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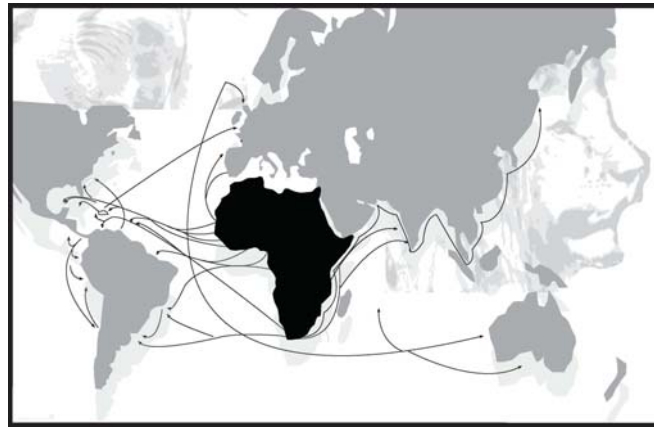
“Media Watch”: A Timeline of Black Urban Video Culture, 1989-2004

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Abstract

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The aim of my project is to open up hip-hop to a wider discussion of contemporary Black, radical politics. In so doing, I shift the exclusive focus away from the culture’s aesthetics, which tends to occlude the political aspects of hip-hop. I examine the historical and cultural implications of representation for Black American subjects and the influence of these implications on hip-hop cultural participants. In “Media Watch,” I employ five examples to argue that video media at large, including music videos, video art, Internet and news video, and other forms, presents a model for democratic representation that hip-hop culture has failed to acknowledge or enact. This is primarily because hip-hop has not critiqued its own lack of diversity with respect to gender and concrete political commitments in its video imagery. Archiving hip-hop video culture in this work, allowed for a much needed, self-reflexive study of hip-hop politics. It also reasserted hip-hop’s significance as a critical lens for interpreting black contemporary politics in general.

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“MEDIA WATCH”: A TIMELINE OF BLACK URBAN VIDEO CULTURE, 1989-2004

When evaluating the representational politics of videos that are publicly discussed/critiqued, new problematics emerge. I have compiled a timeline of video moments significant to hip-hop cultural discourse. The list is the result of a content analysis of fifteen-years of *The Source: The Magazine of Hip-Hop, Culture and Politics*. While readers may question the weight or importance of some of these moments to hip-hop culture, their very existence as newsworthy topics of discussion in *The Source* evidences the broad cultural spectrum and interests of hip-hop culture, one that is too often restricted to analyses of hip-hop music primarily, and other artistic elements secondarily. It would be impossible to explore fully each of the over one hundred entries. Therefore I have selected and provided annotations for five signal events on the timeline. Together, these five moments represent the central themes of black cultural-political representation in today’s American society and they also present a crippling effect that black cultural representations have on black intra-racial political agency. It can be noted in a review of the timeline entries, including, but not at all limited to, the ones that I annotate, that there are overarching

1989

BET’s *Rap City* airs weekdays at 4:30PM for 90 min. and Saturdays at 4:30PM for 60min (EST). The first host is Chris “The Mayor” Thomas and producers for the series include Renee Henson, Deidre Lake and Camille McCurry.

Rap group Digital Underground shoots the video for their single “The Humpty Dance” from the album *Sex Packets*.

Rap group, High Performance, shoots the music video for their single “All Thing’s Considered” at the Silent March on Washington, featuring Jesse Jackson and other prominent black leaders.

Rap group, Public Enemy, shoots a video for their single “Fight The Power” in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, directed by Spike Lee.

themes of racial loyalty, sexism and sexual violence present in hip-hop culture. By reviewing five video moments in recent black urban history we may develop new analyses of how black representation figures in the contemporary moment. Also, we can (re)discover how representation of blacks in the hip-hop generations centers on both antagonist relationships between blacks and white power structures, particularly the American government, police and American media corporations, and antagonistic relationships between black men and black and white women. In both cases black men are more often figured within black public discourse as the victim within these relationships allowing women to be aligned with white power structures, as co-conspirators against black men.

I have chosen to integrate the timeline into this paper because it paints a broader picture of what hip-hop video culture has looked like over a period of 15 years. Taken together these entries illustrate how and when video media became a significant factor in hip-hop historical analysis and at what point it's fascination faded. I am also intrigued by the relevance of a timeline as a primary historical document, very much congruent with hip-hop's "great men, great events," approach to reporting history. Furthermore, apart from Nelson George's *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps and Bohos*, timelines have not been used in hip-hop

1989

Rapper, LL Cool J shoots the video for his single, "Big Ol' Butt" directed by Paris Barklay. The video features close-ups of women's backsides and anticipates L.L.'s "Battle of the Butts" home video, produced by Def Jam, which he describes as "kind of like Miss America – LL style."

2 Live Crew's "Me So Horny" and other popular videos are aired nationwide on video music programming such as *Yo! MTV Raps*, *Video Music Box* (NYC), *Video Jukebox Network* and *Soul Beat* (Oakland, Los Angeles and Detroit).

Following the Central Park Rape attack on a white female jogger, five teenagers were taken in for questioning. Four videotaped confessions and one written confession results in Kevin Richardson, 15, Raymond Santana, Jr., 15, Yusef Salaam, 15, Anton McCray, 15 and Kharey Wise, 16 being convicted and imprisoned for the rape charges.

scholarship or collected essays as a means of analyzing what hip-hop looks like as a cultural and political landscape, a generation or generations or any artistic *and* extra-artistic designation.

The timeline accompanying this paper functions like the Adrian Piper “Personal Chronology” in the text *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective*.¹ The Piper chronology not only lists dates of major exhibitions of the artist’s work and biographical information, it also notes influential art of other genres that Piper was exposed to at various points in her life, including music, film, dance, literature, comedy, comic books, etc. In this way Piper is historicized as an artist by the various mediums she is influenced by, as opposed to just the multiple mediums she practices.

With the timeline divided into divisions of various types of videos associated with a particular year, it also reflects the structure of Deborah Willis’ *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to Present*.² In the text, Willis, divides her discussions and examples of particular photographs into two-three decades, with the exception of the first 60 years. Her discussions include analyses of the following types of

1990

Bay Area rapper Paris shoots a music video for his single “The Devil Made Me Do It” where he villainies George Bush and Pope John Paul.

DC Mayor, Marion Barry is caught on tape during a police sting smoking crack cocaine and having an affair. The entire ordeal is aired on C-Span hours later.

The Fat Boys’ “Human Beatbox,” Darren Robinson, 23, his manager, Curtis Robinson, 27 and bodyguard Pell Wimeley, 31 were are arrested for sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl. Darren Robinson recorded the entire incident on a video camera. Robinson was sentenced to probation following his court trial.

Boogie Down Production’s “Love’s Gonna Get ‘Cha” video, from the album Edutainment is in heavy rotation. The video also features rapper Miss Melody.

¹ Maurice Berger, *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective*. (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 183-196.

² Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to Present*. (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Company, 2000).

“photographs”: daguerreotypes; albumen prints; gelatin silver prints and contact prints; color prints; C-prints (including laser-generated ones); “manipulated”, hand colored, charcoal and conte, oil, ink goache, wax on paper and on canvas, and toned Gelatin silver prints; polacolor ER prints; mixed media/photo monoprints; cyanotypes (including ones on cotton); mural prints; Ilfochrome prints; VanDyke prints; Silver gelatin emulsions on leafs; photo collages; polaroid transfers; DuraFlex prints; photo montages on wood and digital montages; digital color prints; pigments on paper; photo silkscreen with acrylic ink; digital montages printed on gelatin silver paper; and video stills. The end product of all of these diverse processes of production are accounted for under the umbrella of photography. This is analogous to the moments on the timeline when video imagery, because it is a “music video” or is otherwise designated with a video label, includes works shot on film.

As a final example/precedent for the timeline embedded in this chapter, Carroll Parrott Blue’s *The Dawn at My Back: Memoirs of A Black Texas Upbringing* presents a number of examples of dated material cultures.³ These include: letters, magazine covers, emails, newspapers, cinema posters, interviews, social programs, report cards, postmarks, annual

1991

Journalist, Dee Barnes films two separate sequences for her show “Pump It Up,” one with Eazy E and Dr. Dre and one with Ice Cube discussing Cube’s decision to leave N.W.A. Later, upset with the fact that she edited in the segment with Ice Cube, Dr. Dre physically assaults her in a Hollywood nightclub. In a criminal suit, Dr. Dre settles to the tune of a fine, community service, probation and a \$1000 donation to a victim’s recovery organization. He is also required by the judge to star in an anti-violence public service announcement video.

Rap group, Naughty by Nature completes a video for their single “O.P.P.” (Other People’s Pussy)

Los Angeles Police beating of Rodney King is caught on tape by local resident George Holliday. A total of 19 witnesses were present at the infamous beating, including Holliday. King suffered through 56 clubs within 81 seconds.

³ Caroll Parrot Blue, *The Dawn At My Back: Memoir of A Black Texas Upbringing*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

reports, invitations and tombstones. These items, though not assembled in a formal horizontal or vertical, chronological, linear timeline, narrate her history, the history of her family members and in many ways the history of black America during her lifetime up to the point of the publication.

While many of these entries do also represent news history that is greater than just a video moment, the critical and popular attention given to them was in many cases increased due to the fact that video records documented the historical events. Video not only garnered more attention for these moments, but it also shaped what could be thought, said and debated about the “facts” of these moments.

Ultimately, this project grew in response to the “R. Kelly tape” more so than any other video on the timeline, and that was before I even watched it.⁴ I thought about the ways that people were talking about the tape, both personal acquaintances and public entertainers, journalists and scholars, and was compelled to speak back to the discourse that was developing. Dissatisfied by the lack of feminist critique of the tape, particularly when the Nelly “Tip Drill” video, not much later, reawakened hip-hop feminist dialogue in a very public, albeit still “contained” way, I

⁴ My discussion of “the R. Kelly tape” is presented later on in this chapter.

1991

January. Luther “Luke” Campbell and 2 Live Crew’s “Pop that Coochie” music video is the most requested video on Video Jukebox Network for months.

The Persian Gulf War is covered on CNN networks.

Black conservative and EEOC official Clarence Thomas and his former assistant, Anita Hill are videotaped during Thomas’s U.S. Supreme court confirmation hearings, due to sexual harassment allegations that Hill made against Thomas. Hill came forward with allegations of sexual harassment against Thomas. Her charges included his making reference to pornographic media and discussing the size of his own genitalia and his sexual “prowess” with other females. Thomas insisted that he was innocent and that “[he] could not imagine anything that he said or did to Anita Hill that could have been mistaken for sexual harassment.”

wanted to hear, see or *read* criticisms that I believed represented my own and wasn't.

Finally, *The Source* is significant here in researching these video moments because it has the longest history of any serial publication documenting hip-hop culture. In 2001 it reportedly out-sold both *Vibe* and *Rolling Stone* and has been nominated for a National Magazine Award.⁵ It has tracked, much in the way that hip-hop itself has, hip-hop and video cultures, regardless of when these same video moments are cross-listed with other cultures and generations, making them interrelated and not mutually exclusive.

Fight The Power

From an aesthetic standpoint, the video for Public Enemy's rap, "Fight The Power" hardly compares to the film *Do The Right Thing (DTRT)* for which Lee commissioned the rap as a theme song. The video is missing the rare, but striking close-ups (CU) that personalized *DTRT*'s characters, while situating individuals as members of specific communities.⁶

⁵ Shawan Worsley, "Cultural Misbehavior: Audience, Agency and Identity in Black Popular Culture," at *The Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Conference* (Princeton, 2008.)

⁶ For instance, the CU of the fast-moving lips of Mr. Senor Love Daddy in *DTRT*'s opening scene locate black cool, or black masculine, urban style or "swagger," inside of the *We Love FM* disk jockey. The stoic countenance of Radio Raheem's CUs define seriousness and black militancy in the film, they also contrast Buggin Out's wide eyed, irate face after confronting the white male who stepped on his "brand new Air Jordan sneakers" which marked a certain misdirected black angst. And

1991

Louis Farrakhan, upon returning from the Middle East, addresses a press conference where he describes a meeting he had with Saddam Hussein.

The Rap group, Bytches With Problems uses footage from the police beating of Rodney King in their video for the single "Wanted." Their label, Rush Associated paid the videographer George Holliday \$1500 to use the footage.

Chuck D sues the McKensie River Company, parent organization of St. Ides liquor for \$5 million when they sampled his voice from the single "Bring The Noise" into one of their commercials without permission.

L.L. Cool J's "Mama Said Knock You Out" video, directed by Paris Barclay, receives MTV's "Best Rap Video" at their annual award show.

In contrast, the prevailing shot composition in Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" video is a wide shot (WS). The theme for the video is a march staged on the same Bedford Stuyvesant block that *DTRT* was filmed on. While it is somewhat engaging to view the crowd that Lee assembled for the occasion, the look of the video, is comparatively depersonalized. The result is a lack of clarity as to what we are watching. The video's audience is aware that the video is presenting a march. However, no apparent motivation for the march is announced. The audience is also left guessing whom, other than Public Enemy, is marching.

As is typical of black contemporary video culture, "Fight the Power" does successfully portray antagonistic relationships between black men and white power structures, particularly between Chuck D and the police. However, though the opportunity certainly presents itself within the video to critique the antagonistic relationships between black women and white power structures as well, the video fails in this effort.

Lee's staging of this particular march does meaningfully reference other black historical marches, most notably the 1963 March on Washington. In fact, the longform "Fight The Power"

1991

The Pay-per-view cable network premieres "Sisters In The Name of Rap," a concert featuring performances by Queen Latifah, Yo-Yo, Mc Lyte, The Poison Posse and Nefertitti. Dee Barnes hosts the show.

NBA star, Magic Johnson held a press conference to announce that he was retiring from the NBA because he was HIV-positive.

Moses Edinborough completes *Tour of a Black Planet*, a "longform" video on Public Enemy.

Talk show host Phil Donahue invites MC Lyte, Bytches With Problems, Yo-Yo, Harmony and DJ Jazzy Joyce to do an episode on female rap artists. BWP and Harmony debate the use of the word "bitch."

finally, the CU of Tina's pursed lips and erect nipples as Mookie caresses them with ice symbolizes both her and Mookie's raced heterosexual desire. *Do The Right Thing*, DVD, directed by Spike Lee (1989; Criterion, 2001)

video featured on the 2001 Criterion Collection release of *DTRT* begins with archival footage from the 1963 event. This version opens with 1963 Universal-International news footage of Abraham Lincoln's statue from his D.C. memorial, marchers arriving on trains and on buses, footage of random marchers at the event and then, albeit briefly, footage of Dr. Martin Luther King marching. Wide shots of the "200,000 marchers," and medium shots (MS) of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) posters and placards advocating for integrated schools are also included. Notably, we also hear a voiceover from a liberal news journalist, Ed Herlihy, who affirms the presence of the marchers and the justness of their mission. "They came united in one cause," Herlihy notes, "to urge Congress to pass a Civil Rights Bill to end forever the blight of racial inequity." The 1963 marchers in the archival footage are, at least visually, associated with particular organizations, in addition to being King supporters. And they are, most importantly, united with a specific purpose, in this case proposed civil rights legislation.

The entire news brief for the 1963 archival footage that Lee uses is almost six-minutes long. The "Fight The Power" longform edited version of this brief is only 1min., 10sec.⁷

⁷ While there is no archive of broadcasts of music video programming, and therefore I can not go back and look at how "Fight the Power" was originally aired, it is unlikely that this particular part of the video was broadcasted, and may not have been a part of the original video at all.

1992

Female rap group, Salt 'n Pepa shoot a second, "revised" video for their "Lets Talk About Sex" single that features Magic Johnson. The video premiered on an ABC AIDS special hosted by Peter Jennings.

Ice Cube and veteran activist Angela Davis sit down for an hour-long conversation about politics, hip-hop and the black community. The session was videotaped for an electronic press kit despite not being broadcast.

The four police officers charged in the beating of Rodney King were acquitted in Simi Valley, Ca. LA and national news networks capture the city of Los Angeles erupting in riots resulting from the verdict.

Damian Williams and Keith Watson were arrested for the videotaped beating of Reginald Denny during the Los Angeles riots.

Certainly Lee had to condense this footage some but it is important to analyze the entire archival video in order to make sense of the editing decisions Lee made and to highlight what Lee felt was important to take and what he specifically decided to leave. The newscaster sound bites that Lee kept are especially significant because they demonstrate themes of a common purpose and the relationship between blacks and the police and American democracy which resonate inside of the “Fight the Power” video in rather ironic ways.

First, the newscaster notes, “It seems as if the demonstrators were finding strength in each other, and discovered their cause was a bond.” It is also important that the journalist announces in the video that their cause was that of “20 million Negroes.” These statements pronounce a bond greater than just a racial one. They are supported as well by the pronounced reference to the Civil Rights Bill mentioned earlier, and the specific cause of that legislation. The communities of black folks marching in the 1963 footage are not just marching for the sake of their blackness as the “Fight the Power” video ultimately captures the 1989 marchers doing.

Furthermore, Lee edits in references to the D.C. police in ways that are significant in light of the 1989 march as well. In

1991

In Public Enemy’s “Brothers Gonna Work It Out” video, director Lionel Martin restages the police beating of black youth that occurs on Virginia Beach.

2 Live Crew’s “Pop That Coochie” is denied broadcast on BET’s *Rap City* because of explicit content.

1992

Rapper Chuck D appears on MTV’s *Rockline* and ABC’s *Nightline* because of controversy surrounding Public Enemy’s “By the Time I Get To Arizona” music video. Reverend Jesse Jackson and others submit sound bites to *Rockline* expressing their concern for the amount of violence in the video. “All this will cease when you give King his holiday,” D insists on *Nightline*, referencing the fact that Arizona is one of two states not honoring King Day as a national holiday. The video features reenactments of King’s protests and scenes fantasizing PE directed assassinations of government officials.

the “Fight the Power” video Lee uses the announcers comments: “Arrests in Washington were below normal. Police attributed this to the fact that for the first time in 30 years you couldn’t even buy a beer in Washington. The civil rights marchers needed no stimulants like that.” The derogatory association with blacks and alcoholism, even in the face of their apparent sobriety, aside, Lee uses this statement in order to address police presence in black urban communities in his contemporary moment. Lee could have taken the statements made regarding police in the archival footage in their entirety. Immediately before this statement in the 1963 footage the journalist also notes, “Authorities were fearful of disorders and there were 5,000 uniform men on duty.” But the reality of the 1963 march footage is that with the exception of a few officers providing security for Martin Luther King, Jr. behind the speakers’ podium, there were no uniformed officers captured. This is an important distinction because for all intents and purposes it highlights a staged character of the 1963 footage that the 1989 march avoids. To some degree, its what’s missing, visually, in the 1963 news brief in order to make the march look real, they have the black masses, they have the posters, they have the “leadership,” and they are certainly marching and convening but where are the police? By using the journalists statement that

1992

TV host, Arsenio Hall invites KRS-One and BDP on to his show. KRS speaks about the verdict and the LA social realities that anticipated the riots. KRS also demanded amnesty for the “13,000 people [arrested during the riots].”

Barbara Walters interviews rape victim Desiree Washington for 20/20.

ABC News *Nightline* airs an hour-long program “Moments of Crisis: Anatomy of Riot” featuring interviews with LA residents post-LAPD acquittal.

MTV networks sent rappers MC Lyte and Trech, of Naughty by Nature, to the Democratic National Convention and Republican National Convention, respectively. Rapper, TRQ also performs at the RNC.

“arrests were down,” and deliberately leaving out the sound bite announcing the fact that 5,000 officers were on hand, Lee conveys the March on Washington in 1963 as non-threatening to the police. However, the police are present in the “Fight the Power” video. They are shown containing the 1989 marchers and in one scene in the video Chuck D demonstrates his disregard for their presence. After four white, male police officers pass by him, Chuck D sneers at them behind their backs. Lee frames the 1989 march, organized to promote Public Enemy as more threatening to the police than the 1963 March to promote the Civil Rights Bill. This moment in the video reflects Chuck D’s opening remarks warning against, “going out like that ’63 nonsense.” Though Chuck D is not specific about what went wrong with the 1963 march, his opinion likely reflects the critiques that militant nationalists had/have about King’s philosophy of non-violence and peaceful demonstration.

In the 2001 director’s introduction for the video, Lee remembers that the march was organized to end racial violence. Perhaps this memory is supported by his recent review of the footage captured at the event, originally left on the editing floor, in which he did find one banner reading, “Young People’s March on Brooklyn to end Racial Violence.” This clip makes it way into the longform video only. Had this cause been greater

1993

Charles Rourke and Mark Kohut were tried and convicted in one of the first Court TV trials for kidnapping, robbing and setting fire to Christopher Wilson when he was vacationing in Tampa, Florida.

A 30-sec Budweiser Television commercial features a fictional rapper “MC Cow Seller” that a rap group discovers in a rural neighborhood “a jillion miles outside of da’ hood.”

Rappers Paris, KRS-One, Bushwick Bill, Monie Love and Pete Rock all appear along with journalist Havelock Nelson on CNN’s *Sonia Live* to discuss their reaction to the LA Riots.

MEE Productions premieres their documentary video “Reaching the Hip Hop Generation” at a New York City summit.

Reverend Calvin Butts of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, NY poses for the press in a steamroller with “offensive” rap CDs and tapes buried underneath.

supported in the 1989 music television version, the political motivations of the March would have been better asserted and the March would have appeared less “staged” for the purpose of promoting the Public Enemy single only.

Lee also notes, “we had a lot of fun doing [the video].” The spirit of the video was more of a party than a protest of anything, particularly racial violence. To a certain extent this is necessary. A large part of hip-hop is about pleasure. The beat for “Fight the Power,” like many in the genre, is absolutely infectious, it makes you want to dance and celebrate. However, the “Fight the Power” video does not reconcile this dual articulation of pleasure and politics in the same way that the single does on its own, or in the way that the single does in Lee’s film *DTRT*.

Again, in the longform only, the video uses the 1963 newscaster’s concluding remarks: “Washington D.C., 1963, democracy speaks in a mighty voice.” Whereas this is used in the 1963 news brief to suggest the achievement of the assembly, in the 1989 longform this sentiment is mocked. It is strategically placed right before Chuck D remarks,

Yo! Check this out. We rollin’ like this. The young black America we rolling up with seminars, press conferences and straight up rallies. Am I right? We going to get what we got comin’ to us. We aint goin’ out like that ‘63 nonsense.

If democracy is by its most basic definition equal participation

1993

The television show, *Video Music Box*, presents a discussion with rapper Ice T and anti-Gangsta Rap activist C. Deloris Tucker.

20/20 devotes an episode to the disproportionate marketing that malt liquor companies direct toward inner city communities. Reporter John Stossel interviews Chuck D and the St. Ides Ice Cube commercials were heavily critiqued.

The PBS series *Frontline* airs scenes from the Matthew McDaniel video *Birth of A Nation* 4-29-92. The independent production was filmed with a VHS camcorder that McDaniel grabbed from a looted rental store in Los Angeles, CA and it features interviews with South Central residents as well as archival footage of Ice T, NWA, KRS-One, Ice Cube and Chuck D.

MTV rejects The Geto Boy’s “Crooked Officer” video. The work includes actual footage of police brutality.

in government and fair representation for all American voices, Chuck D is apparently very critical of the Civil Rights generation's achievements in this arena, and thus encourages the 1989 marchers that the hip-hop generation "aint goin' out like that." The "Fight the Power" longform like the March on Washington in '63 might also be separated into what it appeared to do, or what is conveyed visually and orally on screen, and how it "rolled," or what concrete political activity is achieved. These distinctions bear an important significance on how we might address the video's political potential. If we first measure what it accomplished, then we may conjecture what else it might have been able to do.

Two years after the mass mediated incident of "racial violence" that involved 15-year-old Tawana Brawley being assaulted and left in a bag of feces, and was followed by a haze of media manipulations of her words, actions and identity, the young woman reappears in the "Fight the Power" video. Tawana Brawley, a New York State resident, was found on Saturday, November 28, 1987 with racial slurs written on to her body and clothing. Brawley informed police that she was both kidnapped and raped by six white, law enforcement officers. As recently as December of 1997, at age twenty-five, Brawley insisted that the charges were true. In 1988, a Grand Jury investigation

1993

CNN's *Both Sides*, a weekly news program hosted by Rev. Jesse Jackson, discusses Gangsta rap with Yo-Yo and Harry Allen.

Professor X, joined by 700 others in New York's Times Square, premieres his video for "Close The Crackhouse" while speaking out against the inordinate number of the dwellings in inner city neighborhoods. The video was displayed on the Square's Sony Jumbo-Tron screen. Chuck D, Poor Righteous Teachers and Big Daddy Kane are all featured in the song and video, which was directed by Ralph McDaniels.

The prosecution of "King of Funk," Rick James results in the court viewing videotape of James beating a woman with a belt and pronouncing, "Maybe I should hire myself out as a professional woman-beater."

1994

Tupac appears on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. There he makes mention of a call that he received from imprisoned boxer Mike Tyson who instructed the young rapper to "calm down."

determined that her allegations were not “credible” and therefore none of the officers allegedly involved were ever brought to trial.⁸ Instead, one of the accused Assistant District Attorney Steven Pagonis responded to Brawley’s public accusations of assault by insisting during the Grand Jury investigation that his name be cleared of all charges. Because Pagonis was a “public servant” the Grand Jury was entitled to issue a report on the investigation provided it “found no misconduct . . . or neglect in office by him.”⁹ After hearing the evidence brought forth in the Grand Jury, they decided to issue the report. According to the document:

Public accusations of a crime, in addition to ruining a person’s reputation, can destroy the ability of a public servant to function effectively even where a grand jury has found no evidence to support an indictment. This is especially true if the accused is a law enforcement officer. Public confidence in the accused official and our system of justice may not be fully restored and maintained without some means of putting the accusations to rest.¹⁰

Ultimately, the success of Pagonis’ request was supported, at least in part, by his willingness to waive his constitutional rights to immunity against self-incrimination and to testify before the Grand Jury and, most importantly, by Brawley’s failure to testify at the Grand Jury proceedings. Brawley’s silence, though likely motivated by her distrust in the legal system, prevented

1994

Female rap group, Salt and Peppa perform their hit single “Shoop” before a *Saturday Night Live* studio and nation-wide audience.

Black female talk show host Rolanda invites KRS-One to discuss rap related violence.

***Eye to Eye* host Connie Chung profiles Gangsta rapper Ice T on the CBS series.**

Geraldo hosts Luther “Luke” Campbell, Dr. Dre and Ed Lover, and C. Deloris Tucker on an episode discussing Gangsta rap.

Rapper, Lisa “Left-Eye” Lopez ignites the home of her fiancé, Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Andre Rison. A news helicopter captures the blaze from above. A neighbor also captured the fire from their home video camera.

⁸ “Report of the Grand Jury Concerning the Tawana Brawley Investigation,” *Court TV Online*, <http://www.courttv.com/archive/legaldocs/newsmakers/tawana/index.html> (accessed November 10, 2008).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

her from asserting her full rights under the law.¹¹

Brawley, as a video subject then, presents a particularly powerful opportunity to stage conflicts of racial violence and distrust in law enforcement systems and representatives. This opportunity is missed however by the further silencing of Brawley in the “Fight the Power” video. Yes, she is in attendance, wearing all white as if to suggest her innocence. However, she does not stand out in any other way. One would have to recognize her face in order to know that she was in the video at all. Lee therefore makes it a point to identify her in his director’s commentary about the video on the *DTRT* re-release. Without this commentary, in the original video, her “testimony” is no more revealed in this instance than it is at the Grand Jury.¹²

This failure is motivated in large part by hip-hop’s insistence on representing broad strokes of political critiques as opposed to concrete commitments for political action. Additionally, it is the result of the tendency in black culture, in general, to promote black male representatives only. On the one hand, Public Enemy’s video is more likely to present a staged

1994

Led by Senator Carol Mosley-Braun (D-IL) and Representative Cardiss Collins (D-IL) the United States Senate and House hold subcommittee hearings on Gangsta rap lyrics. C. Deloris Tucker presents anti-Gangsta rap arguments and Representative Maxine Waters defends Gangsta rap, insisting that it was being used as a scapegoat.

Former NFL star, O.J. Simpson leads police in a televised car chase after allegedly murdering his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson (35) and her friend Ron Goldman (25).

Senator Jesse Helms turns his back on South African President, Nelson Mandela, rather than shake his hand.

¹¹ In 1998, Pagonis also won a \$395 million lawsuit against Al Sharpton and two other public advisers to Tawana Brawley, for ten defamatory remarks made against Pagonis. “Winner in Brawley Suit Says Victory is Bittersweet.” *CNN.com*, July 14, 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/US/9807/13/brawley.verdict.02/>

¹² Similarly in *DTRT* Lee supports Brawley’s accusations on a graffiti mural that reads, “Tawana told the truth.” However, if you do not recognize her name, and you are not familiar with the circumstances surrounding her case, you may also miss this reference entirely. This relates to my discussion in Chapter One about cultural insiderism in hip-hop. *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee.

march with a downplayed theme of “racial violence” than it is to present a “real” march around the specific theme of Tawana Brawley’s case for instance. This tendency in hip-hop culture creates an environment of unfocused political angst. Also, Brawley is certainly not the only victim of racial violence in the nearly all black cast of the video. However, if black culture was not as insistent upon featuring black male representatives, perhaps the “Fight the Power” video might have presented us with the opportunity to march alongside Brawley, as a real *and* symbolic representative of racial violence, instead of Public Enemy, as hip-hop artists.¹³

Furthermore, Brawley’s case would have provided Public Enemy with the opportunity to oppose both racial violence and sexual violence, a platform even further marginalized in hip-hop culture. While the racial and class politics of “Fight the Power,” the single, at least are more clear, there are no explicit critiques of sexual assault in either the video or the rap recording. One particularly signal line from the rap is “Our freedom of speech is freedom of death, we gotta fight the powers that be.” Imagine how significant that line could have been contextualized in the video by Brawley’s

1995

A five-time winner on It’s Showtime at The Apollo, Jessica Care Moore becomes the first poet to score such a feat.

Attorney Ron Sweeney holds a press conference on behalf of his client, Eazy E, in order to announce that he was currently hospitalized because of an illness associated with AIDS. In a statement written by Eazy E, Sweeney read, “I just feel I’ve got thousands and thousands of young fans that have to learn about what’s real when it comes to AIDS.” In this statement Eazy E also announces that he has fathered seven children by six women.

Mike Tyson is released from prison after serving three years for a rape sentence. Tyson is “welcomed” home during videotaped celebrations, including one in Harlem hosted by Don King and Rev. Al Sharpton.

¹³Nelson George notes that the crowd for the Public Enemy video shoot was, “drawn by the power of celebrity (being in a video, maybe meeting Spike or P.E.)” Nelson George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos*. (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1992, 2001) 258. This very celebrity, and black male celebrity specifically, is one of the factors that links all five of the video moments I am discussing in this chapter.

failure to testify before the Grand Jury, after her public presence in the American media defaced her. Opposition to rape has historically been fought on the issues of consent, power and silence. Freedom in this context would not have had to be limited to racial freedom.

While it is unfortunate that critiques of politics in hip-hop culture are often leveled against self-consciously political or “conscious” rappers, and it is tempting even in this instance to be content with Public Enemy’s general political agency, if we don’t begin by holding already presumed politically astute rappers accountable then we might as well “hang [hip hop] up” altogether. According to Jeff Chang, “the [Fight the Power” video] presentation was street demonstration, Black pride march and rap concert, as if the 1972 Black Political Assembly had been transformed into a millennial Brooklyn block party.”¹⁴

What we see in the example of the “Fight the Power” single and video is that hip-hop can express political messages inside of its infectious beats and pleasure-producing environments.

However, hip-hop must extend this capability to avoid flattening specific political agency into blanket political consciousness even in the midst of a “party” atmosphere?

1995

Senator Bob Dole delivers a speech before a Los Angeles rally that critiques Time Warner records for their “misogyny business.”

Following an extensive, televised criminal trial, O.J. Simpson is found not guilty of two murder charges.

A television advertisement featuring C. Delores Tucker and conservative republican, William Bennett urges its audience to counter Time Warner, parent company of Death Row Records, and Gangsta rap music. Tucker argues in the 60-second spot, “[Gangsta rap] celebrates the rape, torture and murder of women. The lyrics are vulgar, offensive and do terrible harm to our children.”

An estimated 400,000 Black men and many mainstream and independent video news networks follow Minister Louis Farrakhan to the Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

¹⁴ Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005) 279-280.

“*The Bitch Set Me Up*”

In the case of the 1990 police “crackdown” on black District of Columbia Mayor Marion Barry, we see similarities between the masculinist politics of “progressive” rappers and other prominent black political figures. Certainly, the political messages contained in hip-hop video culture mimics the themes expressed in dominant political media. Just as “political rappers” should express themes of progressive racial, class and gender politics, black political figures in general, should do so as well. It is certainly the case that rappers take their cues from other contemporary political figures. This influence can be measured when rappers either consciously align with figures such as Minister Louis Farrakhan, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Barack Obama or voice opposition to political leaders including Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and Clarence Thomas, for instance.¹⁵ D.C. Mayor Marion Barry’s surveillance by the

1996

HIV+ NBA player, Earvin Magic Johnson returns to the game.

NBA player, Dennis Rodman delivers tears during the final five minutes of his appearance on The Oprah Winfrey show due to his distress over not being allowed to see his daughter.

Rapper, Snoop Dogg is acquitted at the close of his Court TV televised murder trial.

KRS-One stars in a Nike commercial doing an interpretation of Gil Scott Heron’s “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” Public relations manager, Eric Patton, was credited as being responsible for the advertisement.

¹⁵ See Fat Joe, “The Hidden Hand,” *Don Cartagena*. compact disc, © 1998 Big Beat Records, where he raps, “The Devil’s got a plan/That’s why Farrakhan formed a Million man/ in Washington;” Grandmaster Melle Mel, “Jesse” *The Sugar Hill Records Story*, compact disc, © 1997, Rhino Records, in which he raps, “The name of the man is Jesse Jackson/And his call for Peace was loud as Action;” Jadakiss f. Common, Nas, Styles P, Anthony Hamilton, “Why (Remix),” *Why (Remix) 12*,” 2004, where Common raps, “Why is Bush Acting like he trying to get Osama/Why don’t we impeach him and elect Obama;” Nas, “Rule,” *Stillmatic*, compact disc, © 2002, Columbia Records, where Nas rhymes, “Move over Colin Powell/ Or just throw in the towel,” Nas f. Kelis, “American Way,” *Street’s Disciple*, compact disc, © 2004, Columbia Records, in which Nas rhymes, “Condoleezza Rice – I don’t really get this chick/Tell her if she really cared about poor schools/About poor children/Then she gotta prove/That she ain’t just another Uncle Tom fool;” and finally, Shyne, “Diamonds and Mac-10’s,” *Godfather Buried Alive*, compact disc, © 2004 Def Jam, where he raps, “Black robes white justice/Clarence Thomas is a motherfucking puppet.” The only single among these where the rapper encourages a specific action for their listening public is Grandmaster Melle Mel’s single which encourages his audience to vote for Jesse Jackson in the current presidential election and to also join Jackson’s Rainbow Push Coalition.

police is yet another signal video culture moment that hip-hop tracked.

There is a great deal that is unsettling about the videotaped drug abuse and subsequent arrest of Barry, the consumption of crack cocaine aside. The manner in which it was made available to the public is perhaps the first offense to note. When the DEA held Barry in the hotel room where he was “set-up” on camera he was repeatedly told that his privacy would be protected and that discretion would be used in order to respect his position as a city official. Barry is told explicitly that they will assure him “ultimate privacy.”¹⁶ However, the entire videotaped ordeal ended up on the news that very night.

What is surprising however is not the mass-dissemination of the tape, there is, after-all, a market for scandal regarding all American public officials, black officials included. Rather, what is most striking about the tape, and the resultant public critique, is the failure of the tape’s audience to respond appropriately to the devastating sexual aggression and harassment that the tape revealed. Again, these politics are set-aside for the purposes of racial solidarity in the case of the tape’s black American public.

On the tape, Barry repeatedly makes unwanted sexual advances towards the black woman who remains in the hotel

1996

NBA player, Mahmoud Abdual-Rauf, (Denver Nuggets) is suspended indefinitely for his failure to stand during the national anthem. After being fined, \$31,000 a game, Abdual-Rauf continued his protest for three games before giving in.

General Colin Powell delivers an address at The GOP Convention in support of Affirmative Action and women’s reproductive rights.

Chuck D interviews Strom Thurmond at the Republican National Convention.

President Bill Clinton defeats Republican candidate Bob Dole in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal.

Gun violence interrupts a video-shoot for rapper Nas’s “Street Dreams” at a New York City nightclub.

Death Row Records C.E.O. Suge Knight appears on ABC Network’s *Primetime Live* from the prison he is incarcerated.

¹⁶ This statement is made by one of the arresting officers and is recorded in the video. *Mayor Marion Barry 06/28/1990*, VHS, directed by Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, (1990)

room with him up until the point of his arrest. Though he does not go so far as to force penetration on her, he is told over four times to stop physically touching her in exchanges that involve her pushing his hands off of her and verbally asking him to move more slowly. At one instance in which she declines his sexual advances he responds, “All the men you fucked, give me a break,” in order to express his anger at her rejection. In another instance the woman asks Barry, “Why can’t you learn to be warm instead of just jumping into it,” to which he responds by asking, “I can’t just jump into it?” thus ignoring her request. He also tells her to “fuck [herself]” to which she responds by asking him to stop using profanity towards her. Barry calls a male friend from the hotel room in order to brag about her presence in the room with him. Finally when the police rush in, he asks “where is she?” apparently disturbed by the fact that she might have gotten away from the scene, at which point he repeatedly states, “the bitch set me up,” blaming the woman, not the DEA, for the sting. Ultimately the Barry tape failed to ignite a conversation about drug abuse in the black community *or* about aggressive sexual behaviors. Acts of racial solidarity silenced both of these two dialogues from happening. In large part the centering of race in this type of confrontation results from a legitimate distrust of the American government, and particularly

1997

NYPD officers Justin Volpe, Charles Schwartz, Thomas Bruder and Thomas Weise assault and sodomize Haitian immigrant Abner Louima with a toilet plunger inside the 70th Precinct in Brooklyn. They are shown entering the room on a precinct surveillance tape.

22 year-old James Quarles was shot to death by Baltimore Police Officer as a crowd looked on. Officer’s argued that Quarles lunged towards them while a bystander’s videotape indicates otherwise.

Master P’s black-market video *I’m Bout It* receives national attention.

NBA player Latrell Sprewell chokes and threatens to kill his Golden State Warriors coach P.J. Caelesimo during a Warriors practice. Sprewell publicly apologizes.

the judicial branches. As Johnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy Sheftall note, “There is a great deal of anger within Black communities about the so-called trashing of successful Black men.”¹⁷ As an example of this Cole and Sheftall cite the “high visibility of the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings,” “the trials of O.J. Simpson and Mike Tyson,” and the “FBI handling of . . . Mayor Marion Barry’s *alleged* drug use,” (my emphasis)

This protection of black men, particularly (though not exclusively) black male public figures, from white American racism is unabashedly done at the expense of intra-racial violence, which is very often sexual in nature. As Kristal Brent Zook notes,

The notion of black authenticity tricks us into equating support for the Million Man March, or O.J. Simpson for that matter, with support for black people, because anything else is considered race treason. Well, many of us have grown tired of such backwoodsman reasoning. When the names Rodney King, O.J. Simpson, Mike Tyson, Marion Barry and even Clarence Thomas became symbolic, like ‘Scottsboro,’ black women are left without a way to talk about how some of the Scottsboro ‘boys’ (accused of raping two white women) actually did commit acts of violence and murder against their girlfriends and wives. Black women are left without a way to address Rodney King as anything other than a victim, even after his second arrest for domestic violence.¹⁸

Perhaps now after Barry’s re-election to the office of Mayor in D.C. and current position of D.C. Councilman (elected with a total of 98% of the votes in 2008), he is considered less of a

1997

“Rerun it, rewrite it, reprint it,” NFL player Michael Irvin demands to the American Media when alleged rape victim and ex-stripper Nina Shahravan recounted her testimony that Irvin and teammate Erik Williams held a gun to her head and raped her. Sports Network, ESPN obliged.

Phoenix, Arizona resident Gil Webb Jr., 17 was beaten by three police officers after he led them on a stolen-car chase and crashed into a police vehicle. Webb’s injuries included a broken neck, when officers repeatedly kicked him and threw him into an emergency vehicle. A local TV cameraman captured the brutality on video.

Luther “Luke” Campbell’s “Peep Show” airs primetime for two-hours on the Action-Pay-Per-View Network. *The Peep Show* is a music video program where guests, including Heather Hunter, Too \$hort and Lil’ Kim, bear all in videos that are considered too “nasty” for major entertainment networks.

¹⁷ Johnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African American Communities*. (New York: One World, 2003) xxxi.

¹⁸ Kristal Brent Zook, “A Manifesto of Sort for a Black Feminist Movement.” *New York Times*, November 12, 1995, n.p.

victim, and more of a hero.¹⁹ During his first term when Barry was arrested, D.C. vendors sold T-shirts and cassette tapes with the slogan, “the bitch set me up.”²⁰ By way of these memorabilia, these video moments become what scholar Jacquie Jones calls “the stuff of popular culture,”²¹ and here I would argue, hip-hop culture in particular. The combination of audio and visual “realities” assembled on video tape increase the kinds of discourse that can be quoted, reproduced (in the form of video stills) and critiqued in popular culture. Making it 50% more likely that video media will be re-articulated, as compared to talk-radio or photography, for instance, where only one component, audio or visual, is available. Though at first these moments seem more about American political culture than about hip-hop culture, I argue that it is in these incidents that the two become interrelated. Not only does American news media hand these moments over to the people, via the high visibility of this video footage, but popular media, entertainment media in particular, engages these moments in a way that hip-hop reclaims for purposes all their own. In this way, hip-hop culture begins to function much like the designation of the “civil-rights

1998

Rapper Missy Elliott premieres her “Supa Dupa Fly (The Rain)” video directed by Hype Williams.

From their New Mexico jail cell, brothers Howard and Trent Daniels produce the straight-to-video, documentary *Freaknik 98: The Movie* featuring Atlanta’s annual spring break event.

Rapper, Jay Z releases his longform video, *Streets is Watching* for a “straight-to-video” release. The video also stars Damon Dash, Kareem “Biggs” Burke, Akinyele and Lyor Cohen. Jay Z, Chaka Pilgrim and Damon Dash wrote the screenplay. The video sells over 100,000 copies.

President Clinton begins his Africa trip visiting Botswana, Senegal, Ghana and South Africa.

¹⁹ “D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics: Election Year 2008,” http://www.dcboee.org/election_info/election_year2008/.

²⁰ Jacquie Jones, “The Accusatory Space,” ed. Gina Dent *Black Popular Culture*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992) 96-97.

²¹ Jones, “The Accusatory Space,” 96-97.

era,” just as the hip-hop generations have now succeeded the “civil-rights generations.”

In the example of Barry’s video moment, hip-hop responded to it with humor. For example, Common satirizes Barry’s drug use in his self-aggrandizing bar, “I’m dooper than Marion Barry.”²² Similarly, rapper Esau jokes, “I yelled out O.J. is innocent, but he killed that bitch, and started a riot/ and I gave Marion Barry a piece of crack and told him to light it.”²³ However, just as in the case of entertainment and the “Fight the Power” video, while humor has an important role in black American culture, we must extend these purposes to improve upon our racial, class and sexual politics. In doing so we will make much needed improvements upon our physical, psychological and cultural health. One example of how this has been done is A Tribe Called Quest’s “We Can Get Down,” where rapper Phife condemns negativity in hip-hop and calls for “preaching” about Marion Barry’s drug abuse.”²⁴

“A High-Tech Lynching”

1998

Rap star, DMX informs MTV News, “obviously there has been a misunderstanding. It’s all going to be straightened out in a minute,” after surrendering to New York City police following charges of raping, sodomizing and unlawfully imprisoning a 29-year-old exotic dancer. Journalists latch on to DMX’s lyric “And if you got a daughter older than 15, I’m going to rape her” for media fuel.

President Bill Clinton testifies before a Grand Jury during its investigation into allegations made by Monica Lewinsky. After hours of probing, Clinton admits to having “inappropriate [sexual] relations,” with Lewinsky.

Puff Daddy and Bad Boy Family film the video for “The Benjamins.”

²² Common Sense, “A Penny For My Thoughts,” *Can I Borrow A Dollar*, compact disc, © 1992, Relativity.

²³ Esau, “I’m Going to Hell,” *The Debut Album: The Farewell Tour*, compact disc, © 2000, Mends.

²⁴ A Tribe Called Quest, “We Can Get Down,” *Midnight Marauders*, compact disc, © 1993, Jive. Phife makes no mention in the song to the sexual politics of the video either.

The debate as to whether or not the infamous Clarence Thomas confirmation hearing is relevant to the “hip-hop generation,” is as contested as the often-heated debates over the ages included inside of the “hip-hop generation” itself. Even amongst my own interview subjects, some, like Mark Anthony Neal for instance, insist that the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill debates were an “‘old-school,’ Civil Rights” generation conversation. Correspondingly, Kim Osorio, former editor of *The Source* magazine offers, “I don’t think [the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings] had much of an affect on the hip hop generation, maybe as it should have!” Osorio states this while laughing because she recently filed sexual harassment charges against high-level executives at *The Source* magazine.²⁵

Perhaps, the youngest generation of hip-hop cultural participants, as it is now firmly divided between three groups, is too young to remember who Anita Hill is; however, the rhetoric of the confirmation hearings is still relevant, as Osorio notes. Furthermore, hip-hop, within and outside of *The Source* did participate in larger conversations about the hearings. Shawn Love asserts in his single “Turn Back Time,” that if he could revisit the moment of the hearings he would “rape Anita Hill,”

1998

During the Million Youth March in Harlem, NY, hosted by Khalid Muhammad, 3,000 New York City police attend to patrol the crowd of 10,000 attendees. Later, six black male marchers were indicted for starting a riot that many marchers and Harlem residents insist was caused by the police. Five of the six men were indicted because of videotape the grand jury watched.

1999

Eddie Murphy’s The PJ’s airs on FOX television.

23-year-old, Hampton University junior Kemba Smith was sentenced to 24.5 years in federal prison for refusing to turn-in her drug-dealer boyfriend. This young mother addresses audiences assembled by her family’s Kemba Youth Foundation via videotape: “Nowadays the wrath not only hits men, but us too, which also affects our kids.”

²⁵ These charges ultimately resulted in Osorio being awarded \$15.5 million. See Rosa Clemente, “All Eyes on Her,” *The Village Voice*, October 30, 2006 and Adisa Banjoko, “Kim Osorio KOs Benzino and Dave Mays,” <http://www.myspace.com/thatacrackintheconcrete>.

and, “Tell her to calm down.”²⁶ Master P, on the song, “Living That Life” declares the hearings as “a joke,” almost immediately following remarks that “O.J. wouldn’t be on trial if it wasn’t a white bitch.”²⁷ Finally, Fat Joe critiques the unwillingness of Anita Hill to submit to the sexual desires of Clarence Thomas. He does so by comparing her to his asexual wife, as opposed to his “misses” who “slugs to love him,” or reciprocates his sexual wants/needs.²⁸

The signal phrase that arose from the hearings was Thomas’s insistence that the publicity resulting from the testimony represented a “high tech lynching.”²⁹ Throughout the hearing, Thomas remained stoic and visibly annoyed. His reputation as a public official was, in his opinion, being unjustly dragged through the mud. He insisted to the Senators who presided over the confirmation hearing, “confirm me if you want, don’t confirm me if you are so let, but let this process end.” The media attention to his sexual behavior in his eyes, and in the eyes of many others, was inappropriate.

According to Hill however, and those who supported her, the public admission of her charges of sexual harassment were

1999

Rapper, Eminem breaks his “My Name Is” video on MTV. The video predates the production of any promotional CDs, tapes or albums.

Hip-Hop artist Lauryn Hill wins a record breaking five Grammy Awards.

2000

The Dirty South Raw and Uncut video features 2 Live Crew and the 69 Boyz as four females profile Daytona Beach’s Spring Break festivities.

Uncle Luke’s *Freakfest 2000* video airs.

Rap group Three 6 Mafia’s “Sippin’ on Some Syrup” video is a testament to the growing presence of mainstream Southern hip-hop groups in hip-hop culture.

Oakland based artists, The Punnany Poets, perform for the HBO series *Real Sex*.

²⁶ Shawn Love, “Turn Back Time,” <http://www.ohhla.com> (Accessed November 10, 2008).

²⁷ TRU, “Living That Life,” *TRUE*, compact disc, © 1995, Priority Records.

²⁸ Lord Tariq and Peter Gunz f. Big Punisher and Fat Joe, “Cross Bronx Expressway,” *Make It Reign*, compact disc, © 1998, Sony.

²⁹ See my in-depth interview with Melissa Harris Lacey.

both appropriate and vital. “It would have been more comfortable to remain silent. I felt that I had to tell the truth,” Hill remarks. And though this truth was both publicly and privately condemned by large numbers of society, including evidently the majority of Senators who confirmed Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice, some feminist supporters champion it as an affirming model for political agency. It is in fact the public outcry against sexual misconduct that Tawana Brawley never fully achieved.

When Thomas lamented, “This is a high tech lynching,” he called attention to the increasing accessibility of video technology, and asserted his disdain for the videotaped, publicly aired medium of the confirmation hearings, and for the way that video technology was potentially jeopardizing his career. This was an incredibly sharp move; shift the attention away from the focus of sexual harassment and onto the sophisticated, new age packaging of the allegation. At the same time that he honed in on the newly available technology that many were still only fumbling with, however, he summoned a historical legacy that all were familiar with, that of Southern lynching. In my interview with Melissa Harris-Lacewell she notes,

It became clear in that moment . . . that when black men are facing a white criminal justice system, or in this case a hostile White senate, that they can always point to that moment of lynching, that we have a cultural/racial trope widely and easily available that the black

2000

Lil' Kim's “No Matter What They Say” video answers some of her media critiques.

“Digital Diva” Cita, premieres on *BET's Jam Zone*, and follows with her own show, *Cita's World*, during *BET's* next season.

Vice President Al Gore and NJ Senator Bill Bradley debate key race issues before an MSNBC broadcast including: racial profiling, felony disenfranchisement, affirmative action and refugee laws. Journalists Soledad O'Brien and Tavis Smiley moderated the debate.

St. Louis Mayor, Clarence Harmon addresses a TV news public regarding his refusal to honor rapper Nelly as Universal Records requested.

BET Tonight with Tavis Smiley airs an episode entitled “The Return of Conscious Rap.” Smiley's guests include rappers Common and Dead Prez and journalist Kevin Powell.

community immediately knows what were talking about. “Oh, lynching, that’s oppression, that’s about us.” But of course no black man has ever been lynched for what he supposedly did to a black woman, right. So there was no equivalent, easily available, racial and cultural trope, for Anita Hill. She couldn’t say, this is a [pause], whatever. There is just no place for black women to talk about the oppression at the hands of black men in a way that is easily, readily understandable in the community.³⁰

Here Harris-Lacewell expressed a critique of the metaphor of lynching that Thomas uses. She is of course correct in her recognition that black men were not lynched for their alleged inappropriate sexual behaviors directed towards black women. Both Thomas and Harris-Lacewell appropriately find a space here to suggest the racialized motivations of lynching and the American media, and Harris-Lacewell rightly critiques Thomas’s sexual reading of both arenas. Far less frequent however, were analyses of the advent of video technology during the 1980s and the significant role that it played in the “high tech [pause], whatever” the confirmation hearings were.

Why video, at this time, in this space? First, because American news media has a history of live-action visual cultural representation that includes everything from the Anti-American committee hearings that brought forward celebrities such as Jackie Robinson to the sensationalist coverage of Lil’ Kim’s perjury trial, and Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill found themselves somewhere in the middle of this history. While early

2000

The beverage company, Sprite, launches a five-spot commercial campaign entitled “What are you thinking?” featuring rappers Mos Def, Beanie Sigel, Lord Finesse and Pharoahe Monch. The fifth spot features a reference to the shooting death of Haitian immigrant Amadou Diallo at the hands of the New York Police Department. In this commercial Mos Def is surrounded by police and he pulls his wallet from his pocket while raising his hands in submission.

Russell Simmons, Conrad Muhammad, Martin Luther King III and others gather at the inaugural Rap the Vote campaign meeting. The campaign will feature PSAs with rapper/producer Sean “Puffy” Combs, rapper/actor LL Cool J and singer Mary J. Blidge.

The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan and Attallah Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X, appear on the series *60 Minutes*.

³⁰ See my in-depth interview with Melissa Harris-Lacewell.

news was shot on film and post-1980s news was shot of video the cultural content of these two forms of news did not differ dramatically. Most certainly, it is also because the unedited, videotaped “confessions” of another black, male, D.C. public official “aired the dirty laundry” of black male/female sexual interactions in a way that not only Marion Barry, but Thomas also, could publicly indict “the bitch” for.³¹ It is because Uncle Luke videos and the selectively accompanied censorship trials have helped prepare us for the mass-mediated mentioning of “long, dong, silver,” penis references, even if their re-utterances out of the mouths of conservative, bible-toting black women such as Anita Hill would only better prepare us for C. Deloris Tucker’s media moments a few years later. Hip-hop’s explicit language and it’s public critique made it possible for equally explicit language to be quoted by Anita Hill, albeit timidly, and C. Delores Tucker, women born outside of the hip-hop generations. Finally, and no less importantly, it is because by the early 1990s video would completely replace film, as the most accessible, most alive visual culture medium. When people stop

2000

Following sexual assaults that took place at New York’s Annual Puerto Rican Day Parade, News Media link the incidents to misogynous cultures in rap music.

David Stern, Commissioner of the NBA, publicly condemns player Allen Iverson for his homophobic lyrics on the single “40 Bars” that Iverson released.

Along with breakdancers who performed at the 2000 Republican National Convention, Colin Powell takes the stage at the RNC and encourages Republicans to advocate for people of color always, not just during election seasons.

Rep. Harold Ford, Jr. (D-TN) delivers the Keynote Address at the 2000 Democratic National Convention.

The videotaped police beating of carjacking suspect, Thomas Jones in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania airs on National TV.

³¹ See Roxanne Shanté’s answer to in-depth interview question 11, where she states, “With the Anita Hill situation, all they did was take black laundry and air it out for the world to see. To say, “look how they are, even when they are in “better positions”, look how they still can go at each other. Look how we can still get them to go against each other, even under these circumstances. So don’t fear a black politician because they can still be controlled. I think that was horrible how they did that and how they aired that.” Here Shanté flips the lynching metaphor to direct her anger towards the Senators along with the American media for manipulating black public officials and for continuing to foster damaging black cultural representations.

reading newspapers, and quit going to the movies, they buy TV sets and then VCRs and then DVD players. If the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearing is a “high tech, [pause], whatever,” it is something like a high tech revolution in the packaging of both regressive and progressive political beliefs. Video has now replaced film as a newer, cheaper and more accessible medium with which to carry a message and hip-hop is one of many cultures that takes advantage of this tool.

Hip-hop’s response to the Senate Confirmation hearings was confused at best and certainly lacked the focus on sexual harassment and women’s rights of feminists. Though some in the hip-hop generation are critical of Justice Thomas they do so because of his right-wing formal political agenda not because of his sexual politics. Boogie Down Productions rapper KRS-One for instance proclaims, “You want to see the devil look at Clarence Thomas.”³² However, in the next bar he refers to Colin Powell as the devil as well. In this context it is more likely that KRS-One is critiquing Thomas’s conservative political agenda.

Elsewhere specific references to the hearings from hip-hop cultural participants assert that Hill is lying. Rapper Defari refers to Anita Hill as “money hungry,” and admits that as he increases his own income, he is cautious of women such as Hill

2000

Hip Hop “Flick” *Platinum Pussies*, produced by Derek Gibson, CEO of Forefront Entertainment a New Orleans, Louisiana rap/porn label starts a trend of hip-hop themed pornography videos.

Jay Z’s “Big Pimpin” video features model Gloria almost as notoriously as the rapper himself.

T.V. series *America’s Most Wanted* features a story on former rapper Chi Ali, wanted in connection with a murder.

Director Benny Boom creates a video for Nas and Bravehearts’s “Oochie Wally.”

At the 2000 *MTV Music Video Awards*, Lil’ Kim attends in the now infamous purple pastie covering only the nipple of one exposed breast.

2001

George W. Bush is inaugurated into office as President of the United States.

³² Boogie Down Productions, “Build and Destroy.” *Sex and Violence*, compact disc, © 1992, RCA Records.

who he believes are out to exploit prominent black men financially.³³ This argument is certainly not new in hip-hop at the moment of Hill/Thomas and it is repeated again with rape victim Desiree Washington and each of the accusers in the rape and statutory rape accusations against rappers Tupac and DMX, R&B singer R. Kelly and basketball star Kobe Bryant.³⁴

Because the Thomas/Hill hearings produced two opposing beliefs regarding the allegation of sexual assault that Hill brought forward, hip-hop journalist, Nelson George, considers “public lying” and public lying about sex in particular to be the focus of the scandal.³⁵ This resonates with the cases of the four previously mentioned black male celebrities as well. George presents the following possibilities for who’s lying and how they are misrepresenting the truth: “Is Clarence Thomas a feel-copping boss or a porno pervert? Is Anita Hill a spurned lover or a psycho bitch?” You will note that these options limit Hill to someone who in fact desires Thomas sexually, an allegation she completely denies during the hearings. You will

2001

Rapper, Doug E. Fresh and poets Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, The Last Poets and Nikki Giovanni all present works at the premier tapping of the HBO series *Def Poetry Jam* hosted by rapper, Mos Def and sponsored by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons.

Rapper, Ludacris’s break-through single and video, “What’s Your Fantasy?” advances him into celebrity status.

³³ Defari, “Focused Daily.” *Focused Daily*, compact disc, © 1999, Tommy Boy.

³⁴ In Akinyele, “Bags Packed.” *Vagina Diner*. © 1993, Atlantic/WEA, he plots to use “that old Mike Tyson play and cry out rape,” in order to get an unwanted female out of his house. Nas, raps, with references to Mike Tyson and Tupac, that men should be aware during sexual intercourse with women when women are “fighting,” but not because rape is wrong, because “some hoes is trife/get you on a rape charge/have you serving your life.” Nas, “Dr. Knockboot,” *I Am*. © 1999, Sony. Talib Kweli, uses the example of Kobe Bryant’s accuser to assert that “when they throwing pussy, best believe you gonna catch something,” implying that she had sex willingly with Bryant, but he still caught a case for it. Talib Kweli f. Hi-Tek, “Back Up Offa Me,” *The Beautiful Struggle*. © 2004, Rawkus/Umgd.

³⁵ Nelson George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1992, 2001) 251-252.

also notice that Clarence Thomas is either guilty of physical sexual assault, a charge that Hill does not accuse him of, or a pornography abuser; the specific allegation of sexual harassment that is not extended beyond physical attack or coercion is never questioned.

Therefore, even the more focused analyses of Clarence Thomas's sexual politics that hip-hop culture offers are at least confused if not consciously in denial. "When we find out conclusively who lied," George continues, "we'll still have to figure out whether Thomas's alleged harassment was a matter of lust and power, or of lust, power, and race." The case in fact is definitively about power and race, but "lust" is here a comfortable substitution for assault. It is easier to talk about "lust" as it relates to sexual harassment, a sexual agency that we might imagine all adults are at times guilty of, than it is to use the Hill/Thomas hearings as a moment to have productive conversations about how sexual harassment relates to sexual assault.

"Not Guilty"

The intersection of lust, power and race is also the juncture where black Americans who believed "O.J. did it," found themselves unpacking the circumstances that surrounded the

2001

Rapper, Shyne is a guest on the *Politically Incorrect* series hosted by Bill Maher, filmed weeks before Shyne was scheduled to stand trial for attempted murder in connection with the Club New York shootings himself, Sean "Puffy" Combs and singer Jennifer Lopez were all allegedly involved in at some point. The topic of the show is violence in rap. In response to Maher's comment that "rich rappers . . . are killing each other," Shyne remarked, "I know about two rappers that were killed and nobody's been convicted in those murders. So I don't see how you can say rappers are killing each other . . . [It's] bigger than rappers. [You got] the NRA, the gun lobbyists . . . ain't no Uzis made in Harlem."

Rapper/Producer/Executive Sean "P. Diddy" Combs appears on a two-part interview for Tavis Smiley's *BET Tonight*.

Director Nia Hill premieres her straight-to-video release, *On The Come Up: At the Source Awards*.

murder of Simpson's ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and acquaintance Ronald Goldman.³⁶ These competing forces led some to believe, before and after Simpson was found not-guilty of both murders, that the scenario unfolded as follows: Simpson (read black male) interrupts a romantic encounter between his ex-wife (read White female) and a younger man (read White male) he is overcome with jealous rage and commits an act that it almost completely out of his hands. It is sympathy that for the most part summons the support of O.J. Simpson particularly during the earliest moments of the murder scandal.³⁷

Later we see O.J. Simpson willingly submit to police interrogation. This video moment involves an American television audience viewing O.J. Simpson in handcuffs, despite his not being under arrest at the time. The sympathy that was directed towards Simpson from his black supporters earlier on is now exchanged for empathy. All of the distrust that black America has for the police is translated in this moment into a disregard for the "facts" of the double-murder and Simpson becomes a "police suspect" of the Rodney King variety. In fact,

2001

Rapper, Snoop Dogg plays the role of a cartoon pimp in the FOX series *King of the Hill's* 100th episode.

Missy Elliot's "Get Your Freak On" video is directed by David Meyers.

Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* features Snoop's music and videos mixed with hard-core sex scenes.

BET President Bob Johnson fires Tavis Smiley, canceling his BET Tonight show, citing reasons that included him being "difficult."

Rochester, NY's Danny Vara, a cable-network producer, completes R.P.D. Exposed, a 30min. feature on police brutality in his community that includes footage of a black motorist being beating by police. Vara urges his audience to take justice into their own hands.

³⁶ In the film *Barbershop*, comedian Cedric The Entertainer, refers to the fact that "O.J. did it," meaning O.J. murdered Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman, as one of the cultural truths that blacks will not often admit to. *Barbershop*, DVD, directed by Tim Story. (MGM Entertainment, 2002.)

³⁷ John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000) 63. Nikhil Singh, "Notes on a National Report," *The New Black Renaissance: The Souls Anthology of Critical African-American Studies*, ed., Manning Marable. (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005) 126. Debra J. Dickerson, *The End of Blackness: Returning the Souls of Black Folks to Their Rightful Owners*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2004) 173-4.

as in the case of King, the Simpson case is being handled by the same presumed racist, corrupt Los Angeles Police Department. Racial loyalty, coupled with a distrust of the American government and historical abuses of power by government officials, is the primary agency that the Simpson case enacted inside of black America. Furthermore they also developed a sympathetic leaning in favor of a “un-pre-meditated,” “domestic disturbance.” These three feelings were enough to make even those blacks that presumed Simpson guilty empathetic *days before* he threatens suicide in the back seat of his Bronco.

In *Playing The Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White*, Linda Williams supports that the “visual field” of the O.J. Simpson trial, and here I would extend her analysis to include the video moments of the interrogation and the Bronco chase, “evokes race without having to speak it.”³⁸ The black male body in American video culture is reinterpreted through this visual and video field as victim, because of the history of black male victimization in this country. Even when videos are not speaking the idiom “race,” and instead they are using the language of “fight the power,” “the bitch set me up,” “a high-tech lynching” and “long, dong, silver” represented or re-represented as coming from the mouths of black males, the “race card” encourages

2001

Charles Stone, III directs *The Roots*, “You Got Me,” video.

A 13-year-old mentally disabled girl of Marietta, Georgia is raped by roughly two-dozen men and boys, ranging in age from 12 to the mid-20s. A 10-minute videotape shows the girl struggling as several boys and men rape her.

Rapper Ludacris and Hip-Hop crooner Nate Dogg tape the video for “Area Codes” in South Beach, Fl.

Al-Qaeda terrorists attack World Trade Centers, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania.

President Bush, Jr. urges Congress to support a bill that will allow him to use military force on any individual he believes responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The Senate vote was 98-0 in approval. The House vote was 420-1. African-American representative, Barbara Lee was the lone voice of opposition.

³⁸ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White: From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001) 266.

black viewers to read these black males as innocent.

The Bronco chase, even more so than the handcuffed interrogation, encouraged the support of a black audience (and further hastened the divide between black and white Americans). During the chase, a news helicopter presented live video footage of O.J. Simpson, and his friend and former teammate Al Cowlings, fleeing from police on the day that he was supposed to surrender himself to the LAPD. Los Angeles County prosecutors were now prepared to issue formal charges against Simpson for both murders. As Gil Garcetti, LA District Attorney, noted that day: “Mr. Simpson [was] a fugitive of justice.”

The two hour slow speed chase that Simpson led has been described many ways. Howard Kurtz, of *The Washington Post*, referred to it as both “one of the top five dramatic television moments,” and “surreal.” It was certainly both. The chase is hip-hop’s Kennedy Assassination; almost anyone can remember where he or she was, what he or she was doing and who he or she was with when they first caught a glimpse of the Bronco.

Garcetti referring to Simpson as a “fugitive” (un) intentionally captures the symbolic imagery (and audio) represented on the video feed. The police are alerted to Simpson’s

2001

Director J. Jesse Smith wraps up videos for Erick Sermon’s “Music” (featuring Marvin Gaye) and Mos Def’s “Miss Fat Booty”.

Rap artist, Jay Z, performs MTV Unplugged, No. 2.0 at MTV Studios, Times Square, New York along with drummer, Questlove and other instrumentalists from The Roots. The performance also features Jaguar Wright and Scratch on vocals. Jay Z shocks his audience by performing onstage with a Che Guevara shirt and Wright’s rendition of the “Aint No Love In The Heart of The City” sampled hook is equally awesome.

Jay Z and R&B vocalist R. Kelly host a press conference to merely announce their decision to do a Best of Both Worlds album together.

whereabouts by a white, male motorist who reports that Simpson is “heading North on the 5 Freeway,” his comment is audible on many news stations covering the event, they also appear as subtitles rendered onto one clip. If Clarence Thomas’s dejected countenance summons imagery of the lynched, black male victim, then (for a moment at least) O.J. Simpson in the Bronco is a modern day visual of the escaped slave “heading North,” a black cultural hero. As a former “All-American,” NFL great, Simpson was already a sports celebrity, but with the chase, he becomes a black community Icon, even amongst blacks who previously wrote him out of the race because of his crossover appeal and marriage to a White woman.

But for White America, the reaction was quite the reverse. The once coveted, “safe” image of O.J. Simpson was demonized by many, and abandoned by others. According to Chuck D, “Professional sports franchises and the leagues will tolerate the Black player as long as he fits the ‘goody-two-shoes’ Negro, Hertz Rent-A-Car jumping in airports image once held by O.J. Simpson.”³⁹ But the murderer, escaped “fugitive” image belied this representation and the Bronco chase, also amongst White America, turned Simpson into something (not so) new.

2001

Lauryn Hill performs her second *MTV Unplugged* concert. In an intensely emotional performance, Hill ranges from topics of love (“I Just Want You Around”) to police brutality (“Rebel”).

2002

Following his release from prison, Suge Knight appears on Bill Maher’s *Politically Incorrect*.

Coca Cola’s “Real” campaign features television commercials with hip-hop and neo-soul artists such as Jaguar Wright, Common, Mya and Musiq Soulchild. Videographer Chris Robinson films the Common and Mya television spot.

Busta Rhymes’s “Pass the Courvoisier” video encourages critics to once again evaluate the role rap music and videos serve as free-publicity for corporate products, in this case liquor. Rhyme’s publicist, Biff Warren, notes, “Essentially Courvoisier got an \$800K commercial.”

³⁹ Chuck D with Yusef Jah, *Fight the Power: Rap, Race and Reality*. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997) 100.

But where, in the midst of all the mass-mediated representations of Simpson was the other gender critique? Not the one that raced Simpson into the Sambo or Outlaw stereotypes for black masculinity, but the one that dealt justly with Simpson's history of domestic violence and abuse directed towards Nicole Brown Simpson. Certainly the prosecution, who introduced Nicole Brown Simpson's distressed 911 calls as evidence of O.J.'s abusive past, dealt this card. News media outlets also translated these texts into video moments with found photos of the two individuals pitted on either side of Nicole Brown Simpson's written translations. But the race-loyalty of the black community prevented them from engaging in similar dialogue.

"Golden Showers"

Public Enemy and Tawana Brawley, Marion Barry and his acquaintance, Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, and O.J. and Nicole Brown Simpson all resonate in the still pending charges against singer R. Kelly. Each of the males has a preexistent celebrity that impacts how their video audiences encounter their media moments. This celebrity is what Linda Williams refers to when she states, "If the Simpson trial was about anything, it was about a national fascination with the demeanor of its famous

2002

Coors beer manufacturers promote television advertisements featuring Dr. Dre and Doug E. Fresh. In the Doug E. Fresh spot, Fresh raps Slick Rick's verse from "La Di Da Di."

Sixers star, Allen Iverson makes TV news after reportedly breaking into another man's home looking for his wife Tawanna. In a separate incident Iverson supposedly throws his wife out of the house, completely naked, because of a dispute.

R. Kelly, is indicted on 21-counts of child pornography. Black market videotapes allegedly featuring the artist with under-aged girls circulate around the country. On one tape, R. Kelly reportedly appears with a 14-year old girl.

In Game Four of the Eastern Conference Finals, Celtics vs. Nets, Celtics fans chant "wife beater" at Nets player Jason Kidd.

Rap artist Khia's "My Neck, My Back" video features the Tampa, Fl. Dance "K-Wanging."

defendant.”⁴⁰ And to the contrary, each of the females has varying degrees of anonymity which impacts how viewers respond to the tapes as well. The discourse surrounding each of the video moments is racialized, and to a lesser degree, with the exception of the “R. Kelly tape,” gendered, despite the fact that the racial readings of each of the video moments is motivated by the masculinity of each of the black male celebrities. All five videotapes either stem from or later encounter altercations with criminal justice agents. Each of these signal video examples ignite conversations in hip-hop culture that often victimize black male celebrities and villainize white women and more frequently, black women and girls.

Audience assessments of R. Kelly’s alleged behavior may have been different if the former cases prompted more progressive conversations about gender, and more specifically sexual violence, The O.J. Simpson verdict for instance, was uncompromisingly about race and the criminal justice system. For some, it was also about class and the privilege that O.J. Simpson’s status afforded him to hire a top-notch defense team, which may or may not have “gotten him off.” But it was not, to anyone other than the prosecution, about domestic violence, and O.J.’s confirmed history of abuse directed towards Nicole

2002

Bill O’Reilly challenges Pepsi’s decisions to have rapper Ludacris endorse their product on his FOX T.V. show *The O’Reilly Factor*.” One day later, Pepsi pulls Ludacris’s television ads, blaming consumer complaints about Ludacris’s sexually explicit lyrics.

MTV bans Public Enemy’s “Gotta Give The Peeps What They Need” video because of images and lyrical supports of Death Row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal. The ban was eventually lifted because of an appeal made by Chuck D, and D’s unwavering stance during “negotiations” proposed by MTV.

The videotaped arrest of 16-year-old Inglewood California teen Donovan Jackson includes the officer Jeremy Morse throwing Jackson, face first, into the hood of a car, punching and choking him. A California jury was later deadlocked in the case against Morse.

⁴⁰ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, 268.

Brown Simpson. In my interview with Dr. James Peterson, he illustrates this point with an anecdote about a domestic violence survivor's reaction to the Simpson verdict. Whereas he assumed that the woman would have defended Nicole Brown Simpson's victimization, she applauded the "not-guilty" verdict because of the history of unjust sentencing of black males in criminal justice cases.

But what happens when both parties involved in criminal cases, the defendants and the prosecutorial witnesses, or alleged victims, are black. "Race loyalty" in the context of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, for the masses of the video's public, meant silencing the outcries of black women in order to lessen the public humiliation of black men. This is a deafening silence in the wake of both Anita Hill and Marion Barry's acquaintance, and perhaps even more so in the case of the underage girls that R. Kelly has been accused of raping.

My copy of the "R. Kelly tape" is a DVD with a white cover.⁴¹ The title "R. Kelly Exposed" is affixed to both the outside of the DVD itself, in black inked handwriting and on the

2003

Pacers vs. Knicks, NY, player Ron Artest breaks a television monitor and \$100,000 video camera due to an Indiana upset.

Comedian Dave Chapelle's *Chapelle Show* series premieres on Comedy Central.

Nas's "Made You Look" video is completed.

L.A. Lakers player, Kobe Bryant is charged with sexual assault. In a tearful press conference the NBA star admitted to committing adultery but denied the sexual assault allegations. Bryant attended the press conference with his wife.

Lil' Kim's "Jump Off" video, also starring Mr. Cheeks of The Lost Boys hits the music television screens.

Videographer Chris Robinson directs Snoop's "Beautiful" video, also starring producer/artist Pharell.

⁴¹ The slippage in terminology between VHS videotapes and DVD discs here is symptomatic of the technological terminology holdover from the preceding to succeeding mediums. Also, given the nature of how the video was distributed, it is also likely that others viewed the video on VHS. I refer to the video as "the R. Kelly tape" because this is how it was regarded in popular discourse. See *Reaction to R. Kelly* directed by sexxistar2b. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLMyGzRd4gs>, Iain Mackenzie, "R Kelly Tape Not Fake Says Expert." *BBC Newsbeat*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/hi/entertainment/newsid_7427000/7427021.stm May 30, 2008. Kari Lyderson, "Relatives Deny Alleged Victim is the Girl on R. Kelly Tape," *Washington Post.com* June 5, 2008. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/04/AR2008060404311_pf.html

DVD menu. Like the few other people that have confessed to seeing it in my presence, I can trace my copy back a couple of viewers, but other than that the distribution market is as anonymous as any other bootleg video operation. When the tape first began circulating the black market I defiantly refused watching it because it would have quite honestly horrified me to know that there was a tape of myself willingly or forcibly engaging in sexual acts with another party that was circulating around the country. I didn't view it at first out of respect to the young girl I imagined on the tape.

One of my earliest pre-encounters, if you will, with “The R. Kelly tape” was during a 2002 “Hip Hop Speaks: All Hail the Queen” lecture.⁴² When journalist, Asha Bandele, couldn't remember the terminology that had been given to the sex act of urinating on someone which the “R. Kelly tape” had recently popularized, to Bandele's horror and my own, the 500+ audience of primarily black young people, under the age of 20, that was assembled said, almost in unison, “golden showers.” The cause for concern with “the R. Kelly tape” is not that it features young people engaging in sex acts, or even taboo sex acts. Instead, it is the fact that the tape's audience is failing to evaluate its contents as anything other than consensual sex on the part of the

2003

Following the 2003 French Open, tennis player Serena Williams mocks a French accent and scoffs, “Well, we don't want to play in the war. We want to make clothes. We don't want the war.” CNN uses this opportunity to support the U.S.'s anti-French sentiment resulting from their refusal to enter in Bush's War on Iraq. The remainder of William's statement however includes, “I don't want a war either. I don't know many people who do want to be involved in the war.”

The U.S. Government captures Saddam Hussein.

50 Cent f. Snoop Dogg's “P.I.M.P. (Remix)” video features 50 revealing his “Magic Stick” before a panel of pimp judges.

⁴² Hip Hop Speaks: All Hail The Queen lecture featuring panelists Asha Bandele, Rosa Clemente and Kevin Powell, moderated by Toni Blackman. March 8, 2002 at the House of Justice, New York City, NY.

minor that is participating, the black community, much like the entire American nation, has failed to create a discourse around the topic of statutory rape.

Instead, the hip-hop community is consenting to “consensual” sex relationships between minors and adults.

Certainly part of this has to do with a history of black girls in black communities believing that the sexual relationships that they had with older men were consensual.⁴³ It also has to do with these same black girls defending what they believed to be consensual relationships as a defiant stream of the discourse surrounding the “R. Kelly tape.” Conversely, it has to do with a history of older men, however discreetly, engaging in what they firmly understand to be predatory relationships with underage

2003

Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs, Jay Z, Damon Dash and Russell Simmons are all among the hip-hop personalities that challenged New York’s notorious Rockefeller drug laws during a N.Y. protest.

Singer, Patti LaBelle appears on the B.E.T. network show *106 & Park* admitting the pleasure she takes in watching the series *Uncut*. During the episode she whispers into male co-host A.J.’s ear that her favorite song is “What That Thang Smell Like” by Black Baby Jesus.

⁴³ See Brenda E. Stevenson, “Latasha Haruns, Soon JA DU, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier,” *The Journal of African-American History*. 89:2 (2004): 155 for Stevenson’s discussion of the culture of silence around statutory rape among young, black females and the suspected statutory rape of Latasha Haruns. In this article Karlin also refers to statutory rape as a predatory act. In a case study of 451 women and girls in Washington, DC, 391 of which were “non-white,” mothers were found to be more likely than their “wayward” teenage daughters to report statutory rape. Statutory rape, in this 1968 article, fell under the category of “voluntary intercourse” and in six out of 31 cases of voluntary intercourse the female child (under 13 years) was said to have “provoked the attack.” Charles Y. Hayman, William F. Stewart, Frances R. Lewis and Murray Grant, “Sexual Assault on Women and Children in the District of Columbia.” *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 83:12 (1968): 1023. In a criminal case of a 56-year-old, Trenton, NJ resident and teacher, Sylvester Jones, he is being tried for corruption of a minor, as opposed to sexual assault after being found by police having sex with a 17-year-old student of his high-school. According to a newspaper report the assistant prosecutor informed the judge that “the young lady is in love . . .,” and that “the victim doesn’t want the charges pressed against Jones.” Paul Mickle, “No Assault Charge For Teacher Accused of Sex With Student,” *Trentonian.com*, July 11, 2007. <http://www.trentonian.com/articles/2007/07/11/past%20stories/20001735.txt> Jones ultimately plead not-guilty to three charges of sexual assault in another jurisdiction related to his relationship with this same girl in exchange for a sentence of three years of psychological counseling and a revoked teacher’s license. The Assistant Prosecutor in this case determined that “the girl was the aggressor” and therefore did not want the case tried. Artemis Coughlan, “TEACHER GETS OFF: Special Probation For Having Sex With Student.” *Trentonian.com*. August 7, 2007. <http://www.trentonian.com/articles/2007/08/03/past%20stories/20001142.txt>

girls. Relationships that they not only realize are built upon power, and more specifically the power that they have in those relationships to influence the attitudes and behaviors of younger girls, but that they seek out intentionally because of that power, i.e. predatory relationships.

We do have, as Boots Riley of The Coup, indicates in my interview with him, a public discourse about molestation in the black community. As Riley notes, had there been boys on the tape engaging in sexual acts with a man we would not have had a problem considering these acts to be molestation. While Riley offers that this is not just because of our culture's homophobia, this is certainly a contributing factor. Molestation is an act that the black community is more comfortable opposing, particularly in the case where the victim is a boy, or to a lesser extent, a pre-pubescent girl. But "statutory rape" holds a different weight in the black community and we are simply not affirming its presence as a destructive force in our society.

To be fair, while the public discourse of the hip-hop community surrounding the "R. Kelly tape", talks around the issue of the sex acts being rape, it does at times surprisingly discuss a sort of moral low ground which Kelly's alleged acts occupy. However these unanticipated outcries do not exactly function as voices of reason but instead they seem to serve

2003

The Philadelphia District Attorney's office files a motion to videotape witness testimony in rapper Beanie Sigel's assault and attempted murder trial. The D.A. prosecuting Sigel cited no reasons for his request to "preserve" the testimony.

Chuck D responds to anti-rap sentiments expressed by Professor John McWhorter on the MSNBC series Scarborough County.

Christopher John Farley, senior news editor of Time Magazine challenges Bill O'Reilly, on an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor* for singling out rap stars for the use of violent lyrics.

The video for St. Louis rapper, Chingy's "Right Thurr" premieres the hometown inspired "Chickenhead" dance.

alternative motives.

Many of the voices that have expressed public opposition to the idea of sex with minors have done so in order to highlight their sexual prowess with adult women. For example, Rapper Tony Yayo does mock another male with the words, “You on that R. Kelly shit, you’re bitch is barely grown,” but he does so only as a way to highlight his own ability to attract older “bitches.”⁴⁴

Another reason why rappers speak out against sex with minors is to reject the possibility of criminal incarceration. Twista’s “inspirational” single, “Hope,” uses hip-hop’s mistrust of the police to victimize R. Kelly. “I wish . . . no Po Po (police) bring the heat on our peace like they did R. Kelly.”⁴⁵ And similarly, rapper Big Pun warns, “In my crib nigga/ make sure they over eighteen/I ain’t trying to catch a bid nigga/Underage I won’t allow it.”⁴⁶ With this line of reasoning it seems as though the only potential harm rappers feel results from sex with underaged girls is a jail sentence. This is similar to how rappers earlier on in this chapter discussed the potential harm resulting from the rape of adult women. Twista and Big Pun put aside the potential physical and emotional harm that may be affected to

2003

New Jersey Nets’ Jason Kidd publicly apologizes for abusing his wife Joumana Kidd stating, “I have some serious issues to deal with.”

Conservative Rush Limbaugh is forced to resign from his position as a sports commentator for *Monday Night Football* because of a remark he made regarding Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb. “The media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well,” he stated.

***The Source* releases racist songs recorded by a young Eminem at a press conference.**

The fatal police beating of Nathaniel Jones is captured on videotape in Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁴⁴ G-Unit, “Groupie Love,” *Beg for Mercy*, compact disc, © 2003, Interscope Records.

⁴⁵ Twista, “Hope” *Kamikaze*, compact disc, © 2004, Atlantic Records.

⁴⁶ Luke f. Armageddon, Big Pun and Cuban Link, “Slippery When Wet.” *Luke’s Freakfest 2000*, VHS,(Ground Zero Entertainment, 2001)

the young girls in this environment, and see them as simply gateways to prison.

Another related motive, which black males have in speaking out against sex with underage girls, is to consciously chastise young girls for being sexually promiscuous or “fast.” Rapper, Kool G. Rap notes “only nineteen and over permitted, no matter how much young girls wanna be with it.”⁴⁷ Likewise, the chorus for Will Smith and Snoop Dogg’s “Pump Ya Breaks,” warns girls, “Now if you underage and you actin’ all grown/what you need to do is pump ya breaks.”⁴⁸ There is a real need for community accountability of the behaviors of youth and young adults, certainly as opposed to a willingness in these situations for males and females to lash out against the young girls as if it is their fault they found themselves in the beds of sexual predators.

Again, to be fair, there are examples of black male artists who oppose sex with minors without any apparent ulterior motives. For example, Prodigy of Mobb Deep on a “Shook Ones” freestyle affirms, “I’d rather beat my dick than go the R. Kelly way.” And equally as pointedly, Bossman on his single, “Off Da Record,” critiques R. Kelly with the bars,

2004

Brooklyn, NY Councilwoman Yvette D. Clarke hosts a press conference demanding hip-hop community accountability for regressive gender attitudes. The “Eminem tape” is among the issues discussed.

Iowa’s Brown and Black Presidential Forum presents a live broadcast of their proceedings. On the agenda is hip-hop’s cultural involvement in electoral politics.

Budweiser beer’s “True” television advertisement addresses white cultural appropriation of hip-hop.

Rap artist, Mystikal, is convicted of sexual battery and extortion. Mystikal was sentenced to six years. Key prosecutorial evidence is a videotape of the incident found during a search of the rapper’s home.

⁴⁷ Kool G. Rap and DJ Polo, “Talk Like Sex.” *Wanted: Dead or Alive*. © 1990, Traffic Entertainment/Cold Chillin’.

⁴⁸ Will Smith f, Snoop Dogg, “Pump Ya Breaks,” *Lost and Found*. © 2005, Interscope.

I'm sick till I hurl with the *Best of Both Worlds* (an R. Kelly/Jay Z compilation album)
When the nigga R. Kelly molested lil' girls
If that was my daughter or your daughter
Would you have respect for a molester from next door?
We treat this shit the same
Fuck the money and the fame
Don't lay back and accept it

Bossman's critique here is a very important one and we need to hear more voices like it. He not only refers to R. Kelly's alleged acts as molestation, an important terminology that none of the other artists I have discussed were comfortable using but he also informally advocates a behavior of resistance. The *Best of Both Worlds* project produced by R. Kelly and Jay-Z was an album that Jay Z initially refused to put out once the charges of child pornography that R. Kelly was indicted with were publicized. However, as soon as the dust settled, or the media attention to Kelly's case lessened, Kelly and Jay Z went forward with the project and released the album as "unfinished business." You can interpret Bossman's critique as either a directed insult to Jay Z for his decision to go forward with his business venture or a critique of the hip-hop community, which ultimately bought into the *Best of Both Worlds* project, and all future R. Kelly albums in multi-platinum fashion, or both. But importantly, Bossman suggests buy-cotting as an appropriate agency for the hip-hop generation, in response to R. Kelly's alleged acts. In a culture that is often devoid of "concrete commitments" the proposal to

2004

During the MTV produced Halftime show at the 2004 Super Bowl Janet Jackson exposes her breast while performing alongside Pop singer Justin Timberlake. The two artists were performing in order to promote the following weeks Grammy Awards. As a result of the negative press that the incident received Jackson was "disinvited" from the Grammys. Timberlake skated any negative repercussions by announcing that the incident was the result of a "wardrobe malfunction." This is in contrast to an earlier statement Timberlake made immediately following the event where he remarked, "That was fun. We love giving you all something to talk about." Jackson was offered the opportunity to be re-invited to the Grammys if she apologized, but she refused.

Playboy TV airs the new adult Hip-Hop show *Buckwild*.

buy-cot R. Kelly's music is a much needed, specific cause to rally around.⁴⁹

Similar plans of action, as I mentioned, were not at all forthcoming from the "hip hop intelligentsia," or any other community of concerned journalists and scholars. There were few responses however. As scholar, Mark Anthony Neal, writes, R. Kelly is among the list of powerful black male figures that have been offered, "'save the black man' passes for some straight-up damaging behavior."⁵⁰ And Neal does refer to the specific acts as child pornography. He also critiques the still-rising success of the artist despite the criminal charges.

There were almost no women discussing the tape in such a public manner.⁵¹ This was particularly upsetting to me when *Essence* magazine, one of the few successful black women's serial publications our community has, printed Kevin Powell's "In the Matter of R. Kelly" as their "statement" surrounding the video. The article is informative in terms of presenting the facts of R. Kelly's charges and the subsequent profits from various artistic projects. It is also critical of the black community's race-

2004

Big Boi, of the rap group Outkast releases the straight-to-video DVD *Big Boi's Boom Boom Room*.

Rapper David Banner's "Cadillac on 22s" video features the rapper sporting an Emmett Till T-Shirt. "The murder of Emmett Till was a tragedy that happened in my state," the Mississippi native states, "And it's partially my responsibility to bring that to the light." This same year, Chicago producer/emcee Kanye West also name-drops Emmett Till in his break-through single and self-directed video "Through the Wire."

⁴⁹ WBBM-FM (B-96) radio station in Kelly's Chicago, IL hometown was the one station that reportedly stopped playing R. Kelly's music, for a period of time, in protest. See, S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005) 226.

⁵⁰ Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 27.

⁵¹ Like Watkins and Neal, Johnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, in their book *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, merely listed the R. Kelly controversy in a straight, factual way. See *Gender Talk*, 197.

loyalty and celebrity worshipping. However it does little to present a context of sexual assault and violence that black women experience on a daily basis. The very context of gender violence that Powell has admitted to being a perpetrator of in other journalistic work, including an article for *Essence* magazine.⁵² Perhaps a black woman might have most convincingly articulated this argument. The R. Kelly video discourse needed this voice as an alternative at least.

The other strand of the discourse surrounding the “R. Kelly tape” was the argument as to whether or not the male on the tape is in fact R. Kelly. I cannot say, after having viewed the tape whether it is conclusively him or not. My copy is way too worn. Its dimensions have been changed at least twice from the original recording; more than likely made smaller for Internet streaming and then enlarged for DVD. But quite honestly I find that question to be a matter that was only relevant to the State of Illinois, where R. Kelly was being tried and found not-guilty. The reality of the tape is that the adult man and underaged girl on it are witnessed participating in sexual acts for pay (a fact that is also often left out), and even without the tape that documented this social ill, the black community is already familiar with this unchecked problem.

2004

Rap artist, Nelly, cancels a bone marrow drive at Spelman College after students took offense to his video “Tip Drill” and requested a conversation with him regarding the video’s images. The video features Nelly sliding a credit card down a woman’s backside.

Illinois Senate hopeful, Barack Obama, delivers an address at the Democratic National Convention in which he criticizes television.

⁵² Kevin Powell, *Who’s Gonna Take The Weight?: Manhood, Race and Power in America*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003) 60, 62.

The five video moments that I have analyzed in this chapter explicate how each of the timeline entrees, regardless of their subject(s)'s personal affiliations with rap labels, magazines, television programming, etc. can be grouped together in a "hip-hop" video archive. This is primarily evidenced by the fact that they were critiqued in the premier hip-hop publication, *The Source*, as well as in rap lyrics. These entrees are noted in absence of a formal definition of hip-hop, beyond the assertion that it is a "culture," and in light of definitions of a hip-hop generation(s), yet, each of these entries, arose to national, and in some cases, global prominence, during the era of hip-hop culture and lives of those among the hip-hop generation. Even Kelly for instance, is not a hip-hop artist by genre; he is an R&B singer. Nevertheless, he, Simpson, Barry, Thomas and Hill are still certainly what hip-hop journalists, artists and other cultural participants consider cultural subjects. Archives are typically defined as physical spaces that preserve material culture that is of significant public and historical interest.⁵³ While these subjects are not hip-hop artists they are nevertheless signal figures in hip-hop cultural discourse, and hip-hop artists, most importantly are not the only population inside of hip-hop culture.

Former editor-in-Chief of *The Source*, Selwyn Sefu Hinds' defined hip-hop as a way of looking at The World. This definition fits with the representation of hip-hop video culture in this paper. If you consider that the videos assembled in the timeline were all witnessed by hip-hop culture then the ways of looking at the world that those in the hip-hop generation enact, is reflected in these videos. Furthermore, the definition that Chuck D introduces by figuring hip-hop as "the black CNN" would also figure all of these videos, reported inside of a hip-hop news publication. as hip-hop video culture.

⁵³ Random House, *Webster's College Dictionary*. (New York: Random House, 1999), 70.



figure 1. *rhymes against humanity*

It is important to note that definitions of hip-hop can be more limited or expanded depending on the writer. Andrea Queeley, for instance, defines hip-hop as “the musical and aesthetic culture that emerged from the Bronx in the late 1970s and, as a result of commodification, has become integral if not synonymous with American youth culture.”⁵⁴ Here we see that in the course of a single definition, hip-hop can be either as small as an arts culture or large enough to be synonymous with American youth culture. Hip-hop is youth culture; however, it is not limited to this age group, as those who founded and are still currently invested in the culture are well into their 40s by now. Also, while it is certainly American culture, and the remaining global participants reflect its

⁵⁴ Andrea Queeley, “Hip-Hop and The Aesthetics of Criminalization,” *The New Black Renaissance: The Souls Anthology of Critical African-American Studies*, 196.

Americanness it is also important to remember that hip-hop is black American culture, specifically, likewise despite the number of ethnicities that embrace it.

Todd Boyd adds that hip-hop is so “racially specific,” and class conscious that “even middle-class niggas need a ghetto pass.”⁵⁵ While this trivializes a great deal both the class and racial structures of the culture, Boyd is aligning his definition with popular notions of hip-hop as a culture of “the [urban] streets.” This dissertation, with its focus on the concrete, and videographic settings in urban locales such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland, Washington, DC, New York, Philadelphia, Newark and Durham, also reflects the city centrality.

All of the video culture listed within the timeline, are examples of material culture that should be conserved because of the relevancy of the communal conversations they inspired. According to Jacques Derrida, “archivization produces as much as it records the event.”⁵⁶ Further archiving would make more permanent records of the historical events corresponding to the video media, It would also advance our discourse as cultural theorists and art historians as to the role that video media has in both representing history and impacting history. Video archives, like other digital archives, create a body of texts that scholars can debate for years to come.

⁵⁵ Todd Boyd, “From Elvis to Eminem: Play That Funky Music White Boy!,” *The New Black Renaissance: The Souls Anthology of Critical African-American Studies*. 199.

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 17.