Hop* where Schloss says that he does not want to underline the ethnic and racial identities of rap informants as part of a larger statement about the racial politics of Hip Hop studies. Schloss shifts his critical gaze away from race not to promote a naive universalism, but to shed light on aspects of the music and people who produce it that "become invisible when scholars assume that racial politics explains everything about Hip Hop" (Kajikawa 152).

However, if race is sometimes problematic or of little use in the analysis of Hip Hop, nonetheless Schloss's approach runs the risk of oversimplification. Interviewed by Jason Solomons for *The Guardian,* Spike Lee put it more pithily: "Anyone who thinks we move in a post-racial society is someone who's been smoking crack" (Kajikawa 6). What can be noted, however, is that rap as a genre is no doubt a dynamic and powerful means that can allow for the construction of multiple and new ideas about race and reality, as Eminem's rising to stardom testifies.

It is now time to address the initial question, i.e. how did a genre that is anti-White par excellence manage to attract the attention of Whites?  What is it about rap that captured their interest?

Strikingly, the more Whites seem to be excluded from Black rappers' hermeneutic, linguistic and musical practices, the more they approach that world. It is like a vicious circle of exclusion-inclusion.

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[285] http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rolling-in-compton-with-snoop-and-dre-20101029. Last Visited January 16, 2017.
[286] For a discussion of "colorblindness" see Chapter 1.

As Wallace observes in *Signifying Rappers* (1997), Whites appear to be hooked by the attractive dissonance of a realm which was theoretically grounded on their exclusion as Whites, drawing them deeper and deeper into a world they were expected to repel. As Wallace puts it, it is an emotional wind-up. In his words, the unease and ambivalence with which the White at the window loves rap is like chasing after the girl not despite but because of the fact that she wants no part of you (159).

What is more, listeners might feel privy to a sort of forbidden access thanks to the clandestine nature of some lyrics. According to Tricia Rose, Whites are fascinated by Black culture's differences, "drawn in by the mainstream social constructions of Black culture as a forbidden narrative, and symbol of rebellion" (1994, 5).

Along this line, we must take into account that Hip Hop and rap emerged as forms of Black expression breaking into and filling up mainstream culture whilst redefining for a generation of youth what it meant to be "cool." To be cool – Black or White- you had to like rap. In an interview with Tricia Rose, Carmen Ashhurst-Watson, President of Def Jam Recordings after 1990, said: "rap defines 'cool' for this generation" (Murray and Neal 2004, 554).

As Andy Bennet observes: "A lot of white kids here go for the groove and the image. They see the videos, they see the clothes and the 'cool image' and they enjoy that, they want to be like that. African American rap is simply cool, it's in, and you can relate it to what's going on in the street there" (188).

In *Hip Hop Wars,* Tricia Rose pursued the notion of "cool pose" as created by rappers. According to Rose, it is the culture of violent behavior which stirs up "prestige and coolness, the alluring cool-pose" (2008, 79). In the same manner, in *We Real Cool* (2004) bell hooks analyzed this sense of the cool deriving from rapper poses and attitudes, especially the raw aggression and reckless lifestyle portrayed by gangsta rap: "Cool is about a detached, removed, nonchalant sense of being. An aloofness that suggests one is above it all. A pride, an arrogance even, that is at once laid back, unconcerned, perceived to be highly sexual and potentially violent" (143).

This aesthetic provides a genuinely threatening edginess that is very attractive both to White suburban kids and to urban cultural elites (Runell and Diaz 29) obsessively engaged in "cool hunting": "it is cool to live life dangerously, cool to rebel against the *status quo*" (Runell and Diaz 27). In his book *Fight the Power* Chuck D, a member of Public Enemy, explains that through rap music the "most negative projection of ourselves becomes the most popular for young people. What develops is a driven hipness to be cool and to be on the side of the criminal" (45).

The arrogant and violent attitude of Black rappers can be seen as a response to the limited opportunities available to them and the injustice of these limitations, as well as a response to a hurtful, discriminatory environment. The rapper's cool pose is an attempt to appear undaunted by this reality, to seem untouched by the real effects of racial injustice that continue to be underaccounted for. Dyson (1993) argues that Hip Hop serves the following functions for their performers:

> The blues functioned for another generation of Blacks much as rap functions for young Blacks today: as a source of racial identity, permitting forms of boasting and asserting machismo for devalued Black men suffering from social degradation, allowing commentary on social and personal conditions in uncensored language, and fostering the ability to transform hurt and anguish into art and commerce (9).

In a similar fashion, rapper Murs says: "When you're a young Black male in America, you feel powerless—you feel like you don't have a voice, you're disenfranchised—so when you get the microphone, you wanna just pump yourself up. I think that's where all of the bravado comes from, where all the braggadocio comes from" (Edwards 2009, 26). Braggadocio content in rap lyrics consists in bragging and boasting. Combined with put-downs, insults, and disses against real or imaginary opponents, it comprises the form known as battle rhyming, [287] a highly distinctive trait of Hip Hop lyrics from the outset and an art form in itself.

Bragging rhymes takes a number of different forms, from simply proclaiming yourself the best MC ever to deeper and wittier lyrics. Guerrilla Black says: "Every MC feels like he's the best, and I guess you have to have the arrogance and the bravado to feel like that, to be able to be in this game, because the competition is real hot out there" (Edwards 2009, 26).

Certainly, it teaches youngsters to play the dominator game. Another subgenre of rap, status rap,288 involves boasts about ability and put downs of rivals. Boast raps have a dominant expressive function. Status rap first appeared in the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," which consists in boasting rhythms indicating a strong concern with "status" and social prowess, while outlining one's skills and sexual attractiveness:

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[287] For a definition of rap battles see Chapter 2.
[288] Status rap is another subgenre of rap music. Investigating the thematic structure of rap's lyrical content, Forbes has argued that there are three main categories of rap music: gangsta rap, status rap and progressive or message rap (Forbes 258-260).

Well I was coming home late one dark afternoon

Reporter stopped me for a interview

She said she's heard stories and she's heard fables

That I'm vicious on the mic and the turntables

This young reporter I did adore

So I rocked a vicious rhyme like I never did before

She said "damn fly guy I'm in love with you

The Casanova legend must have been true

I said by the way baby what's your name

Said "I go by the name of Lois Lane/

And you could be my boyfriend you surely can/

Just let me quit my boyfriend called Superman."[289]

The rapper stages his personality, seeking from the audience an appreciation of skill and superiority. The boast element in rap is a balance between humorous exaggeration and genuine self-appraisal. Many rappers claim to be the best around, and they try to prove it with original lyrics and highly personal performances, boasting about their verbal dexterity as well as their sexual performance; or else they glorify their neighborhood (Remes 144-145). Proudly calling themselves "niggas," rappers bask in the glory of gangsta culture, in braggadocio rhymes glamorizing violent attitudes, drug addiction, and the material world.[290] This way, they end up personifying the successful "cool" Black male.

The cool pose of rappers represents a ritualized form of masculinity and hypermasculine Blackness (the tropes of masculinity, promiscuity, and violence are naturalized as inherently Black) and it becomes a romanticized position of strength in the eyes of Whites.[291]

This identification by Whites is no different from how most young men in patriarchal societies come to take on poses that associate masculinity with aggression and violence and that entails "behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control" (Kelley 2004, 127).

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[289] See The Sugarhill Gang's full song "Rapper's Delight" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUqvPJ3cbUQ. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

[290] Most rappers in the videos proudly boast of their material possessions, gold chains, expensive cars, lush clothes.

[291] Kajikawa points out that "As one of the most influential music genres of the last three decades, rap has cultivated a mainstream audience and become a multi-million-dollar industry by promoting highly visible (and often controversial) representations of Black masculine identity" (5).

Bucholtz also underlines that the appeal of Hip Hop culture for Whites may be found in the essential link between Black masculinity and "hyper-physicality, hyper-sexuality and physical strenght" (1999, 444). In this light, White's fixation with Hip Hop may be an attempt to overcome a sense of inadequate masculinity and a desire to project a tougher[292] identity (Cornyetz 1994).

Without doubt, it is the macho-cool Black male stereotypical figure typical of rap music that has gripped White youth's fantasies.

A Philadelphia-based market research firm called MEE (Motivational, Educational Entertainment) Productions put out a study in 1992 that showed how Black music, Black artists and Black youths were trendsetters for what is cool (Kitwana, 2005).

In reality, the feel of the cool associated with Black music and language is not new, preceding the Hip Hop generation by decades. Indeed, the interest of young Whites in rap and Hip Hop culture is entirely in line with the history of the origins and reception of musical genres in America, and should be seen in the context of a string of similar appropriations going back to blues, jazz, rock 'n roll, soul and R & B (Tricia Rose 1994, 5).[293]

Norman Mailer, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author, wrote about White Americans throwing themselves into Black culture in his 1957 essay "The White Negro."

Tracing the history of Black American coolness - or "hip"[294] as he called it - from jazz to the 1950s hipsters he wrote: "So it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro, for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries. But the presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American life is probably due to jazz, and its knife-like entrance into culture". [295]

As shown in chapter 2, Black English spread across popular youth culture through "jive,"[296] the lingua franca of the streets, a Black street vernacular that began to migrate into broad popular youth culture with the jazz and swing music of the late 1930s.

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[292] In *Spectacular Vernaculars*. *Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* Russell Potter states that male rappers usually present themselves as heterosexual, masculine and tough. He says that these characteristics – not just in the context of Hip Hop music – developed as a result of reclaiming manhood in a post-slavery society (1995, 100).

[293] In *Challenging Racism in the Arts*, Tator and Mattis claim that secular Black music has long been appropriated by White musicians. The appropriation of Black music such as rag, jazz, be-bop, funk, rhythm and blues, blues, reggae, gospel, soul, rap, and dub poetry has always been central to the evolution of popular music. Black music has a structure, flow, rhythm, and internal consistency altogether different from European music. Many of Black music's 'tools' - syncopation, polyrhythm, the reliance on 'groove' and feel, the prominence of bass and drums, the use of call-and-answer patterns, the use of suspended chords and chord progressions, and so on - are rarely encountered in European music forms (134).

[294] A definition of hip is given in Chapter 2.

[295] http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/fade-to-White-Black-music-White-artistsbig-money-504#axzz4VBMZrn9v. Last Visited January 17, 2017

[296] Jive began to migrate into broad popular youth culture with the swing music and jitterbug craze of the late 1930s.

Jive, the vocabulary of swing music[297] and the language of jazz musicians as well, was adopted by the end of the 1930s by swing fans aka cats. Black and White alike[298] (Dalzell, 2010, 35) were attracted by this feeling of the "cool" inherent in Black music.

   During the jazz age in the late 1920s and early 1930s Whites in New York would travel to Harlem to see jazz legends Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong (Cutler 2014, 21). As discussed in chapter 2, much of Cab Calloway's jive talk passed into the mainstream because of the popularity of jazz. White audiences and jazz fans started using that language to show how "smart and up to date they were" and little by little the general public followed suit (Mc Crum et al. 1986, 224).

Jive reached its apex in the 1940s, was revived by the hipsters of the 1950s, modified by the hippies of the 1960s, and updated by the rappers of the 1980s, defining the slang of American youth. In the 1970s, Americans of all colors were crazy about the audacious and outrageous performer James Brown who dripped attitude and "unleashed dialect," i.e. Black English. When he released "Soul Power," in 1971 he declared: "I got something that makes me wanna shout/ I got something that tells? me what it's all about/ I got soul, and I'm supa-bad."[299] As Rickford & Rickfors poignantly note:

> Now, imagine what those fans might have thought had they hustled to the music store for the latest James Brown album, and dashed home only to hear an announcer's broadcast-news diction pouring from their record players: "I have something that makes me want to shout, /I have something that informs me what is happening, / I have soul, and I am super-good." Sure, that sort of syntax suits the evening news. Crisp broadcast talk has its place. But such language would not have gone over well with Brown's audiences. Feeling hip, outta sight, cool, funky, bad, or fly themselves, they prefer Spoken Soul, which, by virtue of the experience that produced it, conveys the intoxicating feel of cool. (76-77)

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[297] In 1938, Cab Calloway published the first of his celebrated masterpieces of jive lexicography, the *Cat- alogue, a 'Hepster's' Dictionary* (1938). Later on, in 1944, Calloway reprinted it as *The New Cab Calloway Hepster's Dictionary, Language of Jive*. For swing glossaries dealing with music-specific jive vocabulary see also "The Language of Swing – November 1935." In *Down beat*, 61.7 (1994): 20-40, and "It's Swing!" by Holman Harvey in the *Delineator*, Nov. (1936): 10–11.

[298] Lighter provides the following definition of "cat": "1.b: Esp. Black E. a fellow; a man or boy; (also, in recent use) a person of either sex. [popularized by swing musicians after ca 1935]; 1.c.: Jazz. A usu. Male performer or avid devotee of jazz or swing music" (1994, 367).

[299] See the full song at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxQ0wsvAYTc. Last Visited February 8, 2017.

It was precisely that "intoxicating feel of cool" derived from Spoken Soul[300] that attracted White artists, many of whom built their success by borrowing from and appropriating Black music and language. It is impossible to talk about White rappers' participation in the speech of African American Hip Hop music without hinting at the long history of similar appropriations.

## 4.3 Black Empires White Desires: Cultural Appropriation? Musical Theft?

Wanting to identify when Whites started to appropriate Black music, one only needs to think about the early 20th century, when White musicians such as Benny Goodman took over the African American style of jazz (Tator 133).[301]

In the same period, Irene and Vernon Castle, a husband-and-wife team of ballroom dancers, performed on Broadway with a repertoire of ragtime, jazz rhythms and African American music for dance at a time when music and dance were one. Irving Berlin, a Russian-born American composer and lyricist, widely considered one of the greatest songwriters in American history, drew inspiration from the African American "ragtime craze"[302] for his first major international 1911 hit, "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Finally, famous names when talking about early White appropriation of Black music include those of jazz orchestra or band leaders who, from the 1920s and especially in the North (particularly Chicago), shaped the blues brought by Black musicians from the South, notably by Louis Armstrong. In his essay "The Appropriation of Music and Musical Forms," Perry Hall points out that although Louisiana Creoles created jazz during Jim Crow, the first known jazz album was made by White men,

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[300]The opening chapter of Rickford and Rickford *Spoken Soul* provides an explanation of the origin of the term "spoken soul": "'Spoken Soul' was the name that Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land,* coined for Black talk. In a 1968 interview he waxed eloquent in its praise, declaring that the informal speech or vernacular of many African Americans 'possesses a pronounced lyrical quality which is frequently incompatible to any music other than that ceaselessly and relentlessly driving rhythm that flows from poignantly spent lives.' A decade later, James Baldwin, legendary author of *The Fire Next Time*, described black English as "this passion, this skill . . . this incredible music" (Rickford and Rickford, 2000, 3).

[301] It is difficult to establish the definitive "starting point," since appropriation dates back to before the record industry – to the early half of the nineteenth century- i.e. when there were no recorded tracks and when the first cultural encounters between European and African music took the form of interaction between the religious and folk music of poor rural Whites and the African-derived spiritual and choir music of Blacks (Tator 134).

[302]Between 1896 and 1918 the influence of African American music intensified, a trend best represented by ragtime. The Ragtime Craze emerged in the 1880s, its popularity peaking in the decade after the turn of the century. To some extent the ragtime craze descended from minstrelsy, but the ragtime style was also a more intimate engagement with African American musical techniques and values, due to the increasing involvement of Black songwriters and performers in the music industry. The word "ragtime" derives from the African American term "to rag," meaning to enliven a piece of music by shifting melodic accents onto the off-beats (a technique known as syncopation). This technique has the effect of intensifying the beat, creating rhythm. See http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/08/20080812201933eaifas0.4059717.html#ixzz4Vl3jntlh. Last Visited January 17, 2017.

the Original Dixieland Jazz band. A decade later, the appropriately named Paul Whiteman was crowned King of Jazz by the media.[303]

According to Andrea Carosso, who lectured on the topic at *The J.F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies*,[304] crucial to the White appropriation of Black musical forms is also the fact that pop music from the 1950s focused more on "tunes" and "songs" than on singers. Therefore, attention should be paid also to "which tunes" were appropriated.

This is true of Elvis Presley whose first hit, "Hound Dog," was written and originally popularized by a Black woman: Big Mama Thornton. The same applies to the Rolling Stones, whose first albums comprised blues covers. According to Rickford and Rickford (2000), like other bands that emerged when rock and roll was young, the British band became famous by borrowing Black styles and Black talk. Several of their hits can be traced back to Black standards of the South and a few are plain rip-offs (77). "You Gotta Move," recorded in 1971, is essentially an old African American lyric: "You gotta move, you gotta move, child, Oh, when the Lord gets ready, You gotta move." The original "I Gotta Move" was sung in Black churches for years, particularly on the Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands and elsewhere in the South, and is likely still being sung there (Rickford & Rickford 77).

A crucial step in this history was the appropriation of rhythm and blues,[305] also known as "R&B," into the White-dominated "rock 'n roll" which made Elvis Presley famous.

George Nelson - former Black music editor of *Billboard* - argues that Elvis's status as a sex symbol was actually a byproduct of his appropriation of Black music and style: "Elvis's reverse integration was so complete that on stage he adopted the symbolic fornication Blacks had unashamedly brought to American entertainment. Elvis was sexy (…) Hollywood sexy but sexy in the aggressive

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[303] http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/fade-to-White-Black-music-White-artistsbig-money-504. Last Visited January 7, 2017.

[304] The lecture took place on June 23, 2015 at the Freie Universitaet, Berlin.

[305] Black music was called "race music" until the end of the 1940s. The music magazine *Billboard* replaced the name of its charts tracking music made by and for Blacks in June 1949. What had been called "race records" was renamed "rhythm and blues" by Billboard journalist Jerry Wexler. Deena Weinstein in *Rock'n Roll America: A Social and Cultural History* (2015) says the term Rhythm and Blues, often shortened to R&B, was already in use at some independent record labels and originally described a post-war, urban, Black ghetto style of rhythmic dance music played by small bands, frequently featuring electrified instruments and/or honking saxophones: "Billboard's change was done, in part, to encourage Whites to listen to the music. It also was an admission that they were already doing so. Rhythm and Blues was not an arbitrary phrase. The key was rhythm, which referred to the music's tendency to have a strong backbeat. The word blues merely referenced basic Black music and its variations. Also, like the race music moniker that it replaced, R&B was used as a general label for the several kinds of music popular with Black audiences" (32).
In the introductory paragraph of his book, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (1988), George Nelson, explains that the term originated in the 1940s as a synthesis of Black musical genres—gospel, big-band swing, blues—that, along with new technology, specifically the popularization of the electric bass, produced a propulsive, spirited brand of popular music. A decade later it would be called rock & roll to camouflage its Black roots, and subsequently soul, funk, disco, rap, and other offspring would grow from these roots (*Introduction*).

earthy manner associated with Black males" (1988, 62-63). Nelson goes on to say that even before Elvis made his first record, he was wearing one of Black America's favorite products, Royal Crown Pomade hair grease, used by hep cats to create the shiny, slick hairstyle of the day. Elvis's famous rockabilly hairstyle was his interpretation of Black process, whereby Blacks had their hair straightened and curled into curious shapes. Notably, that hairstyle was a Black attempt to look White. So, in a typical pop music example of cross-cultural collision, Elvis copied Black styles from Blacks imitating White looks (Nelson 1988, 62).

By considering music a meeting place for interracial linguistic and cultural exchange, as this study argues, one must take into account that from the very beginning, the history of appropriation, consumption, and production of Black music by White entertainers was the site of complex power relations between Blacks and Whites. Contradictions inherent in Whites' use of Black musical forms emerges if we think that Whites adopted Black music which had been forged out of the experience of racial oppression (Tator 134). Albert Goldman made this argument in connection with authentic origins and the blues: "Let's put it bluntly: how can a pampered, milk-faced, middle-class kid who has never had a hole in his shoe sing the blues that belong to some beat-up old Black who lived his life in poverty and misery?" (Gracyk 2001, 109).

This objection has been voiced by the rebellions of Black musicians and critics against the usurpation of Black forms. Black rapper Azealia Banks, for instance, recently pointed to White rapper Iggy Azalea's success as further evidence that Black people "don't have shit, don't own shit, not even the shit they created for themselves."[306]

The music industry's recognition of White Hip Hop remains inappropriate and offensive for some African American Hip Hop artists. The historical conditions that prevailed under slavery and legalized racial segregation are not something many Whites connect themselves with, but they loom large in the collective consciousness of many if not most African Americans. According to Susan Gal:

> Ethnic groups have specifiable structural positions of power or subordination in their regional economy and even groups within socialist states or in apparently peripheral geographic areas are importantly affected by their relation to world capitalist forces. This larger context is crucial in shaping the nature of interactions between and within ethnic groups, the permeability of boundaries, the definitions and evaluations of actions and resources, and the nature of competition across boundaries. (1988, 247)

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[306] See *The Guardian* 26 December 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/dec/24/iggy-azalea-azealia-banks-Hip Hop-appropriation-problem. Last Visited January 8, 2017.

Therefore, the relative positions of Whites and Blacks in the US is highly relevant when considering White rappers' appropriation of AAE related speech styles and music.

In line with these considerations, many Black critics and artists see White appropriation of Black music as just another case of White theft or, in Amiri Baraka's words, as a "Great Music Robbery" (Young 2010, 20) whereby mainstream American culture steals from African Americans. In a symposium "Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?" sponsored by Books in Canada (1991), a group of writers explored the issue of voice appropriation. Daniel David Moses explained that many native people feel that their songs, symbols, images and stories belong to them and can only be given away by their owners (Tator and Mattis 98).

Beth Brant (1991) made the same point by observing: "I do not say that only Indians can write about Indians. But you can't steal my stories and call them your own. You can't steal my spirit and call it your own. This is the history of North America - stolen property, stolen lives, stolen dreams and stolen spirituality (…) If your history is one of cultural domination you must be aware (…) you have to tell the truth about your role, your history, your internalized domination and supremacy" (Tator and Mattis 97).

To this day, the discourse of White musical theft is still going strong within Hip Hop.

We are in the midst of a great cultural encounter, one that started long ago—and that is deemed to last long.

What is crucial, indeed, is to take into account that history has as much to do with perspective as with facts.[307] In *The Story of English* (1986) Robert McCrum claims that music has traditionally played a central role in bringing Blacks and Whites together linguistically. Entirely in line with this, Black Hip Hop star Snoop Dogg does not share Azealia Banks's and other critics' charges of White music theft. He told the *The New York Times Magazine* that "rap is supposed to grow (…) One thing

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[307] In "Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory" Barbara Herrnstein Smith accuses literary criticism of bias by stating that all literary criticism is ideological: "Literary criticism is influenced by judgments and affected by particular sets of values and beliefs. When cultural critics offer a judgment of a text, they do so in some social/ cultural and/or institutional context. The relevant context might include one or more of gender, race, and class, and differences in age, sexual orientation, and regional background. Literary authority tends to be accorded along lines of social and cultural dominance; those who engage in literary criticism are usually those with institutional, social, and cultural power. The interpretation of a text and the determination of its value depend on and are strongly influenced by the particular assumptions, expectations and interests with which we approach the work" (184). Recent conceptions of literary evaluation underscore the centrality of the implicit assumptions a critic makes when judging a piece of work. These interpretations are likely to be interesting and useful to a particular audience to the extent that audience holds assumptions and perspectives similar to those of the literary reviewer. The appropriateness of a literary opinion for other people "depends on the extent to which they share one's particular perspective, which is always a function of one's relevant characteristics" (184).

about Iggy and Macklemore[308]: They got soul. They're inspired by Hip Hop. I don't care how you're gonna take it to your people and flip it and dip it and serve it."[309]

Snoop shows that some Black artists support their White colleagues and that collaboration is possible: Snoop Dogg himself has featured in songs with White rappers Eminem and Paul Wall. Against the perspective of Whites' approach towards Hip Hop as theft or robbery, Snoops' observation allows to consider Whites' cross-racial linguistic move towards a cultural form that is inherently Black as a viable path where rap would stand as a ground for interracial encounter. Another example of this open-mindedness by Black artists towards their White colleagues is the fact that Black producer Dr. Dre co-signed Eminem. In addition, Black rapper 50 cents asked Eminem to help him with his lyrics because he recognized that Eminem excelled in delivering specific flows.[310] Further, Eminem has won several rap battles against Black "rivals" where a Black audience was the judge, if the partly autobiographical movie *8 Mile* is anything to go by. Eminem has been welcomed and consecrated by the Black community proving that Black and White can co-exist within Hip Hop. In this light, Eminem's case reflects what Dave Marsh said about Elvis:

> There was nothing shameful about appropriating the work of Black people, but Elvis did something more daring and dangerous, he "not only sounded like a nigger, he was actively and clearly engaged in race-mixing. The crime of Elvis' rock & roll was that he proved that Black and White tendencies could coexist and that the product of their coexistence was not just palatable but thrilling[311] (1982, 38-47).

This is not the deny that cultural appropriation is taking place.[312] In their study *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (1997) Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao define it as the taking

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[308] Macklemore and Iggy Azalea are both White rappers.
[309]https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/snoop-dogg-has-more-than-money-on-his-mind.html?_r=0.    Last Visited January 13, 2017.
[310] See http://www.105.net/news/music-biz/118132/50-Cent-Eminem--un-rapporto.html. Last Visited January 7, 2017.
[311] Elvis may have "borrowed" from Black blues performers (e.g. Big Boy Crudup, Big Mama Thornton), yet he borrowed no less from White country stars (e.g. Enest Tubb, Bill Monroe) and White pop singers (e.g. Mario Lanza, Dean Martin) and he made no attempt whatsoever to segregate the styles he'd appropriated from one another (Rodman 52).
[312] In *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* Ziff and Rao explain that cultural appropriation takes place when a member of a certain culture takes and uses intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts from another culture (1997, 1). Young (2010), Mahon (2004), Hill (2011) and many other scholars have contributed to the discourse on the White cultural appropriation of African American music, including the behavior of White rappers. Specifically, James O. Young in *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* takes Eric Clapton as an example of White cultural appropriation by stating that Eric Clapton "takes the blues as something for his use. Clapton's culture is not that in which the blues originated, so his appropriation is cultural appropriation" (5). White Maureen Mahon focuses on rock 'n roll in relation to cultural appropriation: "White appropriation of Black sound and style was devastating to many of the music's

from a culture that is not our own. Although it can be a multidirectional phenomenon, it is viewed primarily as transference from a subordinate into a dominant culture. The term can thus refer to artists, curators, and writers incorporating into their cultural representations and outputs (paintings, novels, plays, songs, and so on), narratives, images, and artifacts derived from cultures other than their own. In a similar fashion, in *Challenging Racism in the Arts* Carol Tator observes that in the appropriation process cultural forms, expressions, and objects that have been developed by people of color, are interpreted through the voices of White writers, publishers, artists, producers, and musicians (96-97).

Controversies over cultural power relations have grown in recent years making the aim of this study more pertinent than ever, since it investigates whether the kind of cultural appropriation that takes place in Hip Hop music by White rappers crossing over linguistically to AAE is an attempt to tear down walls and establish interracial dialogue beyond conventional racial categories, or whether it reinforces racial friction.

Remarkable for the purpose of the present analysis are Hahn Hans Peter's observations in "Cultural Appropriation: Power, Transformation, and Tradition" (2012) where he suggests that in cultural anthropology, globalization and so-called "vanishing cultures" are the most significant influence on cultural appropriation (19). Due to globalization, it is no longer easy to say where one culture ends and another begins. Cultural anthropologists would agree that cultures do not exist in a vacuum and that borrowing from another culture is not exceptional. Globalization can be seen as contributing to turning cultural products into widespread commodities, which become more easily available to members of different cultures.

## 4.4 Method

This section explores the position of White rappers (Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Paul Wall) who appropriated both the musical genre of Hip Hop and Black people's language.

Because of their Whiteness within a genre coded as Black, interesting questions regarding authenticity and identity are raised about their linguistic practices. Ben Rampton, while talking about the positive aspects of language-crossing, simultaneously warns that it also "involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries and it raises issues of legitimacy that participants need to reckon with in the course of their linguistic acts" (1995, 384).

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originators" (2004, 148). Finally, Jane H. Hill defines symbolical (as opposed to material) appropriation as "the theft by White impresarios and musicians of musical styles and even specific compositions by African Americans" (2008).

While examining what is perceived as "authentic" within Hip Hop, for each rapper such questions will be addressed as: "If a White rapper makes music in the same style and linguistic tradition of African American Hip Hop, is he recognized as "authentic" or "inauthentic"? How are White rappers' linguistic crossings perceived by the Black community? Are they welcomed by Black audiences or do they spark controversy, thus giving the impression of an unwelcome form of trenspassing?

Ultimately, authenticity through linguistic crossing is a quality White musicians seek but only listeners and audiences confer.

A quantitative analysis of the White rapper's use of AAE and a closer look at their careers will provide more answers to these complex questions.

From a linguistic point of view, a significant number of studies have demonstrated the relative ease with which outsiders can acquire phonological and lexical features of another language variety as opposed to its morphology and syntax (Ash and Myhill 1986; Labov 1972; Labov and Harris 1983). Since morphosyntactic features are the hardest to acquire, they are a truer index of the voluntary will to take on the other language.[313] For this reason, the core set of this analysis is based on morphosyntactic features.

Phonological instances of AAE have been omitted mainly for two reasons: first, geographical location would provide too much scope for variation, phonological features – in fact - are often specific to one geographical area (eg: use of [ɔɪ] in place of SAE [oʊ] is exclusive to the Southern States of the USA (Green 2002). Secondly, rap vowel sounds are often changed to fit a certain rhyme scheme, and therefore may not be representative of natural AAE speech for either Blacks or Whites. Moreover, the speed of rapping and background music makes it hard to determine whether or not a purely phonological feature is being used. These uncertainties would have rendered my research inaccurate.

When it came to select the artists, I chose the following rappers: Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Paul Wall (White rappers) and Kanye West, Nas and Tyler the Creator (Black rappers).

This choice was based firstly on chronology: the six rappers all prospered between the 1990s and the present day. This provided an up-to-date view of the use of AAE in contemporary Hip Hop. Secondly, these White rappers were chosen because they have been observed to consistently cross to AAE. Thirdly, as yardstick, a music prize was chosen, eligible to Blacks and Whites alike: the Grammies, awarded by The Recording Academy for outstanding achievements in the mainly English-language music industry. All the chosen artists were nominees or winners of at least one Grammy.

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[313] Furthermore, Geneva Smitherman observed that the largest differences between contemporary Black and White English are on the level of grammatical structure (1986).

I examined the entire discographies of each rapper, a total of 983 songs.[314] The production of African American English by White rappers Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Paul Wall is compared to African American rappers Kanye West, Nas and Tyler.

Lyrics were taken from the web page "Original Hip Hop Lyrics Archive."[315] I also consulted AZ lyrics and Genius rap, and listened to each song on Youtube or Spotify where the albums are posted. This provided additional comparison and a check on transcriptions.

The core set for analysis comprised eight AAE features from the list Rickford (1999, 4-9; 2000) identified as distinctive of AAE. The analysis was carried out by first placing the lyrics in a Word file, then counting the use of each feature. Both AAE and SAE opportunities were counted and the percentages calculated in an Excel file.

The core set list is shown below, with examples of AAE features together with the Standard English (SAE) alternative.

Feature 1: Zero copula - AAE "He Ø nice" for SAE "He is nice"

No copula, one of the strongest AAE features, was examined according to the following rules: the lack of the verb "be" (is and are)[316] occurs in AAE when it operates as both a copula and auxiliary for present tense states and actions. It can be omitted by AAE speakers in questions: "Bob here?" instead of SAE "Is Bob here?"[317] Some restrictions apply[318]: in AAE the copula cannot be deleted either in the past tense (was/were) or in the first person singular in the present tense ("am" cannot be deleted),[319] neither can it be deleted in emphatic positions, i.e. where it is stressed.[320]

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[314] More specifically, Eminem has a total of 314 songs out of 15 albums, Paul Wall 74 songs out of 8 albums, Iggy Azalea 66 songs out of 6 albums, Kanye West 176 songs out of 9 albums, Nas 274 songs out of 12 albums, and Tyler the Creator 79 songs out of 4 albums.

[315] http://www.ohhla.com/

[316] This study includes all copula forms: full, contracted, and null-in the denominator. This is known as Straight Deletion. For Straight Deletion (Rickford et al.'s 1991 equation) the percentage of deleted copulas in a corpus can be calculated by examining the number of deleted, contracted and full copulas in that corpus. See *Talkin' Country: African American English of Black Women in the Mississipp*i by Rose Wilkerson (99-100).

[317] Questions in AAE reveal another property of auxiliaries, i.e. omission in questions. In cases in which auxiliaries do not occur on the surface, questions in AAE are signaled by using a special questioning intonation (Green 2002, 42).

[318] In most studies of the AAE copula these restrictions are known as "don't count" (DC), i.e. cases excluded from analysis. Alongside the restrictions pointed out by Rickford, Blake's recommendations (1997) are followed here as DC forms.

[319] Sentences like "I Ø sick" are not produced at all (Mufwene 300; Rickford & Rickford 2000, 115).

See Green (2002, 38- 41). Rickford observes that in Caribbean Creole English speakers can delete "am" or "'m" ("I Ø cuttin off de heads," a young Barbadian fisherman explains, as he deftly slices up fish on a tray). However, "you can't do this in African American English" (Rickford & Rickford 115). Further, when negative forms of "is" or "are" become "ain't," this form cannot be erased. The forms "what's," "it's," and "that's" -which contain contracted "is" and often drop the final "t", as well (wha's, i's, and tha's) - behave like "am." The contracted form of the copula (in this case 's) cannot be

Consequently AAE copula absence (AAE) or presence (SAE) was analyzed in the present tenses (excluding the first person singular and emphasis) as follows: in questions, before the progressive,[321] and when it occurred before predicate noun phrases, i.e. preceding an adjective, a noun,[322] or prepositional/locative phrases (Mufwene 299).

Copula absence is one of the most identifiable and most frequently studied features of AAE. Although other American dialects feature copula absence, especially southern White varieties, none has nearly as high a rate of absence as AAE (Fasold 1998, Rickford et al. 1991).

Feature 2: Present tense 3rd person (s) absence - AAE "He runØ" for SAE "He runs"

Dropping the third-person singular present-tense "s" suffix is mandatory in mainstream SAE but not in AAE. To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of AAE verbal -s absence, as well as all the SAE third person -s were counted.

Feature 3: Invariant "be"

Invariant be to indicate habit or the future[323] was recorded also in the forms "be's" or "bees" (Rickford & Rickford 2000, 113). The following rules were observed: it was counted when used for future or hypothetical reference as a replacement of SAE forms "will" or "would" (more accurately, their contracted forms 'll and 'd) in sentences like: "Wait awhile. She be ['ll be] right around" (Rickford & Rickford 2000, 113).

Secondly, it was counted when used to describe an event that is regular or habitual: AAE "She be talking behind my back" (instead of SAE present tenses accompanied by adverbs of frequency: "She usually talks behind my back.")

To summarize: percentage of AAE usage was calculated including all instances of AAE invariant be (be's and bees) for the future or habit, as well as all instances of SAE with would be, 'd be, will be, 'll

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deleted, except in some greetings, for instance, Wa'apnin as a variant of "What's happenin?" and What up? as a variant of "What's up?" (Rickford & Rickford 115).

[320] Where it ends the sentence, as in "I don't care who he is," where *I don care who he Ø cannot occur in AAE (Mufwene 300; Green 2002, 38).

[321] I.e. in the environment preceding the verb plus -ing forms, as in "She Ø eating" instead of SAE "She is eating" (Green 2002, 37; Mufwene 299).

[322] E.g. "She Ø tall and She Ø a doctor" for SAE "She is tall/ She is a doctor" (Green 2002, 38).

[323] Whereas the invariant be in imperatives ("Be good!"), in infinitives with to ("He tried to be good"), and after modal verbs like can and must ("He must be good")—is used much the same as in mainstream or Standard English.

be plus all the present tenses with a frequency adverb (usually, habitually regularly, normally, sometimes). [324]

Feature 4: Unstressed been - AAE "I Ø been sick" for SAE "I have been sick"

Been is an unstressed form that functions as SAE present perfects.[325] Unstressed been replaces "has been," "have been", as well as their contracted forms 's and 've. To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of unstressed AAE been were counted as well as all instances of have been, has been, 've been and 's been.

Feature 5: Imma - AAE "Imma be" for SAE "I am going to be"

Another typical trait of AAE is "I'm going to" as "Imma."

Also spelt as *I'ma* and *I'mma,* it is not the contraction of "*I'm"* followed by "*a,"* but of AAE "*I'm gonna"* - which, of course, is a contraction of SAE "*I'm going to,"* itself a contraction of "*I am going to*." It is not in Rickford's list, but is a typical AAE expression, increasingly popular among rappers, and therefore has been included in the core-set.[326] To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of AAE Imma (Ima and I'ma) were counted, and all instances of SAE "I am going to" and "I'm going to."

Feature 6: Ain't - "They ain't here" for SAE "They aren't here

Ain't can be used as the equivalent of Standard English negators, including forms such as don't, didn't: "He ain't go no [ didn't go any] further than third or fourth grade" (Rickford & Rickford 2000, 123). To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of AAE ain't were counted as well as SAE am not, 'm not, is not, isn't, are not, aren't, has not, hasn't, have not, haven't, had not, hadn't, do not, don't, did not, didn't.

Feature 7: Multiple negation - AAE "He doesn't do nothing" for SAE "He doesn't do anything"

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[324] Rickford (2000, 114) and Alim (2006, 55) identified the occurrence of these frequency adverbs plus present tenses in SAE as replacements for AAE invariant habitual be. Invariant be for habitual aspect as in "He be actin crazy" means "He usually/ habitually/ regularly/normally/ sometimes acts crazy" (2006, 55).

[325] See Rickford & Rickford 2000, 117-118 as well as *African American English: Structure, History and Use* by Guy Bailey, John Baugh, Salikoko S. Mufwene, and John R. Rickford (135).

[326] http://www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/dictionary/prime-time-for-imma/. Last Visited January 12, 2017.
And https://literalminded.wordpress.com/2010/04/25/thoughts-on-imma/. Last Visited January 12, 2017

Another common feature of Black English examined in rapper speech is the multiple negative, i.e. negating the verb and all indefinite pronouns in the sentence.

To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of AAE multiple negation with the occurrence of "no, nobody, nothing, neither" after a negative verb were included as well as SAE instances of "any, anybody, anything and either" after the negation.[327]

Feature 8: Personal pronoun system - they and them

AAE speakers can use the subject pronoun "they" to mark the third person plural possessive adjective (where SAE speakers would use the possessive adjective "their"): "They friends" instead of "Their friends" (Rickford 1999, 7).

Furthermore, AAE speakers use the object pronoun "them" instead of the demonstrative SAE adjective "those" as in the sentence "them books," instead of SAE "those books." (Rickford 2000, 111).[328] To calculate the percentage of AAE usage, all instances of AAE personal pronoun "they" instead of SAE "their" were included as well as all AAE instances of "them" as a demonstrative adjective instead of SAE "those."

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[327] See Rickford & Rickford 2000, 123.

[328] In this construction, "them" does not simply indicate that more than one book is being referred to; it also indicates that it is "those" and not "these" books (Rickford 2000, 111).

## 4.5 Results

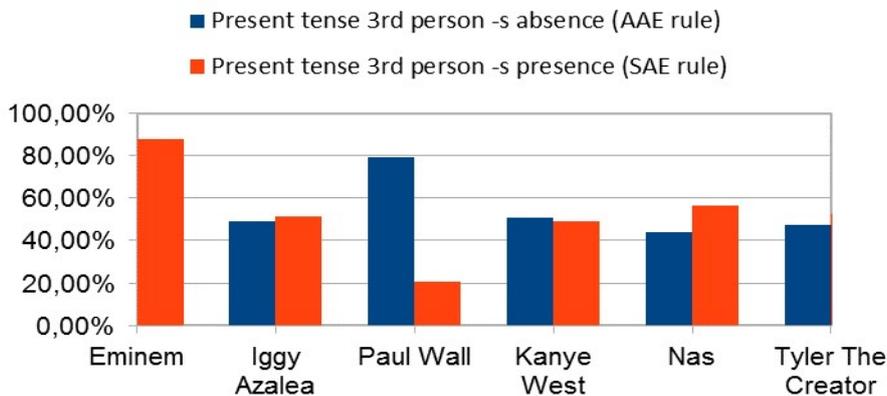### Feature 1



Number of cases

| | Zero copula | Presence of copula | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | AAE rule | SAE rule | |
| Eminem | 188 | 1562 | 1750 |
| Iggy Azalea | 46 | 51 | 97 |
| Paul Wall | 202 | 312 | 514 |
| Kanye West | 594 | 638 | 1232 |
| Nas | 226 | 1728 | 1954 |
| Tyler The Creator | 215 | 550 | 765 |
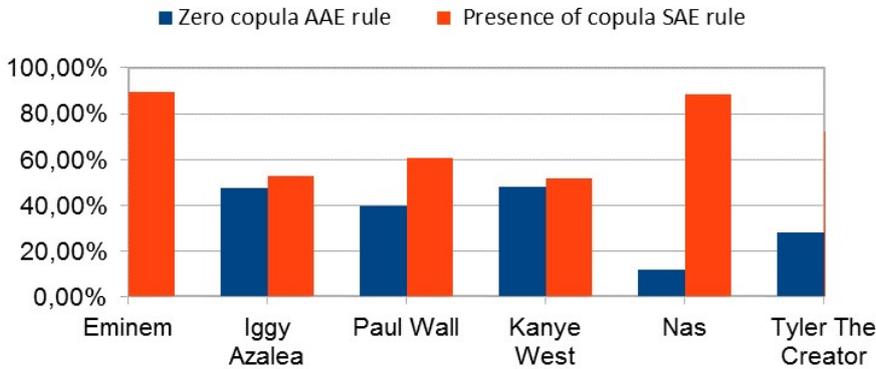
Percentage of cases

| | Zero copula | Presence of copula |
|---|---|---|
| | AAE rule | SAE rule |
| Eminem | 10,74% | 89,26% |
| Iggy Azalea | 47,42% | 52,58% |
| Paul Wall | 39,30% | 60,70% |
| Kanye West | 48,21% | 51,79% |
| Nas | 11,57% | 88,43% |
| Tyler The Creator | 28,10% | 71,90% |

### Feature 2



Number of cases

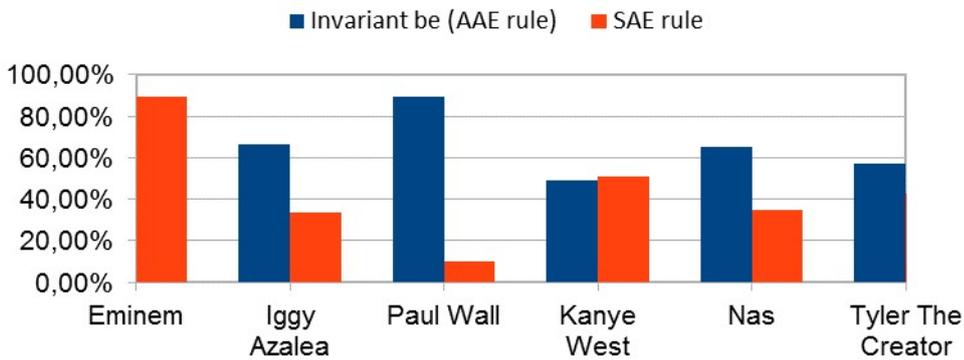| | Present tense 3rd person -s absence (AAE rule) | Present tense 3rd person -s presence (SAE rule) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 56 | 412 | 468 |
| Iggy Azalea | 21 | 22 | 43 |
| Paul Wall | 92 | 24 | 116 |
| Kanye West | 396 | 385 | 781 |
| Nas | 336 | 432 | 768 |
| Tyler The Creator | 90 | 100 | 190 |

Percentage of cases

| | Present tense 3rd person -s absence (AAE rule) | Present tense 3rd person -s presence (SAE rule) |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 11,97% | 88,03% |
| Iggy Azalea | 48,84% | 51,16% |
| Paul Wall | 79,31% | 20,69% |
| Kanye West | 50,70% | 49,30% |
| Nas | 43,75% | 56,25% |
| Tyler The Creator | 47,37% | 52,63% |

## Feature 3

**■ Invariant be (AAE rule)   ■ SAE rule**



Number of cases

| | Invariant be (AAE rule) | SAE rule | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 19 | 166 | 185 |
| Iggy Azalea | 16 | 8 | 24 |
| Paul Wall | 61 | 7 | 68 |
| Kanye West | 50 | 52 | 102 |
| Nas | 126 | 68 | 194 |
| Tyler The Crea | 31 | 23 | 54 |

Percentage of cases

| | Invariant be (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 10,27% | 89,73% |
| Iggy Azalea | 66,67% | 33,33% |
| Paul Wall | 89,71% | 10,29% |
| Kanye West | 49,02% | 50,98% |
| Nas | 64,95% | 35,05% |
| Tyler The Crea | 57,41% | 42,59% |

## Feature 4

**■ Unstressed been (AAE rule)   ■ SAE rule**



Number of cases

| | Unstressed been (AAE rule) | SAE rule | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 41 | 140 | 181 |
| Iggy Azalea | 8 | 18 | 26 |
| Paul Wall | 27 | 17 | 44 |
| Kanye West | 39 | 81 | 120 |
| Nas | 49 | 30 | 79 |
| Tyler The Crea | 10 | 13 | 23 |
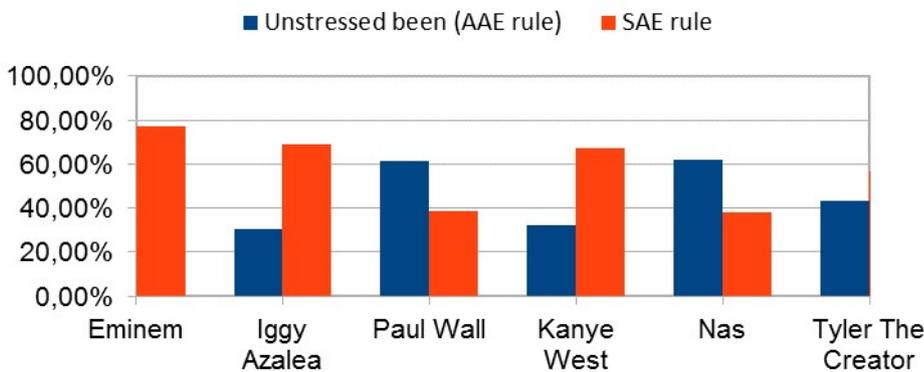
Percentage of cases

| | Unstressed been (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 22,65% | 77,35% |
| Iggy Azalea | 30,77% | 69,23% |
| Paul Wall | 61,36% | 38,64% |
| Kanye West | 32,50% | 67,50% |
| Nas | 62,03% | 37,97% |
| Tyler The Crea | 43,48% | 56,52% |

## Feature 5



Number of cases

| | Imma (AAE rule) | SAE rule | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 71 | 9 | 80 |
| Iggy Azalea | 18 | 0 | 18 |
| Paul Wall | 78 | 2 | 80 |
| Kanye West | 43 | 2 | 45 |
| Nas | 62 | 12 | 74 |
| Tyler The Crea | 3 | 0 | 3 |
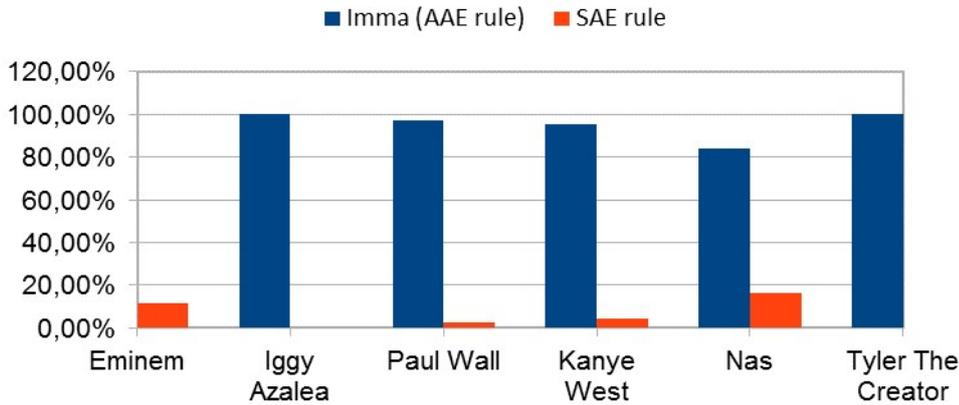
Percentage of cases

| | Imma (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 88,75% | 11,25% |
| Iggy Azalea | 100,00% | 0,00% |
| Paul Wall | 97,50% | 2,50% |
| Kanye West | 95,56% | 4,44% |
| Nas | 83,78% | 16,22% |
| Tyler The Crea | 100,00% | 0,00% |

## Feature 6



Number of cases

| | Ain't as negator (AAE rule) | SAE rule | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 426 | 1100 | 1526 |
| Iggy Azalea | 33 | 40 | 73 |
| Paul Wall | 170 | 273 | 443 |
| Kanye West | 239 | 435 | 674 |
| Nas | 259 | 409 | 668 |
| Tyler The Crea | 90 | 290 | 380 |
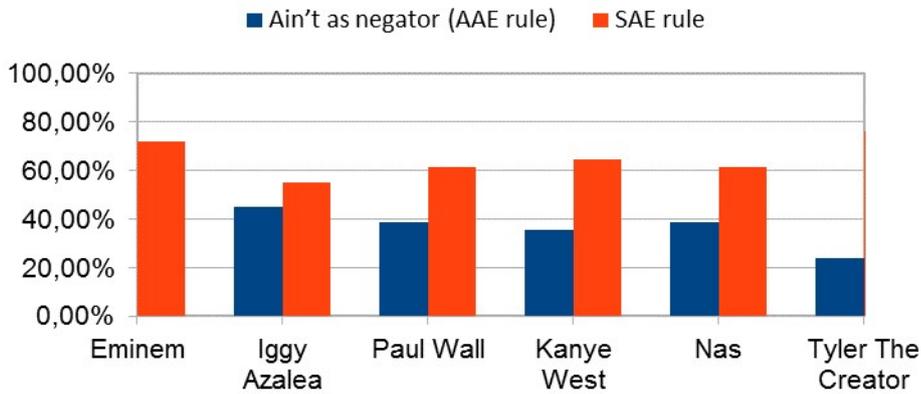
Percentage of cases

| | Ain't as negator (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 27,92% | 72,08% |
| Iggy Azalea | 45,21% | 54,79% |
| Paul Wall | 38,37% | 61,63% |
| Kanye West | 35,46% | 64,54% |
| Nas | 38,77% | 61,23% |
| Tyler The Crea | 23,68% | 76,32% |

## Feature 7



Number of cases

| | Multiple negation (AAE rule) | SAE rule | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 191 | 19 | 210 |
| Iggy Azalea | 19 | 2 | 21 |
| Paul Wall | 80 | 1 | 81 |
| Kanye West | 114 | 6 | 120 |
| Nas | 69 | 2 | 71 |
| Tyler The Crea | 23 | 11 | 34 |
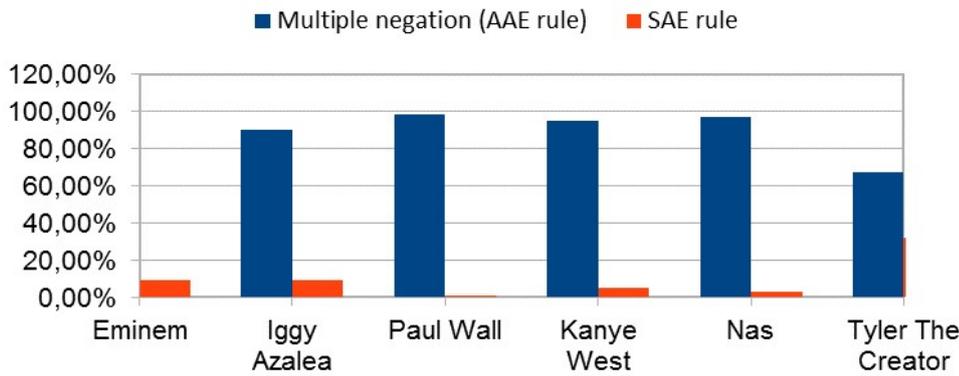
Percentage of cases

| | Multiple negation (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 90,95% | 9,05% |
| Iggy Azalea | 90,48% | 9,52% |
| Paul Wall | 98,77% | 1,23% |
| Kanye West | 95,00% | 5,00% |
| Nas | 97,18% | 2,82% |
| Tyler The Crea | 67,65% | 32,35% |

## Feature 8



Number of cases

| | Personal Pronoun System (AAE rule) | (SAE rule) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 53 | 87 | 140 |
| Iggy Azalea | 8 | 3 | 11 |
| Paul Wall | 56 | 6 | 62 |
| Kanye West | 103 | 38 | 141 |
| Nas | 183 | 18 | 201 |
| Tyler The Crea | 61 | 31 | 92 |
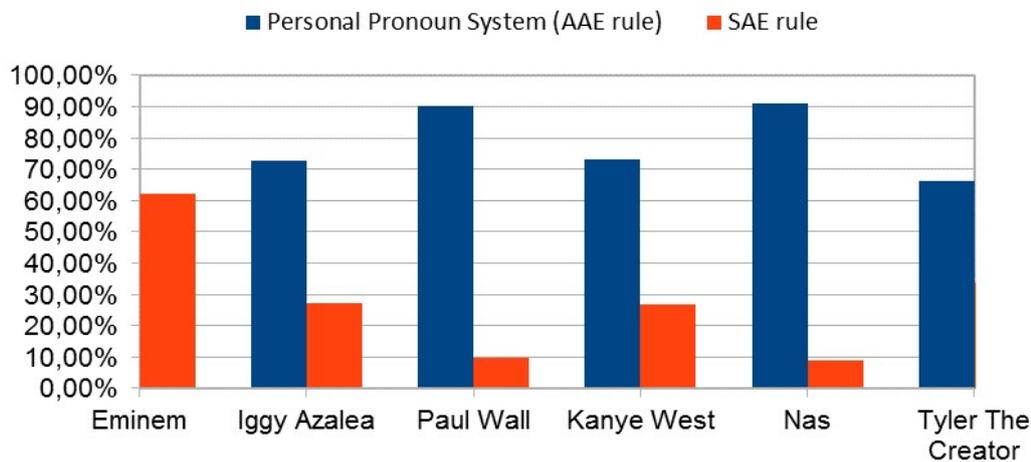
Percentage of cases

| | Personal Pronoun System (AAE rule) | SAE rule |
|---|---|---|
| Eminem | 37,86% | 62,14% |
| Iggy Azalea | 72,73% | 27,27% |
| Paul Wall | 90,32% | 9,68% |
| Kanye West | 73,05% | 26,95% |
| Nas | 91,04% | 8,96% |
| Tyler The Crea | 66,30% | 33,70% |

## 4.6 Discussion

A close analysis of White and Black rapper discographies provides much food for thought. The most striking and unexpected result is that one would assume AAE to be used much more frequently by Black rappers. Instead, there is a great mixture of AAE and standard (SAE) forms in their lyrics.

Feature 1 (48%), 2 (59%), 3 (49%), 4 (32%) and 6 (35%) appear half or a little less than half of the time Kanye West had the chance to employ them.

Only as regards features 5, 7 and 8 Kanye West reaches peaks of 95%, 95%, and 73% respectively.

Features 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 appear respectively 11%, 43%, 64%, 62% and 38% of the times in Nas's lyrics.

Like Kanye West, he uses feature 5, 7, and 8 frequently (respectively 83%, 97% and 91%).

Finally, for the AAE alternative, Tyler the Creator uses 28%, 47%, 57% 43% and 23% respectively for features 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. Tyler uses feature 5 (100%) at every linguistic opportunity, while features 7 (67%) and 8 (66%) only a little more than half of the times he had the chance to use them.

In rap by African American artists, one would expect these numbers to be much higher. Especially, as regards feature 1 (absence of copula) which is used by Kanye, Nas and Tyler astonishingly infrequently, respectively 48%, 11% and 28% of the time. Against Morgan's remark that the absence of copula and deletion are basically a rule in AAE (2002, 129), the results stemming from the data might prompt a series of considerations – all entirely in line with Rickford's observations on Black language use.

First, AAE speakers might not use all the features generally associated with them a hundred percent of the time (Rickford 1999, 9).

Rickford also underlines that African Americans do not use the variety in all contexts and that most AAE features occur with different frequencies in different social situations and for different speakers. He also adds that Black people are masters of alternate AAE and SAE usage by observing that they mix features of AAE with mainstream variants, sometimes even in the course of a single utterance or interaction (1999, 9). He further claims that although it is often said that eighty per cent of African Americans speak AAE all the time (Dillard 1972, 229), this is a guesstimate rather than a systematic and empirical finding (Rickford 1999, 9).

Second, rappers use AAE as part of their performance. This should be a remainder that the AAE used in Hip Hop music might not be a hundred percent truthful account of these performers' actual

use of this language variety in their everyday life. The difference between everyday talk and performance should always be kept in mind: the present study examines only the performative use of this variety in Hip Hop music, with no pretension to make claims about rappers' actual use in daily life.

Third, in the specific case of the Black rappers included in this study, the voluntary fall in the use of AAE – as well as the convergence towards SAE forms -  might indicate a stance toward interaction as well as their will to be accepted by White mainstream society.

From a linguistic point of view, they are apparently not trying to distance themselves from White culture and White language (SAE) as much as one would predict from a genre born as anti-White. Thus, the black rappers' data seem to suggest that the gap between the two cultures and languages might be fading.

In order to verify this hypothesis, our results were set against Smitherman's (2000) and her account of the change in AAE language use based on socio-historical conditions. She stresses the interrelations between the language and the status of African Americans. Specifically, she argues that "in historical moments of racial progress, the language is less Ebonified (i.e. less Black English and less distinct from Standard American English)" whereas "in times of racial suppression, the language is more Ebonified" (2000, 34).

Smitherman argues that the World War I and II years[329] were a time of great optimism among African Americans, as many believed that their status would improve as a result of America's fights for democracy. Legal segregation had ended in most parts of the US,[330] federal antidiscrimination legislation had been passed, and Whites had joined African Americans in the South to fight for voting rights. African Americans sought greater cultural integration and renounced their African heritage, including the more distinctive features of their language. This process culminated in the optimism of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s (Smitherman 2000, 34). [331]

Interestingly, Smitherman's discussion goes on to depict an increase in the distinctiveness of AAE usage with the rise of the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s. The movement for Black Power,

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[329] African Americans began to migrate to Northern cities in large numbers after World War I and in even greater numbers after World War II.

[330] In the South legal segregation only ended in 1965.

[331] In this regard, see also "Poetry Is Not a Luxury: La poesia civile afroamericana" by Annalucia Accardo (11–23) in *Come Gather 'Round Friends. Ácoma per Bruno Cartosio e Alessandro Portelli* (2013) where she assesses the heterogeneous universe of African American poetry in the three crucial periods of Black cultural history: the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920; the new Black aesthetics in the 1960s; and the Black women's renaissance in the 1970s which recovered the literary tradition of African American women through the influence of feminism and the example of Alice Walker.

and its militant anti-racist struggle (Black Panthers)[332] fought internal racism[333] and launched a process of "recreolization" defined as "a conscious attempt to accentuate the uniqueness of Ebonics, to recapture and reconfigure earlier forms of Black speech, to carve out a distinctly African-in-America linguistic identity" (Smitherman 2000, 38). [334]

The increase in the distinctiveness of AAE usage[335] continued into the initial stages of the Hip Hop era, i.e. 1970s and 1980s. By those times the artists were almost exclusively African American and their lyrics were the glorification of AAE (Alim 2006).

However, as previously discussed, due to globalization and major changes in the power and range of the mass media, Hip Hop started to be consumed by a large White audience from the 1990s onwards. This time period is exactly the chronological framework object of the present study: the data show that rappers active from the 1990s onward use less AAE features than one would expect.

The fact that from this period rappers were less committed to showing off their language is consistent with Smitherman's observation regarding the optimism of the historical moments of racial progress when - believing that their status would improve - African American speakers used less African American English and more Standard English because they were seeking greater cultural integration.

Smitherman's claims are intriguing. Our data on the reduced use of AAE among Black rappers from the 1990s onward are consistent with her findings. This agreement lends credence to both lines of study.

Given this portrait, it seems a very probable answer to entertain that Black rappers appear to be performing in a less "Ebonified" language –borrowing Smitherman's image -  in order to seek greater cultural integration, as well as to reach a wider, Whiter audience.

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[332] On the activity and contributions of the Black Panthers see the outstanding documentary "The Black Panthers Vanguard of The Revolution" available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bcubkt6BwY. Last Visited February 7, 2017.

[333] Malcolm X was the Black power advocate to call attention to it. For a deeper understanding of the Black Power Movement see *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* by Karen Ferguson (2013); *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* by Hasan Kwame Jeffries (2009); *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* by Jakobi Williams (2013; and *From Black Power to Black Studies: How A Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* by Fenderson Jonathan (2008).
See also Chapter 1 - notes 11 and 28 – with hints at the Black Power Movement, as well as references to Cornel West and Joe Wood's discussion of Malcolm X.

[334] An ongoing process, she argues, evident in the language used by African American women writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, in the "bilingual consciousness" of middle-class African Americans, and the language of Hip Hop culture.

[335] The increase in AAE usage – according to Smitherman - mirrored a time when Black people realized that integration was far off and they had to stand and fight against claims of their "alleged inferiority" by Whites.

## Eminem[336]

Eminem[337] data show that he crosses extensively to AAE - hitting around the same percentages of his Black peers for feature 5 (88%) and 7 (90%). As regards the rest of the features, the AAE alternative is used around a ten, twenty and thirty percent threshold: features 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 are used respectively 10%, 11%, 10%, 22%, 27% and 37% of the times.

Eminem's proximity to African American culture and language is due to the fact that when he was twelve years old his family moved to Detroit, a city known for its high percentage of African American inhabitants (Vibe 1999, 120).

The overall impression of Eminem's linguistic patterns, as far as this core set goes, is that he never exaggerates in crossing to AAE. It looks like as if he engages in some attempts to sound AAE, but never too much.

Consequently, his linguistic repertoire still includes a large variety of standard features of English.

Edward Armstrong (2004) - who theorized on authenticating strategies - identified three forms of Hip Hop authenticity: first, being true to oneself; second, claiming ''local allegiances and territorial identities''; third, establishing a connection to ''an original source of rap'' through locale, style, or links to an established artist (7-8). Hip Hop realness, then, is conveyed when an artist performs as a unique individual while maintaining a connection with the original culture of Hip Hop. Eminem builds his linguistic credibility by paying homage to AAE, showing that he can master the variety and that he connects to African American culture and language, while simultaneously remaining true to himself and to his native language, i.e. Standard American English. As regards the "link" with established artists, much of Eminem's widespread acceptance must be credited to the guidance of Dr. Dre, the Black Hip Hop legend who discovered him, produced his music, and performs with him both onstage and in recordings.[338] Therefore, Eminem seems to meet all of Armstrong's requirements to achieve authenticity within Hip Hop.

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[336] Born as Marshall Bruce Mathers III, Eminem was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1975. His father, Marshal II, left the family behind when Eminem was only six months old. He claims to have had a "stereotypical, trailer park, White trash upbringing" which in itself also reveals the poverty he endured (Huxley 2000, 7).

[337] Growing up in the Detroit area on the outskirts of the African American sections of town, Marshall Mathers III spent his teenage years working in the local Hip Hop scene as rapper Eminem, a name derived from the spelling of his initials, "M&M." As biographer Anthony Bozza explains, while struggling to support himself by working a series of minimum-wage jobs, Mathers borrowed $1,500 from music producers Mark and Jeff Bass to press 500 copies of his first album, *Infinite* (Bozza 2003, 15-16). Eminem two hit albums, *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) established him as one of the biggest rap stars of the new millennium (Kajikawa 121).

[338] Eminem was discovered by Hip Hop mogul and producer Dr. Dre, who became Eminem's right hand man. In 1999, with the help of Dre, *The Slim Shady LP* was released and went multiplatinum. A year later, *The Marshall Mathers LP* was "noted as the fastest selling album in rap history" (as reported by Biography.com).

However, an extremely interesting perspective emerges if we take Kembrew McLeod's model of "Dimensions of Authenticity." McLeod (1999) has investigated the theme of authenticity within Hip Hop discourse. He gathered data from magazines, artists, songs, and other non-academic sources, in order to grasp what Hip Hop community members perceive to be "real", i.e. authentic, in contrast to what is perceived as "fake." The results stemming from McLeod research show that in Hip Hop "staying true to oneself" and "being Black" are perceived as "authentic" categories, whereas "White" is listed in the column where all "fake" elements stand.

Ironically, in the context of Hip Hop, the historical law of the one-drop rule[339] has backfired on the White rapper. In the U.S.A between 1880 and 1940 one drop of Black blood classified one as inferior and left one without privileges. Today the lack of African heritage seems to be accompanied by an absence of authenticity for the White artist in the eyes of the American Hip Hop community. Instead, a hint – or one drop - of African American ethnicity now entails the advantage of credibility.

For this reason, Whites in Hip Hop find themselves in a paradoxical position. They know that - in order to be considered "authentic" – they have to stay true to themselves and to embrace their racial and ethnic identity.

However, for White rappers to embrace their identity, i.e. their Whiteness, does not qualify for earning a spot in the "authentic" column – and that precisely because they are White, a category considered as "fake" according to the "Dimensions of Authenticity" model.

By acknowledging their racial ethnicity, White rappers are confronted with their fakeness within the Hip Hop genre - or at least according to McLeod's results.

White rappers have to negotiate between "an ambition to be "real" and the purist belief that "real" rap comes from Black men" (Dreisinger 2008, 115).

This "purist" belief is supported by James O. Young's theories on levels of authenticity, according to which a work of art has provenance authenticity when it is produced by an in-group member of a certain culture (2010, 34). According to Young, White rappers fail on this level of authenticity. For this reason, Young maintains that a White rapper remains an outsider who cannot appropriately represent the Black experience. Since this level of authenticity is inextricably linked to the possession of African American ethnicity, Young's claims flirt with ethnic absolutism and ethnicity as

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[339] The *one-drop rule* is a social and legal principle of racial classification that was historically prominent in the United States in the 19th and 20th century as well as a colloquial expression, a phrase which reflects the belief that a person bearing a trace of African ancestry (literally, a single drop of Black or Negro "blood") is Black. Historians and social scientists have tended to assume that, as a principle of classification, the one-drop rule can be traced back to the institution of slavery. See *One 'speck' of Imperfection---Invisible Blackness and the One-drop Rule* (2008) by Erica Faye Cooper (62; 131; 271). See also *Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise and Triumph of the One-drop Rule* by Frank W. Sweet (2005).

a fixed and unchangeable entity. These assumptions do not take into account that in some instances and for certain groups, class can be a substitution of race, where people from diverse ethnic background are grouped together more for their shared experiences of class struggle than for their racial identity (Hagedorn and Davis 2008).

In this fashion, Eminem has overcome the paradoxical position whereby a White cannot gain a position in Hip Hop by presenting a new model of White Hip Hop authenticity. He showed that even though he had no provenance authenticity[340] (not being African American), he nevertheless shared another category with his African American peers: his lower-class background and his life experience within a poor, urban location.

According to Baz Dreisinger, growing up in a Black neighborhood is what bestows an honorary "Blackness" on White rappers (115). Proof, a Black rapper from Detroit where Eminem grew up, calls himself Eminem's "boy for life" and told an interviewer to "keep in mind, he's always lived in Black neighborhoods" (Dresinger 115).

Eminem trades race for class and racial injustice for poverty as a legitimate experience of suffering. As Dreisinger suggests, in fact, some White rappers "turn their class position into a kind of race, one that gives them license to speak of suffering" (118). Hip Hop's representations of racial identity, in fact, are strictly tied to class struggle: it had its immediate origins in the streets, not in the studios and like the "devil's music" of the blues,[341] it was not based in middle-class experience but in an expression of the misery and poverty of the underclass[342] (Hagedorn and Davis 94).

When it comes to class struggle in the neighborhoods of the lower classes, Whites and African Americans share those experiences of poverty and drugs many artists rap about. By sharing those same living conditions Blacks and Whites' lives are somehow more entwined in reality than one would theoretically expect. In this light, Eminem's desire to cross to AAE might also be bound to a deeper psychological investment in Hip Hop culture derived from the fact that Eminem's first-hand experience of class struggle locates him alongside his Black peers' experiences.

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[340] James O. Young (2010) theorized on levels of authenticity and he stated that a work has provenance authenticity when it is produced by an in-group member of a certain culture (34). According to Young, White rappers fail on this level of authenticity. For this reason, Young maintains that a White rapper remains an outsider who cannot represent the Black experience appropriately. Since this level of authenticity is inextricably linked to the possession of African American ethnicity, Young's claims flirt with ethnic absolutism and ethnicity as a fixed and unchangeable entity. These fixed assumptions don't take into account that in some instances class can be a substitution of race, where people from diverse ethnic background are grouped together more for what their class struggle is, rather than for their racial identity.

[341] See Giles Oakley-s *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues* (1977).

[342] See also Amiri Baraka's *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1999).

In this regard, in a pivotal scene of the partly autobiographical movie *8 Mile*[343] (2002) where Eminem stars, he wins an MC battle against a Black opponent - Papa Doc - by turning the crowd's attention from race to class as he reveals that Papa Doc attended private school and has got well-off parents and a supportive home. By doing so, Eminem challenges Doc's own performance of a ghetto Blackness which does not fit with his biography[344] and he embraces, instead, his own trailer park upbringing as part of his credibility while simultaneously discrediting Papa Doc's private school education. Eminem wins the Black audience's favor. His lower-class status, in this case, aligns him with the Black audience much more than his Black adversary who, despite being Black, has been raised in a middle-class upbringing.

Eminem's lyrics reflecting his actual biography within a poor, urban location, counter Hip Hop's representations of White privilege[345] (Hess 2005, 72). In "If I Had" from the *Slim Shady EP* (1997) he raps: "I'm tired of being White trash, broke and always poor." He therefore sports "White trash" as a bagde of pride that substitutes class for race. Thanks to this White trash status Eminem implies that he is "so poor that he might as well be Black" (Dresinger 118).

The pejorative term "White trash" points to a salient class category within the "White race" as Valerie Melissa Babb observes in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1998). She claims that White Americans are mostly stereotypically classified as middle-class, in contrast to African Americans, who are perceived as working-class or even poor (220). Whites who are not part of the middle class get labeled as "rednecks," "hillbillies" or White trash. According to Babb, "White trash is typically reserved for Whites whose lives are spatially and culturally closest to those of Blacks" (220). White trash is at the bottom of the White hierarchy. For rappers, this becomes an important point to make, i.e. they claim that they can in no way be considered as the "privileged ones" since they are poor and they cannot get jobs.

In addition, Eminem not only demonstrates that he is White trash located among the "dispossessed underclass members," he also joins Blacks' expectations and arguments against "White privilege" in

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[343] The movie depicts the story of a poor White kid who grows up in Detroit and who is very talented when it comes to rapping. However, he has hard times getting accepted by the African American-dominated Hip Hop scene. He gets beaten up, fights with his single mother, but eventually blows everyone away with his rhyming abilities and establishes himself as a respectable rap artist within the Black community. This movie, with its undeniable similarities to Eminem's own life, showed how he struggled for recognition.

[344] In a similar fashion, in early 1990s before Eminem came to the scenes, White rapper Vanilla Ice lied to conceal his White privilege and constructed a false autobiography to make people believe he had had an underclass upbringing. Ice went from crossover superstar to what Ice himself deemed the most hated man in Hip Hop when rumors spread that he lied about his upbringing and the racial make-up of his high school. Similarly, in the early 1990s, L.A. rapper Boss was the female gangsta rapper on the scene, but her name made the headlines when word leaked that this self-proclaimed "gangsta bitch" was actually a well-educated young woman from the wealthy suburbs. (Dresinger 115)

[345] Babb (1998) calls Whiteness the "system of privileges accorded to those with White skin" (9)

general. He seeks in no way to hide his Whiteness and he overtly displays his awareness of racial advantages which have historically seen Whites profit from Black-created forms of music. By confronting all the problematic aspects attached to the notion of "White privilege" he demonstrates that he is aware of a "system of privileges accorded to those with White skin" (Babb 1998, 9). Instead of shying away from that debate, he engages in it in the first person and overtly criticizes it. He works to diffuse his potential adversaries and contentious listeners' arguments against Whites performing Black music by anticipating their points, for example in his song ''Without Me'': "I'm the worst thing since Elvis Presley to do Black music so selfishly and use it to get myself wealthy."

These lyrics overtly brings to light Eminem's critical stance towards "White privilege" accorded to Whites and his understanding of the history of Whiteness in music.
He also recognizes that his skin color probably got him more fans, and helped him target a new, mostly White audience. In "White America" he declares:

> Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself
> If they were brown Shady'd lose, Shady sits on the shelf
> But Shady's cute, Shady knew, Shady's dimples would help
> Make ladies swoon baby (ooh baby!), Look at my sales
> Let's do the math: if I was Black, I woulda sold half."[346]

He does not pretend not to take part in a commercialized business, but rather acknowledges that his commercial appeal, due to his White identity, might have been one of the reasons for his

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[346]In his lyrics, Eminem is ironically criticizing his Whiteness and his White privilege as a key to his success: the underlying meaning of these lines is that a combination of being White, being good looking and being able to look even "more" stereotypically European by bleaching his hair and wearing blue contact lenses made him more saleable, he demonstrates to remain critical and well aware of his White privilege, as well as that some people might still perceive his music as a cultural theft, and that criticism stemming from some opponents cannot be erased. As expected, in fact, these lines were later mocked by the *Source* editor-in-chief Kim Osorio in the 2004 issue that laughably tried to expose Eminem as a racist. The opening line of her article was: "Let's do the math. If Eminem were Black, he would have sold half – or a lot less than half." However, according to Hess (2005) Eminem has so carefully established his right to perform Hip Hop despite his Whiteness that his career has survived numerous attacks, particularly from *The Source magazine*, which in 2003 had also made public an unreleased Eminem recording and accused the rapper of using racist language and promoting racial stereotypes (383). Kolawole, in an article for *The Guardian* (2003), defended Eminem: "Considering that Eminem has said little out of the ordinary in a genre in which, to a considerable degree, Black women are subject to daily insults, [The Source's] indignant stance is confusing. Of course, since he is White and at pains to placate African Americans, Eminem has had to apologize for his lyrics, saying they were 'foolishness written when he was a stupid kid while his Black contemporaries show no such repentance." With this respect, Hess states: "Eminem has established himself so firmly within Hip Hop culture that these lyrics are defended as part of it" (383). See http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1091817,00.html. Last Visited January 9, 2017.

marketability: "they connected with me because I looked like them," Eminem states (Hess 2005, 384).

At the same time, however, he credits Black legend Dre's sponsorship with authenticating him: ''Kids flipped when they knew I was produced by Dre, that's all it took, and they were instantly hooked right in" (Hess 2005, 384).

What remains crucial is that while it may be easier for White rappers to have commercial success, it is very difficult for them to get the respect of the Black community. Just to quote a renowned example, Whites are perceived as outsiders to such a great extent that when White rapper Vanilla Ice became a target of ridicule after his claims to struggle were found false,[347] the genre's racial boundaries seemed to grow even less permeable as people in the recording industry refused to risk their reputations and resources on non-Black performers. Dr. Dre, who eventually helped introduce Eminem to a mainstream audience and produced his debut single, reports being cautioned by friends and business associates not to risk his reputation by backing a White rapper (Kajikawa 125).

Nevertheless, Eminem has earned prestige from his Black peers demonstrating great vocal and lyrical skill. As hinted in the introductory part of the present chapter, Hip Hop is meritocratic, and Eminem stands as evidence of this statement: his talent and personal story have enabled him to connect with other Hip Hop artists and audiences in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Eminem's skills are unique in the genre: rather than just rhyming the last syllable or the last word of every measure—the standard practice in much old school Hip Hop—he creates churning internal rhymes that break up the monotony of standard four-measure phrasing. Such rhyme schemes allow his lyrics to spill over the measure lines (enjambment), creating phrases whose rhythms and rhymes often cadence well before or after the downbeat. Such musical features represented what contemporary critics termed the "faster cadences" and "new rhyme patterns" of certain mid-1990s emcees (Kajikawa 122).

That Eminem has gained respect from the Black Hip Hop community is undeniable: one only needs to think about the astonishing number of collaborations with Black artists he can boast.

Just to mention a few, Eminem performed with the following Black artists: with 50 cent in "Patiently waiting," "Rap game," "Spend some time," "Never Enough," "Encore," "The re-up," "You don't know," "Crak a bottle," "Don't push me," and "Gatman and Robbin."

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[347] As soon as people learned that he had grown up in a stable, upper-middle class suburban home, his street credibility was ruined (Hess 2005, 383).

Many are the featurings with his producer, Dr.Dre, as for example in "Forget about Dre," "I need a Doctor" "Old Time' Sake" "Say what you say" and "Guilty Conscience."

Further collaborations are: "Bitch Please II" (with Snoop Dogg, Xzibit, Dre). In addition, *Eminem together with* Jay-Z, Dr. Dre and 50 Cent, Stat Quo and Cashis teamed up on "*Syllables.*" Eminem rapped with Lil Wayne in "Drop the world," and "No love;" with Xzibit in "Don't approach me" and "Say my name;" with Yelawolf in "Throw it up;" with Drake, Kanye West and Lil Wayne in "Forever;" with Black Hip Hop legent T.I in "That's all she wrote" and with Jay-Z in "Renegade."

Eventually, Eminem won six Grammy Awards for best Hip Hop album, respectively in 2000 with *The Slim Shady LP*, in 2001 with *The Marshall Mathers LP*, in 2003 with *The Eminem Show*, in 2010 with *Relapse*, in 2011 with Recovery and in 2015 with *The Marshall Mathers LP 2.*

Further, he was named "King of Hip Hop" in 2011 by *Rolling Stone Magazine* (Aretha 2012, 11).

This is revealing of the fact that, in a music ground coded as Black, Eminem was able to resolve the problem of his Whiteness, and that the extent to which he crossed to AAE has been accepted by the Black community as authentic. Relevant is also that his career has allowed a general understanding of his White identity not as a fixed essence but rather as a dynamic construct that can undergo changes and challenge notions of ethnic absolutism. Not surprisingly, Baz Dreisinger defines Eminem as the contemporary personification of racial and musical crossover (115).


Paul Wall[348]


As demonstrated in the single case of Eminem, White rappers take in subordinate positions in Hip Hop because their Whiteness is perceived as fake within the genre. For this reason, it is very difficult for them to get respect[349] and they have to prove their skills double as much as their Black counterparts.

Eminem embraced his lower-class status as "White trash" as the most ironic and paradoxical strategy to become more "Black," as already verified. However, there exist further strategies for White rappers who want to build their authenticity, and who have ambitions of being perceived as legitimate ingroup members of Hip Hop.

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[348] https://africanamericanenglish.com/2010/07/09/White-people-speaking-aae/. Last Visited January 8, 2017.

[349] To explore how white rap artists get the respect of the Black community we have used Kembrew McLeod's framework of "Dimensions of Authenticity" (1999), Edward Armstrong's theories on authenticity (2004), Baz Dreisinger "Authenticating Strategies" (2008) and Androutsopoulos' sociolinguistic and discourse analytic scheme of "tertiary" Hip Hop texts which represent the Internet discourse of the Hip Hop community on forums, articles, and video clips.

According to Dreisinger most strategies usually revolve around expressing linguistic proximity to Blackness (115). Paul Wall's[350] scores point towards this direction: his crossing to AAE is outstanding: for feature 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 he reaches peaks of respectively 79%, 89%, 97% 98%, and 90%. He opts for the AAE alternative even more frequently than Black rappers as regards feature 2, 3, 7. His lowest rates never go below 30% for feature 1 (39%), 4 (61%), and 6 (38%).

On the whole, Paul Wall's linguistic set depicts a deep engagement in crossing to AAE.

In addition, following Dreisinger's list of authenticating strategies which have been elaborated and theorized thanks to Eminem's rising to stardom and to a close study of his career, desires to be part of the Hip Hop culture and to become accepted by its members can be fulfilled by emphasizing one's upbringing in certain cities and neighborhoods, preferably ones with a high percentage of African American residents.

In this regard, Wall is well aware that growing up in a Black neighborhood is a pre-requisite for White rappers to have an honorary Blackness bestowed on them. Therefore, he underlines that hard-knock Houston had been his breeding ground (Dreisinger 115).

Secondly, "sexual liaisons with Black women can be the feather in a White rapper's cap" [351] (Dreisinger 115). With this respect, Paul Wall 's marriage to a Black woman not only earns him a special spot within the "authenticity" column, but might well explain why he crosses to AAE. His proximity with a mother-tongue speaker of AAE makes his crossing even more authentic because it stems from an everyday-life first-hand experience of the language.

The *Online Journal on African American English*[352] reports that White people who grow up in predominantly African American neighborhoods, or who have a lot of African American family and friends, tend to speak AAE in a way that feels very natural to them. The *Journal* then posits the question: what causes a White speaker of AAE to be viewed as authentic or inauthentic? Does it always depend on linguistic ability, or can it also be based on social facts, such as where someone grew up or who they're friends with?

Interestingly enough, they quote Paul Wall as an example of authenticity by explaining that Wall is a "popular rapper and a White speaker of AAE who very often gets labelled as authentic. His AAE is on

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[350] Wall grew up in a devoutly Christian household, the son of a school teacher mother and a heroin addict father who left the family. Born Paul Manry, he was later adopted by his stepfather and changed his name to Paul Slayton. He was dubbed "Paul Wall" in his early teens by a friend, not for any particular reason other than that it rhymes (Westhoff 204).

[351] According to Dreisinger, however, sexual liaisons are not fundamental: for instance, Eminem's wife, Kim Mathers, is White and blonde.

[352] https://africanamericanenglish.com/2010/07/09/White-people-speaking-aae/. Last Visited January 8, 2017.

point, and he excels at rapping, an art form which comes out of the African American community."[353]

Tom Breiham wrote an article for *The Village Voice* going so far as to point out that "if you'd never seen a picture of him, you wouldn't know he was White. His voice is a deep Southern roll rather than the nasal jackhammer flow that most White rappers have."[354]

Therefore, evidence comes out that his crossing to AAE lends him credibility and that he is linguistically perceived as authentic.

A striking thing is that, unlike Eminem, he never points at his Whiteness in his lyrics.

Not incidentally, according to Ben Westhoff, Paul Wall is one of the most curious of Hip Hop specimens. In fact, he is the first-ever famous White rapper who doesn't talk about being White, and who makes no attempt to engage in his contradictory position as a White guy selling Black culture to probably mostly White people. As Tom Breiham points out, he's the only White face in the "Still Tippin'" and "Sittin' Sidewayz" videos,[355] and he, as well as his Black colleagues, does not seem to think there is a single thing weird about that. Paul Wall expresses his view on this topic in an interview for *Allhiphop*, where he discusses what it has been like to be White in Hip Hop and how he is perceived by the Hip Hop world*:*

> We live in the MTV generation where race isn't an issue. If you make it an issue, then it's an issue. But it's not an issue, especially in Houston. I see it more up North and in the East, and even in the West where there's a lot of separatism and a lot of division and there's a divide amongst the races but you don't see that in Houston. We're American. We respect you for who you are or whatever you are, we respect that: above and beyond all other things we're human.[356]

In the same interview, he declares that despite being taught to respect others, regardless of their race, Paul Wall, a father of two biracial children, has personally encountered racism outside his hometown of Houston for being married with a Black Mexican girl. He points out that this rejection

[353] https://africanamericanenglish.com/2010/07/09/White-people-speaking-aae/. Last Visited January 8, 2017.

[354] http://www.villagevoice.com/blogs/status-aint-hoods-history-of-White-rappers-6385831. Last Visited January 8, 2017.

[355] See also "Swanging in the Rain" where he is perfectly comfortable in his position among other Black rappers: http://allhiphop.com/2015/10/06/watch-paul-walls-new-video-swangin-in-the-rain/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[356] http://allhiphop.com/2015/10/05/paul-wall-talks-being-White-in-Hip  Hop-addresses-influencing-riff-raff/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

never comes from the Hip Hop community,[357] neither from the hood nor by other minority groups, but rather from upper-class White people looking down on him.[358]

The interviewers then go on noting that he has never been treated as White by the Black community but rather as an in-group member, and that his authenticity and his loyalty to Black culture has always been perceived as genuine.

This perception might be linked also to the fact that Paul Wall makes it visible with his own deeds that for him to adopt AAE features and his involvement in Hip Hop culture is a symbolic political alignment with African Americans, as well as other disadvantaged and oppressed groups. He campaigned for encouraging people to vote. In this regard, *African American News Issues* [359] let us know that rappers Paul Wall together with his Black colleagues Z-Ro, Justified, II Krunk, Lil Keke, C-Stone, and Jeweler Johnny Dang, teamed up to encourage Black people to go to the polls.

Furthermore, Wall himself opened an account in a Black owned bank. Reportedly, *Hip Hop Wired*[360] announced that some of the biggest names in Houston's rich Hip Hop scene (namely Paul Wall, Trae Tha Truth, Slim Thug, Willie D, Lil KeK) came together to open accounts at Unity Bank, the only Black-owned bank in the entire state of Texas. In the wake of civil unrest going on in African American communities over police violence, they were among the rappers who stepped up to talk with their financial power. Wall declared from his Instagram: "Earlier today me and my homies went and opened up new accounts at @unitybanktexas the ONLY Black Owned Bank in Texas. They have several Houston locations. I encourage you to do the same."[361]

If we relate the abovementioned info to the fact that Dreisinger's "authenticating strategies" include engaging oneself socially and politically to help better the situation of African Americans in the United States (115), Paul Wall totally meets this requirement, as well.

Finally, in Dreisinger's categorization, being friends and having close connections to African American rappers and producers can help the White rapper to be taken seriously.

In this regard, since the early years Paul Wall's career has been marked out by his strong connections to Black people.

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[357] Wall, in the interview, says that his relationship with his wife, Crystal (the two have been married for ten years and have two kids) is wholly embraced by both the Black and Hip Hop community.

[358] See Also http://www.eurweb.com/2015/11/watch-paul-wall-speaks-on-racism-with-having-Black-wife-and/# and

[359] http://www.aframnews.com/swangin-to-the-polls/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[360]http://hiphopwired.com/510749/paul-wall-trae-tha-truth-slim-thug-lead-houston-rappers-opening-accounts-Black-owned-bank/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[361] https://www.instagram.com/p/BIEctlyAC0R/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

In fact, he emerged within a collective of Black Houston (Texas) artists such as Chamillionaire[362] and Slim Thug, who began to hit the mainstream record charts in 2004-2005.[363]

Wall and Chamillionaire started to rap when they were in their sixth grade and, as teenagers, they bribed their way into rap shows and built up relationships with DJs and promoters (Westhoff 205). They found work distributing flyers for labels like Def Jam and No Limit, and eventually attracted the attention of an impresario named Michael "5000" Watts who then asked them to help promote his Swishahouse record label.

In the early stages of their career, the Black and White duo made good money selling their mix CDs in malls around Texas. Wall and Chamillionaire quickly sold one hundred thousand copies of *Get Ya Mind Correct* (2002) their first independent CD together, whose title addresses those who intimidated them by stating that they could not make it as rappers.

Westhoff reports that the duo had charm indeed, recalling: "the White kid with an ear for hooks and the fast-rapping Black kid could sing, best friends who'd grown up together in a middle-class section of northwest Houston called Woodland Trails" (204).

They also had a big fan base that was real broad: Wall recalls of his early days rapping with Chamillionaire that they had the gangstas, the computer nerds, kids that went to school, the nine-to-five, regular people (Westhoff 203).

Eventually they convinced Watts to let them rap an intro for his 97.9 The Box (KBXX) radio show. Watts put the track on a popular mixtape called Choppin Em Up Part 2 and everybody liked it, as Chamillionaire recalls: "People started asking: 'Wait a minute. Who are these guys, Chamillionaire and Paul Wall?'" (Westhoff 206). However, after coming far, Wall and Cham began growing annoyed with each other to the extent that even during the creation of *Get Ya Mind Correct* they were arguing.

The two split and each went on his path by signing with different major labels, Paul Wall with Warner Music Group and Chamillionaire[364] with Universal. Most remarkably, Cham and Wall managed to excel, apart from each other. In 2010, after having become extremely rich,[365] they would reconcile.

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[362] Chamillionaire, whose moniker is a combination of "chameleon" and "millionaire," was born Hakeem Seriki and has Nigerian heritage (Westhoff 204).

[363] See Faniel Maco's book *Hip Hop in Houston: The Origin and the Legacy* (2013).

[364] Chamillionaire has the biggest hit in Houston's rap history, "Ridin'."

[365] "Particularly so was Chamillionaire, who in 2008 cracked Forbes's list of the top-earning rap stars, tying "The Game" and "OutKast" at number fourteen with an estimated $10 million (Westhoff 206). As for Wall, along the way he has invested in two Houston jewelry stores, specializing in custom grills.

After the split with Chamillionaire, *Paul Wall* stayed connected to record label Swishahouse, releasing *The People's Champ* in 2005,[366] which went platinum while also having the distinction of reaching number one on the Billboard charts.

Apart from the pivotal relationship with Chamillionaire in the early stages of his career, the good southern boy Paul Wall follows Eminem's career path in gaining his credibility from the strength of being associated with many other Black artists.

His first single "Sittin' Sidewayz," features Big Pokey, a Black rapper from Houston (Texas) and one of the original longtime members of the Screwed Up Click (S.U.C). Indeed, Paul Wall's most well-known stanza comes literally from Big Pokey, whose lines: "Sittin' sideways/ Paused in a daze/ On a Sunday night I might play me some Maze," served as the hook for Paul Wall's hit "Sittin' Sidewayz."

Other remarkable collaborations are Wall's feats with, respectively: Kanye West in West's single "Drive Slow," (Hess 2007, 571); "Everybody Know Me" (feat. Snoop Dogg)[367] and "Chose Me" (feat. Snoop Dogg & Berner); and finally, "So Many Diamonds" feat T.I.

All these featurings seem to prove that Paul Wall has been accepted by the Black Hip Hop community, not to mention the fact that in 2007 he received a Grammy award nomination for Best Rap Performance as a Duo or Group with the song "Grillz,"[368] performing together with Black rapper Nelly.

According to the *Online Journal on African American English*, the fact that Wall grew up in a working-class Houston area which is predominantly African American (Acres Homes), and that he is married to an African American woman, his socio-political engagement for the improvement of African Americans, as well as the fact that his career is replete with collaborations with Black artists -- all of these facts, linguistic and social, have likely contributed to the consensus that Wall is not "faking it."

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[366] See the magazine *Billboard* (19 May 2007): "Wall's *The People Champ* claimed number 1 first week debut on The Billboard 200 with 176.000 units and has far tallied sales of 842,000" (26).

[367] See "Paul Wall features Snoop Dogg" at http://allhiphop.com/2015/09/11/paul-wall-slab-god-tracklist/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[368] "Grillz" is a song by American Black rapper Nelly from his compilation album *Sweatsuit*. The song features Paul Wall and Ali & Gipp. Brandi Williams also does back-up vocals on the song, but is not officially credited as a featured artist.

## Iggy Azalea

Iggy Azalea[369] is a female White rapper, Australian born but American raised. In fact, she moved to the United States in her teens to pursue a rap career. She is one of the most controversial White artists of the moment due to her huge mainstream success and the equally big amount of criticism she keeps receiving. She became known and gained fame for her ability to construct fast rhymes and for her hit song "Fancy."[370]

In 2013 Azalea signed a contract with the Hip Hop music label Def Jam Records. Worth noting, her debut album *The New Classic* (2014) was produced by Black Hip Hop legend and rapper T.I.

In 2014 she won her first award ever at the 2014 American Music Awards. The online magazine *Rap Up* observes that "Iggy led the pack with six nominations, beating out Drake and Eminem and taking home the prize for Favorite Rap/Hip Hop Album for her debut *The New Classic*." [371] While receiving the award from Jamie Foxx, she proudly brought up her producer T.I.[372]on stage.

She won one MTV Video Music Award for her collaboration with Ariana Grande, along with seven more nominations, becoming the most nominated artist.[373]

Azalea also won three Teen Choice Awards[374] and one MTV Europe Music Award.[375] She received the 2014 ARIA Award for Breakthrough Artist and the 2015 People's Choice Award for Favorite Hip Hop Artist.[376]

She collected four nominations at the 57th Annual Grammy Awards, including Best New Artist, Record of the Year, Best Pop Duo/Group Performance for "Fancy" and Best Rap Album for *The New Classic*.[377]

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[369] Born Amethyst Kelly in Mullumbimby (New South Wales) Azalea left home aged sixteen and flew to Miami alone; she planned to enroll on an audio engineering course if the rap dreams didn't work out. "I had always been drawn to jobs where there weren't many other women involved," she says, "and very few women do audio engineering." See https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[370] With her debut single "Fancy," she became only the fourth solo female rapper to ever top the Billboard Hot 100.

[371] http://www.rap-up.com/2014/11/23/video-iggy-azalea-wins-favorite-Hip Hop-album-at-amas/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[372] Iggy is a protégé of T.I., one of Hip Hop's legends well known for his bravado that is a hallmark of Black culture.

[373] http://www.usmagazine.com/entertainment/news/mtv-video-music-awards-2014-complete-winners-list-from-the-vmas-2014248. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[374] http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/teen-choice-awards-2014-winners-724423. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[375] http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6312160/mtv-ema-2014-winners-list. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[376] http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6327868/sia-chet-faker-win-big-at-aria-awards. Last Visited January 19, 2017.
      http://www.idolator.com/7576109/peoples-choice-awards-2015-iggy-azalea-taylor-swift-ed-sheeran-win-big. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[377] http://www.billboard.com/articles/6363565/grammys-2015-nominations-57th-annual. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

She was the first non-African American female rapper to be issued on the 2012 cover of *XXL-Magazine* and to be listed among other Hip Hop performers on *Top Ten Freshman*'s list.[378]

*Billboard Magazine* has devoted a page to Iggy's biography, defining her life an "unlikely crossover success story," which marks her career as a transracial move.[379]

The Italian magazine "Sette" devoted an article to her stunning raise to stardom by stating that she has matched and equaled The Beatles' success.[380] Journalist Stefania Ulivi claims that from Iggy's first album *The New Classic*, two singles have been simultaneously ranked first and second in the Billboard chart,[381] a striking achievement which only the Beatles before her had attained. Ulivi reports that Iggy has been raised in the deep South, between Miami, Houston and Atlanta, where she absorbed the typically Southern-style drawl.[382]

Remarkable of Iggy's career is her mainstream success despite being a White rapper and a woman.

Women generally have a hard time to be taken seriously as rap artists for the derogative portraits of women as "bitches" that Hip Hop provides.

The genre is in fact notorious for its general low consideration of homosexuals and for bad depictions of women[383] as "ho's" and "bitches" (Potter 1995, 99). It is no surprise that misogyny and homophobia remain the Achilles' heel of Hip Hop music, particularly within "gangsta rap" whose lyrics are replete with braggings or complaints about women called "bitches."[384]

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[378] http://2dopeboyz.com/2012/02/28/and-xxls-2012-freshmen-are-2/. Last Visited January 19, 2017.
Further, in 2012, XXL Magazine put her on the cover of its annual Top Ten Freshman issue alongside Danny Brown, Roscoe Dash, and French Montana.

[379] http://www.billboard.com/artist/5694588/iggy-azalea/biography. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[380] Ulivi, Stefania. "Attesa per Iggy, voce sincera dell'Hip Hop. A due anni dal precedente album, trepidazione per il nuovo lavoro della cantante che ha eguagliato I Beatles" *Sette* 24 giugno 216.

[381] The Guardian reports the same data, attesting that she has held the No 1 *and* No 2 slots at the same time on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. See https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool.Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[382] See Iggy Azalea's biography on Billboard.com http://www.billboard.com/artist/5694588/iggy-azalea/biography. Last Visited January 13, 2017.

[383] John Hagedorn and Mike Davis points to the true-to-life storytelling aspect of Hip Hop music. They claim that if the goal is to paint credible pictures of life in impoverished neighborhoods, then misogyny is an "all-too-real aspect of life on the streets" and therefore pops up regularly in rap's lyrics (2008, 104-105). Another interpretation for this mysoginist attitudes is that because of White power, African American women were taken from their families and abused as sex slaves. As a consequence of this traumatic past, rappers often reclaim these women through their lyrics, creating a discourse of possession in relation to their 'ho's' and 'bitches' (Potter 1995, 100).

[384] As Edward G. Armstrong poignantly observed in "Gangsta Misogyny: a Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence Against Women in Rap Music" (2001) Ice-T's (1987) "6 'N The Mornin'" and Eazy-E's (1988a; 1993; and N.W.A's [1989b]) "Boyz-N-The-Hood" anticipated and affected gangsta rap music's matter-of-fact depictions of violence and misogyny. These songs, in fact, center thematically on gender-based conflict against women. In "6 'N The Mornin'", Ice-T batters a woman."Boyz-N-The-Hood" suggests corporal punishment for women who "talk shit." Dr. Dre (1992) presents the identical message in "Nuthin' But A 'G' Thang," the No. 1 rap song of all time (Krohn and Suazo 1995). For women, talking back (Ice-T 1989a; Too $hort 1987b and 1993d) and showing disrespect (dissin') (N.W.A 1991b) cause men to react violently. MC Ren (1992b) hits, with a shoe, women who complain. Rejecting a proposition provokes a physical

Greg Dimitriadis argues that at the West Coast, where gangsta rap dominated and where tough and macho identities were the norm, women were least likely to contribute to Hip Hop music and even excluded. He observed that rap producers even "denied opportunities for female access and opened a space for the proliferation of already existing and deeply misogynist cultural discourses" (2001, 23).[385]

Undoubtedly, rap has been and currently is a male-dominated music scene. Female rappers are still a minority and, so far, female artists that can boast international success are very few in number.[386] This draws attention to a paradox within Hip Hop music. As Pough observes: "while some rappers claim to be the new voice for the marginalized group of Black youth they claim to represent, they oppress and marginalize women and homosexuals [...] Even though Hip Hop culture suffers state oppression, it can and it does in certain instances act as an oppressor" (2004, 19). This echoes the thoughts of philosopher Simone Weil who argued that "when the weak get together, they mimic the actions of the formerly powerful" (Elam and Jackson 2005, 84).

Gwendolyn Pough in *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* argues that female rappers are faced with a double challenge: against both the negative images Hip Hop spreads of women and the historical stereotypes the hegemonic White society potentially maintains (2004, 97). Moreover, within Hip Hop women have to "find a middle ground between their appreciation for the African American-dominated genre and their self-respect as women" (Hagedorn and Davis 2008, 104 - 105).

In light of these considerations, Black rappers and actresses Eve and Jill Scott, during an interview where they were promoting their upcoming movie, affirmed that on the one hand Iggy Azalea stands as a worthy representative of their category (generally underestimated in Hip Hop) and that she is perceived as empowering women's position in the genre: "At the end of the day I get it. I get that people might be upset about certain things but yeah she's White but they grew up with

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attack (Eazy-E 1992b). Too $hort (1993a) hurled this tirade: "You fuck with us, bitch, something gettin' broken/ Your leg, arm, jaw, nose, pick a part."

[385] As Kajikawa points out: "although all kinds of people make and listen to rap music, the industry that produces it has tended to focus almost exclusively on cultivating and promoting Black male artists" (5).

[386] Ralph Basui Watkins, in *Hip Hop Redemption* (2011), provides a list of the female rappers whom he calls "Sistas on the Mic," and who can be said to have achieved mainstream success: they are surprisingly few. The list includes only Lauryn Hill with the album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (Ruffhouse/ Columbia 1998), MC Lyte with the album *Lyte as Rock* (First Priority/Atlantic, 1988), Queen Latifah with *All Hail the Queen* (Tommy Boy 1989), Salt-n-Pepa with *Hot, Cool and Vicious* (Next Plateau, 1986) and Yo-Yo with *Make Way for the Motherlode* (East West/Atlantic 1991).

our shit. Hip Hop is everywhere -- every neighborhood, every country, every city -- and it didn't just hit... yes it's from us and it's our thing but she's representing a group of girls right now as well."[387]

On the other end, however, they feel she might be "stealing" a spot to Black female rappers and they underline her exaggerated use of AAE which they coin in degrading terms as "Blaccent": "She's from a different place and I've said this before, it would be dope to hear her with her swag (…) Who are you, what are you, what is that?"[388]

A closer look at Iggy Azalea's data might well explain why they call her rapping accent "Blaccent."

Giving a glance at Iggy's scores, one instantly finds out that her overall use of AAE features is remarkably high: she employs all of them half or more than half of the time there is a linguistic opportunity. Azalea exceeds Eminem, and sometimes she even tops Paul Wall and Black rappers who are native AAE speakers. Feature 1 is employed by Iggy 47% of the times while Eminem employs it 10%, Paul Wall 39%, Kanye 48%, Nas 11% and Tyler 28%.

For feature 2 she has a record of 48%, surpassed only by Paul Wall's 79%, but she nevertheless exceeds Eminem's 11% and remains close to the Black rappers' figures: Kanye 50%, Nas 43% and Tyler 47%.

Feature 3 is employed more than half of the times she had the opportunity to do so: 66% of the times, while Eminem 10%, Paul Wall 89%, Kanye 49%, Nas 64% and Tyler 57%.

She hit her lowest rate only for feature 4 where she has a record of 30% against Eminem's 22%, Paul Wall's 61%, Kanye's 32%, Nas'62% and Tyler's 43%.

She employs feature 5 at every linguistic opportunity hitting a 100% together with Tyler (who employs feature 5 a 100% of the times as well) against Eminem's 88%, Wall's 97%, Kanye's 95%, Nas' 83%.

She tops all other artists as regards feature 6, hitting a 45% against Eminem's 27%, Paul Wall's 38%, Kanye's 35%, Nas' 38% and Tyler's 23%.

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[387] See http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6450997/jill-scott-eve-weigh-in-on-iggy-azalea-blaccent. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[388] See http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6450997/jill-scott-eve-weigh-in-on-iggy-azalea-blaccent. Last Visited January 19, 2017.
Iggy responded to this claims by stating: "There's a difference between being yourself and being your stereotype. When people I've never met say I should act more like myself I feel like they're really saying 'act more like how I stereotype you to be, so I can feel comfortable.' I'm myself as strange as I may be, daily. I think it's really important we all feel free to explore or feel passionate about whatever u wish. And I hope all my young fans take what I'm saying and remember it if you ever find yourself in similar shoes. Be as complex and multidimensional and interesting as you possibly can." See: http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6451198/iggy-azalea-responds-jill-scott-eve-blaccent-stereotype

She remains within the standards among the other rappers for feature 7, for which she records a 90% (Eminem 90%, Wall 98%, Kanye 95%, Nas 97% and Tyler 67%).

Eventually, she hits a 72% for feature 8, while Eminem has a 37%, Wall 90%, Kanye 73, Nas 91 % and Tyler 66%.

What is striking about Iggy Azalea is that in interviews her Australian accent comes out strongly, whereas on stage she raps as if she lived in Atlanta (U.S.A.) all her life.

In an interview with *The Guardian* on the 28th of June, 2014 she declared: "I love the fact that I don't rap the way I talk; I think it's completely hilarious and ironic and cool."[389]

The journalist underlines how fast fame came for her and he recalls that when he first met Azalea in February 2013, she already had millions of YouTube views for her tracks "Work" and "Pu$$y", she wasn't yet signed, but she was admired for her retro US southern-style flow, twisted vowels and filthy humor.

During the interview, Iggy recounted how she would surf over rap sites, and the way she wormed into the Houston Hip Hop scene and was unafraid to ask silly questions: "UGK and Snoop Dogg were always talking about vogues. I thought, what is a vogue? I found out it was a tyre. I asked [Texan rapper] Slim Thug's brother in a parking lot what a vogue meant, and then I knew."[390]

However, the controversies surrounding her career and her use of AAE have escalated.

The internet fizzes with blogs accusing her of pretending to be Black – or blaming her for being a cultural appropriator and a racist.

To start with, a big scandal came when Azealia Banks, a female Black rapper and renowned Twitter-beef merchant, accused Azalea of being racist. In early 2012 the two girls had a career clash because they bore the same name, same age, same attitude, and similarly provocative songs.

After Iggy landed the cover of the Hip Hop periodical *XXL*, Banks angrily tweeted: "How can you endorse a White woman who calls herself a runaway slave master?"[391]

Banks did not stop her rage against Iggy and she gave an emotionally-charged Hot 97 interview[392] on 19 December, 2014, during which she described how she feared things like Azalea's

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[389] https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[390] https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[391] In the song "D.R.U.G.S." Iggy Azalea raps "when the relay starts I am a runaway slave-master." The inclusion of "master" at the end of the line was called out as racist while Iggy apologized and clarified it was intended to be a metaphoric sample based on an originally literal lyric by Kendrick Lamar. In his song "Look out for Detox" the line did not include the word "master": "Finish line with the tire marks/When the relay starts I'm a runaway slave." From 2011 to 2013 Iggy replaced it with the line "runaway train-master" in live performances.

Grammy nomination were contributing to the erasure of Hip Hop's Blackness, and Blackness in general: "When they give these Grammys out, all it says to White kids is 'You're amazing, you're great, you can do anything you put your mind to,' she said. "And all it says to Black kids is 'You don't have shit, you don't own shit, not even the shit you created for yourself.' And it makes me upset."[393]

Iggy has also been the target of substantial criticism from gender and race scholar Britney Cooper, an African American woman who grew up in the South and who finds Azalea offensive because she mimics the sonic register of a downhome Atlanta girl.[394] Cooper further states that while Iggy may love Hip Hop, she shows very little appreciation of Black culture or the problematic ways that White privilege can colonize that culture to the tune of millions of dollars.

Cooper further points out her resentment and disappointment about her younger nephew singing along Iggy's music:

> Recently, my nine-year-old nephew came running into the room, eager to find a seat to watch a performance by Iggy Azalea on an awards show. He sat, enraptured by her performance, yelling, "Iggy!" utterly oblivious to the look of chagrin and dismay on my face. (…) I resent Iggy Azalea for her co-optation and appropriation of sonic Southern Blackness, particularly the sonic Blackness of Southern Black women. Everytime she raps the line 'tell me how you luv dat,' in her song "Fancy," I want to scream 'I don't love dat!' I hate it.[395]

She also claims that in the case of Southern White rapper Paul Wall who "sounds Black", at least it is clear that he also has the accents of the places and communities in which he grew up.

Cooper appreciates other White rappers like Eminem or Macklemore because they always remain critical of White privilege and especially of the way this privilege operates in their own life and career.

Macklemore, for example, in 2014 won three Grammies in the rap category, and he spontaneously apologized to rapper Kendrick Lamar for having "robbed" him of his prize.

In his song "White Privilege" from the album *The Language of my World* (2005) he declares:

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[392] http://uk.complex.com/music/2014/12/hot-97-interview-azealia-banks-vs-iggy-azalea. Last Visited January 19, 2017.
[393] http://uk.complex.com/music/2014/12/hot-97-interview-azealia-banks-vs-iggy-azalea. Last Visited January 19, 2017.
[394] As mentioned earlier, Iggy moved from Miami to Houston and Atlanta where she allegedly got her famous or infamous Southern "drawl" which is the cause of much resentment on the part of the Black community.
[395] http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy_azaleas_post_racial_mess_americas_oldest_race_tale_remixed/.
Last Visited January 19, 2017.

Where's my place in a music that's been taken by my race

Culturally appropriated by the White face?

And we don't want to admit that this is existing

So scared to acknowledge the benefits of our White privilege

Macklemore, like Eminem, overtly takes a critical position towards his own White privilege; Iggy's lyrics, on the contrary, never address such issues: she never questions her position and her White privilege within the musical genre of Hip Hop.

Iggy was criticized also by Black rapper Q-Tip, who used twitter[396] as an educational platform to emphasized the historical significance of Hip Hop, and underlined that Iggy's problem ultimately rests in her borrowing from a culture without acknowledging its history.[397]

Q-Tip took Twitter to patiently, gently and compassionately address Iggy personally and to teach her on the historical and political forces that created and continue to drive Hip Hop music. Over the course of nearly 40 tweets, he emphasized Iggy's failure to understand racism, White privilege, and the history of rap: "did u know president Clinton was the ONLY PRESIDENT to apologize for it? did u know that remnants of slavery exist today thru White privilege?" [398]

Taking a look at Iggy's authenticating strategies, apart from her controversial adoption of AAE, her only apparently unsuccessful authenticating attempt is that of trading – in Eminem's fashion - race for class and racial injustice for poverty. In the song "Work" she talks about her legitimate experience of suffering and of financial hardships: "No money, no family, age 16 in the middle of Miami"[399] to remind her audience how she came to the States empty handed. Further, she claims to have "Trust Your Struggle" tattooed on her forearm, as a self-proclaimed confirmation of her right to speak.

In other songs like "Walk the Line" she presents herself as underappreciated within the genre. She addresses all the prejudice she faced on her way to the top and how she "walks alone":

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[396] https://twitter.com/QtipTheAbstract/with_replies. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[397] https://ca.complex.com/music/2014/12/qtip-iggy-azalea-history-lesson. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[398] http://jezebel.com/q-tip-schools-iggy-azalea-on-Hip Hop-history-and-were-a-1673811788. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

[399] https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

This is the line that I walk alone (…)

I've been counted out, I've been stepped on

I was wide awake and got slept on

I had everything and then lost it

Worked my ass off, I'm exhausted

All this talking about me, just talk about me.

In "Don't Need Y'all," she underlines: "Try to knock me down but I'm strong/ I did all this on my own." Even though she hardly ever speaks about her roots, in "Walk the Line" she declares: "Money never a maybe but never forgot my roots," then she calls herself an "immigrant" and she underlines her struggle and the hard work she went through in the song "Work":

I'm tryna let you know what the fuck that I've been through (…)

3 jobs took years to save

But I got a ticket on that plane

People got a lot to say

But don't know shit bout where I was made

Or how many floors that I had to scrub

Just to make it past where I am from

(…) I've been work, work, work, work, working on my shit (…)

Hustle and the struggle is the only thing I'm trusting

Thoroughbred in a mud brick before the budget (…)

Pledge allegiance to the struggle

Ain't been easy.

Apart from these few hints at her personal struggle, other songs revolve around themes of luxury, courtship, and the climb to fame. Azalea does not engage in discussing authenticity, nor self-awareness of her White privilege. She told Billboard magazine "We get so caught up, especially in rap, with what's authentic, and I wish people would think more about what the fuck that even means […]"[400]

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[400]  http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.29158/title.iggy-azalea-addresses-rap-authenticity-tupac-rolling-stones-in-billboard-cover-story#. Last Visited January 19, 2017.

We infer that by this claim she might bring to the front her critical stance towards the widespread opinion that Hip Hop produced by African American artists is considered to be inherently authentic. Along these lines, I suggest that not every African American artist automatically represents the ideas and values of the African American community in his or her work. Black rappers often mention money and they talk about lifestyles made possible by capitalism. They can brag about having "bitches" and can talk about poor people in a condescending way -- or they might pretend to come from the streets, while they grew up in middle-class families in suburban places. Not every Black rapper automatically acts morally "authentic" or according to "keepin it real" [401] laws. Moreover, even hypothesizing that they acted "real" and "authentic," some scholars claim that Black rappers' authenticity gets lost in the very moment it becomes commercialized and sold to White audiences, that they often become "sell outs" to a White audience (Kajikawa 6). Thus, the authenticity issue seems to be a central paradox of Hip Hop among Black rappers, as well.

Among black people who came to Azalea's defense stand African American talk show host Wendy Williams. She went out strongly on the topic by stating: "Would you guys stop with the Iggy Azalea?! How much hate do you guys have?! (…) I want you all to leave her alone." Then Williams

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[401] The frequently used phrase "keeping it real" describes the practice of staying true to one's culture and values. Real Hip Hop should draw attention to 'the complex dimensions of ghetto life ignored by many Americans" (Dyson 1996, 184), shedding light on "otherwise invisible lives" (Cobb 2007, 196) and exchanging true information (Ice-T 1994, 98). At its best, it should stimulate young men and women to education, to get together and form opinions to counter the hegemonic society in a creative and challenging way. Hip Hop, in fact, can be credited for stimulating many African American children to rise from illiteracy, develop their reading and writing skills and to take part in public and political life. This spirit had been originally promoted and encouraged by Afrika Bambaataa, the "godfather of Hip Hop." As Hagedorn and Davis explain: he was one of the first MCs and former gang member, whose vision for Hip Hop has remained one pole of an intense cultural struggle among youth today: "Bambaataa, whose given name is Kevin Donovan, was a warlord in the Bronx River Project division of the Black Spades, one of that area's largest, most feared street gangs. Unlike other gang members, Bambaataa was not targeted for arrest and prison. Instead he left the gang and turned his talents to use music to lure kids from the violent life of the streets" (95). Bambaataa early on saw that music and the not-yet-named Hip Hop had the potential to pull kids from the self-hatred and destructive behavior that is an all-too-common response to poverty and racism. Craig S. Watkins, in *Hip Hop Matters*, observes that "At some point he started to believe that the energy, loyalty, and passion that defined gang life could be guided toward more socially productive activities" (2005, 23).
For a lot of rappers, 'keepin' it real' is difficult once they become mainstream popular and financially successful. Stories of everyday struggle, which a great part of their fan base can usually identify with, become only addressed in a reminiscent way anymore. It happens that newly successful rappers lose touch with the man in the street in the very moment they are seen throwing money in the air, wearing huge gold chains, and expensive clothes.
Another general observation about rap and especially gangsta rap's intrinsic paradox is that at its best it is a powerful indictment of racism and oppression that calls our attention to the crises of the inner cities and vividly describes the plight of African Americans.
At its worst, gangsta rap is itself racist, sexist and glorifies violence, being little but a money-making means that is part of the problem rather than the solution. Along these lines, Forbes observes: "unfortunately, this struggle for individual, ontological, and material space often results in counterproductive and oppressive tendencies, which can be seen in sexism, patriarchal ideals, and problematic consumerism that much rap represents. On one level, rap strikes at the dehumanizing tendencies of American society, on another level, it buys into the structures and attitudes fostering such dehumanizing practices" (260).

addressed the African American community by adding "I know who the haters are: my people. (…) It seems like Black people don't want this girl to win because she's White."[402]

Williams claims that Black people in the U.S. feel ill will towards Azalea because African American people are "very territorial about our rap music," and she mentions that Azalea's use of AAE plays a role in the territorial response from the Black community.

This shows that Azalea's linguistic crossing is perceived by many Black people as a violation of what Valerie Melissa Babb has identified as "people's general understanding of race and gender" in her book *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (Babb 1998, 193).

Azalea's most outstanding authenticating attempt relies on her overzealous use of AAE as a central way of positioning herself within Hip Hop. She tries to make herself sound authentic in order to overcompensate her Whiteness, yet she seems to fail in being accepted by a large part of the Black community members.

Cecilia Cutler,[403] who has studied a young White teenager who had been observed to adopt the poses and the language of Hip Hop had noticed the same pattern in her research. As her study demonstrates, often it is the people the most distant from the Black community who use - or overuse - the patterns of AAE: "Sometimes they take this one feature and they beat it to death, as a way to signal that they've arrived, that they know what they're doing, that they're part of this culture" (1999, 428). In Iggy's case, this strategy seems to backfire. Imitating AAE too closely invites ridicule – she has been teased for her "Blaccent" and she might even be perceived as offensive by some Black people, as it might be inferred from the many abovementioned critiques she has received.

Although the earlier-quoted interviews are not a scientific poll, they nevertheless give an impression of how people perceive Azalea to be different from Eminem and Paul Wall.

These impressions form what Androutsopoulos called "tertiary" Hip Hop texts (Alim 2009, 14),[404] which represent the Internet discourse of the Hip Hop community on forums, articles, and video clips.

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[402] http://www.eonline.com/news/627094/wendy-williams-defends-iggy-azalea-Black-people-don-t-want-this-girl-to-win-because-she-s-White

[403] See her study "Yorkville Crossing: A Case Study of Hip-Hop and the Language of a White Middle Class Teenager in New York City" (1999).

[404] The sources used to gather impression on how Iggy is perceived by the Black community correspond to what Androutsopoulos calls the "third sphere of Hip Hop discourse." In Androutsopoulos' sociolinguistic and discourse analytic schema of Hip Hop discourses, he builds upon Fiske's (1987) concept of vertical intertextuality to outline three

Despite heavy criticism, Iggy is supported by some representatives of the Black community. As already attested, in the first line stands her powerful Black mentor: T.I. Right-hand man as well as executive producer of her album, T.I. sticks up for her whenever he can. He featured on the album *The New Classic*, as did the Atlanta-based musical trio Watch the Duck. T.I even recently expressed disappointment claiming: "I can't believe we're at a place in America where we still see color," in direct response to people attacking Iggy, especially Black women who have asked him why he couldn't mentor and put on a Black female rapper. [405]

Further, her hand is tattooed with the title "Live. Love. A$AP," the debut single of her ex-boyfriend, African American Harlem rapper A$AP Rocky. Moreover, she is known to have had relationships with basketball player Nick Young of the LA Lakers. Other early supporters were Nas and Kanye West, whom she name-dropped fiercely during the interview with *The Guardian*.

In the same earlier-mentioned *Guardian* interview, Iggy ponders that: "You know the funny thing is I have never had *any* musicians tell me that I wasn't authentic for being White. Not one. Even *I* had a warped perception of how I would be received in this business. What I've come to realize is that it's the people who write about music – or who are outside it in some way – who have a problem with what I am doing. The only true insiders are the musicians themselves."

Then she adds that while reading Keith Richards' autobiography she agreed with his claim that no American blues musicians ever accused the Rolling Stones of "imitating" their sound – but people were writing that stuff about them back in England.

Although it seems that Iggy Azalea is obtaining increasing mainstream success and fame, considering her chart-topping songs and the stunning number of awards she has received - the majority of Black community members is still critical of her and of her crossing to AAE.

As mentioned before, Iggy represents the strangest turn on the music scene since she is simultaneously racially divisive and extremely popular.

Iggy's career exemplifies that - as it has already been mentioned - it might be easier for White rappers to obtain mainstream success because White audiences identify themselves with their White peers. Yet it is much harder for them to gain respect and to be recognized as "authentic." Ultimately, as it might be inferred from the analysis of Iggy's career and reception, the members of

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interrelated spheres: "artist expression (corresponding to Fiske's 'primary texts'), media discourse ('secondary texts'), and discourse among Hip Hop fans and activists ('tertiary texts')" (p. 44).

[405] http://beneviera.com/2014/07/10/ti-colorblind-iggy-azalea/

the Black community do not seem willing to embrace Azalea as they eventually did with Eminem and Paul Wall.

## CONCLUSION

*Language is not only a means of communicating information.*
*It is also a very important mean of establishing*
*relationships with other people*
*David Crystal*

In the present study we have discussed the cultural phenomenon of Hip Hop via its musical voice – rap - questioning whether it can be a ground for interracial communication.

Based on the linguistic data we have gathered, it is reasonable to assume that Hip Hop can be regarded as a locus for an interracial linguistic encounter.

We also suggest that White rappers' linguistic practices challenge notions of ethnic absolutism and contribute to the idea that Hip Hop culture fosters interaction and attempts to reshape and redefine racial boundaries. We claim that white rappers experimenting with AAE-styled speech may improve the status of AAE in broader society and that their adoption of AAE as a white performance language might help erase the negative stigma Whites have attached to AAE.

In view of this, rap music makes a symbolic language for popular anti-racism available.

Within this framework, significant and unexpected data have emerged in relation to Black rappers' lyrics. Originally used as a mere term of comparison, Black rappers' speech was expected to stick to AAE almost completely as evidence of their presumed wish to diverge from SAE and mark their identity as AAE speakers. However, the data show that AAE forms have been counterbalanced by the remarkable presence of SAE forms in their linguistic repertoire.

We set these results in the context of Smitherman's sociolinguistic theories on language change based on socio-historical conditions. Our inference was that Black rappers' voluntary decrease in the use of AAE – as well as their convergence towards SAE forms -  might indicate a stance toward interaction and a wish for greater cultural integration.

The present analysis has also offered an original approach to the discussion of rap as a speech genre rooted in African American English (AAE). Crucial for the understanding of this variety of English was the theoretical and linguistic background we provided in Chapter 1. We analyzed the complex power-relations that exist between African American English and Standard American English (SAE) in the US.

We discussed the persistent racial tensions that undergird the relationship between these two varieties and we called for the eradication of the widespread belief of the inferiority of Black English. We took objection to White America's linguistic disapproval of AAE. We verified that this biased blame on AAE is based on an ideology of linguistic supremacy, i.e. the uncorroborated belief that certain linguistic norms are inherently superior to the linguistic norms of other communities.

By grounding our argumentation on the theories of renowned linguists such as William Labov and John R. Rickford, we challenged the ideology of linguistic supremacy and we argued for the structural and social equality of languages and for the appreciation and respect towards AAE. We demonstrated that, far from being an inferior language, AAE must be recognized as a rule-governed variety in its own right which is having a very special influence on global language, especially because of its expansion via Hip Hop music.

Subsequently, we discussed rap's rhetoric and detected its functional and structural affiliation with the African American oral tradition of Signifyin(g).

An analysis of this structural kinship has allowed us to demonstrate how rap and Signifying reveal to be meta-rhetorical practices aimed at challenging the White order of meanings. We also suggested that they function as anti-languages and provided examples of such a formulation.

We detected the term "nigga" to be the best score of this process of linguistic, semiotic, political and metaphysical offensive against the White order of meaning. Therefore, we engaged in an analysis of this term considering its relation to the word nigger.

While we were researching both the origin and meaning of the terms, a number of interesting points have come up.

We verified that it is a common belief, nowadays, to associate the schwa variant (nigg-a) with Black culture, while the word nigger is seen as inextricably linked to White racism. Similarly, we observed that people mistakenly claim that the form nigga is a respelling formulated by rappers via the influence of the widespread mainstream phenomenon of Hip Hop.

On account of this, we demonstrated that the logic behind the recent re-spelling breaks down by bringing to light literary and historical evidence to the contrary, i.e. showing that White racists have used 'nigga' nearly as often as they have used 'nigger.'

We proved that nigg-a was first introduced via the schwa pronunciation of White colonists in the American South under the influence of the dialect of London aristocrats in the 18th century, who developed a 'non-rhotic' speech variant.  Thus, it was White southerners who first adopted this pronunciation (nigga). Since White planters and slave traders were in everyday contact with Black

people, Black people themselves started taking on this trend because of the influence of their masters' speech. As a consequence, "nigga" reflects a southern speech dialect and, primarily, a White one.

This recognition is amongst the most relevant aspects of the present study.

After proving that nigga originally reflected a Southern White American pronunciation, we then analyzed the ways the term was incorporated into the lexicon of the counter - language created over the centuries by African Americans starting from slavery times to Hip Hop culture. Entirely in line with the logic of Signifyin(g) and anti-languages, Black people appropriated the term by keeping the signifier "nigga" intact while changing the signified, thus endowing the term with several different – sometimes opposing - meanings. In particular, we investigated the way the term "nigga" has been uniquely re-imagined and re-signified by Hip Hop culture.

Against the claims of a new-respelling by black rappers, the present study distinguished more specifically that the novelty of Hip Hop's appropriation does not rest in the emergence of a new respelling, but rather in a new way that an old spelling came to be re-used as a tool for the articulation of a peculiar socio-political stance as well as for the assertion of a self-conscious identity.

Finally, in the last chapter White rappers Eminem, Iggy Azalea, and Paul Wall have been identified as not only affiliating with Hip Hop as a Black music genre, but also as having embraced African American English in their performances.

We verified that their cross-over to AAE is an attempt to take part in complex and prestigious African American culture whilst flagging respect and esteem for Black English.

However, we noticed that the degree of success of their linguistic cross-overs in the eyes of the Black community varied greatly and is still a hot button issue.

To explore how white rap artists obtained or failed gaining the respect of the Black community we used Kembrew McLeod's framework of "Dimensions of Authenticity" (1999), Edward Armstrong's theories on authenticity (2004), Baz Dreisinger "Authenticating Strategies" (2008) and Androutsopoulos' sociolinguistic analytic scheme of "tertiary" Hip Hop texts which represent the Internet discourse of the Hip Hop community on forums, articles, and video clips.

We documented that Black community members have bestowed their seal of approval on Eminem and Paul Wall, deeming their linguistic appropriation more a sharing rather than a stealing. However, we noted that Iggy Azalea's cross-over is divisive: some support her, others consider her a cultural appropriator.

We found that in the singular case of Eminem, the authentic autobiographical content of his lyrics and his critical stance towards his own Whiteness and his White privilege have helped him reshape his identity and foster an interracial dialogue. His music and his crossing have been welcomed and celebrated by the Black community, and he is hence an epitome of how Hip Hop music can be the ground for interracial communication, where the borders dividing Whites and Blacks fade. His reception as a White rapper by White listeners and Black rap stars and community members is the most evident example of White and Black interaction in Hip Hop.

Similarly, we attested that Paul Wall's engagement in Hip Hop and his crossing to AAE is considered authentic. The fact that he grew up in a working-class predominantly African American area of Houston, is married to an African American woman, is socially and politically engaged in the improvement of African Americans and has expressed solidarity with their political struggles, as well as his numerous collaborations with Black artists, have contributed to his legitimation within Hip Hop by the Black community.

White rappers such as Eminem and Paul Wall wear their alleged upbringing in Black neighborhoods as badges of authenticity, surrounding themselves with Black people while onstage and ultimately staking a claim that proximity to Blackness gives them a special pass to Black culture. Their cross-identification is predicated on a genuine understanding and enactment of Black culture.

By contrast, we brought to light how Iggy Azalea is one of the most controversial of White artists. Her increasing fame and mainstream success is undeniable, but she is also the object of continuous attacks and criticism. Although Black Hip Hop legend T.I. and other Black artists support her, the Black community is highly critical of her language appropriation.

Her rates of AAE features are extremely high compared to other rappers. Although she reproduces perfect AAE, her language has been the subject of scorn and redefined by some African Americans derogatorily as "Blaccent." Black people recognize her diligent grasp of AAE — which she learnt during the years spent between Miami, Atlanta and Houston - however they feel that her crossing - instead of earning her credibility - only highlights how foreign she is.

Scholar Britney Cooper, an African American who grew up in the South, finds Azalea offensive precisely because she uses the sonic register of a downhome Atlanta girl without the right to do so. Iggy Azalea may depict herself as a "poor" immigrant struggling to make ends meet who moved to the United States in her teens, claiming a history of struggle in an attempt to trade race for class — as Eminem did before her — but nevertheless both her story and engagement in Hip Hop fail to be perceived as authentic.

While Eminem and Paul Wall ground their use of AAE in a deeper heartfelt engagement in Black culture - Eminem with his vocal critique of White privilege and of the way it operates in his life and career, and Paul Wall expressing his solidarity with the political struggles of African Americans - Iggy's performances show no awareness of the complexity of adopting an African American linguistic identity. A large proportion of Black community members feel that the way she has taken AAE and Black culture wholesale and used it to fuel her fame and fortune is disrespectful. They point to racially insensitive lyrics, such as when Azalea called herself a "runaway slave master." They claim she appropriates Black culture and language without having any understanding of the problematic ways White privilege can colonize that culture to the tune of millions of dollars.

Black community members have been, and remain, very conscious of the long-standing threat of appropriation. One obvious example is Rock and Roll, which started life as a way for the music industry to market Black Rhythm and Blues to White teenagers and ended with White performers moving to the forefront of the genre, ousting African American musicians and enjoying greater fame and larger financial rewards.

In this way, by becoming white, Rock and Roll followed swing (where White American jazz and swing musicians Bennie Goodman was hailed as "the King of Swing") and early jazz – see Paul Whiteman as "the King of Jazz." (Kajikawa 125). We verified that Eminem, Paul Wall and Iggy Azalea's success – as part of this long problematic history of White performers profiting from Black music - raises fears of Whites muscling in once again. However, unlike Rock and swing, rap has not become White. The preponderance of African American rappers in the US music charts challenges Whites to establish themselves as "cultural appropriators" in a space that is still widely perceived as Black and dominated by Black artists. In a 1991 interview, African American journalist Havelock Nelson[406] pondered: ''Rock-and-roll was Black back in the days when it began. I don't know if rap in the year 2050 will be seen as White. But it damn sure could be'' (Dreisinger 119). Yet, more than twenty years after Nelson's musings, White artists are still a minority in Hip Hop despite its increasing commercial dominance. Although Eminem, Paul Wall, and Iggy Azalea have broken rap sales records, their combined sales taken together are no match for the magnitude of Black artists' sales. The Hip Hop industry has been, and still remains, largely dominated by Black performers and White artists make up only a minority of rappers in the line of business today.

Central to this research is the fact that in Eminem, Paul Wall and Iggy Azalea, the use of African American English as an identity resource is like stepping into an alien ethnic territory

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[406] He wrote the book *Bring the Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (1991).

('Blackness') and stepping out of one's own national boundaries to merge into a global "Hip Hop nation not necessarily imagined in primarily racial or ethnic terms" (Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook 11).

White rappers Eminem, Paul Wall and Iggy Azalea are ultimately demonstrating that the culture they belong to is neither Black nor White, but rather Hip Hop. Their linguistic practices are part and parcel of their attempts to rearticulate and reimagine race.

Grounding the concluding remarks on this observation, Hip Hop may be seen not only as music but also as a racially-cognizant culture which provides paths for White rappers to channel their voice using AAE to defy and redefine racial boundaries.

Danny Hoch - a Jewish American actor and performance artist whose 1998 one-man show "Jails, Hospitals, and Hip Hop" involves him speaking as a White man who defines himself racially through Hip Hop - says that for his generation the predominant culture was Hip Hop no matter where the grandparents came from: "It was a common language that people could relate to (…) a way of viewing the world" (Dreisinger 119). During the show, he explores the multi-cultural and multi-lingual New York he grew up in, focusing on the power of Hip Hop and naive or street-wise White youngsters dreaming they are Black.

We have underlined how White and Black rappers see Hip Hop music as a kind of race and as the cultural glue that holds them together, defining them as people and musicians.

In view of these considerations, we claim that Hip Hop proves to be a ground for interracial communication, as well as one of the few, perhaps the only, musical genre in America that "consistently talks openly, boldly and honestly about race" (Alim and Smitherman 2012, 159).

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## Artists

Andre 3000

AZ

Beastie Boys

Big Pokey

Bill Cosby

Chamillionaire

Chate Haze

Chet Haze

Chief Rocker Busy Bee

Chris Rock

Dave Chappelle

Dead Prez

Dr. Dre

Elvis Presley

Eminem

Fab Five Freddy

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five

Grand Wizard Theodore and the Fantastic Five M.C.s.

GZA

Ice Cube

Ice-T

Iggy Azalea

Ill Bill

James Brown

Jay-Z

Kanye West

MF Doom

Michael Jackson

Nas

Notorious B.I.G.

N.W.A

Paul Wall

Public Enemy

Rakim

Richard Pryor

Run DMC

Scarface

Screwed Up Click (S.U.C)

Snoop Dogg

The Last Poets

The Rolling Stones

The Sugarhill Gang

Tupac Shakur (2 Pac)

Tyler, the Creator