

# Metaphorical Conceptions in Hip-Hop Music

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“On my block, it’s like the world don’t exist. We stay confined to this small little section with dividends,” proclaims hip-hop artist Scarface in his composition “On My Block.” From the perspective of the artist, then, his neighborhood, figured adequately as a *block*, takes on the qualities of a corporeal, three-dimensional square: one both confining and small. The impression of the artist, voiced through metaphor, allows the careful listener to envision an insider’s representation of an urban, African American neighborhood. Whether the neighborhood as a block is meant to resemble a jail cell, a cramped, subdivided apartment, or even an auction block is unclear, but it is clear that Scarface pictures his neighborhood pejoratively. His block is not the same block of such phrases as “block parties” or “The New Kids on the Block.” Rather, Scarface’s metaphorical block contrasts with pleasant and safe metaphors; his connotes an arguably unique African American enclosure or confinement.

Scarface and many other rap artists also offer listeners fresh analyses and observations through some of America’s marginalized voices (Ogbar 164). Their metaphors are generally specific to the subculture that either adopts them from the dominant culture or creates them to address their own cultural needs. Scarface uses the metaphor of the block to describe impoverished urban African American neighborhoods, neighborhoods frequently referenced as “the projects,” “the crib,” and “the bricks.” What do these metaphors ultimately symbolize? How have they been reconceptualized by African Americans? By non-Black persons?

Traditionally, literary scholars focused on three aspects of metaphorical language unique to human communication and dissimilar to literal language. Metaphor, to earlier semanticists, was important because it enabled speakers to express ideas and meanings that were difficult, if not impossible, to express in literal speech. Metaphor also gave speakers a particularly compact means of communication, one not laden with extraneous words. Most importantly, metaphors, unlike literal speech, were able to describe the vividness of human experience in terms that only humans could express (Gibbs 125-33).

Metaphors tend to be language community-specific. They frequently become incorporated into a language community as special expressions of precise meanings. New and innovative metaphors are important also because they can often serve as vehicles to create new concepts. While most people would agree that poetry depends on metaphor to create imaginative worlds (Ricoeur 12-13), fewer people are aware that metaphors have been pivotal in the sciences for their role in conceptualizing new theoretical orientations and models (Smith, Pollio and Pitts 912-

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13). Poetry and science studies show that metaphors can be used to signal the inchoate starts of reality shifts that are only possible through the figurative and allegorical influences of language.

This idea is not as contemporary as it sounds; it reflects the phenomenon known as Sperber's Law, after the German H. Sperber, who first observed that topics that are either intensely emotional or extremely incomprehensible are likely to become centers of metaphoric attraction (Smith, et al. 412-13). When this occurs, language users substitute more familiar and understandable metaphorical concepts and terminology from fields or domains to illuminate the newer problematic subject. In like fashion, those problematic ideals that come to be understood through other domains of thought will be used in the future to help clarify challenging matters. Sperber's Law, then, suggests that the principal concerns of an historical era or discourse community will likely be reflected in the chief metaphors of the time period and that these same metaphors will come to direct and possibly to constrain the direction of intellectual analysis of that period and future periods. Some linguists have gone even farther with similar objectives to suggest that to understand the intellectual history of a specific time period, one must explicitly understand the metaphors of that time (Smith, et al. 913).

Past metaphorical research has shown that metaphors give people new understandings of their collective experience and new meanings to their past, their daily lives, and their collective knowledges and beliefs. New metaphors have the power to create a new reality for both the listener and the speaker; they cause both to understand their experiences in different ways. This new meaning is heightened further when discourse communities adjust their conceptual system and begin to act and think according to the terms of the new metaphor.

Perhaps the most radical approach to understanding the importance of metaphor with reference to human conceptual systems was begun by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. They claim that the conceptual system in which humans think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature, or constructivist. According to constructivism, the objective world is not directly accessible but rather constructed on the basis of the constraining influences of human knowledges and languages. Within this view, metaphor aids in creating reality (Ortony 5).

Lakoff and Johnson theorize that metaphors are similar to other concepts that govern our thoughts and structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how people relate to one another. Counter to the general belief that metaphor is gratuitous in everyday life and speech, this theory elevates metaphor and its use to a position of importance in both thought and action (3). Lakoff and Johnson posit that human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and since metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to metaphorical concepts in a systematic way, the surface level metaphors that people utter could be used to study the nature of metaphorical concepts and to understand the metaphorical nature of human activities (10-13).

As a key example of a metaphorical concept, Lakoff and Johnson suggest that we see arguments as war. As an underlying concept, "argument is war" allows us to see that we don't just talk about arguments in terms of war, but actually win or lose arguments as if they embodied war. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent and the argument itself is structured by the concept of war (*viz.*, attack, defense, counterattack, and so on). This conceptual metaphor is realized in daily speech by the wide variety of expressions we use to define arguments in terms of war. As Lakoff and

Johnson frame it, these include, but are not limited to:

- Your claims are indefensible.
- He attacked every weak point in my argument.
- His criticisms were right on target.
- I demolished his argument.
- I never won an argument with her.
- If you use that strategy, he'll wipe you out.
- She shot down all my arguments. (4)<sup>1</sup>

Lakoff and Johnson state that the essence of metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (xx). In this way, using the "argument is war" example, the argument and the war are two different things, but argument is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of war. The concept is metaphorically structured, leading the language to be metaphorically structured. This structuring in turn, according to Lakoff and Johnson, leads our thought processes to be conceived in largely metaphorical terms because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly defined by our experience, hence our dependence on metaphors to understand and articulate them (5-6).

As a product of a historically oral culture that embodies familiar metaphorical traits such as satire, irony, indeterminacy, sexuality, loyalty, betrayal, closure, and encasement (Gates 1988: 6), African American rap music is especially rich in metaphoric language.<sup>2</sup> Its roots, along with other African American linguistic traditions (including signifying, the dozens, and narrativizing), give rap music its exceptional linguistic variety.<sup>3</sup> These traditions correlate the rapper to the modern "griot," a linguistically fluent and a gifted storyteller (Smitherman 1997: 4).<sup>4</sup>

The hip-hop generation, whose members have propagated hip hop culture and rap music, does not form a homogeneous group, so I want to define as closely as possible who the hip hop generation is. I want to distin-

guish its members from the dominant society and even more their metaphors from dominant social metaphors.

Loosely speaking, as characterized by Bakari Kitwana, members of the hip-hop generation were born after 1965 and before 1984 (12). They are predominantly African American; their culture they express in many different ways. The chief cultural creation is the production of rap or hip-hop music, but the culture can also be defined through their language, attitude, style, and fashion, all of which are manifested in popular media such as hip-hop music, Black gansta' films, hip-hop magazines, and television networks such as MTV and BET.<sup>5</sup> The culture is also displayed by its own celebrities like Mike Tyson, Snoop Dogg, and Allen Iverson. The continuation of the culture occurs when both Black and White youth turn to these sources to find value and identity. According to Ernest Allen, rap music, more than any of the other indices mentioned, has been the fundamental force in creating and shaping the hip-hop culture; it is the principle medium for the expression of the worldviews of African American youth (qtd. in Smitherman 1997: 5). As a post-modern popular art form, it confronts and challenges deeply held social and aesthetic beliefs (Shusterman 614).

The power and influence of rap music are enormous. Within 20 years, from 1980 to 2000, rap music went from underground cult status to the number one top selling musical format, complete with Grammy awards and mainstream corporate support. Rappers themselves have helped to shape hip-hop culture and influence countless members of the generation. Most rappers have been male, and as a result, rap music is more representative of Black men's cultural norms than Black women's (Neal 76).

Many hip-hop critics are rightly concerned, however, with what they see as the hyper-commercialization of rap music by the corporate record industry.<sup>6</sup> They also malign the influence of dominant commercial concerns

on the aesthetic and political values of rap music. Many also find fault with commercialized rap's neglect of political, social, and racial consciousness, African American linguistic traditions, and its development as a viable art (Gladney 294, 304, Powell 2002). But even Ice Cube, who glorifies violence, materialism, and misogyny in his lyrics, insists that his music is fundamentally socially responsible and that his use of vulgarities helps to communicate this responsibility to communities that would otherwise be disinterested (Ogbar 170). Other critics say that gangster rap, the major offender in the commercialization of rap music, is a self-styled product of "the ghetto." As such, it purposefully reproduces the exaggerated "Blackness" of African American ghettos and the destruction there and should therefore be seen as an accurate and symbolic replica of the urban African American experience (De Genova 106). The commercialization of rap music and the ownership of many large record labels by African Americans and the distribution of money to African American artists, producers, executives, and business managers have increased the success of many African Americans, but have contributed little to the improvement of the social reality of substandard housing, medical care, and education that affects half of African American children and accounts for a quarter of African Americans under the control of the justice system (Tate 11-12).

In essence, for better or for worse, rap music is one modern response to the social and economic ailments of the collective African American community, which include joblessness, disempowerment, and poverty (Smitherman 1997: 5) Young members of the hip-hop generation find themselves essentially in an antagonistic relationship with the institutions that attempt to structure

and control their lives. Law enforcement, school systems, and popular media all identify them as internally dangerous elements of urban America, and this identification leads to the social construction of rap as also fundamentally unsafe (Rose 1991: 279). As a result, hip-hop culture is often

**Hip-hop metaphors show a profound lack of faith in those civil institutions charged with providing a safety for blacks.**

viewed by mainstream society as impoverished, and the evidence used to support this claim is rap. In the minds of many within and outside hip-hop, this

culture is affiliated with unemployment, violent crime (including the high incarceration rates that accompany it), drug abuse, fierce materialism, and the objectification of both men and women (Powell 2002). It is my contention that these topics, being both intensely emotional and problematic to hip-hop culture (and consequently corresponding favorably to Sperber's Law), have become centers of metaphoric attention within the community.

More importantly, I believe that an evaluation of the relative metaphors found in gangsta' rap can be used to better explain and understand the social history of the hip-hop generation and to reveal the underlying conceptual system formulated by the same.<sup>7</sup> This conceptual system was generated to structure hip-hop reality and give it meaning. The identification and classification of this conceptual system can also give both the dominant culture and the subculture a better understanding of the hip-hop generation. Using this understanding, activists, community leaders, politicians, and civil servants might more efficiently meet the challenges that the hip-hop generation faces. At a minimum, this knowledge may help them approach the problems faced by contemporary, urban African Americans with a clearer awareness of the experiences faced by the same.

Perhaps the most immediate experience that members of the hip-hop

generation encounter is their neighborhood. As stated earlier, the hip-hop generation has created numerous metaphorical references for the areas in which they live or about which they produce art, virtually none of them positive. Critic Nick De Genova brands the ghetto of rap music as a "space of death" and also as a space of "survival and transcendence." It is the "heart of Blackness" (119). In this sense, Black urban neighborhoods are mythically emblematic of the distance American society has not covered in its effort to end segregation. African Americans as constructed in gangsta' rap lyrics remain strongly segregated from their White counterparts in neighborhoods that are ripe with criminal gangs, drug abuse, violent crime, inferior schools, and poverty. Those mythical African American neighborhoods are glaring contradictions to the idea that progress has been made from the civil rights movement and that there has been great growth in the desegregation of America. At least a part of hip-hop's "immoral" philosophy finds its origin in the fact that the civil rights movement did not fulfill its promise to Black America (Evelyn par. 18, online). The rap/hip hop community realizes these inconsistencies, and constructs metaphorical concepts of their neighborhoods that are portrayed in the rap music that comes out of the hip-hop culture.

The overwhelming majority of metaphors used to describe African American neighborhoods conceptualize them as restrictive rather than protective objects.<sup>8</sup> Examples are:

- I'm the reason that your block is vacant (Baby, Clipse and Pharrell Williams, "What Happened to that Boy")
- I'm from Da Bricks where the weed go for two for five dick (Redman, "Brick City Mashin' ")
- Get to the crib so I can call Big Slate up<sup>9</sup> (Outkast, "Decatur Psalm")
- I'm real bloody man, the hood love me man  
Don't make me show up in ya crib like bro-man  
Locked up in a pen, I still do my thing  
(50 Cent, "Poor Lil Rich Nigga")

This pervasive conceptualization of neighborhoods as restrictive objects exemplifies how African Americans have allegedly come to understand their environments and is likely a key to the general suspicion and disenfranchisement that many of the hip-hop generation have toward US power structures. Alongside the myth that the majority of Americans live in secure neighborhoods with little rational fear of crime or danger is the myth that African Americans have for generations been raised and come to age in environments that are rife with danger and delinquency. This contradiction in mythic US neighborhoods is clearly seen in the metaphors used by the hip-hop generation and shows a trickle-down effect in the amount of faith the hip-hop generation has in those civil institutions charged with providing a safe haven for African Americans. According to Kitwana, this faithlessness includes a general lack of faith in police, local and national politicians, the liberal Democratic movement, Black leaders, and religious organizations (18-25).<sup>10</sup>

A genuine rather than constructed difficulty that African Americans face is disproportionate, rampant unemployment. Members of the hip-hop generation in particular are twice as likely as their White counterparts to be unemployed, and those with similar skills and backgrounds continue to be paid less than Whites for the same jobs (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). The jobs that are available, and that tend to be earmarked for Black youth, are low wage jobs with poor environments and low expectations. Those who want to start their own businesses often find that it is difficult to secure loans or financial backing. High unemployment rates coupled with a sense of futility with equal wages directly correspond with the number of Black youths involved in the underground economy. For many of the hip-hop generation, this underground economy appears to

be the quickest and most reliable source of income (Kitwana 40-46).

This method of industry, the underground economy, often finds itself metaphorized in rap music. As an example, in the opening lines of "On My Block" Scarface describes the underground economy as: "a either working or ya slinging cocaine on my block. / Ya had to hustle cuz that's how we was raised on my block." Notorious B.I.G. in "Things Done Changed" (1994) speaks of the selling of drugs as "Slinging crack rock," and Bishop in "U Know U Ghetto When" (2001) describes it as "push(ing) crack" and later as "juggling." Newcomers to the hip-hop scene, Nappy Roots, describe working in underground economy in the following way: "Get my grind on, hustle that bustle to make my grip in any time zone / bundle that bubble, let's make it split" ("Hustla," ll. 68-69). These few examples suggest that members of the hip-hop generation view work, or at least work of the underground economy, as being conceptualized as frenetic movement. That is to say, that work in the underground economy is unlike typical work found within conventional economic endeavors. Much of the work that members of the hip-hop community are either familiar with or accustomed to cannot be described using the typical metaphors that the dominant society has established for entering data or answering telephones. Instead metaphors used by hip-hop culture depict work as chaotic, uncontrolled, dangerous, and possibly violent. As an underlying concept, work as frenetic movement is further shown through additional metaphors that image work in the underground economy:

- You niggaz had to hustle for the cash (Tupac Shakur, "To Live & Die in L.A.," 1998)
- So I fight with my pen (Tupac Shakur, "To Live & Die in L.A.," 1998)
- I hit the studio and drop a jewel (Tupac Shakur, "To Live & Die in L.A.," 1998)
- Armed and dangerous, ain't too many can bang with us (Notorious B.I.G., "Notorious Thugs," 1997)

- Thug ass niggas that love to bust (Notorious B.I.G., "Notorious Thugs," 1997)
- Cause a mothafucka try to get me in a jackin' (Notorious B.I.G., "Notorious Thugs," 1997)<sup>11</sup>
- Imagine your kids gotta sling crack to survive, swing a Mac to be alive (NAS, "I Want to Talk to You")
- They watch us from the buildin but niggaz still be on the grind (G-Unit, "I'm So Hood")
- My soldiers slingin' 'caine, sunny, snow, in sleet or rain (50 Cent and Young Buck, "Blood Hound")
- I stack heavy doe, sell out every show (P. Diddy, Busta Rhymes, and M.O.P., "Bad Boy For Life")

How the hip-hop generation conceptualizes working in the underground economy is important for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most significant of these is the demystification of work itself. As a conceptual metaphor, working in the underground economy is by no means glamorized; it is purposefully unpredictable. It is generally difficult work that also appears to discourage workers. Although film and other popular culture media have portrayed it as romantic, work in the underground economy is inconsistently available, physically taxing, and always inconstant. Film, novels, television shows, and music videos have convinced many people that work in the underground economy is prestigious and alluring; the conceptual metaphors used by the hip-hop generation contradict this misperception.

Working in the underground economy forms only one of the many controversies about rap music. Perhaps no other controversial theme has captured the interest of the American media and feminist movements as has the obvious sexual objectification of women in rap music.<sup>12</sup> Album after album names women as *bitches*, *hoes*, *gold diggers*, *chickenheads*, and so on. The representation of women as sexual objects for men's use is a common trope in rap music.<sup>13</sup>

Both male and female rappers figure heterosexual intercourse as an object. A brief review of the metaphors

used in only one song, "T-Shirt and Panties On," by Adina Howard, shows sex is, metaphorically, an object to be hit, turned out, taken, and "freaked":

- We're gonna turn it out
- Hit it from behind
- Have Gloria freak it
- Take it cause I'm all alone

Howard makes it clear that the sex act, within her conceptual patterns, is not only an object, but also an object and an act of violence. These terms separate heterosexual intercourse from emotions, intimacy, and cognition, and they correlate with the pervasive idea that many African American males of the hip-hop generation have embraced nihilism over emotions (De Genova 89-90). The sex act is openly portrayed as being about the body and the availability of the body. The use of neuter pronouns to refer to heterosexual intercourse heightens its alleged objectivity and divorces it from personal significance. Additional examples of the objectified violent nature of heterosexual intercourse pervade the lyrics of other rap artists:<sup>14</sup>

- I'm qualified to knock a hoe (Snoop Dogg, "Bring it on")
- You wanna bang, let's bang it (Snoop Dogg, "Bring it on")
- Got it cracking with my hoe (Snoop Dogg, "Bring it on")
- Let me hit that from behind (Notorious B.I.G., "Fuck You Tonight," 1997)
- I got you all pinned up (Notorious B.I.G., "Fuck You Tonight," 1997)
- I push my seed somewhere deep in her chest (The Roots, "The Seed")
- And even if I did twist her (Clipse, "Ma, I Don't Love Her")
- I get her and wear her down, next door neighbors hear the sound Pictures hittin the ground, just enough to hold us down
- I'm stickin and movin, cruisin after the third round (G-Unit, "Wanna Get to Know You")
- And when it's finished over and done with Imma smoke a blunt and knock the pussy off some bitch (Mystikal and Butch Cassidy, "Tarantula")

One possible reason for this objectification of raced sex acts within the

hip-hop generation is the putative resentment or outright dismissiveness that Black men feel towards Black women who have ostensibly enjoyed greater economic success since the height of the civil rights movement. In reality, Black women complete undergraduate and graduate degrees at twice the rate that Black men do (Close 45). Terminal degrees in law and in medicine have been disproportionately earned by Black women in comparison with their male counterparts. This gender gap theoretically leads Black women but not Black men to material success. This alleged greater material success is another possible reason for the objectification of Black women and, as a result, material wealth has become an index of success for the hip-hop generation, whose members tend to focus more on professional careers, material items, and financial wealth than on intimacy and relationships (Kitwana 107-18). This attitude leads to a general conception that material objects are the signs of success and has affected the hip-hop generation's approach to love, sex, and relationships by perceiving them as being materialistic and objective (Kitwana 6-12).

Materialism constitutes another recurrent theme in rap. Rap advertises the ideal of conspicuous consumption, and rappers expend those things associated with materialism, including luxury cars, women, technology, clothes, and jewelry. Whatever the connection between an alleged African American hyper-materialism and a "racial reflex" ingrained in black people as a result of their having once been sold as chattel (Dyson 110-11), materialist notions and their consequences have seriously affected African Americans' collective pursuit of the American dream (Shusterman 622-23).

Interestingly, rap music's metaphors of materialism exhibit significant metonymy. Metonymy, while metaphoric in nature, is distinguishable from metaphors proper in that it involves a part standing for the whole

(wheels for a car, the law for police officers) or an individual example standing for a related general category (a mother for *motherhood*) (Chandler 125-39). In this way, metonymy grounds itself in the object to which it refers, and takes its essential meaning from the object itself. This tendency is exhibited in rap music through such terms as *chromes* for hubcaps, *stones* and *chips* for jewelry, *paper* and *Benjamins* for dollar bills, and wealth generally through terms like *bank* and *trump* (referring to Donald Trump). Because the hip-hop culture frequently tends not to separate materialism from the physical entity that it is attached to (through metonymy) and instead keeps an obvious link between the metaphor of the signified material alive, it sees materialism analogous to essentialism. In other words, material items of value cannot be separated from their physical constructions without losing that same value. As a conceptual metaphor, "Materialism is Essentialism," can be seen in the following lyrics:

-I got a fetish for the stones, I'm heavy  
on the ice man (G-Unit, "Poppin'  
Them Thangs")  
-You try and play me I'm a blaze in it  
My chromes cost more than the crib  
ya momma raised ya in (50 Cent,  
"Poor Lil Rich Nigga")  
-Cause this paper we makin' is real, all  
day  
Chains showin', rings glowin', Range  
Rovin'  
And my nigga push ki's like Beethoven  
(P. Diddy, G. Dep, and The  
Hoodfellaz, "If You Want This  
Money")  
-Young broad go around in them cus-  
tom drops  
And it's nothing to grab the nines and  
spit at ya  
Bare broke, to roll your stones like  
Mick Jagger  
Hot chrome properly to your dome  
(Foxy Brown and Capone-N-  
Noreaga, "Run Yo Shit")  
-Thinkin I'm Gotti and shit, fuck with  
anyone of them bitches you wit  
Pushin a six-hundred, wrist flooded  
with chips<sup>15</sup> (Guru, Ice-T and  
Suspectz, "Underground  
Connections")  
-Half of my roots is Dominican  
Me gusta le benjamins

This dude got the juice of a pimp in  
him  
I'm turning stones like medusa had  
glimpse of them (Fabolous, "Not  
Give a Fuck")  
-Hey y'all, all I'm tryin' a do is stay  
ballin'  
Thick papers in my pockets, credit  
cards in my wallet  
Ben Franklin on my answer machine  
(Daz and Bad Azz, "U Ain't Shit")

As a conceptual metaphor, "Materialism is Essentialism" relates to many of the key criticisms that are leveled at the hip-hop culture. Chief among these are the criticisms that the hip-hop generation is devoid of a common spirituality and hides itself behind various masks (including material worship) and ultimately nihilism. According to Powell (2002), Dyson, and De Genova, the hip-hop generation has become almost synonymous with materialism.

There are vast statistics documenting African Americans killed by other African Americans, and, at times, these records lead to critical discussion of Black on Black crime in America (Rose 1991: 288). Critics such as Tricia Rose point out, though, that this focus on Black on Black crime can silence discussions of other serious troubles faced by African American communities, including socioeconomic difficulties, substandard housing, nominal health care, inadequate municipal services, police harassment, and racial discrimination, and that "Black on Black crime" has become a catch phrase for all that is wrong in African American neighborhoods (Rose 1991: 288). In response to poverty, disenfranchisement, and despair, many young African Americans regard Black on Black crime as an effective strategy for self-actualization. Rapper Talib Kweli invokes the voice of the impatient:

They don't wanna raise the babies so  
the election is fixed  
That's why we don't be fuckin with  
politics  
They bet on that, parents fought and  
got wet for that  
Hosed down, bit by dogs, and got  
Blacks into house arrest for that

It's all good except for that—we still  
poor  
Money, power and respect is why we  
kill for, for real ("The Proud")

As a societal problem, Black on Black crime is one group's response to, as Kweli states, a pathologizing lack of wealth, power, and civil rights reserved for African Americans. When any of these core elements is missing among any peoples anywhere, then the value of human life everywhere becomes negotiable, even bankrupt. Consequently, in hip-hop metaphors the source of human life, the body, becomes objectified and inanimate.<sup>16</sup> In violent rap lyrics, for example, victims of aggression are treated as inert objects that can be molested and controlled. Frequently bodies are disappeared, laid somewhere, bent, bumped, and knocked about. Accordingly, rap music represents black victims of Black on Black crime as devastated bodies.

-But I'll hunt or duck a nigga down  
like it's sport  
Front on me, I'll cut ya, gun-butt ya or  
bump ya (50 Cent, "What Up  
Gangsta")  
-A new mind a new 9, I had to cock  
back and spray  
Lay ya down for that title and crown  
(Daz and Bad Azz, "U Ain't Shit")  
-I don't know what you been thinkin,  
don't know what you been drinkin  
But you get outta line boy, I'll lay your  
ass down . . .  
The 16 top shot loader'll bend ya ass  
up like yoga  
Your fuckin wit a soldier (G-Unit, "Lay  
You Down")  
-Nigga told me, "Do your dirt all by  
your lonely"  
So I go hit them niggas 'fore 50 couldn't  
even hold me  
I'm waiting, anticipating to put a nigga  
under (G-Unit, "Gangsta Shit")  
-Shells hit your chest go out your back  
man  
See me I put in work, man I been doin'  
dirt  
For so long when niggas get laid out  
(laid out) . . .  
I'll knock a baller off his pivot with  
this motherfuckin' choppa' (50  
Cent and Young Buck, "Blood  
Hound")

Regardless of rap's positive and negative messages, it is the definite cultural movement of the hip-hop generation, and its influences far outreach the African American community. US consumption of rap music is not limited to Black men; African American women as well male and female European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans consume this music. Moreover, it is an international crossover success. Rap's ability to impact social change is immense, but this success is tarnished given that some of the social changes the rap brings about are arguably negative and counterintuitive. The objectification of women through metaphor in rap music has likely helped to sustain the conceptualization of women as a commodity as well as continue the material and emotional divide between African American men and women. The search for material wealth, as found conceptualized in the metaphors of rap music, has also likely led many to believe that the hip-hop generation suffers from a spiritual bankruptcy, while crime and violence in urban African American neighborhoods continue to create an atmosphere of limitation as seen in the conceptualization of living spaces and economic opportunities in rap metaphors. The negative representation of women in rap, along with the overt glorification of the gangster underground, materialism, and violent crime, as seen in rap's conceptual metaphors, has likely caused many to view rap music as degenerative and problematic. This pessimistic view of rap has led many people to ignore its potential for addressing and understanding social issues such as inadequate housing, shrinking economic opportunities, and general loss of hope.

The conceptual metaphors found in rap music are symbolic of more than just the psychological and physical nature of the hip-hop experience. They are emblems of the social inadequacies that still exist in the United States and of the economic and institutional dis-

advantages that many African Americans still face. Metaphors of rap music shape hip hop culture, and enable its comprehension. Rap, according to Kierna Dawsey, is an art form that accurately reports "the nuances, pathology and most importantly, resilience of America's best kept secret . . . the Black ghetto" (qtd. in Smitherman 1997: 7). The conceptual metaphors created within the "Black ghetto" are evidence of the secrets hidden within.

As Lakoff and Johnson state, the objective world is not directly accessible but rather built upon the constrain-

ing influences of human knowledge and language. Metaphors are instrumental in creating this reality and the surface-level metaphors found can be used to study the character of metaphorical concepts and understand the metaphorical nature of human activities. The metaphors of the hip-hop generation as established in rap music help to identify and understand the problematic ideals and obstacles faced by the younger generation of the African American community. They also help to clarify the challenging matters that the hip-hop generation must confront.

## Notes

1. Other metaphorical concepts that Lakoff and Johnson discuss include "Ideas are food, plants, people, products, etc.," "Love is a physical force, a patient, madness, magic, and war," "Life is a container or a gambling game," and various others (15-51).

2. These traits paradoxically mimic many of the metaphoric conceptual categories discussed in this paper.

3. Rap metaphors also have many corollaries with the Black Arts Movement, which like rap, created a voice to reach and replicate the lives of ordinary African Americans. The poetry of both the Black Arts movement and rap not only "taps the reservoir of the Black Cultural Universe," but does so using the language of the Black community (Smitherman 1973). The Black lexis, ripe with the oral culture of Africa, gives the Black artist a fantastic history of metaphorical awareness and metaphorical choices (Smitherman 1973: 265), many of which are used in rap music. Further, as Addison Gayle, Jr., argued, Black art is historically ingrained with the anger that is felt by the African American community and, to this end, hip-hop culture and rap music have respectively sustained various aesthetic convictions that arose out of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s (Gladney 291).

4. Gates refers to this storytelling ability as the ability to talk in innuendo, carp, cajole, lie, and needle. It refers to the ability to talk circles around your opponent (Gates 1987: 238-39).

5. Rap itself was originally a metaphor for romantic, sexual interactions among African Americans. By the 1960s, it had lost its sexual affiliations and instead referred to strong and influential speech (Smitherman 1997: 4)

6. This contention is not to neglect the commercialization of Hip-Hop in brand advertising as diverse as Coca-Cola, Taco Bell, KFC, Mattel, DC Comics, J. C. Penney, Spiegel, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Levi-Strauss, Pepsi, and Calvin Klein (Speigler 122-25 and Miller 10-11).

7. This study will concentrate mainly on the dominant metaphors found in the sub-genre of gansta' rap. Gansta' rap, while obviously commercialized, is the highest grossing rap genre and portrays changes in urban life and values.

8. Perhaps for whites the house is seen as a protective place to escape from the daily obstacles of life. Thus the home is a revitalizing fixture in white lives. Conversely, rap and hip-hop figure African American living spaces as restrictive and controlling.

9. Unlike a baby's crib, which might imply safety and security, this *crib* is likely borrowed from the original metaphor of crib as a small, tightly controlled room for prostitutes in a brothel.

10. Racial profiling, the militarization of urban police forces, random parole sweeps, and the use of community informants in Black neighborhoods have deteriorated trust between law enforcement and hip hoppers.

11. *Jackin'* is a linguistic shortening of the term *carjacking*, a word associated with *hijacking*, both of which are based etymologically on *jack*, the denotations of which include to rob, mug, or steal. It perhaps derives from the practice of stealing tires by "jacking up" a car, hence the colloquialism "jack you up."

12. While men are also sexually objectified in rap music, their objectification has received little attention from media or political groups.

13. The sexual objectification of women is not a problem that occurs only within hip-hop culture. The objectification of Black women by Black men has garnered more attention than the corresponding objectification of women in mainstream society. As Rose points out, the objectification of women has long been a Black cultural practice, but it is no different than that found in other cultures as well (1991: 289-90).

14. Rap is not the only genre to objectify sex. Billboards, television shows, product advertisements, and music videos also objectify women.

15. Of further interest is the 'Italian Mob' metaphor glorified in many gansta rap lyrics and videos. Snoop Dogg, for instance, labeled his sophomore LP *The Doggfather* and Jay-Z raps about his god-father flow. Many gansta rap video are littered with mythical Italian Mafia tropes like expensive clothing and cars. Such metaphors glorify crime, violence, and materialism (Ogbar 167-68).

16. Smitherman noticed a similar metaphor when she wrote that for the rap group Naughty by Nature "the chain remains the same as in enslavement" (1997: 6).

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