UC Davis

UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title

Getting “a message through to the red, white, and blue”: Ice-T in the age of Obama

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7c84s9cv>

ISBN

9781472418357

Author

Osumare, H

Publication Date

2016

DOI

10.4324/9781315603612-23

Peer reviewed

Rapper, Writer, Pop-Cultural Player

Word files for proofing

This is an edited Word file, which has been styled ready for typesetting. This is now the **final opportunity** to review your text and amend it prior to publication.

Any queries about the text have been inserted using Comment boxes in the Word files. Please answer these queries in your corrections. Once you have responded to a query, you can delete the comment.

When making your corrections, please consider the following:

- Make sure Track Changes is turned on – this allows us to keep an accurate file history record for the book.
- Please do not change the formatting styles used in this file – if a piece of text has been styled incorrectly, please alert your Editor about this by using a Comment box.
- To see the changes that have already been made, use the 'Final Showing Mark-up' view. To hide this and just see the final version, use the 'Final' view (in the Review tab).
- Edit and return this file, please do not copy/paste anything into a new document.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Chapter 11

Getting “A Message Through to the Red, White, and Blue”: Ice-T in the Age of Obama

By Halifu Osumare

The title of this chapter is taken from a verse in Ice-T’s 1992 track “Body Count” on the infamous debut album by his all-black rock band Body Count. The verse reads: “Goddamn what a brother gotta do to get a message through to the red, white and blue? / What I gotta die before you realize I was a brother with open eyes? / The world’s insane while you drink champagne and I’m livin’ in black rain.”¹ These lyrics quintessentially represent what Robin DG Kelley calls “the first-person autobiographical accounts” of gangsta rap street journalism that positions the political within the personal lived experience of the urban inner city black male.² This verse not only signals Ice-T’s street roots in the Crips territory of South Central Los Angeles (LA), but also his innate political awareness of his plight as a black male in urban America. As evidenced by lines such as “You try to ban the A.K., I got ten of ‘em stashed / With a case of hand grenades,” it also dramatizes his flair for hyperbolic “revenge fantasies” that initiated the then fledgling genre of gangsta rap, allowing urban black males to rhetorically inflict their retribution on the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) for its infamous police brutality.³ Within just a few months, the LAPD’s disrepute was about to become world news with the 1992 Rodney King beating and the subsequent urban rebellion that followed the acquittal of the police officers involved.

Even if “Body Count,” as well as his more notorious “Cop Killer,” were not really rap records, it was *perceived* as “hip-hop.”⁴ Ice-T had already ushered in gangsta rap with his bestselling “6 in the Mornin’” on his 1987 album *Rhyme Pays*, and as Ice-T himself reveals, “That became the signature Ice-

¹ Body Count, “Body Count,” *Body Count* (Sire/Warner Bros., 1992). [AU: include in Biblio?]

² Robin D.G. Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in William Eric Perkins (ed.), *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996): 127.

³ Body Count, “Body Count.”

⁴ On the media’s misrecognition of Body Count as a “rap” act, see Christopher Sieving, “Cop Out? The Media, ‘Cop Killer,’ and the Deracialization of Black Rage,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 22, no. 4 (October 1998): 347.

T style—rhymes that were ‘topical’ and ‘vividly optical.’”⁵ “Body Count” signals Ice-T’s trajectory from street hoodlum to Hollywood and television celebrity icon. He now “drinks champagne” with the executive shot callers, yet remains a “brother with open eyes” who uses his mainstream stardom to shine a spotlight on the “black rain” that continues to shower on urban black and Latino males even in the Age of Obama. Ice-T’s focus on illuminating the life of poorly educated, but streetwise, black urban males is rooted in a desire to “keep it real” along with his projected “cool,” which is the source of his swagger that brought him notice from the record industry and Hollywood producers alike.

Interestingly enough, the same year the *Body Count* album debuted, sociologists Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson gave us an important study of “cool pose” as a coping mechanism against racism and socioeconomic marginalization. They observed that “black males, especially those who are young and live in the inner cities of our nation, have adopted and use cool masculinity—or as we prefer to call it, ‘cool pose’—as a way of surviving in a restrictive society.”⁶ Cool becomes a way of showing pride, strength, and most of all, control. Ice-T self-defined his version of cool by not succumbing to street peer pressure, whether it was not formally committing himself to the Crips gang at South Central’s Crenshaw High School, nor packing a gun for his numerous high-end burglaries, or eschewing drug use. As he details in his recently published memoir: “The main reason I never felt the need to make myself high was that I never felt the need to lose control. If I was drunk, I was vulnerable. If I was high, somebody could beat me out of something.”⁷ Always aware of the capitalist “jungle” of America, Ice-T’s cool was about showing “both the dominant culture and [other] black male[s] that he is strong and proud. He is somebody.” Majors and Billson posit personal black male swagger within a historic and political context: “He [the young urban black male] is a survivor, in spite of the systematic harm done by the legacy of slavery and the realities of racial oppression, in spite of the centuries of hardship and mistrust.”⁸

⁵ Ice-T and Douglas Century, *Ice: A Memoir of Gangster Life and Redemption—From South Central to Hollywood* (New York: One World, 2011): 53.

⁶ Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster): 1992.

⁷ Ice-T, *Ice*: 34.

⁸ Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*: 5.

This essay explores the cultural and political significance of Ice-T's cool pose, particularly as it relates to our contemporary times; what I and others have termed the "Age of Obama." In particular, I examine the way in which Ice-T's prideful survival instincts speak to Barack Obama's articulation of power and African American masculinity—or, the current President's own cool pose. As I will illustrate, Ice-T and Obama double each other in a number of significant ways. They are both African American men born of the same generation—Obama is 52, Ice-T is 55—and who have, in their own separate ways, gone on to enjoy considerable "crossover" success within dominant American culture and society. A crucial factor of this success can be attributed to the fact that both men are considered "cool." Of course, the control under pressure that any president of the US must exhibit has an obvious twist with President Obama. As I have asked elsewhere:

[W]hat are the sources of this new style and approach in [Obama's] handling of everything from international relations to his cabinet choices, and from his cool demeanor dealing with one of the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression to taking Michele out on a date night in a trendy DC restaurant? Besides his obvious intelligence and political savvy, Barack Obama has swagger! Barack Obama is hip! Barack Obama is cool!⁹

Yet, despite his cool, or maybe *because* of it, Obama's critics have been particularly virulent and disrespectful. One only has to look to the euphemisms within Newt Gingrich's 2012 GOP primary campaign statement regarding Obama's perceived status as "America's best food stamp President."¹⁰ This accusation refers to the concerted Republican stance that Obama is trying to reduce the work requirement of the 1996 welfare reform law enacted under the Clinton administration. Gingrich's label alludes to the Obama administration's so-called efforts to increase the government's responsibility for the black poor, who are wrongfully viewed as the majority welfare recipients. The comment is but one example of the obvious racial overtones with which Obama's opposition has attempted to paint the administration of the first black president. The particular cool that Obama must maintain in the face of his political

⁹ Halifu Osumare, "Jay-Z on His iPod: Barack Obama as a Hip-Hop Generation Pop Icon," *Seeing Black*, August 3, 2009, <http://www.seeingblack.com>.

¹⁰ See Felicia Sonmez, "Romney Camp Deploys Gingrich to Make Welfare-Reform Argument Against Obama," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2012.

opponents is learned early-on in America's ghettos as the survival side of cool, as "restrained masculinity: emotionless, stoic, and unflinching."¹¹

Among other symbols, Obama signifies a highly visible break in America's racialized history, while simultaneously exuding a particular kind of "cool pose," which he must maintain against the onslaught of overt and veiled racism from his political adversaries. Most centrally, his presidency illustrates how racism works in contemporary times that are erroneously touted as post-racial. Hip-hop inflected social critic Touré exposed this falsehood: "This is often what the face of modern racism is: invisible or hard to discern lurking in shadows or hidden. Institutional inequalities and glass ceilings and even racial profiling can be hard to see at times and can be easily dismissed by dissenters. Modern racism is often an amorphous beast."¹² It will take more than the 48 years since the 1964 Civil Rights Act to overcome the over 300 years of slavery, Jim Crowism, and ingrained purposeful racialization with American black (and Latino) stereotypes. With Barack Obama winning a second term of the US presidency, the process is taking place.

In different yet intersecting ways, Obama and Ice-T capture contemporary discourses of racism, resistance, and masculine self-stylization. In this chapter I interrogate the "Age of Obama" as a unique stage in the racialized history of the US, a juncture where Ice-T is implicated in hip-hop's economic commodified "power move." LA, as a world renowned urban center, became the "school" in which Ice-T is socialized into this racialized history, as well as being a central urban purveyor of commodified black popular culture. I thus locate Ice-T's "cool pose" as an ambivalent expression of black masculinity within hip-hop capitalism and American patriarchy. Race, popular culture, and gender become crucial lenses to deconstruct and fathom the shifting ways US black males have tried to talk back to the American status quo and affect the values on which this nation state was founded; or, in the words of Ice-T, have tried "to get a message through to the red, white, and blue."

Race and Racism in the Age of Obama

The US's racist history and its potential to overcome it were brought into sharp relief by the election of the first black president. Yet, that potential faded fast. When Obama's opponents—predominantly white

¹¹ Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*: 4–5.

¹² Touré, *Who's Afraid of Post Blackness? What it Means to Be Black Now* (New York: Free Press, 2011): 119.

Tea Party and hardcore Republicans—hurl a declaration like, “We’re going to take back the country,” black folks imagine the historic photos of white men and women glaring, smiling, and standing around limp, dead black bodies swinging from trees in the Reconstruction South. We hear not mere reactions to the so-called “*socialist* big government” that Obama’s opponents imagine he’s trying to implement, but the voice of arrogant white supremacy enraged by the realization of the “audacity of hope” that he represents. This voice is encapsulated by conservative cultural critic Dinesh De Souza in his discussion of what he terms the “Obama Conundrum.” De Souza argues that the president is driven by the principles of collective activism and wealth redistribution at the center of the Duboisian Civil Right tradition. This argument is juxtaposed with the conservative Washingtonian admonition for emphasis on hard work and skill development, which, today, De Souza says, is being perpetuated by hardworking immigrant minorities. De Souza blames Obama for being “ignorant of all the lessons of the twentieth century”—the triumph of capitalism over socialism, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.¹³ Yet nowhere in De Souza’s diatribe does he acknowledge the continuing persistence of racial difference and racism.¹⁴

East Texas southerner Carlos Dews, now English language and literature professor at John Cabot University in Rome, illuminates the blatant racism of many Obama critics:

I first heard “The Nigger Show” [as an] expression used to describe the Obama administration during a visit to my hometown in East Texas during the early summer of 2009. I understood what the epithet meant: Our minds are made up, the president lacks legitimacy, and there is nothing he can do that we will support. I was not surprised to hear such a phrase.¹⁵

¹³ “Dinesh D’Souza Analyzes Barack Obama,” YouTube video. Uploaded by “upandopen,” March 6, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpAyhQhInyI>.

¹⁴ According to US Bureau of the Census report, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States 2010*, the median income for a white household in 2010 was \$51,846 while for an African American household it was \$32,068. See www.census.gov.

¹⁵ Carlos Dews, “‘The ‘Nigger Show’: When Racism Masquerades,” Originally appeared in *Aspenia*, December 2009 (an Italian journal published by the Aspen Foundation), now available on *The Religious Consultation*, <http://www.religiousconsultation.org>.

I use Dews's perspectives particularly because of his white southern upbringing that is now informed by an international European perspective, allowing him a wider vision of the white supremacist racialization process. Dews continues:

Ironically, until the election of Barack Obama, my discussion of racism in the United States seemed historical. I felt that with the passage of the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s, the country had turned a corner that the slow evaporation of overt racism was perhaps inevitable. Now, my personal experience of Southern racism feels current and all too familiar.¹⁶

The multi-generational and multi-racial coalition responsible for putting Barack Obama into the most powerful position of the most powerful nation in the world is being challenged by the white supremacy at the very foundations of the nation, which was erected as another stalwart pillar alongside its more frequently touted concepts of the equality of man and the rights of the individual. But Dews recognizes that white supremacy has become more sophisticated—it has learned to masquerade as other concepts. Veiled racism becomes a more illusive culprit that lurks behind public political discourses in the Age of Obama. As Dews continues:

The veiled racism I sense in the United States today is couched, in public discourse at least, in terms that allow for plausible deniability of racist intent. And those who resist any policy initiative from the Obama Administration engage in a scorched-earth policy that reminds me of the self-centered white flight, the abandonment of public schools, and the proliferation of private schools, that followed the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate public schools.¹⁷

Racism in the Age of Obama masquerades as anti big government, deficit reduction, and absolute opposition to “Obamacare,” even when it means voting against one’s own self-interest. In actuality, Obama’s white opponents really want someone who looks more like them in the highest office in the US.

Another southerner who should know racism when he sees it, former President Jimmy Carter, called much of Obama’s condemnation for what it is, and was roundly criticized for playing “the race card” that did not exist. In a September 2009 interview with NBC’s Brian Williams, President Carter

¹⁶ Dews (2009).

¹⁷ Dews (2009).

was willing to go public with what no one at his level was willing to say about Obama and race. Carter commented that:

An overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man—that he’s African American. I live in the South and I’ve seen the South come a long way, and I’ve seen the rest of the country who’s shared the South’s attitude toward minority groups at that time, particularly African Americans. That racism still exists, and I think it’s bubbled up to the surface because of a belief by white people, not just in the South but around the country, that African Americans are not qualified to lead this great country. It’s an abominable circumstance and grieves me and concerns me very deeply.¹⁸

Obama’s white (and black, including Shelby Steele) critics denounced Carter’s accusation by insisting that the Obama criticism is about policy, not race. Yet Carter continued to argue that anti-Obama right-wing demonstrators—who liken Obama to Hitler, suggest that he should have been buried with Kennedy, and utter completely disrespectful outbursts, like South Carolinian Republican congressman Joe Wilson’s “You Lie!” cry during President Obama’s speech to the November 2009 Joint Session of Congress—are all fueled by racism. The Obama administration was obligated to treat Carter’s analysis like a distraction that they did not need during the heat of their argument to sell the Affordable Health Care Act. The pressures and responsibilities of office compromise the ability of America’s first black President to call such criticism out for what it really is. Acknowledging American racism becomes a liability for Obama, motivated by fear of white backlash when so much is at stake.

African descendants, as the quintessential “Other,” are a historical global phenomenon that Dews is positioned to view first hand. As he details, his emigration to Europe does not constitute a clean break with the racism he encountered in America, but rather a spectral return: “More than 40 years after my experiences with racism, I am thousands of miles away in Rome, but surrounded by ghosts.” Dews received a US National Endowment for the Arts grant for his “Big Read Rome” program, and he chose Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, “in part because I thought that some of the most salient issues in

¹⁸ Andrew Malcolm, “Are Obama’s Critics Racists? Jimmy Carter Thinks So,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2009.

the novel—racism, classism, xenophobia, the Jim Crow era—were perhaps relevant to an increasingly diverse, contemporary Italy.” Ironically, during the first week of his reading project, a Nigerian woman, who asked two Italian women to stop smoking on a Roman bus, was called *sporca nera* (dirty nigger), and the incident reached national news. And even though Dews received his NEA grant during the Bush administration, a major Rome newspaper headline read, “Obama Brings Antiracist Book to Rome,” assuming because Obama is black he would be more likely to have an administration sympathetic to projects like that of Dews. The point being: anti-black and brown sentiments with their resulting racist stereotypes and governmental policies are indeed global.

While on tour with Body Count, Ice-T himself had one of his most violent fan-backlash experiences in Italy. The incident in Milan took place during Body Count’s first European tour in 1993. As he recalls in his memoir:

It was during our first gig in Italy that some real craziness popped. The thing about playing a rock gig in Italy—which I didn’t know at the time—was some of the fans were a bit behind the curve. Back in the day, the old punk bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash used to tour Europe, and the Italian punks, just like the English punks, used to spit on them. Freaky as that sounds, unloading a big gob of spit on your heroes was a sign of respect. Punk turned everything upside down that way. That was back in the mid-seventies, before AIDS, before everyone was freaked out about bodily fluids. These punks in Italy never got the memo that spitting was played out.¹⁹

After Ice-T reached out in the audience and hit an Italian male fan for spitting on him, and the audience turned violent toward the band. The band members not only had to stop the concert, but literally had to run for their lives to avoid a waiting mob who were overturning parking lot cars and worse. While Ice-T’s reaction was eventually vindicated on the rest of his Italian tour, he says, “[Although] we loved the rest of our European gigs. Of course—it goes without saying—we haven’t been back to Milan since!” Whether or not the violence toward Body Count in Italy was motivated *entirely* by racism, the fact that they were an all-black rock band was definitely a part of the motivational mix. Ice-T understood that within punk culture the act of spitting was meant to be taken as a sign of respect; but it behooved the

¹⁹ Ice-T, *Ice*: 135.

young Milan punk fans to temper that cultural trait when faced with a black male rock group from the US. Again, the incident illustrates that racism towards blacks is, in fact, an international phenomenon, and black hip-hop touring artists in Europe can often be subject to fans' lack of cultural sensitivity at best, and continuing overt racism at worse.

Ice-T has been more direct than most hip-hop artists about racism. In *The Ice Opinion: Who Gives a Fuck?*, a collection of essays published in 1994, he commented:

At any given time, I might have more money in the bank than a middle-aged white lady will ever see in her life, but if I'm strolling through a mall in Chicago, she'll clutch her purse nervously when she sees me coming. People will eye me suspiciously in the stores. I see them sweat next to me on elevators. You just get used to it. It ain't no big thing. Black people are just used to that shit. You just expect that kind of reaction.²⁰

These observations are typical for black males living in urban America, not only when Ice-T's first book was published, but also in 2012 at the end of Obama's first term as President. Ice-T personalizes how black people have coped with this constant onslaught of covert daily stereotyping, as well as overt discrimination in housing, employment, health care, and education:

I could just be pissed at the world twenty-four hours a day, every day, or I can just go on about my business and look at them like they're dumb. And I picked the second option, because that's just how this country is, and these people are programmed. Somewhere along the line you just learn to tolerate it. Some people don't tolerate it, and they learn to hate. I just never could get into that. I just looked at the stupid people like trapped animals. They are trapped in their own fears.²¹

Obama had to learn the same lessons in particular urban American sites: multicultural Honolulu, Hawaii, the only state where inter-racial marriage was not outlawed at the time; class-stratified New York City during his Columbia University years; and Southside Chicago during his political state and federal senate years. Race, racism, and power politics had to not only be understood by Obama, but also manipulated like a chess game for ultimate success. His adult US mainland sociopolitical experiences

²⁰ Ice-T with Heidi Siegmund, *The Ice Opinion: Who Gives A Fuck?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994): 133.

²¹ Ice-T (1994): 133–4

help to put his racially hybrid youth upbringing in Hawaii into perspective. Indeed, different urban centers teach particular configurations of the confluence of race and class in America. Thomas Sugrue, in his *Not Even Past: Barack Obama and the Burden of Race* (2009), records Obama's first perceptions of New York:

I was seeing the steady fracturing of the world taking place. I began to grasp the almost mathematical precision with which America's race and class problems joined, the depth, the ferocity of resulting tribal wars; the bile that flowed freely not just out on the streets but in the stalls of Columbia's bathrooms as well where, no matter how many times the administration tried to paint them over, the walls remained scratched with blunt correspondence between niggers and kikes.²²

These are the words of a sensitive young man beginning to map the intersection of racial hierarchy and poverty in America, as well as the resulting divisions from power politics that creates unequal access to resources (a phenomenon with which he would eventually have to grapple at the highest level imaginable). Sugrue, who analyzes race as "not yet past," records Chicago as the urban center where "[Obama] would earn the equivalent of an advanced degree in urban policy—and develop a distinctive political framework for thinking about the intersections of race and class."²³ Particular urban centers like LA impart discrete kinds of juxtapositions of racial and class hierarchies that in turn provide a particular kind of socialization for black males like Ice-T. And Chicago, with its notorious "Tammany Hall" kind of backroom politics, along with its entrenched black Southside cultural politics, did the same for Obama.

Yet, it is also obvious that President Obama exhibits ambivalence around race. Some say his lack of focus on racial inequality in his first term is politically savvy, given the fact that he is the *first* African American president. However, it could also be indicative of his inability to tackle the biggest contradiction to America's founding principles that still lurks below the surface around every policy decision, just as slavery did in the construction of the US Constitution itself. "Obama represents the

²² Cited in Thomas J Sugrue, *Not Even Past: Barack Obama and the Burden of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009): 57; cited in Barack Obama, *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Times Books, 1995): 20–21.

²³ Sugrue (2009): 59.

paradox of race in twenty-first century America,” assesses Sugrue; “he embodies the fluidity and opportunity of racial identity in a time of transition.” He further evaluates the Age of Obama as representing “the ambiguities of a racial order that denies racism yet is rife with racial inequality.”²⁴ Obama, then, becomes a symbol of, rather than a corrective to, these persistent twenty-first-century contradictions.

It is this very ambivalence toward race that is captured in another erroneous concept of the second decade of the twenty-first century: “post-blackness.” In a world of postmodern hip-hop mash-ups that easily mix cultural tropes, facile arguments emerge about racial transcendence. That would be a utopian dream come true if it were not for one thing: the dystopia of continued racism in ever more subtle, yet virulent, strains. The fact that the streets of Southside Chicago, the Bronx, Baltimore, Washington DC, and South Central LA (that socialized Ice-T) are still rife with crime, drive-bys, and gang warfare, is testimony to the continuing racial and class disparity that has young black men killing each other, while trying to get a piece of the so-called American Dream that has become the inner city nightmare. This reality occurs every day, even as many stereotypes are being defied and artistic cross-cultural representations, as Touré analyses, have become the norm:

The post-Black era is filled with ... mashups—from *The Grey Album* where Jay-Z’s vocals are mixed with Beatles music; to white singer-songwriter Nina Gordon’s cover of NWA’s “Straight Outta Compton,” slowly singing their vulgar autobiographical rhymes over sweet acoustic guitar to Chappelle’s “Clayton Bigsby” sketch where a blind Black man believes himself a Klansman, to the cultural schizophrenia of a world where Eminem is an elite MC and Tiger Woods and the Williams sisters dominate overwhelmingly white endeavors.²⁵

Like Obama, Ice-T symbolically represents this double-entendre of twenty-first-century America. He is a figure that is at once socialized by continuing racial inequality, while flirting with cultural amalgamation that transcends race. One striking revelation when reading Ice-T’s autobiography is his insistence on telling the truth: “I don’t lie.” It is important for him to look reality square in the face

²⁴ Sugrue (2009): 136.

²⁵ Touré, *Who’s Afraid*: 49.

and call it how he sees it. And this is most evident in his attitude about race and culture. He recognized early on the strict racial geography of LA with his “schooling” in gang life at Crenshaw High, where “it was an almost 100 percent black school. Wasn’t one white kid there.” Today as an adult father in Obama’s America, Ice-T educates his children about the realities of him being mixed ethnicity as black and Mexican. In one memorable moment in his memoir he discusses the racial politics of the prison system with his son: “you’re Mexican and black. So you don’t have a car to be in: Who the fuck you gonna be with? Niggas ain’t going to cosign. The *éses* ain’t going to take you. Sorry, man, you’re royally fucked.”²⁶

Yet, eyes wide open racially, Ice-T simultaneously recognizes, and artistically utilizes, the American *cultural* mix that transcends racialized *political* boundaries. His hard rock group Body Count was proof of his vision of the black-white musical mix underlying American culture:

I always liked the hard stuff. Rap to me was a form of rock. When you listen to hip-hop, we never say, “we’re gonna R&B the mic.” We say, “We’re gonna *rock* the mic! Or “We’re gonna *rock* the house.” To me rocking is just aggression. If you go along with everything, if you sing what everyone wants to hear, you’re doing what’s popular. You’re pop. But if you say, “Fuck that. I don’t understand why—I want to go against the grain.” Then it’s rock.²⁷

Ice-T recognizes the socio-political exigencies of race in urban America, along with its historical cultural intermingling that produced someone like him—a black man who becomes a perceptive, non-biased gangbanger turned American icon. As illustrated in the song “Body Count,” Ice-T’s music captures and negotiates America’s double reality of racial hybridity and segregation: “What I gotta die before you realize I was a brother with open eyes?” With his eyes open to the dueling realities of racial segregation and cultural amalgamation, Ice-T signifies the best and least quixotic conception of the “post-racial.” He is both firmly lodged in the reality of his black LA world, while simultaneously able to relate to a broad spectrum of the American socioeconomic and cultural mix.

Ice-T’s “Cool Pose” and Black Masculinity in Hip-Hop Capitalism

²⁶ Ice-T, *Ice*: 198–9.

²⁷ Ice-T (2011): 130.

In the introduction of this chapter I mentioned the notion of “cool pose,” as first articulated by Majors and Billson. It is a construct that attempts to explicate the social composure underlying an often-seething rage of black men in urban America. Cool pose is a survival strategy for black men in a society seemingly set on making them an endangered species. It is ultimately motivated by a sense of masculine pride not to let the system, established on your back as slave labor and second-class citizenship, defeat you. Coolness is also a behavioral attribute of the streets that contains all of the conspicuous consumption of the American economic system *without* that level of finance. Therefore, cool posturing is necessary to survive among your own “homeys” who exhibit the by-product of centuries of racial degradation: black-on-black violent self-hatred. Similarly, as we will see and as other essays in this collection have detailed, the cool posturing of hip-hop artists such as Ice-T has become highly lucrative—a beneficent route to “success” within a ruthless post-industrial environment. As such, the cool pose encapsulates the highly ambivalent relationship between African-American masculinity and late US capitalism.

The increasing consumer-oriented credit system that pushed the US into an indebted nation over time has further entrenched the developing American class structure. A concomitant value system evolved from a self-delusional game that everyone is “middle class.” This late-capitalist social structure further increased the gap between the white “haves” and the black “have nots.” Majors and Billson discuss *anomie*—the breakdown of social norms and values by an individual or society—as part of the consumer-oriented society that sped out of control. As they detail: “Anomie completes its destruction when those who are shut out of culturally sanctioned means for achieving success become convinced, in their anger and frustration, that the rules that govern the mainstream do not apply to them.”²⁸ Using sociologist Robert Merton’s theory of individual adaptation, they explain cool pose as a part of black male culture’s individual adaptation to the reality that “while they may share the society’s basic goals, they do not share the means for achieving them.” Differential access to the society’s resources will eventually create the “deviant” behavior exhibited in South Central, Compton, New Jersey, Chicago, Baltimore, and so on. Out of Merton’s typology of adaptations—conformity, innovation, retreatism, ritualism, and rebellion—it is innovation, defined as “creating illegitimate or unconventional means to achieve the same goals,” that they analyze as the chief behavioral adaptation they find among poor black

²⁸ Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*: 6.

males in urban America.²⁹

Innovation is a fitting term for the cultural adaptation of black males to their historic unequal access to vast American economic resources that grew exponentially over the latter part of the twentieth century. Although rebellion, as exhibited by the 1960s Black Power Movement, was a popular strategy of the time, it is “innovation” that best captures the negative masculine roles created by black urban males in the ongoing parallel underground economy—pimp, gang leader, hustler, drug dealer. The unconventional creativity of innovation underscores cool pose as a requisite for success in such alternative subcultural contexts as black LA that strive for their own relative wealth and sense of masculine pride. It is within this context that Ice-T can be viewed as one of the supreme *innovators*, having mastered the art of the underground economy without going to prison, and eventually turning that hustler instinct into long-term survival within the cutthroat business of Hollywood. In fact, it is because he had developed his brand of cool in the mean streets of South Central LA that he was able to “peep” the rules of the game in the multibillion dollar entertainment industry. He writes in his memoir:

One thing I’ve learned from straddling two worlds: Hollywood is way more gangster than the streets. Hollywood is way colder. Way more vicious ... In the studios, they’re dealing with billions of dollars. On the streets, you’re dealing with hundreds of thousands of dollars. When cats are dealing with billions of dollars, anybody—I mean, anybody—is expendable.³⁰

Here, Ice-T subverts the dominant binary between legitimate and illegitimate capitalism, and draws attention to the value of a “cool pose” in both contexts. In essence, he stresses the central importance of adaptation within the practice of “cool.” Similarly, Majors and Billson stress the *historic* and *transmutable* nature of these adaptive strategies from which cool pose emanates, including today’s so-called post-racial era: “This survival strategy began under servitude, continued through Reconstruction, legalized discrimination, and ghettoization, and persists today in an era of veiled exclusions and subtler hostilities.”³¹

²⁹ Majors and Billson (1992): 6.

³⁰ Ice-T, *Ice*: 175.

³¹ Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*: 7.

Nonetheless, “cool” as an attribute transcends these national boundaries and historical timeframes. As I have discussed elsewhere, “cool” is imbedded in the expressive culture of African peoples, even before the degradations of the American experience. The Yoruba concept of *itutu*, for example, is a construct encompassing “an all-embracing, positive attribute which combines notions of composure, silence, vitality, healing, and social purification” that African Art Historian Robert Farris Thompson identified also among 35 different West and Central African ethnic groups.³² The use of music, dance, song, and oratory not only for secular occasions, but also for spiritual purposes to “cool” the entire village from social tensions, is an accepted cultural strategy of African peoples that responds to group and individual socio-psychic dynamics that must be kept in balance. Cool, in the context of the hot intensity of performance, actually serves as the mediation between inevitable underlying social tensions and controlled equanimity that serves to keep society, and individuals within in it, healthy. Hence, “mystic concepts of *itutu* have transformed in urban African American assertions of independent power” through cool poses such as the bopping “pimp walk” of the 1970s and today’s folded arm, tilted head stance of the hip-hop emcee.³³

The more secular emphasis of cool in the African American experience is precisely because of 350 years of purposeful disempowerment. Cool pose in the urban black experience is a survival mechanism that even in today’s “veiled exclusions and subtler hostilities” allows black men to save face in a patriarchal capitalist system. Ironically, however, cool is what often also prevents them from realizing their full self-realized personal power. Middle-aged Ice-T now realizes his brand of cool has both defined him and kept him from his fuller self-definition:

When you get named ice it’s because you seem to lack emotions. You seem cold to the world. But that coldness was never a negative attribute to me. The way I’ve always seen it is: Emotions don’t really get shit done ... When

³² Robert Farris Thompson, cited in Halifu Osumare, “‘An Aesthetic of the Cool’ Revisited: The Ancestral Dance Link in the African Diaspora,” *UCLA Journal of Dance Ethnology*, Vol. 17 (1993): 2–4. Thompson conducted his fieldwork originally in the 1960s with his major opus on the subject, *African Art in Motion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). He continues to be one of the major articulators of the adaptation of African cultural principles in the Americas, including hip-hop culture in the US.

³³ Osumare (1993): 4.

you're in the military you're not allowed to be emotional ... Same thing in the street; the hustler's life isn't any more emotional than a military dude ... But the strange thing is, now that I'm over fifty I've been getting a lot more open to my feelings. You lose the self-absorption you felt as a young man.³⁴

As Ice-T explains, cool pose is not an autonomous or self-determining attribute. Rather, it is associated with an overdetermined black masculinity embedded within wider national discourses of work, competition, and economic prestige. bell hooks positions [legitimate] *work* itself as a part of the oppressive system of American capitalism that was first built on black enslavement:

[M]ost black males suffer psychologically in the world of work whether they make loads of money or low wages from overt and covert racially based psychological terrorism ... the everyday work world becomes the location where that dominance can be enacted and reenacted again and again. In this way work in the United States continues to be stressful and more often than not demoralizing for most black males.³⁵

hooks analyzes the revolutionary Black Power movement as a black male opposition to the often-demeaning position that their fathers had to assume with white male supervisors and corporate heads in work situations. "Young beautiful brilliant black power male militants were the first black leftists to loudly call out the evils of capitalism. And during that call they unmasked wage slavery, naming it for what it was."³⁶ Legitimate work, in the above-ground economy has not been, until recently, the place of a sense of achievement for black males, the way it has been for white males. This has created in the process two completely different relationships to the so-called American Dream, which in dominant discourses is associated with hard work, honesty, and achievement. Capitalism in the US, therefore, has always been tainted with the deleterious effects of racial hierarchy compounded by overlapping inequalities of what hooks calls "white supremacy capitalist patriarchy."³⁷

Again, these determining realities and aspects of "cool pose" speak to the unstable and even chimeric boundary between legitimate and illegitimate capitalism in America. The underground economy,

³⁴ Ice-T, *Ice*: 206.

³⁵ bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004): 24.

³⁶ hooks (2004): 25.

³⁷ hooks (2004): 79.

be it “numbers running,” drug sales, petty theft, or outright robbery and fencing of consumer goods, became a part of the “innovation” of black male reaction to the constraints of their historically proscribed opportunities. This was the original world of Ice-T, and still is the world of so many young black males that he currently tries to help. Male breadwinning is the cornerstone of US capitalism, linking a particular definition of manhood with material accumulation. As hooks reveals, for the black community, “Patriarchal manhood was the theory and gangsta culture was its ultimate practice.”³⁸ In this kind of black patriarchal gangsta culture, hip-hop becomes a methodology of “legitimate” work that does not seem demeaning to the black male ego—allowing an articulate emcee to demonstrate that he’s a “brother with open eyes”—while ironically forging a link to corporate gangsterism. On this point, hooks writes:

Black men of all classes have come to see the market-driven capitalist society we are living in as a modern Babylon without rules, without any meaningful structure of law and order as a world where “gangsta culture” is the norm. Power patriarchal players (mostly white but now and then men of color) in mainstream corporate or high-paying government jobs do their own version of the gangsta culture game.³⁹

Rap music, with all its ancillary industries of street fashion, celebrity product endorsements, and overall twenty-first-century cool style, has become a multi-billion dollar industry and an alternative to the underground economy. Hip-hop has forged what I call an economic “power move” whereby “hip-hop strategic plays with traditional hierarchal power that seize the methods and processes by which business is conducted to interject alternative methodologies.”⁴⁰ This globally accepted ghettocentric aesthetic has not only become commonplace, but a part of a new socioeconomic authority.

Ice-T is a prototypical symbol of hip-hop’s power move into big business capitalism. Most old-school hip-hop originators had no conception that their natural cool with rhyme, rhythm, and ciphers would develop into a culture of millionaire-makers. But Ice-T’s innate rebellious tendency to keep it real regarding his own life as a street hustler allowed him to forge new hardcore cultural territory:

³⁸ hooks (2004): 25.

³⁹ hooks (2004): 25–6.

⁴⁰ Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 155.

I pushed the boundaries. Nobody had said “nigga,” “ho,” or “muthafucka” on wax before I did ... There was nobody else rapping about the streets the way that I did. In fact, that was the main question about me: Could a guy base an entire career around something so hard and so negative?⁴¹

Even respected hip-hop originators from New York, like Grandmaster Caz, questioned Ice-T about putting so much energy into the rap game, when he was already playing high-stakes finance with street hustling.⁴² No one thought hip-hop could become the industry that it has become or that Ice-T’s particular brand of rap—what the media dubbed gangster rap—would be the genre to push hip-hop into the white teenage suburbs, pushing it to rival the rock music market.

Gangsta rap, initiated by Ice-T and developed to a “science” with NWA, drove hip-hop culture into the symbol of postmodern late capitalism that positions ghettocentric cool at the center of today’s global commerce. “The ambiguity implicit within such a power shift, initiated from America’s historically marginalized lower class,” I have said, “is central to fathoming the competing and often confusing signs of hip-hop culture in the twenty-first century.”⁴³ The American outlaw mythology forged out of the so-called “manifest destiny” of territorial westward expansion that established the US as we know it, and the “gangster mentality” necessary for land and indigenous Native American conquest is alive and well in the corporate suites. Hip-hop street hustlers found their corporate counterparts and replicated those roles in their boutique labels such as Death Row Records and Bad Boy Entertainment. Ice-T’s early rap and rock rhymes helped forge that complicit, yet counter-hegemonic model. Even with gangster record industry dynamics, from a personal point of view hip-hop has also saved a lot of lives from either prison or death. This includes Ice-T: “Hip-hop saved my life. That’s no bullshit. It was hip-hop that got me out of that negative cycle I was living. If I’d stayed a hustler, I’ve got no doubt, I’d either be dead or in the pen like so many of my partners.”⁴⁴

Mellowing with Age: Obama, Ice-T, and the Future of Hip-Hop

⁴¹ Ice-T, *Ice*: 99.

⁴² Ice-T (2011): 97.

⁴³ Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic*: 166.

⁴⁴ Ice-T, *Ice*: 211.

In exploring Ice-T within the context of the Age of Obama, I am implicitly commenting upon a generation of black men coming of age in the early 1980s of American Reaganomics. This generation experienced the introduction of the personal computer, the Internet, video games, and cable television. The US Census Bureau charting of baby-boomers from 1946 to 1964 is far too wide a spread; what Mark Anthony Neal calls the “post-soul generation” is composed of a constituency very different than those born right after World War II.⁴⁵ Both Barack Obama and Tracy Marrow are members of this in-between generation that straddles the civil rights and hip-hop generations. Being an “in-between,” candidate Obama had to not only overcome his white opponents, but also his black political elders, who felt he hadn’t come through their ranks. On this point, Gwen Ifill quotes William Jelani Cobb in her *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*:

Positioned as he is between the boomers and the hip-hop generation, Obama is indebted, but not beholden, to the civil rights gerontocracy. A successful Obama candidacy would simultaneously represent a huge leap forward for black America and the death knell for the reign of the civil rights-era leadership—or at least the illusion of their influence.⁴⁶

Ice-T’s generational perspective also eludes any easy categorization. Being a part of the in-between age group for Tracy Marrow meant that coming of age in South Central in the mid-seventies at Crenshaw High meant being well versed in the Crips-Blood street gang formation, but escaping the full-blown devolution into machine-gun drive-by shootings. His generation of street hustler had the opportunity to develop a gangster mentality that still valued honor. It also positioned him at the right cultural moment to contribute to the regional diversification of the developing sound of rap in the late 1980s. Emerging from this in-between generation, both men offer crucial links connecting the civil rights and the hip-hop generations.

⁴⁵ Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 103.

⁴⁶William Jelani Cobb, “Optimism about black Progress Declines,” Pew Research Center and National Public Radio, November 13, 2007. Cited in Gwen Ifill, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* (New York: Doubleday, 2009): 41.

In recent years, Obama and Ice-T's inter-generational perspective has informed their masculinist personas in significant ways. As this in-between generation moves past middle age, there is often a deconstruction of its original cool pose, an attempt to take apart the "mask" and study both its uses and limitations. Clearly Ice-T attempts to dismantle his well-constructed pimp/playa brand to focus on the craft and skills of hip-hop in his directorial debut with his film documentary *Something From Nothing: The Art of Rap* (2012):

The documentary follows my life, coming from LA, wanting to be a rapper, meeting the cats in New York, then watching hip-hop go back to LA ... The movie is not about the money, the girls, the cars—none of that. I feel it's the definitive movie about the art form. It takes the best hip-hop artists of all time and asks them: How are you motivated and inspired?

Although, Ice-T still takes pride in being "The first rapper to drop the street language—*bitch, ho, nigga*," he has become in his mid-50s an OG who to a greater extent concentrates on substance over floss—cultural process over constructed media-honed product. This is a result of intelligent personal growth that age often brings, particularly when one has seen "the game," from the streets to the corporate suites.⁴⁷

It is the hip-hop generation that solidified the concept of the "personal as political." If the rap genre that Ice-T helped to establish on the West Coast personalized into street journalism what politically consciousness groups like Public Enemy and X-Clan were initiating on the East Coast, then gangsta rap, even with all of its regressive aspects, helped to forge a link between the individual plights of specific black men in racist America and the effects of white supremacy on the group. Ice-T, in his own bid to tell the truth about his personal life fashioned another way of getting "a message through to the red, white and blue." Gangsta rap became a crucial genre of hip-hop, *because* it was personal. It spoke not only graphically to many urban black males, but also tapped into the outlaw fantasies of white suburban and mid-western teens whose consumer buying power enhanced the potential of hip-hop in the marketplace. In the process white teen consumers facilitated rap's conversion into an escape from inner city hustling

⁴⁷ Ice-T, *Ice*: 215.

and crime for black males.⁴⁸ The life-changing dynamics that hip-hop represents for black males like Ice-T, and young emcees today, create a larger responsibility for its ultimate message. President Barack Obama rightfully has revealed this about hip-hop's potential:

There is a great potential for [rappers] to deliver a message of extraordinary power, that gets people thinking ... I mean the thing about hip-hop today is it's smart, it's insightful. The way that they can communicate a complex message in a very short space is remarkable. And a lot of these kids are not going to be reading *The New York Times*. That's not how they're getting their information. The question, then, is what's the content, what's the message. I understand folks want to be rooted in the community, they wanna be down. But what I always say is that hip-hop is just not a mirror of what is, it should also be a reflection of what can be. A lot of times folks say I wanna be real, I wanna be down, then we're just trapped in what is. The question is: imagine something different; imagine communities that aren't torn up by violence. Imagine communities where we're respecting our women. Imagine a community where knowledge, reading and academic excellence or valued. Imagine communities where fathers are doing right by their kids. That's also something that has to be reflected. Art just can't be a rear view mirror; it should have a headlight out there.⁴⁹

Here, Obama focuses on the transformative, rather than simply the reflective, aspects of hip-hop as a subcultural practice; its ability to "imagine" or gesture towards an alternative set of social practices and priorities. Ice-T feels like the "extraordinary power" of rap has *already* been realized, even to the point of putting Barack Obama in the presidency itself. During a 2012 interview on NBC's *Today*, while

⁴⁸ Joan Morgan's *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (New York:

Touchstone, 1999) did the same for the black female voice in forging a way of talking about black feminism from a hip-hop generation's perspective. Black nationalism and black feminism actually transcended scholarly and politically conscious circles and penetrated the streets through hip-hop ciphers of knowledge production. Also, see Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip-Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), particularly Chapter 6, "Is the Personal Still Political?": 161–96.

⁴⁹ "USA President Barack Obama Opinion on Hip-Hop and Rap 2008," YouTube video. Uploaded by "starrground," February 3, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFSVG7jRp_g.

promoting *The Art of Rap* documentary, Ice-T analyzed the political power of hip-hop regarding President Obama:

It was hip-hop that got people willing to vote, over twenty-years ago. There's only 10 percent black people in this country; white people voted for Barack ... and that had to happen after their eyes were opened up, and hip-hop is what brought us together; hip-hop is what took down a lot of those boundaries; music did that.⁵⁰

He credits the youth subculture with bringing the races together as the hip-hop generation comes of age. At this juncture, one of the developers of the culture explains the past and present changes hip-hop has already accomplished, while the consumer-politician—President Barack Obama—dreams of the potential for the future of hip-hop.

Currently, Ice-T, through his college lectures, public school talks, prison visits, and his short-lived gang intervention show *The Peacemaker* (2010), has converted the personal into a powerful statement of the political. In the process he has become a hip-hop cipher himself, shining “a headlight” on what could be. His life trajectory from street hustler, gangbanger, from thief to trend-setting hip-hop emcee who defined a new musical category to first rapper to star in a movie (*New Jack City*, 1992), to television actor on the long-running *Law & Order: SVU* (2000–present), embodies the self-made man mythology that America represents, but not in the usual sense. As Jay-Z alludes to in his *Decoded* (2010), hustlers like Ice-T represent “the hustlers story—through hip-hop—[that] has connected with a global audience. The deeper we get into those sidewalk cracks and into the mind of the young hustler trying to find his fortune there, the closer we get to the ultimate human story, the story of struggle, which is what defines us all.”⁵¹ Obama admonishes hip-hop to focus on the positive aspects of this struggle, which Ice-T is now *doing* by helping young street males to dream about *what could be* through hip-hop. Ice-T becomes a hip-hop cipher—“a conceptual space,” as Imani Perry analyzes, “in which heightened consciousness exists ... a privileged outlaw space.”⁵² As an outlaw himself, Ice-T articulated his real life criminality that parallels

⁵⁰ “Ice-T: Rap Put Obama in the White House,” *The Today Show*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.today.com>.

⁵¹ Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010): 19.

⁵² Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004):

American capitalism. He made that privileged “outlaw space” a form of truth-telling, deciphering the realities of marginalization within a white supremacy capitalist patriarchy that is global in its reach, and that has developed new ways of masking itself. In that reality representation he also fashioned his own redemption.

Bibliography

Collins, Patricia Hill, *From Black Power to Hip-Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

Dews, Carlos, “‘The ‘Nigger Show’: When Racism Masquerades,” *The Religious Consultation*, December 2009, http://www.religiousconsultation.org/NEWS/The_nigger_show.htm (Accessed August 22, 2012).

hooks, bell, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Ice-T and Douglas Century, *Ice: A Memoir of Gangster Life and Redemption—From South Central to Hollywood* (New York: One World, 2011).

_____, with Heidi Siegmund, *The Ice Opinion: Who Gives A Fuck?* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

“Ice-T: Rap Put Obama in the White House,” *The Today Show*, June 13, 2012, <http://video.today.msnbc.msn.com/today/47797515#47797515> (Accessed November 9, 2012).

Ifill, Gwen, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010).

Kelley, Robin DG, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in William Eric Perkins (ed.), *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996): 117–58.

Majors, Richard and Janet Mancinci Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

Malcolm, Andrew, “Are Obama’s Critics Racists? Jimmy Carter Thinks So,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2009.

Morgan, Joan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

Neal, Mark Anthony, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Obama, Barack, *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

Osumare, Halifu, "'An Aesthetic of the Cool' Revisited: The Ancestral Dance Link in the African Diaspora," *UCLA Journal of Dance Ethnology*, Vol. 17 (1993): 1–17.

_____, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

_____, "Jay-Z on His iPod: Barack Obama as a Hip-Hop Generation Pop Icon, *Seeing Black*, August 3, 2009, http://www.seeingblack.com/article_680.shtml.

Perry, Imani, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

Sieving, Christopher, "Cop Out? The Media, 'Cop Killer,' and the Deracialization of Black Rage," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 22, no. 4 (October 1998): 334–53.

Something From Nothing: The Art of Rap, dirs. Ice-T and Andy Baybutt (Indomina Films, 2012).

Sonmez, Felicia, "Romney Camp Deploys Gingrich to Make Welfare-Reform Argument Against Obama," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2012.

Sugrue, Thomas J, *Not Even Past: Barack Obama and the Burden of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Thompson, Robert Farris, *African Art in Motion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974).

Touré, *Who's Afraid of Post Blackness? What it Means to Be Black Now* (New York: Free Press, 2011).

US Bureau of the Census, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States 2010*, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/income_wealth/cb11-157.html#tablea

(Accessed Jun 21, 2013).

YouTube Video References

"Dinesh D'Souza Analyzes Barack Obama," YouTube video. Uploaded by "upandopen," March 6, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpAyhQhInyI>.

“USA President Barack Obama Opinion on Hip-Hop and Rap 2008,” YouTube video. Uploaded by “starrground,” February 3, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pESVG7jRp_g.