Keeping It Real? "Post-Blackness" and Hip Hop in the Nineties

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Many scholars in recent years have written about the concept of "post-blackness."[1] The term first mentioned by art-historian Robert Farris Thompson in 1991[2] was later popularized by Thelma Golden who defined it as "as a description of artists who were adamant about not being labelled as 'black' artists, though their work was steeped, in fact deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness."[3] Golden's idea of "post-blackness" started to develop already with the transformational generation born after the civil rights movement. Race was experienced differently by black artists from this time,[4] as traditional notions of race and "black power" became too narrow and needed to be refined. According to Golden, the idea of "post-blackness" was fully embedded into the world of art in the nineties.[5] Scholars in recent years, such as Touré and Michael Eric Dyson further explain this notion by stating that black people are "rooted in, but not restricted by blackness"[6] and there should not be any racial policing or charges of racial disloyalty.[7] This means that there should not be accusations of "insufficient blackness" towards the work of black artists.

"Post-black" theory poses an interesting challenge to one of America's largest art movements in the nineties, namely hip hop, because hip hop in this time has been said to be

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[1] Michael Eric Dyson, foreword to *Who's Afraid of Post-blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011); Jr Baker, A Houston, and Merinda K. Simmons, *The Trouble with Post-Blackness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Paul C. Taylor, "Post-black, old black," *African American Review* 41, no.4 (2007): 625-640.
[2] Robert Farris Thompson, "Afro-Modernism," *Artforum* 30 (1991): 91-94.
[3] Thelma Golden, *Freestyle*, exhibition catalogue. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 14.
[4] Paul C. Taylor, "Post-black, old black," 626.
[5] Taylor, 627
[6] Dyson, foreword to *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?,* xviii.

[7] Randall Kennedy, "The Fallacy of Touré's Post-Blackness Theory," *the Root,* August 11, 2011, https://www.theroot.com/the-fallacy-of-toures-post-blackness-theory-1790865279.

rooted in an idea of black authenticity, also known as a "keeping it real" mentality that is specifically linked to the definition of blackness.[8] Although many studies such as "´Keepin' It Real´: White Hip-Hoppers Discourses of Language, Race and Authenticity" by Cecilia Cutler and Anthony Kwame Harrison's "Racial Authenticity in Rap Music and Hip Hop" have focused on hip hop and authenticity[9] and various studies have examined the relationship between hip hop and black identity in general,[10] not many scholars have focused upon the relationship between the "post-blackness" theory and hip hop. Only one study—an MA thesis—really focuses on these two concepts together. April Sunami explores the relationship between the transformation of blackness in hip hop and visual culture and links this to the post-black theory,[11] but this work focuses only on advertisements, graphic art, music videos and album covers and does not capture the actual words of black artists. This thesis aims to fill that gap and explore the role of "post-blackness" in the development of hip hop in the nineties, mainly through newspaper articles and existing interviews with hip hop artists. This thesis contends that although black artists and the media partially show a "post-black" perception of hip hop in the nineties, this perception is also problematized because hip hop in the nineties was still rooted deeply in the notion of "black authenticity."

Since this thesis will largely be based upon two theoretical concepts that were only shortly mentioned in the text above, it is important to first explain more elaborately the

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[8] Kembrew Mcleod, "Authenticity Within Hip-hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (1999): 136; Anthony Kwame Harrison, "Racial Authenticity in Rap Music and Hip Hop," *Sociology Compass* 2, no.6 (2008): 1785.

[9] Cecilia Cutler, "´Keepin'It Real´: White Hip-Hoppers' Discourses of Language, Race, and Authenticity," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (2003): 211-233; Harrison, "Racial Authenticity in Rap Music and Hip Hop," 1783-1800.

[10] Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle, *The Vinyl Ain't Final : Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[11] April J Sunami, "Transforming "Blackness": "Post-Black" and Contemporary Hip-Hop in Visual Culture" (master's thesis, Ohio University, 2008).

notions of "post-blackness" and "racial authenticity" and the scholarly debate that has been going on around them to finally argue why this study is needed and what it contributes to studies on race and hip hop in the nineties.

"Post-blackness"

As mentioned in the introduction, the term "post-blackness" was first used by historian Robert Farris Thompson. In "Through the Conceptual Lens: The Rise, the Fall, and Resurrection of Blackness", it is explained how Thompson argued that the development of modernism in Western countries was intertwined with inspiration from diasporic and African art. He contends that "black and Modernist cultures were inseparable long ago. Why use the word, 'post-modern' when it may also mean 'post-black'?"[12] Although this is not the same explanation of the notion Thelma Golden uses, Thompson in this way made it possible to open a space for thought about diversity and multiculturalism in modern art.

Thelma Golden and Glenn Lidon then popularized the term and it is their understanding of the notion that is used and criticized by many academics.[13] One of these academics is Margo Natalie Crawford, who in *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty First Century Aesthetics* makes a comparison between black artists today and visual artists that were part of the Black Arts Movement in the sixties and seventies. Crawford uses Golden and Lidon´s understanding of "post-blackness" and links this to the Black Arts Movement.[14] For Golden and Lidon, "post-black" referred to post-black art and it

[12] Valerie Cassel Oliver, "Through the Conceptual Lens: The Rise, The Fall, and Resurrection of Blackness," in *Double consciousness: Black conceptual art since 1970* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2005), 77.
[13] Huey Copeland, "Post/Black/Atlantic: A Conversation with Thelma Golden and Glenn Ligon," in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, eds. Peter Gorschluter and Tanya Barson (Liverpool: Tate, 2010), 81.
[14] Margo Natalie Crawford, *Black Post-blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-first- century Aesthetics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 11.

entailed that from the nineties there was a new generation of artists that looked upon history differently and had a different relationship with it.[15]

Since the Obama administration, what it means to be black has again been put in different perspectives. One of the most prominent books that recently came out about the term "post-blackness" was Touré's *"Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?": What It Means to Be Black Now.* In this book, which was first published in 2011, Touré explains how in this time the narrow definition of black identity does no longer apply. "Post-blackness", however, does not mean the same as post-racial. Black people are still rooted in blackness, but they are not restricted by it.[16] Although Touré's definition of Post-Blackness has been added to the scholarly debate fairly recently, and does not explicitly refer to the nineties, it is merely an expansion and clearer definition of Farrison and Thompson's idea of "Post-Blackness" and will thus be used for this thesis. Touré is critical of both white people and black people having certain expectations of how blacks should behave, and he especially does not approve of the judgmental behavior of blacks who claim there is a "right way to be black". Touré argues that "Post-Blackness" "has little patience for racial patriotism, racial fundamentalism and racial policing."[17]

One of the main critiques of Touré's book is Randall Kennedy's "The fallacy of Touré's Post-Blackness Theory" for magazine *The Root*. He argued that there are several things wrong with Touré's way of thinking. First of all, if there are no boundaries and no restrictions concerning blackness, whites could also claim to be black. In addition to this, whereas Touré claims no one can be "expelled" from being black, because there is no right way to be black, Kennedy contends that in some cases, for example when a person is clearly

[15] Copeland, "Post/Black/Atlantic: A Conversation with Thelma Golden and Glenn Ligon," 79.
[16] Touré, *Who's Afraid of Post-blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), xiv.
[17] Dyson, xv.

antagonistic towards being black, one should be expelled from being part of the black American community.

Moreover, whereas Touré clearly advocated against the "keeping it real" mentality and the notion of racial authenticity, Kennedy argues that there is a difference between "specious and defensible notions of racial authenticity." Kennedy agrees with the fact that claims of racial authenticity stating that blacks should for example not "ski or study hard" are specious notions of racial authenticity. They reinforce stereotypes and should therefore be defied. However, in some cases black activists, politicians and artists claim they will "keep it real" even though people look at them as being "too black," which is the rhetoric of racial authenticity Kennedy sees as defensible and agreeable.[18] Lastly, Kennedy critiques Touré because Touré himself is in a way advocating black political correctness by critiquing the way this has been done so far and offering himself as a "self-appointed monitor of racial value"[19] Kennedy's reaction to this definition is valuable because it explains the critical side to this notion that might be the opinion of other black people as well.

"Post-blackness" then, is a complex concept. As mentioned before it does not mean that black identity is no longer of importance for black artists, or that black artists deny being black. It merely means that they do not accept being restricted by their black identity and ideas of black authenticity. Although notion of racial authenticity has been mentioned a couple of times, it should be defined and contextualized more clearly to be able to use it in the rest of the study.

Racial Authenticity in Hip Hop

[18] Kennedy, "The Fallacy of Touré's Post-Blackness Theory."
[19] Kennedy.

Kembrew Mcleod contends that although the fashion, linguistic styles and even musical styles of hip hop artists and consumers differ, authenticity in the nineties is a concept they all commonly invoke.[20] Although this "keeping it real mentality" is known and used by most hip hop artists, its meaning can be fluid and unclear. Mcleod argues that "authenticity is invoked around a range of topics that include hip-hop music, racial identification, the music industry, social location, individualism, and gender and sexual roles. Profanity and slang are often used in discourse to emphasize the claims about authenticity that the speaker or writer is trying to support."[21] Mcleod researches this slang and devotes his study to the various meanings of the phrase to "keep it real". Although various dimensions to what this phrase can mean come in to play, only the racial dimension will be discussed here.

To explain the notion of racial authenticity in hip hop and rap music specifically one can use Cecilia Cutler's "'Keeping it real': White Hip Hoppers Discourses of Language, Race and Authenticity." Quoting Richford and Richford, she also argues that the notion of racial authenticity can be explained by the expression "keepin´ it real," which is "practically a mantra in hip-hop, exhorting individuals to be true to their roots and not to 'front' or pretend to be something they are not."[22] Because hip hop has its origins mostly in the urban African American communities, this keeping it real mentality also entails that black identity and the black urban street experience are privileged and preferred. Quoting Boyd, Cutler explains that "hip-hop and basketball are spaces where Blackness has been normalized, and Whiteness treated as the Other."[23]

[20] Mcleod, "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultured Threatened with Assimilation," 135.
[21] Mcleod, 138.
[22] John Rickford and Russell Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), 23, quoted in Cutler, "Keeping it Real," 212.
[23] Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C. (Head Niggas in Charge): The Death of Civil Rights and The Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press), 23, quoted in Cutler, 212.

In "Racial Authenticity in Rap Music and Hip Hop," Anthony Kwame Harrison also holds this view, contending that "the base assumptions surrounding hip hop and racial authenticity have always been that black identity is, by default, legitimate, while white identity is either suspect or invalid."[24] He argues that the notion of racial authenticity in hip hop has been widely researched in the sociological field since the 1990s, when hip hop established itself as an academic field. One interesting point he sets out is that the larger audience did not pay much attention to hip hop until hip hop had a broad white audience. [25] These characteristics of racial authenticity as explained by the aforementioned scholars will be kept in mind throughout the rest of the thesis when linking the primary sources to the theory.

Defining Hip Hop

Before linking the 'post-black' theory to hip hop artists from the nineties, one more concept needs to be defined for this study. Although many studies give a definition of hip hop[26], they define it differently and the question on what hip hop means is widely debated. This thesis will use a short and clear definition of hip hop that is given in *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*:

> Hip-hop refers to both the culture and the musical genre associated with that culture. It is important to make this distinction because hip-hop culture encompasses much more than rap music. The elements that comprise hip-hop culture are graffiti art, break dancing, DJ-ing, and MC-ing, better known as rapping.[27]

[24] Harrison, 1783.
[25] Harrison, 1783.
[26] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, 2; Murray Forman and Marc Anthony, *That's the Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[27] Carlos E. Cortés, *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 1073.

Because this thesis will focus mostly on rap artists, a specific definition of rap music also has to be spelled out. One of the major books about hip hop that came out in the 1990s was *Black Noise* by Tricia Rose. She defines rap music as follows:

> Rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America. Rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music. It began in the mid-1970s in the South Bronx in New York City as a part of hip hop, an African-American and Afro-Caribbean youth culture composed of graffiti, breakdancing and rap music.[28]

What is interesting about this definition is that Rose emphasizes the fact that hip hop and rap music is rooted in African-American culture and already coins it as a "black cultural expression". Although studies about hip hop explain that the culture is influenced by other ethnic cultures, they all agree that it is mostly associated with African American youth.[29]

However, as mentioned before, although these works focus on hip hop and black identity, they do not focus on the change of black identity in the nineties in relation to the change of hip hop. By investigating the relationship between the "post-blackness" theory and hip hop, this thesis will be significant for the following reasons: it will contribute to the knowledge of race and pop culture in the nineties by exploring the relation between hip hop and black identity of that time through the concept of "post-blackness." Hip hop is known to have had a strong influence on the identity and sense of self of black youths.[30] This thesis is in line with that idea, but will offer a different perspective and will help describe how influential the framework of a newfound black identity is for hip hop in the nineties. Moreover, if this study shows a strong relationship between the "post-blackness" theory and hip hop, this study will help future scholars who want to focus on these two phenomena.

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[28] Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.
[29] Rose, *Black Noise*; Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of The Hip-hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007); David Toop, *the Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
[30] John Helmer, David Diamond, and Ron Stolberg. *Hip Hop's Impact on the Development of the Self and Identity*, 2015, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

To place this study within a broader cultural and political context in the nineties, it is important to not just look at hip hop artists in isolation but also focus on how they were portrayed in the media. Therefore, the first chapter will focus on how media articles portrayed hip hop (artists) in the nineties answer whether hip hop is labeled as a "black phenomenon" by them and whether they talk about changes considering hip hop culture and definitions of black authenticity in the nineties. For this chapter, fifteen articles about hip hop from the nineties were used from *The New York Times, The Guardian* and *The Washington Post.*

These newspapers were chosen for a few reasons. Firstly, they are all seen as politically liberal. If there are differences between the newspapers in how matters of race are discussed this most likely has to do with differences in society and not with the political views of the authors/newspapers. Liberal discourse also has a stronger emphasis on the need for social equality.[31] This makes it easier to find issues of race in these newspapers. Moreover, the *New York Times and The Washington post* were in the top ten of largest U.S. newspapers in the 1990s.[32] In addition to this, the *New York Times and The Washington Post* are the two largest newspapers in the US today ranked by circulation.[33] This is important because "access to large news media is crucial for those who want to try to influence public opinion and public policy."[34] Moreover, large news media are "much more open to historical discussions about race and urban policy."[35] Three out of fifteen articles are from *The Guardian,* which is a British newspaper but also had a large American audience in the 1990s[36]and was in the top 10

[31] Horváth, Jurai, "Critical discourse analysis of Obama's political discourse," in *Language, literature and culture in a changing transatlantic world, International conference proceedings*, eds. Milan Ferenčík and Juraj Horváth (Presov: University of Presov, 2009), 45-56.
[32] Nat Ives, "Where 1990's Top Papers Are Now," Adage, March 9, 2009, accessed February 15, 2019, https://adage.com/article/media/1990-s-top-papers/135094/.
[33] "Top 15 U.S. Newspapers by Circulation," AgilityPR, accessed February 15, 2019, https://www.agilitypr.com/resources/top-media-outlets/top-15-daily-american-newspapers/.
[34] Ronald N. Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society from Watts to Rodney King* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.
[35] Jacobs, *Race, Media and the Crisis of Civil Society*, 10.
[36] Leon Neyfakh, "Guardian Reclaims America," *the Observer*, September 5, 2009.

of largest UK newspapers in the 1990s and top fifteen of largest newspapers in the UK today ranked by circulation.[37]

The newspaper articles were retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, an academic database on which the articles can be searched by newspaper, topic and year.. These articles were selected on the topic of "hip hop" and "race" in the years 1990 till 1999. Unfortunately, it was not possible to use an equal amount of articles per newspaper since not all articles found turned out to be useful, but since this thesis does not focus on a comparison between the newspapers but merely tries to give an overview of how newspapers and the media in general present hip hop in the nineties this was not an important issue. Throughout the thesis, the aforementioned primary sources will be constantly linked to a theoretical frame of "post-blackness" and "racial authenticity."

In chapter two interviews are examined to show black hip hop artists' own perception of racial authenticity. The meaning and characteristics of racial authenticity according to these artists as well as the potential change in perceptions of racial authenticity of hip hop during the nineties is examined. It is contented that hip hop artists from the nineties value racial authenticity, which to them means reflecting the black struggle in their music, but also show a perception that reflects the notion of "post-blackness." It was not possible to use interviews of all the rappers that were prominent in the nineties because there were too many. Moreover, instead of focusing on multiple artists and having a broad overview of rappers´ perception of racial authenticity and "post-blackness," this thesis aims to focus on fewer artists and discuss their views in more depth.

Therefore, the interviews of only four prominent hip hop artists in the 1990s were chosen for this thesis. LL Cool J, Ice-T, Queen Latifah and Public Enemy, who all rapped

[37] Audit Bureau of Circulations.

about political issues or racial tensions.[38] All these artists were extremely popular. Both signed at Def Jam Records, LL Cool J and Public Enemy were at the top of the music business in the early 1990s[39] and LL Cool J was one of the first artists to be accepted by the mainstream media.[40] In addition to this, these four artists represent various genres of hip hop. Whereas LL Cool J, Public Enemy and Queen Latifah represent the East-Coast, where hip hop started, which "involved emcee battling, graffiti, writing, breakdancing, fashion and DJ-ing,"[41] Ice-T represents the West Coast. He comes from a community in South Los Angeles that experienced a gang scene. "West Coast raps told about gang life, violence, drugs and abusive police tactics. Rapper Ice-T is credited with creating the gangsta style of rap"[42] and often raps about the struggle of "the black man." Public Enemy is the only rap group examined in this thesis. Moreover, the artists of Public Enemy were not content with the way mainstream journalists portrayed hip hop,[43] wanted to present themselves in their own way and openly urged pro-black politics.[44] Queen Latifah is known as a hip hop activist and more specifically, a hip hop activist focusing on race and gender.[45] In this thesis, then, the views of black artists that represent West-Coast hip hop, East-Coast hip hop, a black nationalist hip hop group and the female rapper are analyzed.

Interviews were selected from the Adler Hip Hop Archive, an academic archive in which sources can be selected by year and topic as well as electronic sources, MTV, hip hop documentary *Rockumentary* and 90shiphop.com. The interviews were collected from multiple websites and sources for two reasons. First of all, in this way the interviews were both from

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[38] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography," www.allmusic.com.
[39] Shaina C. Indovino, *Russel Simmons: From the Streets to the Music Business* (PA: Mason Crest, 2014), 150.
[40] Nicolae Sfetcu, *American Music* (Louisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2014), *56.*
[41] Richard T. Schaefer, "Rap: The Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society 1*, no.1 (2008): 1123.
[42] Schaefer, "Rap: The Movement," 1123.
[43] Russell Myrie, *Don't Rhyme for the Sake of Riddlin'* (New York: Grove Press, 2010), 92.
[44] Myrie, *Don't Rhyme for the Sake of Riddlin'*, 94.
[45] Amy Pettinella, *Queen Latifah: Award Winning Actress and Hip-Hop Activist* (London: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2014), *6.*

sources specifically from hip hop magazines (such as some from the Adler Hip Hop Archive) and from media outlets for a broader audience, such as the Oprah Winfrey show, which means the audience can also be taken into account in the analysis. Moreover, hip hop interviews from the nineties are difficult to find. To find enough interviews which are accessible, multiple sources had to be used.

The third chapter then, uses these same sources but instead focuses on racial disloyalty and contends that although black hip hop artists in the nineties partially want to hold a "post-black" view when it comes to racial disloyalty and denounce the idea of selling out because they verbally oppose the idea that there is a right way to be black, they problematize this "post-black" view by issues of racial disloyalty. By investigating the "post-black" view of the media and hip hop artists towards hip hop, this thesis provides insight into the complex relationship hip hop has with notions of racial authenticity and blackness in the nineties.

Chapter 1: Hip Hop by Black Boys, About Black Boys, for Black Boys? Hip Hop's "Post-Blackness" and the Media

Although a large part of this thesis focuses on the question whether hip hop artists from the nineties show a "post-black" perception that challenges hip hop's authenticity culture, it is important not to research this in isolation but also focus on how hip hop was portrayed in the media. Since the media have a large effect on the public opinion and vice versa

[1] and the media can "legitimize social groups" because media organizations are usually regarded as reliable sources on public affairs,[2] this first chapter places this study within a broader framework that shows what kind of perception the media and the mainstream audience have of hip hop and blackness. This chapter will focus on a possible "post-black" perception of the media that challenges hip hop's authenticity culture and examines whether the media label hip hop as a "black phenomenon" and whether the media talk about changes considering hip hop culture and black authenticity in the nineties. It is argued that although the media partly shows a "post-black" perception through encouraging hip-hop's newly found interracial nature, the media also problematizes this "post-black" perception by arguing that hip hop's new nineties nature reinforces negative stereotypes against African Americans. This chapter will draw from newspaper articles from the nineties in newspapers *The New York Times, The Guardian and The Washington Post* to show this.

[1] Kellstedt, Paul M. Kellstedt, *The Mass Media and the Dynamics of American Racial Attitudes* (Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165; Wai-man Lam, *Contemporary Hong Kong Politics : Governance in the Post-1997 Era* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 165.
[2] Lam, *Contemporary Hong Kong Politics*, 165.

No elaborate description of the history of hip hop will be given, since this has been done by many[3], but a brief overview of the historical context of hip hop in the nineties is necessary to understand the environment hip hop artists were in.

Since hip hop´s emergence in the mid-seventies in The Bronx in New York City it had really been established as an important musical genre and a way of cultural expression in the nineties. By 1993 the record sales reached 700 million dollars, showing how hip hop had transformed into a genre that was part of mainstream American culture.[4] This means that the nature of hip hop itself also changed. The genre developed significantly in the nineties and gave room to white artists as well.[5] Hip hop was everywhere, in soft-drink commercials, in pop music and on TV. MTV came up with a show about rap music, called *MTV Raps*.

Hip hop in the nineties (especially in its earlier years) has been coined as the "golden age." From 1986 till 1993 some of the most popular rappers, such as LL Cool J and N.W.A. recorded songs that became extremely popular and this was also the time hip hop trio Run-D.M.C. had their breakthrough. Rap in this period was characterized by dis tracks, skeletal beats and samples from souls and hard rock tracks.[6]

Although hip hop was popular in the nineties it was also a response to the political situation and the struggles African Americans faced. As Michael Eric Dyson argues in *Know What I Mean: Reflections on Hip Hop,* both Afrocentric and black nationalist rap were very important during the golden age of hip hop.[7] Hip hop gave room to black and brown artists who had been previously invisible. Dyson also refers to rap from this time as "conscious rap," "rap that is socially aware and consciously connected to historic patterns of political protest

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[3] Alan Light, *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Chang, *Can't stop won't stop*; Toop, *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop*.
[4] Mcleod, 134.
[5] Hanif Abdurraqib, "From Vanilla Ice to Macklemore: Understanding the White Rapper's Burden," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/oct/08/vanilla-ice-eminem-macklemore-understanding-white-rappers-burden.
[6] "Golden Age," All Music, February 19, 2019, https://www.allmusic.com/style/golden-age-ma0000012011.
[7] Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean: Reflections on Hip Hop* (New York: Civitas Books, 2007), *64.*

and aligned with progressive forces of social critique."[8] One of the hip hop genres that became dominant in these years was gangsta rap, first coming to prominence on the East Coast. This genre reflected the lifestyles African Americans had in inner cities. East Coast rappers rapped about poverty, drug dealing and drug use.[9] These controversial themes provoked criticism of hip hop as well. This style of hip hop will be discussed in more detail in the second and third chapter, when the interviews of gangsta rapper Ice-T are analyzed. In the beginning of the nineties hip hop received a lot of criticism from politicians and mainstream Americans. In 1992 Bill Clinton openly critiqued rap music, establishing rap as a source of political criticism. As mentioned in *ABC news* "in the 1990s... there was one cultural idea that seemed to have bi-partisan support: that rap music was a symptom of the destruction of American values."[10]

Hip hop in the nineties, then, was very controversial nature. Although it was changing from a culture that mainly belonged to one group, namely the African-American community, to a culture belonging to mainstream American culture, it also faced a lot of criticism and still aimed to reflect the daily struggles African Americans faced. This relationship hip hop had with race is also present in the media in the nineties, in which coverage about race and racial struggles revolved in part around hip hop.[11]

In "The Culture Industry, Hip Hop Music and the White Perspective: How One-Dimensional Representation of Hip Hop Music Has Influenced White Racial Attitudes," Walter Edward Hart, once again spells out how hip hop changed in the nineties. Hart does not only discuss the positive changes, for example the fact that hip hop became extremely popular, but also how the mass media was crucial in the negative representation of hip hop.

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[8] Dyson, *Know What I Mean,* 64.
[9] Greg Tate, "Gangsta Rap," *Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2019, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
[10] Dana Hughes, "Hip Hop in Politics: What a Difference a Generation Makes," *abcnews*, February 14, 2013, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/hip-hop-politics-difference-generation-makes/story?id=18495205.
[11] Kellsted, *The Mass Media and the Dynamics of American Racial Attitudes*, 32.

For example, in the late nineties particularly gangsta rap, but more broadly hip hop as a musical genre in general was criticized because of its negative themes such as violence, materialism, misogynism and hyper sexuality. Although a large part of hip hop is not focused on these negative themes, but on the contrary tries to make a positive change by focusing on a critique of politics and social injustice and other ways of urban storytelling, these dimensions of hip hop are highly underrepresented in mass media.[12]

In the following quote, Hart describes how the mass media is merely focused on giving an one-sided view of hip hop music to please their white audience:

> The culture industry's intentional one-dimensional representation of hip hop music, for the purpose of attracting White consumers, plays on historically negative assumptions of the black culture. This positioning of hip hop music created an economic environment which necessitated rappers adopt the commoditized negative images, which continued the cycle of one dimensionalization.[13]'

According to Hart, the white teenage audience wants to see black culture portrayed in a negative way. This also comes up in the newspaper articles examined, as will become clear later in this chapter. To come to that point, however, it is important to also spell out other findings in the articles. First of all, hip hop in general is coined as something that started as a black phenomenon. It is called "black entertainment,[14] a "primarily black musical genre,"[15] a genre that is made "by black boys," "about black boys" and "for black boys"[16] and a "black-inspired, urban youth esthetic."[17] However, as mentioned before, in the nineties, hip hop had changed from a phenomenon that was specifically associated only with black musicians and

[12] Walter Hard, *The Culture Industry, Hip Hop Music, and the White Perspective: How One Dimensional Representation of Hip Hop Music Has Influenced White Racial Attitudes*, 2009, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 5.
[13] Hard, *The Culture Industry,* 5.
[14] "Def Ambition," *The Guardian,* April 27, 1996.
[15] Calvin Sims, "Gangster Rappers: the Lives, the Lyrics," *The New York Times,* November 28, 1993.
[16] Scott Poulson-Bryant, "Hip hop: At the moment they're largely unseen, mute force," *The Guardian,* November 25, 1994.
[17] Michael Mariott, "Hip-Hop's Hostile Takeover: Hip-Hop's Takeover It's a faster trip now," *The New York Times,* September 20, 1992.

listeners into a genre that catered to a white audience.This means that the nature of the music had changed.

One point that is highlighted several times in the articles is the change of hip hop from something extraordinary into the mainstream.[18] Moreover, not only rap as a musical genre is becoming something that is acknowledged by everyone, black street culture in general is "at the heart of the mainstream."[19]

Changing from a "black phenomenon" into a phenomenon for mainstream America means that although "hip-hop got its start in black America,"[20] hip hop in the nineties has a very large white audience. As mentioned before, TV-programs like those of MTV have brought hip hop and rap to the white suburban audience[21] and more than seventy percent of hip hop albums were purchased by white people.[22] Around this time, hip hop was seen as something that could bring cultures together and had a very interracial nature because "a whole generation of kids-black, white, Latino, Asian- has grown up immersed in hip-hop."[23] Hip hop was brightly colored.[24] One of the newspaper articles went even further with this statement by using a quote from KRS-One, a rapper who was known for rapping about afflictions in society,[25] in which he states that Martin Luther King's dream is realized only in hip hop.[26] Some of the articles thus view hip hop's interracial nature in the nineties extremely positively. In "Racial Stereotypes Blur at a Ritz Hip-Hop Show" an article in *The New York Times,* Peter Watrous Allan Kozinn mentions how 3rd Bass, a white hip hop group, that

[18] Sims, "Gangster Rappers."; "Def Ambition."; Christopher John Farley, "Hip-hop Nation," *The Guardian* , March 19, 1999.
[19] Pascoe Sawyers, "Don't Mention the N-Word," *The Guardian,* March 20, 1998.
[20] Farley, "Hip-Hop Nation."
[21] Laura Blumenfeld, "Trends Blacks Like Who? Why White Teens Find Hip-Hop cool," *The Washington Post,* July 20, 1992.
[22] Farley.
[23] Farley.
[24] Marriott, "Hip-Hop's Hostile Takeover: Hip-Hop's Takeover It's a faster trip now."
[25] Heather Aldridge, and Diana B. Carlin (1993) The rap on violence: A rhetorical analysis of rapper KRS-One, Communication Studies 44, no.2 (1993): 110.
[26] Ann Power, Back to Hip hop basics," *The New York Times,* January 5, 1998.

headlined a hip hop show at the Ritz, "crashed stereotypes,"[27] particularly because hip hop (unlike other music genres that are associated with African Americans such as jazz) did not have a history of white involvement and there was no group like 3rd Bass before them. In "Hip-Hop Nation," another white hip hop group, the Beastie Boys, is discussed as well, arguing that it is surprising that a white group focuses on social activism.[28]

In "Wiggers or White Allies: White Hip-Hop Culture and Racial Sincerity," however, the opposite is argued. According to this study, white rap artists do not crash stereotypes or add to the controversial nature of hip hop by joining in on the activism, but merely strip hip hop of its powerful message:

> The journalist Armond White, for example, lambasts the Beastie Boys for evacuating hip-hop of its cultural specificity and political edge as protest music. He contends that "white appropriation attempts to erase the culture it plunders," a conclusion echoed by the vast majority of cultural critics writing about white identification with blackness.[29]

In this quote, the argument is made that white hip hop artists appropriate black culture and by doing so do not focus on it as protest music and thus erase black culture at the same time by not placing it in its context. This way of thinking is not only applicable to white hip hop artists, but also to white hip hop listeners. Although it is thus mentioned that many young white people have an appreciation for hip hop and sometimes also for African-American culture,[30] the relationship between the white audience and hip hop on the one hand and the black audience and artists and hip hop on the other seems to be a very different one. They both view and experience hip hop differently. Although no longer only people from the black

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[27] Peter Watrous Allan Kozinn, "Racial Stereotypes Blur at a Ritz Hip-Hop Show," *The New York Times*, March 7, 1990.
[28] Farley.
[29] Kimberly Chabot Davis, "Wiggers or White Allies?: White Hip-Hop Culture and Racial Sincerity," in *Beyond the White Negro*, ed Kimberley Chabot Davis (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 27.
[30] Laura Blumenfeld, "Trends Blacks Like Who? Why White Teens Find Hip-Hop cool."

community are involved in hip hop culture, some non-black people say that "they don't pay much attention to the lyrics, they just like the beats."[31]

Just liking the beats of hip hop at first does not seem to be too problematic. However, there clearly is a difference between people who understand why rappers have to "keep it real" and are struggling with being black in America as opposed to people who are just "liking the music." As is noted by "A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop Culture," authenticity in rap in the nineties had to do with way more than just the sound of the music. Rap artists were rapping about "street-level politics of struggle and survival."[32] Artists in this time showed how important it was for minorities to speak about their lives. They showed the need for change by exploring the difference between their viewpoints and those of the white majority.[33]

Some critics of hip hop's white audience go even further in explaining the relationship white people have with hip hop. In "Hip-Hop Nation" rapper Ice Cube is quoted when talking about this relationship as follows: "It's kinda like being at the zoo. You can look into that world, but you don't have to touch it. It's safe."[34] According to him, white people thus only want to look at hip hop to be entertained, just like being at the zoo. They do not really want to (or cannot) understand what the music and the culture is really about. One white hip hop music lover quoted in an article in *The Washington Post* agrees, stating that black culture is more interesting than white culture but that he would not want to be black: "I'm happy being white emulating black," he says. "You can just enjoy it and be part of it without dealing with the downside. You can be black without having the racism they deal with."[35] "Racial

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[31] Farley.
[32] Toby S. Jenkins, "A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop Culture," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 8 (2011): 1231.
[33] Jenkins, "A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop Culture," 1231.
[34] Farley.
[35] Blumenfeld.

Formation Theory and Systemic Racism" by Ginger Jacobson clarifies this view of white Americans not being able to truly understand black culture and not being able to connect with it by contending that

> White Americans often have little to no interpersonal contact with people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2010a), yet all Americans are exposed to the "white racial frame." This is a racial framing of society that combines racial stereotypes, racial narratives and interpretations, racial images, language accents, racialized emotions, and inclinations to discriminatory action to maintain a positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a negative orientation to oppressed and exploited nonwhites (Feagin 2010b:10).[36]

This means that even though a lot of white Americans have no direct contact with black people they do have a way of profiling them, often stereotypically. Moreover, according to Jacobsen, the mass media normalizes and proliferates this white racial frame because through this white people look in on a culture they have no interaction with.[37] The criticism hip hop artists face comes partially from hip hop's representation of black people and the implications it may have for others who try to emulate how black people in the media are portrayed in the mass media.[38] According to "A Beautiful Mind," racism is bound to happen in an environment that believes stereotypes and "the mass culture is not buying the persona of the intelligent, socially aware, and politically critical Black Man." [39]

What is very interesting about the newspaper articles from *The New York Times, The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* is that they do focus on stereotypes, but merely as a subject of their articles. Even though existing literature has shown that the way that African Americans in America are portrayed is usually through negative stereotypes and thus generally reinforces the stereotypes the dominant culture already has of black culture,[40] the

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[36] Ginger Jacobsen, "Racial Formation Theory and Systemic Racism in Hip-Hop Fans' Perceptions," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. 3 (2015):833.
[37] Ginger Jacobsen, "Racial Formation Theory and Systemic Racism in Hip-Hop Fans," 833.
[38] Jacobsen, "Racial Formation Theory and Systemic Racism," 834.
[39] Jenkins, "A Beautiful Mind," 1232.
[40] Kellstedt, 18.

articles themselves generally do not show stereotypical views towards rappers and hip-hop culture. Although some newspaper articles, such as "Hip-Hop Nation" argue that the street culture (such as fashion items and street terms such as "hater" and "player") is finally "seen" by the mainstream because of hip hop and its popularity[41] and hip-hop has forced advertisers, film-makers and writers to adopt "street" signifiers, other articles indicate that the way advertisers, music videos and TV present rappers and hip hop culture often stereotypes African Americans.[42]

"Can Rap Move Beyond Gangstas," an article in *The New York Times* written by Jon Pareles, emphasizes that hip hop's audience is not focused on important messages the music genre conveys such as police brutality, but much more focused on "the music's macho swagger and blunt anger."[43] According to this article, which is particularly about gangsta rap, the genre claims to be the only genre focused on the social reality of the inner city, while it actually portrays stereotypes and justifies gun use and violence:

> As gangsta rap has become a major media image for young black men, its destractors have begun insisting it is not realistic reportage but degrading stereotyping, even if its authors are black themselves. "You tried keeping it real, but you should try keeping it right," De La Soul chides: another rap warns would-be gangsters, "Money don't make shots repel."[44]

In the passage above, it is argued that black artists themselves reinforce stereotypes in gangsta rap. And although media outlets such as MTV have indeed made it possible for the hip hop culture to become visible, according to the articles used for this chapter, black culture is often represented in a negative, stereotypical way, as is pointed out in "Don't Mention the N-

[41] Farley.
[42] Jon Pareles, "Can Rap Move Beyond Gangstas," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1996; Sawyers, "Don't Mention the N-Word."; Blumenfeld.
[43] Jon Pareles, "Can Rap Move Beyond Gangstas,"
[44] Pareles.

Word," an article in *The Guardian* that argues the "n-word" is often used by African Americans as a term of endearment but is nonetheless degrading:

> The entertainment corporations have made millions out of exploiting black culture. The "nigger" phenomenon has provided them with yet another opportunity to market a black cultural product. The approach seems to be "Yes we'll promote black artists, but only if they're prepared to disrespect their race and the legacy of the black struggle for freedom."[45]

The newspaper articles in general do not all advertise this way of thinking. But a point that comes up in quite a few of the articles is that hip hop artists are at least changing their music for a white audience. Russel Simmons, owner of hip hop label Def Jam Records, claims that his label is selling "black entertainment to people who are into black culture. Some of them just happen to be white."[46] By saying this, he seems to suggest that the white audience is merely adapting to the black hip hop artists. But later in the same article, he argues that

> Although his (Russel Simmons') black militant act Public Enemy hit it big with album titles like Fear Of A Black Planet, the foundation of Def Jam's success has been the smoother, more commercial hip-hop (LL Cool J, Warren G). Even Public Enemy and brat punks like the Beastie Boys built their careers by appealing to white college audiences than the street kids of Queens.[47]

If rappers make "more commercial hip-hop" to increase the number of white listeners, this means that they change the nature of hip hop, which is specifically about the meaning of "being black," to a more accessible kind of hip hop with less political meaning.

Furthermore, white listeners also change themselves to fit into the hip hop culture. Because hip hop started off with African Americans and still has a large focus on "blackness," white listeners also want to join in into the black nature of hip hop and start "acting black.". "Keepin' It Real Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity" helps clarify these actions and argues that someone's authenticity is not only based on markers such as skin

[45] Sawyers.
[46] "Def Ambition."
[47] "Def Ambition."

color, but more so on other markers such as the performance of a certain identity, in this case a black identity. This builds communities of groups with their own "socially imposed boundaries to determine who belongs in a particular setting."[48]

What is problematic about this fact is that even though the white audience cannot really understand the black struggle, they feel the need to "act black" and call themselves "wiggers": "white teenagers who emulate ghetto behavior have begun referring to themselves as 'wiggers,'… The word wigger is derived from 'nigger,' which rap musicians have transformed from a term of derision to an all-purpose pronoun and term of endearment."[49] In "Racial Authenticity, "Acting Black," and Cultural Consumption," Natasha Warikoo defines the word "wigger" as follows: "a white person trying to act black."[50] And although some white listeners contend that "whites implicitly should not cross, in order to maintain racial authenticity and avoid encroaching on black peers' territory,"[51] black culture is definitely imitated by hip hop's white audience.

Imitating "blackness" in hip hop, however, does not only mean that whites try to copy the hip hop style when it comes to clothes and the way of speaking. Some white people imitating black people "identify blackness with the power to generate fear."[52] They start acting like "gangsters" because they identify this with "blackness" and "hip hop authenticity." This idea is very dangerous for young black men. Although white suburban kids might be able to get away with "playing at gangsterism,"[53] black men who play the gangster role and have the idea this is the only way of being authentically black might get into trouble with the

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[48] Andreana Clay, "Keepin' It Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity," *American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 10 (2003): 1350.
[49] Brent Staples, "Dying to be Black: The Suburban Romance with Urban Violence," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1996.
[50] Natasha K Warikoo, "Racial Authenticity, "Acting Black," and Cultural Consumption," in *Balancing Acts*: *Youth Culture in the Global City* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 46.
[51] Warikoo, "Racial Authenticity, "Acting Black," and Cultural Consumption."
[52] Staples, "Dying to be Black."
[53] Staples.

police, as has already happened in various occasions.[54] Tricia Rose writes about the relationship between hip hop and violence and argues that in the 1990s "the concern over hip hop and violence peaked,"[55] but that this concern is not always genuine, and merely "winds up stigmatizing some expressions (rap music) and the groups with which they are associated (black youth)."[56] If black men portray this violent behavior, they are stigmatized, whereas white suburban men might not be treated in the same way.

This way of presenting hip hop and the way hip hop artists are portrayed of course has to do with making money. As is mentioned in "Hip-hop Nation," hip-hop openly celebrates capitalism, whereas other art forms do not do so.[57] This is both the case for record labels and hip hop artists themselves, because once rappers become successful this takes them away from the streets.[58]Around 1990, hip hop had sold millions of albums[59] and it is no coincidence that violence is such a large part of the image of hip hop, for "the violence has been very good for sales."[60]

It is thus interesting to see that hip hop´s popularity and commercialization caused great changes in its meaning. "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space" clarifies this by arguing that the genre has expanded so much that it has made room for many innovations.[61] Not only thematically and technologically hip hop has grown into a new genre, it has also crossed national borders and adapted itself to the wishes of every community that is involved with the

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[54] Staples.
[55] Tricia Rose, "Hip Hop Causes Violence," in *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--And Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 35.
[56] Rose, "Hip Hop Causes Violence," 36.
[57] Farley.
[58] Jon Pareles, "Rapping as Good Business," *The New York Times,* October 27, 1997.
[59] Pareles, "Can Rap Move Beyond Gangstas."
[60] Staples.
[61] Rebollo-Gil Guillermo and Amanda Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space," *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 1 (2012): 120.

genre.[62] Unfortunately, negative stereotypes of African Americans are also part of the commercial portrayal of hip hop. Black males are often portrayed as violent and dangerous, whereas this was the opposite of the message that hip hop originally wished to convey.[63] "Music and Political Resistance: The Cultural Foundation of Black Politics" also posits this idea by arguing that at first rap gave a community that felt unrepresented and alienated a voice. It countered images given by the media and politicians that often represented urban youth in a distorted way.[64] This is not so much the case later on because the "ability to influence political attitudes"[65] in rap is "watered down compared to the rap music" in the beginning of the nineties because of the commercialization and commodification of hip hop.[66]

All the issues that came up in the newspaper articles can be summarized into a few major points. Hip hop's struggle with its own identity is so complex because its definition of blackness is challenged by various dimensions. The white audience wants to "act black," to imitate "blackness" to gain authenticity in the hip hop culture, whereas hip hop's "blackness" is limited and changed specifically by the demands of this white audience. Hart explains this complex relationship as follows:

> The culture industry's cycle of assumptions is the interaction between the director (culture industry), the author (hip hop artist), and the audience (White consumer). Together the three combine to create ideological outcomes that reflect and reinforce historically negative White racial attitudes... The culture industry would not yield as much influence over racial perceptions if the hip hop artists did not accept the demands of the culture industry and reflect negative images of Blackness through hip hop music. However, the artists and the culture industry would not continue to perpetuate negative images of Blackness through hip hop music if the White audience did not accept the representations as authentic Blackness.[67]

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[62] Rebollo-Gil Guillermo and Amanda Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music," 120.
[63] Guillermo and Moaras, 120.
[64] Lakeyta M. Bonnette, "Music and Political Resistance:The Cultural Foundation of Black Politics," in *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) , 48.
[65] Bonnette, "Music and Political Resistance: The Cultural Foundation of Black Politics," 49.
[66] Bonnette, 49.
[67] Hard, 10

This identity struggle that came along with a new, commercialized and broader audience, is also highlighted in "The Crystallization of Hip Hop Culture in Corporate and Mainstream America, 1995-1998," in which hip hop's controversial nature in the nineties is once more explained:

> Hip hop music and culture evolved and transformed from its Golden Age in the 1980s, spreading nationally, and then globally, as well as developing its identities and sounds regionally, as it expanded in power and influence. It underwent commercialization on its way toward the mainstream of American culture. Along the way it also struggled with its own identity.[68]

Since hip hop became more mainstream and gained a large white audience, the definition of "blackness" for hip hop has stayed important, but has also changed. Because the white audience relates "blackness" to violence and "gangsterism", black hip hop artists themselves portray these stereotypes because this portrayal generates sales.

To conclude this chapter, the newspaper articles in *The New York Times, The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* showed that although the media presents hip hop as something that used to be a black phenomenon, it has now moved beyond that and changed into a mainstream phenomenon. Not only does hip hop now have a large white audience, there are also various white rappers (and rap groups) who are perceived to be challenging the stereotypes in hip hop that "being real" also necessarily means being black. Even though there are many articles that view hip hop's newly interracial nature very positively, there are also articles that do not appreciate "wiggers," white people who act black because they cannot understand the struggle many black people faced, especially because "acting black" for white people often means acting like a gangster. They generally identify being black with violence, which is very stereotypical. The industry does not try to do anything about this image because

[68] Robert Acker, *The Crystallization of Hip Hop Culture in Corporate and Mainstream America, 1995–1998,* 2012, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 12.

it makes money, which may also be the reason why black artists sometimes do not go against these stereotypical views.

Even though some articles wanted to highlight a “post-black” perception that showed the alterations in hip hop’s authentic culture, this perception was also problematized by the fact that these alterations still reinforce stereotypes of African Americans. Although this chapter focused very much on white hip hop artists and listeners who “act black,” the meaning of “blackness” for African-American hip hop artists themselves is not yet clearly examined. The importance and nature of racial authenticity for hip hop will be examined more elaborately in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Being Racially Authentic and "Post-Black" in Hip Hop

As was mentioned in the introduction, authenticity in hip hop culture is usually linked to "blackness". "Keeping it real" means that people have to stay connected to their (black) roots. Black identity in this case is seen as legitimate, whereas white identity is not.

[1] This chapter will draw from interviews to show black hip hop artists´ perception of racial authenticity. The meaning and characteristics of racial authenticity according to these artists as well as the potential change of racial authenticity of hip hop during the nineties is examined. Interviews from the nineties with hip hop artists LL Cool J, Ice-T, the rap group Public Enemy (consisting of rappers Flava Flav and Chuck D) and Queen Latifah are used to argue that these hip hop artists from the nineties value racial authenticity, which to them means reflecting the black struggle in their music, but also to show an inclusive and interracial perception of hip hop that reflects the notion of "post-blackness".

These artists were chosen because they were prominent black hip hop artists in the nineties and have been known to rap about political issues or racial tensions[2] and will therefore be more likely to also show their views on these matters in interviews. In researching racial group identity, interviews are an indispensable and reliable source "on (underrepresented) minority populations."[3] Moreover, interviews give interviewees the opportunity to give their own view of how they see themselves and their group members.[4]

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[1] Mcleod; Cutler; Harrison.
[2] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography," www.allmusic.com.
[3] Layna Mosley, " Using Interviews to Understand Racial Group Identity and Political Behavior," In *Interview Research in Political Science*, 225. (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 226.
[4] Mosley, "Using Interviews to Understand Racial Group Identity And Political Behavior," 227.

In *White Noise: Negotiating Boundaries and Constructing Whiteness in Hip Hop America,* Carolyn Corrado posits that (in sociology) generally race is theorized through a black/white lense. In this way of theorizing, blackness and whiteness are oppositional and whiteness is the placeholder whereas blackness is "the other."[5] As mentioned before, hip hop is one of the exceptions to this view. Among others, Tricia Rose notes that hip hop is an authentically black phenomenon. Whites historically are interested and fascinated by African-American culture and hip hop is no exception to this.[6] According to *White Noise,* however, there are generally two views to the idea that hip hop is authentically black. There are those that argue that hip hop indeed is "rooted in the African American experience and as such, blacks are the legitimate, authentic purveyors of that culture."[7] White people who actively participate in the hip hop culture in this case are seen as imitating black people.

In *Hip Hop Wars*, Tricia Rose's later book on hip hop music and culture, it is even argued that "white consumption of hip-hop – in this moment at least – has a strong likelihood of reproducing the long and ugly history of racial tourism that requires black people to perform whites' desires in order to become successful in a predominately white-pleasure-driven marketplace."[8] In this case, white consumption of hip hop would thus not be desired at all because it would recreate racial history in America. On the other hand, there are those who find the former view too short-sided and argue that stating that hip hop is authentically black ignore the fact that hip hop has multicultural origins and that it is not only one's skin color that determines authenticity, but more so someone's attitude.[9]

In the next section of this chapter, the views of black hip hop artists on these issues will be analyzed. First, a short background of each artist/group is given to show why they are

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[5] Carolyn Corrado, *White Noise: Negotiating Boundaries and Constructing Whiteness in Hip-hop America* (Albany, NY: University at Albany, 2013) 7.
[6] Rose, Black Noise, 5.
[7] Corrado, White Noise, 69.
[8] Rose, The Hip hop wars, 232.
[9] Corrado, 62.

significant for this "post-black" and authenticity clash. Then, the interviews chosen for each artist are analyzed to show their views on racial authenticity and link this to the post-black theory that was given in the introduction of this thesis to come to a conclusion of what perceptions these artists have towards "authenticity" and "blackness."

LL Cool J was born as James Todd Smith in 1969 in Queens, New York and is part of the East Coast rap community. He became one of the first rap artists to be accepted into the mainstream and has made a lot of rap songs that embrace an anti-drugs and stay-in-school message.[10] In addition to this, his music was very politically aware.[11] His work has resulted in many "firsts". He was the first rap artist to perform in Africa,[12] the first rap artist who released an album on Def Jam Records, a successful record label that helped established hip hop in the eighties and nineties[13] and the first rap artist performing acoustic on *MTV Unplugged,* an MTV television series where artists were only supported by acoustic instruments.[14] However, he was also criticized by colleagues and listeners for being inauthentic and becoming too mainstream.[15]

When asked about the acceptance of rap into the mainstream in an interview in England with *The Word,* a British television show in the 1990s,[16] he agrees that he guesses rap is accepted.[17] He speaks more of the evolvement of hip hop in a nineties MTV interview with him and colleagues Redman, Methodman and DMX:

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[10] LL Cool J, "Cool as F**K," Interview by Frank Broughton, *Hip Hop Connection,* 1993; "LL Cool J Puts Word Out: Go to School, it's Too Cool," deseretnews, November 14, 1997, https://www.deseretnews.com/article/594763/LL-Cool-J-puts-word-out-Go-to-school-its-too-cool.html.
[11] LL Cool J, "Cool as F**K," Interview by Frank Broughton, *Hip Hop Connection,* 1993.
[12] LL Cool J, "Cool as F**K."
[13] Edwin Turner, "I Review Def Jam 25, the Overstuffed Illustrated Oral History of a Record Label that Helped Change American Culture," Biblioklept. December 17, 2011, https://biblioklept.org/2011/12/17/i-review-def-jam-25-the-overstuffed-illustrated-oral-history-of-a-record-label-that-helped-change-american-culture/.
[14] LL Cool J, "Feature Story About LL Cool J," Interview, *Adler Hip Hop Archive,* 1993.
[15] Steve Huey, "All Music Review," https://www.allmusic.com/album/walking-with-a-panther-mw0000653729.
[16] Charlie Parson, "How The World Changes Television For Ever," *The Guardian,* August 10, 2010.
[17] LL Cool J, Interview by Terry Christian, *The Word,* 1990.

> I think that hip hop has only grown. The reality is, when something evolves, it changes shape you know, and I think that people have expanded on what already existed and taking it to the next level and I think that that's important. I don't think that any of the true art of hip hop has been lost, 'cause like I always say, art imitates a life and um, rap music imitates life 'cause it's art.[18]

LL Cool J himself has no issues with the fact that hip hop is becoming more mainstream, nor does he argue that his music is only directed at a black audience. It is again in *The Word* interview that he states that "Rap is for everybody, white or black don't matter."[19] This statement clearly shows he does not feel that he should make music that only appeals to black people. On the contrary, in *Rockumentary*, a documentary about LL Cool J and his work, which was released in 1993, he describes that he does not really understand that he is looked upon negatively for having too many white followers.[20]

LL Cool J thus contends that hip hop is for both white and black people, which is also evident in an interview with *XXL* from 1999 in which he talks about his work as an actor and rapper and gets into how other black people make more claims for racial authenticity than he does: "Brothers get into how they don't like to see Blacks depicted this way or that way…. The industry that we work in is so dog-eat-out and cutthroat, it was so fly for me to see different races and nationalities work together."[21] At the same time he notes that money and fame go to everybody's head once they are famous, it is not a cultural issue.[22] By saying this, he seems to want to avoid stereotyping black hip hop artists by saying this issue is not cultural but applies to all artists. This is important because it shows that he is aware of how he might be portrayed as a black man. In the MTV interview he does emphasize racial authenticity. He explains that every hip hop artist rhymes about different topics and 'feels' different things. According to LL Cool J that does not mean that the art changes: "it's still young, urban men.

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[18] LL Cool J, Interview by Abbie Kearse, *MTV*, 1997.
[19] LL Cool J, Interview by Terry Christian.
[20] LL Cool J, Interview. *Rockumentary*, 1993.
[21] LL Cool J, "Interview with LL Cool J," Interview by Double Dragon, *XXL*, 1999.
[22] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Still Knocking Us Out," Interview, *NPR*, September 25, 1997.

African-American men, expressing what they feel, growing up in a city environment."[23] Here, he puts value on the fact that hip hop music is generally *made* by African-American men.

Moreover, LL Cool J often links expressing his feelings through music with being real and not forgetting where he came from.[24] In an interview with LL Cool J in 1993 for *Hype* magazine (a hip hop magazine), titled "Crossing LL's Roads," the rapper mentions how people may see the way he is rapping on his new album as something out of the ordinary because they have previously been listening to "diluted music": "if you been getting something diluted for a long time, then when you get something pure, your system acts funny to it."[25] He thus emphasizes the fact that he is an artist who produces "real" or "pure" music. In "Hip-Hop Authenticity in Black and White" by Michael Jeffries, the sentiment that for something to be authentic it has to be related to real life is also expressed.[26] In this study it is argued that authenticity in art is based on someone's life experiences. This does not only apply to the art the artist is produces, namely the narrative authenticity of the rap music, but also to the artist himself, since "the representation and the creator of the representation are simultaneously judged when amateur and professional aestheticians evaluate the quality of a work."[27] Jeffries contends that for an artist to be authentic, the behavior of the artists is just as important as the music itself.

That LL Cool J values this relationship between authenticity, art and artist as well, is evident from his emphasis on being real. This sentiment is expressed in a 1996 interview about LL Cool J's past, present and future as well, when he explains his way of making music

[23] LL Cool J, Interview by Abbie Kearse.
[24] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Still Knocking Us Out."
[25] LL Cool J, "Crossing LL's Roads," Interview by Victor Everett, *Hype Magazine*, 1993.
[26] Michael Jeffries, "Hip-Hop Authenticity in Black and White." In *Thug Life Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 119.
[27] Jeffries, "Hip-Hop Authenticity in Black and White," 119.

as doing what he feels "is real."[28] This idea of doing what he feels is real is in line with looking back on his past. It is in the same interview that he emphasizes that he does not "forget the struggle. I just keep striving"[29] He continues by mentioning his hometown and stating that "if you don't support your neighborhood, your neighborhood don't support you."[30] According to "Hip-Hop Authenticity," this is a common thought for hip hop artists. They generally see themselves as a representative of their community and want to give something real, "a documentary story of their world"[31] This is interesting, because "being real" is apparently partially being connected to one's old neighborhood, even after successful rappers may have long moved out. This implies that there is a clash between striving for what you want as a black hip hop artist and being seen as someone who is not authentic.

In general, LL Cool J values racial authenticity in hip hop when it comes to expressing his struggles as a black man. Moreover, he makes it clear that according to him hip hop is made by African-American men. However, he embraces hip hop´s white listeners, the fact that hip hop has become more mainstream, and unity in hip hop. Whereas LL Cool J represents the rap of the East Coast of the U.S. that represents where hip hop was "born," the next part of this chapter will move on to hip hop artist Ice-T, representing West Coast rap, which is more focused on gangsta rap.

Ice-T was born as Tracy Marrow in Newark, NJ. At the age of twelve he moved to Los Angeles and eventually became one of the leading figures in Californian hip hop and gangsta rap.[32] His music reflected the life in ghettos and gave social commentary but was also marked

[28] Glenda33, "LL Cool J: Past, Present and Future," YouTube Video, 21:20, July 28, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqFAsavUCnE.
[29] Glenda33, "LL Cool J: Past, Present and Future."
[30] Glenda33.
[31] Jeffries, 133."
[32] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography," https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ice-t-mn0000072003/biography.

by sexism and violence.[33] In 1992 Ice-T released the song "Cop Killer" on the album called "Body Count". In this song, Ice-T rapped from the point of view of a police murderer. By doing so, he caused national controversy. The song became associated with the LA riots and the incident with Rodney King, who was kicked and beaten by white LAPD officers. In the song, Ice-T refers to the King case. It was released in March 1992, which was also the time the LPAD officers were acquitted. This became the catalyst for the LA riots.[34] Soon there was a wave of protest surrounding "Cop Killer", including members of Congress, police organizations and President George Bush.[35]

In the interviews from the nineties, Ice-T is often asked about "Cop Killer". In an interview with *A Current Affair* (an Australian current affairs TV-program) about this song, the interviewer asks Ice-T if people like George Bush and other critics such as church groups have done him any harm. He responds by saying that people like George Bush who criticize his music want "to keep the tradition." This tradition according to Ice-T is "holding slaves, and I ain't with it."[36] With this statement, which refers to black people being held as slaves in American history, Ice-T seems to create a division between him as a black hip hop artist and white critics. He sees himself as a hero for being controversial and speaking openly about racial tensions and wanting to change the national structure as it is.

These racial tensions were of course not only related to the LA riots. A lot of African-American rappers use their music to convey a message about the black struggle. In *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Discussing Race, Policing and the Fourth Amendment Through the "War on" Paradigm*, this struggle is explained as follows:

> While new generations of young people are raised under conditions that are considerably worse than those faced prior to the post-Civil Rights Era, both liberal and conservative whites appear eager to "move on"--to disregard, with finality, the

[33] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography."
[34] Ice-T, "Talking 25 Years of Cop Killer with Ice-T," Interview by Tim Scott, June 2, 2017.
[35] Ice-T, "Talking 25 Years of Cop Killer with Ice-T."
[36] Ice-T, Interview by Jana Wendt, A Current Affair, August 12, 1992.

> historical context that produced today's miserable conditions. The generation I refer to is the children of the Black Power activists of the 1960s and 1970s, the children who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s, and were bequeathed revolutionary ideals in a post-revolutionary age.[37]

It is contended that although the Civil Rights Movement officially granted a lot of rights to black people, in reality these rights were not always realized. White people, however, expected black people to move on and were ready to move on themselves, even though people of color faced changes in the economy and political sphere, which "reduced employment and education opportunities forever,"[38] and state restructuring which "abetted rather than ameliorated poverty."[39] However, public opinion now shifted from an understanding that African Americans were suffering from "a legacy of discrimination and racism to "African Americans should try harder to succeed.'"[40] The generation of people of color that grew up in this period are associated with thugs and gangsters. They are also known as "the Hip Hop generation."[41]

Just as LL Cool J, Ice-T is part of this hip hop generation and as well as LL-Cool J, Ice-T also values rapping about his roots.[42] Again, the notions of being real and being authentic seem to be linked to remembering where black artists come from and the struggles they face(d). In an interview in New Zealand about his song 'Cop Killer', he says that just because he has money does not mean he is no longer part of the black community. On the contrary, this makes him even angrier "for the brothers that don't have anything."[43] In "The Hood, the Nation, the World," a study about the change of hip hop into the mainstream in the

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[37] Donald F. Tibbs, "From Black Power to Hip Hop: Discussing Race, Policing, and the Fourth Amendment through the "war On" Paradigm," *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 15, no. 1 (2012): 55.
[38] Bonnette, 37.
[39] Bonnette, 37.
[40] Bonnette, 38.
[41] Bonnette, 38
[42] Ice-T, Interview by Jana Wendt.
[43] Ice-T, Interview by Dylan Taite, 1992.

1990s, Murray Forman argues that "the hood" is mostly described as the authentic space that "real rap" comes from. This is one of the signifiers of authenticity in hip hop.[44]

Moreover, in an interview with Oprah Ice-T he defends his colleagues such as rap group N.W.A. (Niggas with Attitude), stating that black rap artists are ultimately showing what they are feeling and they cannot pretend something else. According to Ice T they might say controversial things but are merely suggesting that they "wanna be a brother in this life and this is what I'm feeling…. All you can say is what's true and how you feel." He concludes this statement by moving on to his own motivation: "Imma tell you the truth, like it or leave it."[45]

Furthermore, Ice-T states that white people have a problem with hip hop because their children are listening to it and are therefore exposed to the struggle of African Americans. He contends that white people would have no problem with hip hop culture and rap music if only black people listened to it:

> the problem is their kids are buying more rap records than our kids…[46] The white kids from suburbia are now listening to N.W.A, the parents don't know what to do about it. If only the brothers in the neighborhood listened to it, nobody cared.[47]

The sentiment that Ice-T is expressing here is similar to a sentiment that is explained in "Hip Hop Studies in Black." This study highlights the fact that hip hop is the focus of so much (academic) attention in the nineties and onwards because of so-called "post-racialism," whereas actually hip hop "lives in inverse relation to the life of black freedom: when the possibility of black revolution is effectively contained, then the signs of black culture become less threatening and more readily consumable and popular."[48] "Hip Hop Studies in Black"

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[44] Murray Forman, "The Hood, the Nation, the World," in *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002), 306.
[45] Ice-T, Interview by Oprah
[46] Ice-T, Interview by Oprah
[47] Ice-T, Interview by Oprah
[48] Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 289.

thus argues that when hip hop became more mainstream and white people started to focus on it, this was only done so after containing its blackness. When hip hop is rooted too much in black culture and its struggles, white people firmly criticize it.

In saying that white people only have a problem with the fact that their children now listen to it, Ice-T is also implicitly agreeing that hip hop carries out something that might be harmful. "After Blackness, Then Blackness: Afro Pessimism, Black Life, and Classical Hip Hop as Counter-Performance by Murray Forman" explains this struggle with hip hop and argues that "hip hop is said either to effectively challenge the political status quo through various means or it is said to reproduce the terms of its captivity."[49] As this study explains further on, what is meant by this is that black rap artists themselves sometimes use the stereotypes that hip hop music evokes.[50] For example the cover *Home Invasion*, Ice-T's album from 1993 graphically represented the "black urban threat" that will enter white children's ears.[51] By implying that the young white audience will be threatened by rap music that black artists have made, Ice-T is already making the assumption that rap music is a threat in the first place and in this way confirming a (racial) stereotype.

In the interviews used for this chapter, Ice-T generally does not reflect a post-black view. He seems to emphasize the value of racial authenticity in his work as a black hip hop artist. Being 'real' for him as a black artist means rapping about where you come from and reflecting the struggles black people face. He does not highlight the universal aspect of music and does not state that hip hop is for all races. On the contrary, as Cutler and Harrison

[49] Kevin Eubanks, "After Blackness, Then Blackness: Afro Pessimism, Black Life, and Classical Hip Hop as Counter-Performance," in *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 6.
[50] Murray Forman, "Space Matters," in *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002, 65.
[51] Forman, "Space Matters,"

highlighted, Ice-T is presenting a view that sees white people as 'the other' in hip hop, being defensive towards them when it comes to hip hop music.

Queen Latifah fits into this chapter because she is one of the more prominent female rappers during the nineties[52] and in this way offers a different perspective than the male voices do. Born as Dana Owens in 1970 in East-Orange, NJ, Latifah started rapping at the age of 18.[53] She already went against traditional notions of authenticity in hip hop because of the way she challenged gender roles in hip hop, as well as the fact that she was the first woman to become so popular in hip hop. In many interviews Latifah emphasizes that she challenges the way hip hop is portrayed by showing a female role and not depicting herself in stereotypical, sexist ways.[54] An interview in the 1990s in which she emphasized issues of race was with Slamming Rap Video in 1990. Queen Latifah argues that music that black hip hop artist make is not just meant for black people, but because it is made by black artists it might not directly be relevant for the white music listener:

> music is universal and music doesn't just go to a black audience…. The kids in America who are not black. So, then you have to deal with "what, is this not for me?" well you know, a lot of people feel like they do are left out. But you really have to understand this is a job we have to accomplish. This is something we have to take responsibility for…I think by us bringing knowledge to our people we are bringing knowledge to every other people and letting them know how we live. Then that's where it becomes more universal, that's where the teaching becomes universal. That's where you say it's directed at the black culture but it's something for everyone to know. And that's the only way it's gonna change. It doesn't mean anything for just me, you know. Y'all have the power. Y'all have to help us change. Y'all have to help us grow.[55]

Thus, in this quote, she values racial authenticity, emphasizing that hip hop music is made by black artists and directed at the black culture, mirroring the struggles they face. At the same time, she also argues that music is universal and that its message is important for everyone to

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[52] Queen Latifah, "She Raises Her Voice on Women's Issues," Interview by Robin D. Givhan, *Detroit Free Press,* March 8, 1992
[53] Queen Latifah, "She Raises Her Voice on Women's Issues."
[54] Queen Latifah, "All Hail the Queen," Interview by Gary Gray, *Word Up!,* 1992.
[55] Queen Latifah, Interview, *Slamming Rap Video,* 1990.

acknowledge. This way of thinking is emphasized again in an interview with *Spokesman* in 1996 in which she is asked about Tupac Shakur's death and contends that "this is a great American tragedy. Not just for the black community, for everybody. Everyone was magnetized by him."[56] As mentioned before, she tries to emphasize that hip hop is not just a thing for the black community.

Similar to LL Cool J, Latifah talks about the way in which hip hop changed in the nineties. However, she does not highlight the fact that it has become more mainstream or has become more accepted, but merely emphasizes that hip hop is more focused on social and political issues in the nineties. In an interview with *Rap Masters* titled "Queen Latifah on Rapping to Raise Awareness" she states that in the eighties everything was basically about having fun and that this way of rapping really changed in the nineties with groups like Public Enemy who pay more attention to social and political rhymes.[57] She also agrees that it is not just a group like Public Enemy that brings about this kind of awareness. In an interview with *Detroit Free Press* Latifah herself mentions how rap has "positioned her as a spokesperson for a generation of young women."[58] She is content with this position and tries to bring about change, contending that the President (George H.W. Bush) and other politicians started to worry about homelessness and unemployment only when it was no longer just a problem for minorities. She argues that this way of thinking is racist and says that we should "stop teaching a white male history."[59]

In these interviews it becomes clear that Latifah acknowledges racial issues and tries to change them with her rap music. Similar to the other hip-hop artists examined in this chapter, she thinks it is a matter of course that hip hop artists are black and she even goes

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[56] Queen Latifah, "Queen Latifah Went All Out for Her Role in Set it Off," Interview, *Spokesman,* 1996.
[57] Queen Latifah, "Queen Latifah on Rapping to Raise Awareness," Interview by Jean Powell, *Rap Masters.*
[58] Queen Latifah, "She Raises Her Voice on Women's Issues."
[59] Queen Latifah, "She Raises Her Voice on Women's Issues."

further by saying it is *directed* at the black community. Latifah does not really seem to mention that she is "keeping it real." This might be the fact because this phrase and mindset is generally linked to male hip hop artists.[60]

As mentioned already when discussing Queen Latifah's view on racial authenticity, a rap group that focused on political awareness was Public Enemy, consisting of the rappers Chuck D, born Carlton Douglas Ridenhour in 1960, Flushing, New York and Flavor Flav, born William Jonathan Drayton in 1959 in Roosevelt, New York.[61] They rewrote the rules of hip-hop in the late eighties and throughout the nineties and for many are the definitive rap group of all time.[62] They were called a black activist and black nationalist group.[63] In "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur, black nationalism is defined as follows: "the political belief and practice of African Americans as a distinct people with a distinct historical personality who politically should develop structures to define, defend and develop the interests of blacks as a people"[64] Black nationalists thus want to help people in the black community develop and grow. However, some black nationalists differ in their methods and goals as "some Revolutionary Nationalists envision a multiracial movement, while others center their work among African people."[65] Public Enemy is a group that seems to combine these visions. They promote Afrocentricity and encourage "self-determination, self-reliance, Black pride, unity, and consciousness,[66]

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[60] Louis B Gallien, "Keeping It Real: Hip-Hop Culture and the Framing of Values for Contemporary African-American Students," *Journal of College and Character* 3 no.8 (2002): 3.
[61] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography," https://www.allmusic.com/artist/public-enemy-mn0000856785/biography.
[62] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Artist Biography," https://www.allmusic.com/artist/public-enemy-mn0000856785/biography.
[63] Chuck D, "Chuck D Interview," Interview by Chris Wilder, *The Source*, June 1991.
[64] Karin L Stanford, "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 16.
[65] Stanford, Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur, 17.
[66] Bonette, "It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop:Rap Music and Black Nationalism," In *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 51.

Moreover, they want to unite people of all races as becomes clear in the following. In interviews from the nineties with Public Enemy, they stress the importance of being real. In an interview from 1991 during the tour for their album, Flavor Flav states that everyone loves their beats, but ultimately it is the message that counts: "It's the message, it's about life, about reality. That's what we write about. Reality."[67] That he is talking mostly about racial struggles becomes clear when Chuck D takes over and states the following: "We can't turn ourselves around. It won't happen. And as far as a white structure helping a black structure? That won't happen. We gotta do it ourselves.[68] Thus, by rapping and distributing their music, Flavor Flav and Chuck D are trying to bring about change when it comes to the struggle of black people. Here their focus seems to be on a "black vision" and self-sufficiency, but they also include white people in this process. As Flavor Flav states: "instead of dwelling and looking out for revenge, let's build the wall of unity."[69] Public Enemy wants people of all races to get along.

There is one interview in which Chuck D very elaborately explains Public Enemy's views on racial authenticity. In an interview with *Playboy* in 1991, Chuck D sets out how he and Flavor Flav promote Afrocentricity with their music because they "live under a structure that promotes whites. At the moment, we got to hold onto our blackness out of self-defense. The bottom line is that white comes from black -the Asiatic Black man- and Africa isn't the third world but the first world, the cradle of civilization."[70] Here, he literally states that the use and performance of their black identity in music is a way to defend themselves. They need to show that white people also come from black people and are not a "superior" race. However, although this seems to be a way to claim racial authenticity, Chuck D actually also finds it

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[67] Ross Cunningham, "Public Enemy Interview," YouTube Video, 7:59, November 21, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2P2nIAo1ug.
Glenda33, "LL Cool J: Past, Present and Future," YouTube Video, 21:20, July 28, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqFAsavUCnE.
[68] Cunningham, "Public Enemy Interview,"
[69] Cunningham.
[70] Chuck D, "20 Questions for Chuck D," Interview by Bill Wyman, *Playboy Magazine,* November 1990.

intriguing that one of their white fans said she could relate to their blackness, saying that "deep down everybody is black."[71] Chuck D views this positively, which really reflects a post-black view by contending exactly what Touré seemed to advocate, that there is no right way to be black.[72]

However, this was exactly what Kennedy's critique was to the notion of "post-blackness," namely the fact that white people can then claim to be black while they have not experienced any of the hardships that come with being black.[73] Chuck D continued by saying that

> The whole concept is that there is no such thing as black and white. The world is full of different complexions. The difference between black and white is set up by people who want to remain in power. This black and white thing is a belief structure, not a physical reality. There is nobody on this planet who is 100 percent black or 100 percent white. This is not news to black people- black people know they're mixed.[74]

Public Enemy shows a very innovative way of defining being black and white. However, Public Enemy also focuses on avoiding black stereotypes. Chuck D tries to move away from the specious notions of racial authenticity that both Touré and Kennedy also defied. The notions of racial authenticity that only reinforce stereotypes, which Chuck D uses as an explanation for the fact that he is not trying to be sensuous because according to him there is an idea that black people can only dance, have rhythm and are seen as sensuous and closer to nature with their bodies.[75]

Public Enemy's desire to unify people through hip hop although they still want to maintain Afrocentricity can be explained through "After Blackness". According to this study, blackness after the civil rights movement is difficult to define because of its dual nature. This is also prominent in Public Enemy's definition of blackness. In promoting Afrocentricity, hip

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[71] Chuck D, "20 Questions for Chuck D."
[72] Touré, *Who´s Afraid of Post-blackness? What It Means To Be Black Now* (New York: Atria Books, 2011).
[73] Kennedy, "The Fallacy of Touré's Post-Blackness Theory."
[74] Chuck D, "20 Questions for Chuck D."
[75] Chuck D, "20 Questions for Chuck D."

hop artists such as Public Enemy on the one hand go against an historical idea of "anti-blackness" and know that they can still be seen as a threat because of their "blackness" for which they do not want to excuse themselves. On the other hand, they acknowledge that this is a new time in which race relations have changed.[76] Public Enemy seems to show more of a post-black view, because they want to include white people in hip hop and argue that notions of blackness and whiteness are not the reality, but at the same time they value racial authenticity by emphasizing how reality for them is by rapping about the struggles they face as black men.

To conclude this chapter, hip hop artists LL Cool J, Ice-T, Queen Latifah and rap group Public Enemy, who were prominent in the nineties, generally say that hip hop is for everybody (although Queen Latifah did specifically mention that it is directed at the black community). When they say that, however, they mostly seem to refer to hip hop listeners and not hip hop artists themselves. As artists they are perceived as being authentic partly because they are black. Moreover, LL Cool J, Latifah, Ice-T and Public Enemy said that hip hop in general has changed, has become more mainstream and has more white listeners now, which means that the meaning of racial authenticity also has partially changed because hip hop is for everyone (to listen to) and not just for black people.

Furthermore, most of the artists said that being authentic for them meant they had to "be real" and "be themselves" and this was mostly linked to their blackness, were they came from and the struggles that they faced as black people as well as the changes they would like to see in the structure of the U.S., in which black and white people are treated unequally. Although there clearly was a difference in the way Ice-T and LL Cool J looked at the white audience, this could also have to do with their difference in genre. Ice-T made more controversial music

[76] Eubanks, "After blackness," 13.

as gangsta rapper and therefore received more criticism and might view the white audience more negatively. Public Enemy promoted the idea of unity, but also referred to the idea of being authentic because of being "Afrocentric" and because they reflected the hard lives of black men.

All artists in their own way still show the importance of the notion of racial authenticity for black hip hop artists, especially when it comes to black artists producing hip hop music and reflecting the black struggle. However, the notion of post-blackness also seems to challenge this way of thinking since most artists also emphasized the promotion of unity in hip hop, especially when it comes to white listeners and even accepting someone who is white into the black community (in the case of Public Enemy). Although much information about blackness and being seen as someone who is racially disloyal and "sells out" was found in the interviews, this did not fit into the subject of this chapter. In the next chapter, the link between racial authenticity and charges of racial disloyalty and racial solidarity will be examined further.

Chapter 3 Racial Disloyalty: "Sellouts" Toms" and "Acting Caucasian"

Whereas the last chapter focused on the meaning of racial authenticity for black hip hop artists during the nineties, this chapter will focus on the notion of racial disloyalty and the perception of black hip hop artists considering this term. To be considered racially disloyal, means that there also is a certain way to be racially loyal. In the *Encyclopedia of Identity* racial loyalty is explained as "a steadfast allegiance to one's race and faithfulness in discharging supposed obligation of duty, love and friendship."[77] Racial loyalty is very important for black solidarity, because people who focus on racial loyalty do not only think about the way they should feel about their own membership within their race, but also about the way they should feel about their fellow members.[78]

Racial loyalty can also be explained as racial solidarity which is an important theme in nationalist movements of minorities and occurs especially where minority and dominant racial groups have to compete for the same goals and minority groups "have become frustrated and disillusioned because of unfulfilled expectations."[79] When one is racially disloyal, however, one is betraying the allegiance to one's race.[80] Accusations of disloyalty have been made widely among African Americans. Black people who are considered to be racially disloyal are often addressed with pejoratives such as "Oreos" (black on the outside but white on the inside and "Uncle Toms" (referring to the obedient slave in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Book).[81] These pejoratives all lead to the idea of a "sellout", which is seen the opposite of someone who is

[77] J.L.A. Garcia, "Racial Disloyalty," in *Encyclopedia of Identity*, ed. Ronald L. Jackson (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc, 2010), 622.
[78] Garcia, "Racial Disloyalty," 622.
[79] William J Wilson, Castellano B. Turner, and William A. Darity," "Racial Solidarity and Separate Education," *The School Review* 81, no. 3 (1973): 365.
[80] Garcia, 622.
[81] Garcia, 622.

authentic. In a "post-black" view, there would be no need for a term such as racial disloyalty because there would be no restrictions when it comes to being black.

In this chapter, it is argued that black hip hop artists in the nineties partially hold a "post-black" view when it comes to racial disloyalty by on the one hand denouncing the idea of "selling out" because they verbally oppose the idea that there is a right way to be black, but on the other hand reinforcing the idea of racial disloyalty by accusing African-American individuals of being racially disloyal as well as trying to defend themselves against those accusations.

Furthermore, there is an extra dimension to the role of hip hop artists and racial disloyalty in this chapter because three of the five artists examined in this thesis eventually also became actors during the time they were active as rappers and specifically mention their roles as actors in relation to racial loyalty. This means that their identity as black hip hop artists also might have been challenged by the roles they played in movies/tv-shows, especially since even in the movie business they are often still focused on portraying "reality."[82] Therefore, when these artists talk about racial disloyalty and their acting performances, this is also taken into account. Before the interviews of the artists will be analyzed to explore their ideas of racial disloyalty, it is important to explain the terms racial disloyalty and "sellout" in more detail.

In *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal,* Randall Kennedy researches the usage and history of the term. He also tries to define the notion of a "sellout," even though this is difficult to do. As mentioned before in explaining Kennedy's critique on "post-blackness,"

[82] Carla Hay, "Actin' Up: Rappers Take to the Screen, Infiltrating Pop Culture as Never Before," *Billboard - The International Newsweekly of Music, Video and Home Entertainment*, December 4, 1999.

"selling out" to him means someone who intentionally harms the community they are in. In the preface of his book, he explains the term as follows:

> A "sellout" is a person who betrays something to which she is said to owe allegiance. When used in a racial context among African Americans, "sellout" is a disparaging term that refers to blacks who knowingly or with gross negligence act against the interest of blacks as a whole. Defining it that cleanly, however, offers a misleading sense of clarity. "Sellout" is a messy, volatile, contested term about which disagreement is rife, especially when it comes to applying the label to specific persons or conduct.[83]

Kennedy himself thus acknowledges that although he comes up with a straightforward definition of the term, this does not mean that it is immediately clear who is a "sellout" and who is not. To be a "sellout" of the black community means that one was initially 'in' the black community. But who can be considered to be black? This is also difficult to answer. Kennedy contends that skin color has been the most important criterion, but this criterion has become less decisive since self-identification has become more important in this era. Anyone can be black virtually as long as they can show they consider themselves this way.[84]

Besides explaining the difficulty of defining a term as "sellout" and deciding who is black and who is not, Kennedy explains why African Americans have a certain "fear of collaboration and defection."[85] As a minority group among the white majority, African Americans are afraid that people in their community will betray them, the black collective, and "sellout" because of difficulties, fear and self-interest. This mindset becomes clear in phrases such as "Don't forget where you came from." Many African Americans also criticize others within their community who, according to them, are "acting white" or showing signs of actions that are not seen as appropriate for the black community. Journalist John Blake has written about the efforts of black people, especially those who are elites and can be found in white settings, who signal other African Americans they are still black. He calls people who

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[83] Randall Kennedy, *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 1.
[84] Kennedy, *Sellout*, 10.
[85] Kennedy, 25.

makes these efforts “Soul Patrols”, black people who “impose their definition of blackness on other black people.”[86]

In “Acting White: A Critical Review,” Kitae Sohn examines the reasons behind “acting white” by African Americans and the fear of collaboration and defection that Kennedy writes about is further explained. Although Sohn’s study is about school achievements in particular, she also uses the study of Fordham and Ogbu from 1986 to argue that Black Americans have constructed a collective identity that is opposed to the white dominant culture because this is the only way they can cope with the fact they are subordinate minorities because they were “involuntarily and permanently incorporated into the American society.”[87]. This means that they are against crossing cultural boundaries which, in this case, would mean exhibiting behavior that can be perceived as belonging to white Americans. People who do this are “acting white.” In hip hop music, these cultural boundaries are especially important because the political message of this music is to underscore African American suffering and oppression. [88] “Music and Political Resistance: The Cultural Foundation of Black Politics” posits that throughout history, “minorities and other oppressed groups often use culture as a resistance mechanism, a platform on which to assert their attitudes and discuss issues relevant to them.”[89] With hip hop, African Americans demonstrated they were able to show the truth according to them instead of merely imitating mainstream America’s popular culture.[90] In the rest of this chapter, this background information of racial disloyalty is linked to the interviews of the hip hop artists.

In the interviews with LL Cool J he himself does not “charge” anyone with racial disloyalty. On the contrary, he claims that he is sometimes called racially disloyal and that he

[86] Kennedy, 25.
[87] Kitae Sohn, Acting White: A Critical Review, 219.
[88] Bonnette, “Music and Political Resistance: The Cultural Foundation of Black Politics," 35.
[89] Bonnette, 32.
[90] Bonnette, 40.

does not understand why.[91] These views are again emphasized in an interview with *Spin* magazine in 1991 in which LL Cool J and Mike Tyson talk about the similarities between hip hop and boxing. They both agree that when someone becomes successful as a rap artist or a professional boxer, people from his or her old neighborhood cannot relate to this rap artist or boxer anymore and start addressing him (or her) as a "sellout"[92] In chapter three of his book, Kennedy also speaks briefly about the way in which rappers such as the rap group Geto Boys address the concern of becoming a "sellout" in lyrics that question whether successful and wealthy African Americans have to stay in black communities, can marry outside their race, have racial responsibilities or whether they should avoid certain opportunities that are not in line with these racial responsibilities.[93] As LL Cool J confirms in this interview and what also becomes clear from the lyrics of rap group Geto Boys is that in the hip hop community, questions of racial disloyalty arise. Especially when rappers become successful, they question their own position in the black community.

Besides the fact that LL Cool J addresses his own position in the black community after becoming successful, he also addresses white rap artists and suggests that he would probably have been much more successful if he had been a white artist:

> If I was white? I'd probably be four or five times bigger. Look at New Edition and New Kids on the Block. New Edition is a hot group. New Kids on the Block, they're white, they blew up. They got bubble gum. New Edition don't have fucking bubble gum. You know what I'm saying?[94]

By comparing New Edition, an R&B group that was popular in the eighties consisting of six African-American men to New Kids on the Block, an R&B group consisting of white men, LL Cool J shows what the difference between white and black hip hop artists is according to him. White hip hop artists may become more successful more easily than black hip hop

[91] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Versus Mike Tyson," interview by Virginia Liberatore, *Spin*, January 1991.
[92] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Versus Mike Tyson," interview by Virginia Liberatore, *Spin*, January 1991.
[93] Kennedy, 25.
[94] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Versus Mike Tyson,"

artists. By saying that New Kids on the Block "got bubble gum" he perhaps means they make music to "appeal to the masses."[95] The interviewer responds to LL Cool J by asking him if he is not just as popular with white people as black people. LL Cool J then replies as follows:

> Oh, no question. But I've always said, that's why when people say, "L.L., hey, like, on the last album, you sold out," I say, "Yo, can I ask you a question, Mike Tyson sell out?" "No, he's a brother." I say, he's a cross-over artist…Me personally, I don't think it's about being black or white, I think it's about everybody being all right.[96]

In the quote above LL Cool J compares himself to Mike Tyson and argues that being a cross-over artists does not mean he is a "sellout". He thinks rap is for all people and the music should not be about whether your black or white. He does not seem to believe in the definition of a "sellout". This view is also emphasized in an interview with *The New York Times* titled "Rapper's New Role". According to LL Cool J, rap is "hardly just a phenomenon among black teenagers. Sixty-five to seventy percent of rap music is bought by white kids… It has an appeal that kids of all colors relate to. It's a music that kids respect." [97] By continually arguing that hip hop is for everybody, LL Cool J disregards the idea of a "sellout" in the rap community.

In the nineties, it started to be more common for hip hop artists to be seen on screen as well.[98] Because of their popularity, hip hop artists "sell many tickets."[99] And because rappers usually express themselves by telling their life stories, it is even more interesting to see them in a different role, trying on different identities.[100] However, not every rapper immediately sees performing as an actor as something positive. Especially in the early nineties, rappers

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[95] "Bubble Gum," www.urbandictionary.com, November 10, 2010, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bubble%20gum.
[96] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Versus Mike Tyson,"
[97] LL Cool J, "Rapper's New Role," interview, *New York Times*, 1999.
[98] Sanneh Kelefah, "Making the 'Easy' Jump From Hip-Hop to Screen." *New York Times,* May 12, 2012; Tia Tyree and Barbara Hines, *The Pursuit of "movie Money": A Textual Analysis of Rap Artists as Actors in Hollywood Films*, 2007. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; Hay, "Actin' Up: Rappers Take to the Screen, Infiltrating Pop Culture as Never Before."
[99] Sanneh Kelefah, "Making the 'Easy' Jump From Hip-Hop to Screen."
[100] Kelefah.

would be called "sellouts" for playing in movies and shows because according to the hip-hop community this could be seen as becoming too commercial.[101] This is mostly the case because "when White audiences warmed to Rap in the 1980s, it opened up the opportunity for Rap artists and filmmakers to form a relationship."[102] This means that there is a direct relationship between the white involvement in rap and the involvement of hip hop artists in the film industry. This caused some rappers to target the film industry, especially because of their representation of black people.

In the 1996 interview that was mentioned before in the last chapter, LL Cool J mentions how he played an undercover cop in a movie and does not seem to see it as a controversy that he is playing a police officer as a black man,[103] whereas later in this chapter, Ice-T, who also played a police officer in movies, will explain how he did a "lot of soul-searching" before he finally decided to do this.[104] In "LL Cool J Gets Deep and Personal," an interview from 1999 with *Insite Magazine*, LL Cool J describes how he does not look at playing certain roles as portraying certain stereotypes[105] LL Cool J in this sense, seems to have more of a "post-black" view.

To conclude this section, in the interviews with LL Cool J he is not playing "Soul Patrol." He does not use any terms that could describe someone as racially disloyal. He is aware of these terms, as becomes clear from the fact that he explains how people who become successful in the black community are perceived as sellouts because black people that are "lower" on the ladder cannot relate to them anymore. LL Cool J seems to have a "post-black"

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[101] Hay.
[102] Tyree and Hines, *The Pursuit of "movie Money": A Textual Analysis of Rap Artists as Actors in Hollywood Films.*
[103] MMMVINTAGEVIDEOS, "LL Cool J Not Wanting To Be Actor or Sex Symbol Interview," YouTube Video, 08:30, 9 February 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgddAmeMkEo.
[104] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991," YouTube Video, 12:55, 28 November 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vibxkSsaiDo.
[105] LL Cool J, "LL Cool J Gets Deep and Personal," interview by Josh Massey, *Insite Magazine,* August 1999.

view towards racial disloyalty because he does not encourage that there is a "right way to be black" as a hip hop artist (and an actor). He also respects white hip hop artists, but does realize that his race can have a negative effect on his success when he claims that he would have been even more successful if he had been white.

In his interviews, Ice-T often talks about racial disloyalty. He does not address white artists like LL Cool J does, but Ice-T himself does describe how he was viewed negatively by people from his old neighborhood because he made it out of the ghetto. He does not understand why people do not view this positively, but instead turn against him.[106] The interviewer from the MTV interview in 1991 asks him if he thinks that anything can be done about the ghettos in LA South Central (as mentioned in the first chapter the nineties were very turbulent times for LA South Central because of the LA riots. [107] In addition to this, homicide rates went up tremendously after the introduction of drugs.[108]Ice-T's reply is that they have to escape. He continues by stating that

> Nobody lives in the ghetto by choice. Nobody lives in the Bronx cause they want to. You live there cause your mother lived there… They're not black communities, they're poor communities. Economics is why you stay there. But in the ghetto, they have a real stupid mentality which is: Yo if you leave Brooklyn, you're selling out. It's the stupidest thing in the world. You know, it's like, you're not supposed to wanna go jetskiing, or go to the snow, you're supposed to stay on your corner and wash your car. Just wait on the police to put a bullet in your head.[109]

This quote shows that Ice-T literally spells out the stereotypes some black people thinks they should follow. He does not agree with them and thinks this is a stupid mentality to have. This way of thinking is in line with a "post-black" view, because it shows Ice-T's perspective that black people should be allowed to be black in the way that they want to be and not be

[106] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991,".
[107] "South Central History," South Central History, 3 May 2019, http://www.southcentralhistory.com/gang-history.php.
[108] Mike Sonksen, "The History of South Central LA And Its Struggle With Gentrification," 14 September 2017, https://www.kcet.org/shows/city-rising/the-history-of-south-central-los-angeles-and-its-struggle-with-gentrification.
[109] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991,".

criticized because of doing something that is not in line with prescribed notions of being black.

At the same time, contrary to LL Cool J, Ice-T also accuses other black people of being "sellouts" and thus charges them with being racially disloyal. In his interview with *A Current Affair,* (an Australian current affairs TV-program) he discusses police brutality in the U.S.[110] In relation to his song *Bodycount*, which was already mentioned several times in the first chapter, he claims he has no problems with killing police officers and police officers being killed. Furthermore, Ice-T states that other people might not understand this rage, because they do not know how bad police brutality (against black people) is in America. When the interviewer responds to this statement by mentioning that Ice-T presents it as a black view, although there actually are black people who do not agree with the lyrics of *Bodycount* and want the song to be banned, such as the new black chief of the L.A. Police, Ice-T replies as follows:

> He's not black, he might have black skin, but he is not at the bottom of the system. When I say black and white, it has nothing to do with skin color. It has to do with whether the system works for you or the system works against you. I have no love for that particular police chief. He is a – what we consider in America- a Tom.[111]

There are several striking things about this quote. First of all, this quote is interesting because it reflects Kennedy's idea of being black. This shows that Ice-T does not agree with the "post-blackness" theory suggesting that there *is* a right way of being black. If you "sell out" or are negative against your own people, you can be banned from the black community and are no longer considered "black" even though you have black skin. Ice-T uses term "Tom", which is short for "Uncle Tom", which in the Webster dictionary is defined as "a black person who is overeager to win the approval of whites as by obsequious behavior or uncritical acceptance of

[110] Ice-T, Interview by Jana Wendt
[111] Ice-T, Interview by Jana Wendt

white values and goals."[112] Kennedy confirms this definition and states that sometimes the term "Uncle Tom" and "sellout" are used interchangeably. A sellout is someone who is "subservient to whites at the expense of his own people." A "sellout" is someone who is clearly antagonistic to people of the black race. In this sense, a "sellout" is worse than an enemy: other members of the community think the "sellout" is part of their community and they trust this person, although the "sellout" purposely harms the persons who view him as one of them.[113] In this case, however, Ice-T does seem to use the terms interchangeably because he does not only say that the black police officer is subservient to whites, but also that he is not black. Ice-T's comment about this police officer is also in line with Clay's study, as was mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. Skin color is not the only marker of "blackness", behavior is an important marker as well.[114]

It is also in the MTV interview that it becomes clear Ice-T is afraid of being seen as a "sellout." He explains how he got into rapping and music and eventually was asked to play a police officer in a movie. Initially he did not know whether he should do it and "went through a lot of soul-searching and a lot of discussions with my homeboys."[115] None of his friends told him not to do it and they went even further, saying that he should not "hold his ideals so high to miss this opportunity."[116] Ice-T goes on by explaining how his friends encouraged him by saying that a lot of black men ("brothers on the street"[117]) would want to be in his position, and he got the chance to do it. He eventually played a police officer in movies for several years. This provides an interesting clash. By feeling the need to explain his choice to play a police officer, Ice-T shows that apparently there is a clash between what is considered to be

[112] "Uncle Tom," Merriam Webster Dictionary, May 3, 2019,https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Uncle%20Tom.
[113] Kennedy, 1.
[114] Clay, "Keepin' It Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity."
[115] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991."
[116] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991."
[117] KeithRichardson, "Ice-T MTV Interview 1991."

authentically black and moving past that and be the best "black" version you can potentially be.

What is not necessarily crucial to substantiate the arguments in this chapter, but nonetheless important to mention is that this interview was not held in the United States, but in Australia. This makes it easier for Ice-T to argue that people who are not from America do not understand what is going on there and do not undergo the same hardships that they go through, such as police violence against black people.[118] He uses this to put his point across that race relations in America are not like the race relations in other countries.

Overall, Ice-T clearly views the idea of a "sellout" differently than LL Cool J. Ice-T himself accuses someone of being a "Tom" and explicitly says that although this person may have black skin, he is no longer black because of agonistic views against the black community. However, when Ice-T himself is called a "sellout", he does not agree. He contends that black people should be able to leave their hometowns and do the things they want to do without being seen as racially disloyal. This is interesting because Ice-T in this way agrees with Kennedy's idea of a "sellout" and argues against the idea of "post-blackness." He states that although one has to be careful about accusing someone of being racially disloyal, one can be accused of doing this when he or she is clearly hurting the black community. It is still unclear, however, what the exact guidelines for being black are.

There are two interviews that clearly show Public Enemy's views on racial disloyalty. These interviews are with Chuck D only but since he is expressing his views as the views of his group, [119]they will also be interpreted as such. In an interview with *Spin* magazine in 1990 Chuck D is asked what he thinks of white rappers like 3rd Bass (a hip hop group that was active in the late eighties and early nineties, and one of the few white rap groups, although

[118] Ice-T, Interview by Jana Wendt.
[119] Chuck D, "Public Service (Interview with Chuck D)," interview by Frank Owen, *Spin,* March 1990.

they had an African-American DJ, that was accepted into in the mainstream around that time).[120] Chuck replies by saying that "3rd Bass is a good example of people just being people… Serch is not going around pretending he's black. He's saying brothers is kicking it, and I'm out here kicking it with them."[121] Chuck D does not have a problem with white rappers, as long as they do not pretend to be black and give credit to other black rappers as well. He confirms these ideas by stating he does not have a problem with whites "dabbling" in black musical styles.[122] Again, this statement is accompanied by saying that hip hop did start with the black community: "all levels of hipness start with the black community. They then cross into the hip whites and then into the mainstream."[123] What he is saying here is interesting because he again proves the statement made before in the last chapter that racial authenticity is important to Public Enemy as artists because they understand it as a black phenomenon, something that is invented by black people. But, they do not say it has to stay this way. The only thing they want is for black people to be given credit for it. "It is important that what we create, we control."[124]

The idea that to be involved in hip hop, white rappers have to respect black people is once again emphasized when Chuck D goes on about respecting the limited Afrocentricity of the New Kids On The Block, the white R&B group that was mentioned before by LL Cool J. Chuck D states that this group genuinely loves hip-hop and has refused to get rid of their black manager Maurice Starr. Chuck D views this positively and wishes he "could say that much about some so-called black acts."[125] Here, Chuck D himself is talking about "sellouts" or people who are racially disloyal. With "so-called black acts" he probably means black

[120] https://www.allmusic.com/artist/3rd-bass-mn0000569541/biography
[121] Chuck D, "Public Service."
[122] Chuck D, "Public Service,".
[123] Chuck D, "Public Service,".
[124] Chuck D, "Public Service,".
[125] Chuck D, "Public Service,".

artists that are not promoting Afrocentricity as Public Enemy does or are not loyal to black people like Public Enemy or the New Kids On The Block.

In the interview with *Spin* magazine as well as in an interview with *Playboy* called "20 Questions for Chuck D," Chuck D explains Public Enemy's use of the acronym "Jackass," Just Acting Caucasian Kills A Simple Solution. Chuck D explains that he does not have a problem with whites, but with people "acting Caucasian." He goes on by saying that acting Caucasian

> hasn't done one motherfucking positive thing for black people. If whites want to do something positive, they can realize that they're a small part of the human family and not the big part of it that they think they are, trying to convince the world that they are.[126]

While by reading about "acting Caucasian", one could initially think that Public Enemy is talking about African Americans who act in a white manner to benefit themselves,[127] "acting Caucasian" actually means something else, and something that is very much in line with thinking in a "post-black" manner. The "Jackass" theory entails that "if whites would only abandon Caucasian arrogance they could easily live in harmony with the world's majority non-white populations."[128] Public Enemy is talking about white people who consider themselves to be superior whereas Public Enemy contends someone who is "pure white" (or "pure black") does not exist.[129] So, although they promote Afrocentricity they do not think in the black/white binary one might expect them to think in. They merely promote racial pride, which is an important trait of Black Nationalism.[130] Even when black people do not get

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[126] Chuck D, "20 Questions For Chuck D," interview by Bill Wyman, *Playboy Magazine,* November 1990.
[127] Robert Christgau, "Jesus, Jews and the Jackass Theory," *Adler Hip Hop Archive,* January 1990, https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:13450650.
[128] Mark Anthony Neal, *That's The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011), 585.
[129] Neal, *That's The Joint,* 585.
[130] Bonette, "It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop: Rap Music and Black Nationalism," in *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 59.

respect from others, and feel hostility due to a system of white supremacy, they should rely on themselves and maintain their pride.[131]

Another interesting fact that becomes evident from the *Spin* interview is that the members of Public Enemy themselves were denounced as "sellouts" for their "refusal to condone Professor Griff's antisemitic remarks."[132] Professor Griff was a member of Public Enemy who argued that Jews caused all the problems in the world. He eventually left the group in 1989.[133] Apparently, being seen as a "sellout" in the black community does not only mean the opposite of representing Afrocentricity and supporting your own race, it also means not supporting other races and minorities. This is one of the ways in which racial authenticity differs from racial disloyalty.

All in all, although Public Enemy is seen as a black nationalist group, they do not take a radical approach to blackness one would expect from them. Although they do accuse some black artists of being "sellouts" (they expect some Afrocentricity of black acts and otherwise call them "so-called black acts"), they do not view white rappers negatively and do not see it as racially disloyal that they support them. They embrace the fact that there are white rappers as long as they give credit to African Americans as the founders of hip hop. Public Enemy is very outspoken when it comes to 'acting Caucasian', but by this they thus do not mean a black person acting white, but white people acting superior. A black person acting white, however, is a phenomenon that is very important for the notion of racial disloyalty and does need to be addressed more thoroughly in this chapter.

In *Acting White: Rethinking Race in Post-Racial America*, Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati argue that because black people (and other minorities) are often negatively

[131] Bonnette, "It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop: Rap Music and Black Nationalism," 54.
[132] Chuck D, "Public Service,".
[133] Kyle Adams, "Public Enemy," *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture 2018*, 373-76.

stereotyped, they feel that they have to counter these negative stereotypes. The difficulty lies in the fact that black people have to negotiate between their sense of self and the sense of who the dominant institutions requires them to be.[134] While doing so, they realize they can actually help the black community by acting more in the manner that pleases white dominant institutions. A black person's presence at the top provides benefits to black people at the bottom.[135] More simply put, black people sometimes help other black people by acting white.

This is also the view Queen Latifah seems to have, when people accuse her of acting white. Although in the nineties, Queen Latifah herself was perceived as a "sellout" and especially her album *Nature of A Sista* was perceived as such[136], she does not use the term in the interviews either to address others or to defend herself when the term is being used to address her. The reason why she is called a "sellout" is in part because *Nature of A Sista* was perceived as more mainstream and less controversial than music she made before. Moreover, taking into account her job as an actress, she could be perceived as a "sellout" because in playing in certain shows on television, people (from the black community) perceive her as portraying the way black people live through white eyes, thus reinforcing stereotypes.[137] Latifah, however, does not agree with this view and does not see that playing in TV shows the way she does portrays black people as demeaning. She merely sees herself representing the black community. "What I did realize tho, was that I was watching everyone else's lives all my life. I'd never really seen myself on television."[138] In a *Vibe* interview in 1996 she

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[134] Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati, *Acting White: Rethinking Race in Post-Racial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24.
[135] Carbado and Gulati, *Acting White,* 150.
[136] "Queen Latifah Nature Of A Sista," *Time Is Illmatic,* 23 April 2015, https://timeisillmatic.me/2015/04/23/queen-latifah-nature-of-a-sista-september-3-1991/.
[137] Queen Latifah, "The Ever-Expanding Realm of Queen Latifah," interview by Andy Meisler, *The New York Times,* September 1994.
[138] Queen Latifah, "The Ever-Expanding Realm of Queen Latifah,".

expresses the same views, contending that although what she is portraying may not be commercial, it is groundbreaking for the black community:

> I've never been afraid to visually express things that aren't commercial. Look at the risk of putting African-American women in roles that white men would normally take. There is nothing to reference this film with. This is the most money- $10 million- New Line has ever spent on a film of this kind- I hate to call it urban, or black, or whatever, but that's what I mean."[139]

This quote shows that on the one hand, Queen Latifah feels like she is paving the way for the black community. She does not mention that she is "acting white" to do this, and although others may feel she is following the lines of the white dominant cultural by reinforcing stereotypes, she feels she is helping the black community.[140] On the other hand, although she does not say this literally, Queen Latifah seems a bit afraid to say something that may be perceived as not fitting for a black woman. In an interview with *The Source,* when the interviewer asks her if she is a feminist, she replies that "she does not adhere to it" and continues by saying the following:

> I know that at the end of the day, I'm a Black woman in this world and I gotta get mine. I want to see the rise of the Black male in personal strength and power. I wanna see the creation of a new black community for ourselves and respect from others.[141]

This response seems to reflect the idea that black women are not supposed to be feminists because this is only for white women. This is confirmed in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (among other sources) in which Tricia Rose contends that in interviews with Queen Latifah (and other female rap artists) it became clear that black women do not want to be labeled as feminists because they specifically link the feminist movement to white women.[142] In addition to this, black women do not want to join forces

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[139] Queen Latifah, "Heads Ain't Ready for Queen Latifah's Next Move," interview by Danyel Smith, *Vibe,* December 1996.
[140] Queen Latifah, "Queen Latifah: Born 2 Roll," interview by Mighty Mi, *The Source,* May 1994.
[141] Queen Latifah, "Queen Latifah: Born 2 Roll,."
[142] Rose, *Black Noise,* 176; Bonette, "Beyond the Music: Black Feminism and Rap Music," in *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 90.

with white women at the expense of the identities of black women.[143] Moreover, women in the rap industry are facing even more problems than men since "just as hip hop poses a menace to dominant white bourgeois culture, women's participation in its supposedly masculine rituals threatens still another haven of male hegemony."[144] Furthermore, Queen Latifah is known to mirror a Black Nationalist sentiment that equality for black people in the United States "will result from the rise of the Black man first and the elimination of racism before sexism."[145] She does not necessarily believe that sexism and racism can and should be eliminated at the same time.

Overall, it is interesting to see Queen Latifah's view on racial issues as a black female hip hop artist. She seems to have another view than her male counterparts. Without literally using the term "sellout" or a synonym of this word, she shows that when it comes to racial disloyalty on the one hand, she has a "post-black" view. She is not afraid to portray certain stereotypes because she does not see them in this way and merely thinks she is helping the black community grow, which in part could be attributed to the idea that black people have to act "white" to help the black community. On the other hand, she values racial authenticity for not wanting to be labeled as a "feminist", because she does not think this is fitting for a black woman.

The interviews with these black hip hop artists have shown that accusations of racial disloyalty are very common in the hip hop industry. The perception of these hip hop artists in relation to racial disloyalty varies. The artists partially show a "post-black" view when it comes to racial disloyalty because they are not afraid to verbally support white rappers and they explain that they do certain things that may be seen as "acting white" in their role as

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[143] Rose, *Black Noise*, 177.
[144] Nancy Guevara, "Women Writing' Rappin' Breakin'," *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays On Rap Music And Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 81.
[145] Bonette, "Beyond the Music: Black Feminism and Rap Music," 90.

rappers (or actors). However, the artists also showed themselves in the function of “soul patrol”. Therefore, these hip hop artists also show that they are still deeply rooted in notions of racial authenticity when it comes to racial disloyalty. In the literature of this chapter, these views were also posited. It was argued that African Americans often feel a strong collective identity and aspire to be racially loyal. They also want to counter negative stereotypes and realize that in their struggle to become successful they sometimes have to “act white” to cater to the dominant society. Although these things challenge each other they do not necessarily have to oppose each other.

Conclusion

The notion of "post-blackness" as first introduced by Thelma Golden has shown to have an interesting relation with hip hop. Having reviewed various literature on the "post-blackness" theory, Kennedy's definition of "post-blackness" which entailed that black people should embrace their black identity but not be restricted in being black was used to indicate that although black artists and the media in the nineties partially show a "post-black" view, this view is also problematic because hip hop in the nineties is still rooted deeply in the notion of "racial authenticity."

In chapter one it was contended that the media also showed a "post-black" perception in encouraging hip hop's newly found interracial nature. However, this "post-black" perception then was problematized by arguing that hip hop's new commercial nineties nature enforces negative stereotypes of African Americans by portraying them as violent, aggressive "thugs". Various secondary sources showed that hip hop in the nineties had become mainstream and was no longer specifically associated only with black musicians and listeners, but was now also very occupied with making music for a white audience. This means that the nature of the music had changed. "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music" and ""Music and Political Resistance" showed how hip hop's commercialized character that moved into the mainstream and therefore was embraced by all races, also reinforces the stereotypical portrayal of African Americans in hip hop. Moreover, the interracial character of hip hop caused white people to "act black" even though they could not understand the black struggle. That this is seen as a problem by both African Americans and even some white hip hp fanatics shows that hip hop has not lost its focus on racial authenticity.

Chapter two showed how important racial authenticity is for black hip hop artists in the nineties, even though the way in which they view "racial authenticity" differs. Some

showed a more "post-black" view than others. Interviews with prominent hip hop artists LL Cool J, Ice-T, Public Enemy and Queen Latifah were used to posit that being authentic for these artists is in part linked to their black identity, but they also show a "post-black" view by arguing that hip hop in the nineties has changed and is for everybody, not just black people. In "Acting White" it was argued that because African Americans have a feeling of collective identity they are against crossing cultural boundaries and therefore do not want members of their community to "act white." In *Acting White,* however, it is contended that because African Americans want to counter negative stereotypes, they have to behave accordingly and sometimes "act white" to help their community. Even a group such as Public Enemy that is seen as a black nationalist group and firmly promotes Afrocentricity has to adapt to their white audience and colleagues and the fact that although black identity maybe an important part of their message, this identity has also changed over the years. They do not want to excuse themselves for their blackness but they also do not want to portray stereotypes to show their blackness, which fits exactly into the "post-blackness" theory.

The last chapter helped clarify the notion of racial disloyalty and showed its strong relation with racial authenticity. *White Noise* contended that some hip hop fanatics feel that hip hop has its origins not only in black culture, but in the culture of various races, whereas *Black Noise,* among other sources focuses especially on hip hop's origins in black culture. The focus of black hip hop artists on racial disloyalty problematizes the notion of "post-blackness" because this restricts people in their blackness. Being called a "sellout" is the worst accusation of racial disloyalty for black hip hop artists and is deeply rooted in African-American history, but black hip hop artists themselves also accuse others of being the exact same. The fact that LL Cool J, Ice-T and Queen Latifah also became actors in movies in the nineties was used to argue they do consider how they are portrayed as black artists, but at the same time do not wish to let themselves be restricted in what roles they should play when they

can help the black community by doing so. Ice-T clearly showed that in some cases, the audience of the interviews may be an important factor in the way black hip hop artists present their views. When talking to an Australian audience, he did not feel the need to defend his arguments, stating that he thinks and acts the way he does because of the racial issues that America has. Besides this, not much information that indicated a clear relationship between the views of the artists and the audience was found. Of the artists examined, only Queen Latifah did not use a term similar to "sellout", but she did show she would be afraid of being accused as such by expressing sentiments that indicate she does not want to bring down the black man.

In all chapters, the subject of being financially successful was significant. Black hip hop artists want to become successful to gain independence and self-suffiency. The generation of African Americans born after the Civil Rights Movement struggle to do this, even though formally they were granted many rights, as was explained in "From Black Power to Hip Hop" and "Music and Political Resistance." LL Cool J, Ice-T, Public Enemy and Queen Latifah have shown that they want to thrive for the black community, but by doing so can behave in ways that are seen as not fitting for their race. This struggle again shows the clash between the "post-blackness" theory and racial authenticity.

This study showed that hip hop in the nineties moved in different directions. Black hip hop artists were moving in the direction of the "commercial" white audience especially to become successful and make money and therefore may have lost some of their racial authenticity and started "acting white" according to colleagues or fans. To defend themselves against this accusation, they used the "post-black" perception, stating that there is no right way to be black. At the same time, because this notion of racial authenticity is partly the core of the genre and is what makes hip hop special, the white audience also moved towards black hip hop artists and started "acting black." Although black hip hop artists want to carry out

"post-black" ideas and embrace the interracial nature hip hop has in the nineties by positively responding to a white audience and white colleagues, they are very aware of the fact this is difficult to do. As individuals they may want to follow this path, but they are always influenced by the black collective identity that wants to hold on to the authenticity culture of hip hop.

Of course, since not a lot of research has been done on the notion of "post-blackness" in relation to hip hop culture and music, it was difficult to generalize. This thesis aimed to contribute to the studies on hip hop culture and black identity by focusing on the change of these concepts in the nineties. However, for this thesis, the focus was only on a few specific hip hop artists and even though the first chapter tied these chapters together by giving a broader overview of how the larger audience gave commentary on hip hop and "blackness" as well as received commentary on hip hop and "blackness," more research needs to be done for this study to become part of a larger framework that focuses on hip hop culture and black identity. For further research, more artists need to be examined and instead of looking just at the nineties, later years in hip hop could be researched to see how "post-blackness" has developed over time and if it still has the same relationship with racial authenticity.

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