Making Movie Money: A 25-Year Analysis of Rappers' Acting Roles in Hollywood Movies

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Since the 1980s, moviemakers and rappers have collaborated to churn out an extensive body of cinematic work. With rappers moving from small cameo roles to obtaining lead acting roles, there is an undeniable influence rappers and rap music had and still have on the movie industry. The purpose of this research was to explore the existence of rappers in the movie industry by investigating the appearances of rap artists in Hollywood movies, connections that existed between rap artists' musical personalities and the movie characters they portrayed as well as connections between Hip Hop movements and rappers' roles in Hollywood. Key findings indicated gangsta, hardcore and party rappers were cast in movies most frequently, and rap artists with popular gimmicks or the strongest or most unique personalities within rap groups were more likely to be cast in movies. Further, findings indicate there were connections between the realities rap artists portrayed in the music industry and the characters they portrayed in Hollywood movies, and the 1990s was the "Golden Age of Rappers in Movies." Finally, while most films did have rap artists speaking, acting and looking similar to their rap personas, there were opportunities for rappers to break away from their rap personas. Most notably, the elite rap actors discussed in this research – LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Marky Mark, Snoop Dog, Fresh Prince and Mos Def – showed rappers can progress in the Hollywood movie system, transcend their rap personas and become successful actors.

As 2016 ended, Will "Fresh Prince" Smith's[1] Collateral Beauty was released in theaters. With more than twenty-five movies to his credit, it might be hard for some to watch his dramatic cinematic portrayal of a father struggling to accept the death of his daughter and remember he earned his notoriety as the pop rapper Fresh Prince. He is arguably one of the most popular actors in entertainment. Fresh Prince topped the Ulmer Scale's "Hot List" multiple times, which scores an actor's worldwide bankability on a scale from zero to one hundred, and it is based on several criterion, including risk factors, value in the film worldwide marketplace, professionalism and talent. [2] Further punctuating his success in the film industry is the lifetime gross of his films tops more than $3.1 billion. [3] Yet, Fresh Prince, and many other rappers, transitioned from rapping to acting and penetrated the movie industry with fervor for decades.

O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson, Dana "Queen Latifah" Owens, Tracy "Ice T" Marrow, James "LL Cool J" Smith III, Calvin "Snoop Dogg" Broadus Jr. and others have moved from the stage to the movie screen. According to successful rapper, screenwriter, actor and producer Ice Cube, rappers had a term for the lure of large Hollywood

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[1] All rappers will be presented first using their entire names with stage names. Then they will only be referred to using their stage names.

[2] "Will Smith Tops the List of Most Bankable Actors Worldwide," *Ulmer Scale*, Accessed on June 16, 2010, https://www.blackentrepreneurprofile.com/profile-full/article/will-smith-tops-list-of-most-bankable-actors-worldwide/.

[3] "Will Smith," *Box Office Mojo*, accessed on December 21, 2016, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/people/chart/?id=willsmith.htm.

paychecks. He called it "movie money," and he said it drove rappers to put down their microphones and pick up movie scripts. [4] However, at the time, Ice Cube noted Hollywood movie producers - more than other actors and directors – were more likely to accept rappers as actors. Ice Cube insisted producers look for any "edge" in the marketplace to attract moviegoers to theaters and rappers gave them a competitive "edge." Further, actor, screenwriter and producer Spike Lee was noted as stating that Hollywood producers must seriously take into consideration the presence of rappers in film. He said, "You can't deny it, you have to deal with it, or you're making very uncool movies. And if you don't make them, your competitor will."[5]

From LL Cool J's role in Krush Grove in 1985 to Yasiin "Mos Def" Bey (Dante Smith) and Queen Latifah's leading roles in the Just Wright in 2010 to Christopher "Ludacris" Bridges role in the Fast & Furious movie franchise, the occurrences and significance of the roles rappers play in Hollywood movies has evolved over the last two decades. Rappers are not only obtaining roles, but prominent ones. A review of scholarship concerning rap and Hip Hop indicates scholars are focusing on certain aspects of these movements, but have not systematically chronicled the quantity and type of appearances of multiple types of rappers as a cohesive group within the movie industry over an extended period.

Much scholarly research has been written about the history and current influence of Hip Hop on culture; its influence on fashion, art, culture and behavior; impact on youth, and even its influence in the movie industry. [6] Yet, this research fills a much-needed gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the number and types of acting roles of rappers in Hollywood without prejudice to the types of movies or rappers being investigated.

In the movie industry where studio executives covet a sure thing, rap artists bring hordes of young Black, White, and Latino moviegoers to urban and suburban theaters, and rap artists have appeared in some of the highest grossing and most profitable films in Hollywood. [7] Rap artists' natural stage presence and fan base make them shine on the big screen. [8] By investigating how rap artists emerged and staked a considerable claim within the movie industry, this study will be significant, because it will be the much-needed analytical scholarship used to assess exactly how this pop culture phenomenon materialized and blossomed over more than a twenty-five year period. Furthermore, this work describes how influential certain rap styles or personas were within the movie industry.

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[4] Tia C. M. Tyree, interview by author, Washington, D.C., January 8, 2007.

[5] E. Feimster, "From Hip Hop to Hollywood," accessed on April 10, 2006, http://channels.netscape.com/celebrity/becksmith.jsp?p=bsf_hiphop.

[6] See examples in the bibliography for works by Robin Boylorn; Kimberly Monteyne; Ronald Jackson and Sakile Kai Camara; Monica White Ndounou; S. Craig Watkins; as well as Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson.

[7] Sakina P. Spruell, "Hip Hop at the Movies," *Black Enterprise* 32, no. 12 (2002): 62-66.

[8] Hall, Regina, "Hip Hop Inc.," *Essence*, 36.2 (2005): 102.

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Theoretical Underpinnings: The Social Construction of Reality and the Rapper

Ultimately, rap is not just words; it is multidimensional. Rap is pedagogy, mass culture, subversion and farce.[9] Not only does rap dictate the major focus be placed on the performer and not the group or DJ, but the dynamics of rap require the performer focus on personal narrative.[10] Tricia Rose posits the power of rappers' voices and their roles as storytellers ensured rapping would become the central expression of Hip Hop culture. Rose also argued rappers speak with "authority, conviction, confidence and power," and those with impressive verbal dexterity and performative skills captivate their audiences' attention.[11]

Rappers personally construct realities for consumers to believe in for their own reasons. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann outlined several key concepts concerning the interactions between individuals and society. Most notably, Berger and Luckmann argued society is a human product and acts as if it is an objective reality and man is a social product. There are three steps in the social construction of reality, which are externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of the individual self into the world, and objectivation is attained by the products of this activity – both the physical and mental activities – and the reality that faces its original producers and becomes institutionalized. Internalization is the re-appropriation of individuals of this same reality, which is transformed again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness or socialization.[12] Ultimately, social reality is not a true social fact within itself. Instead, social reality is created and communicated; it derives meaning within and through systems of communication. Essentially, people consciously help to develop or construct their realities based on their existing values, beliefs and ideological positions.[13] These values, beliefs and ideologies are not individual choices; instead, they are components of complex and dynamic social and cultural patterns.[14]

Social construction of reality is an important concept to understand when investigating how rappers came into the Hollywood moviemaking process, because it helps ground the idea that societies are based on cultural and personal experiences. As a social group, rap artists describe and sell their realties to their audiences. Most rap lyrics are first-person narratives that retell what the artists (allegedly) saw or did and

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[9] Clarence Lusane, "Rap, Race and Power Politics," *The Black Scholar* 23, no. 2 (1993): 37-51.

[10] Robin Roberts, "Music Videos, Performance and Resistance: Feminist rappers," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 25, no. 2 (1991): 141-152.

[11] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) p. 55.

[12] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (UK: Penguin, 1991).

[13] See Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane's research "Media and the Social Construction of Reality: Toward an integration of Theory and Research" and George Gerbner's research "Communication and Social Environment."

[14] Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 50, no. 2 (1991): 248-287.

recount events that happened personally or specifically to them.[15] In addition, speech can be translated as action; a text is axiomatically an ethnography.[16] Rap is speech, and when text is accompanied by music, there is an explicit conceptual framework that begins to provide answers concerning musical meaning and social significance. Individuals not only live their realities, but they express them to others. Rappers have their music to help manifest and express their realities to others, and Hollywood moviemakers spend millions of dollars attempting to construct realistic stories to sell to audiences.

As noted by Celine Parrenas Shimizu, narrative Hollywood movies are a manifestation of the White male fantasy and imagination, and as characters, times and places are constructed for the art of moviemaking, audiences are shown what moviemakers want to see happen, which may even be a reflection or response to what audiences, too, desire to see.[17] For example, Hip Hop gangsta films expose the racist ideology that exists in Hollywood that not only encourages the development of African-American cinema, but also limits it. The most commercially successful genres of African-America films are Hip Hop gangsta films and comedies. Yet, it is exactly the preferences of these types of films by Hollywood audiences that limit the existence of complex cinematic portrayals that highlight the humanity within the spectrum of the Black experience.[18]

To further this point, Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, assert the existence of a "parasitic" relationship between the movie industry and Hip Hop, which manifests itself through a seduction of Hip Hop and Black movie artists entangled in a courtship that pays them money in exchange for popularity and movie roles.[19] However, these scholars warned audiences are often engulfed in the, "insidious arrangement where they are pleasured at their own risk. Unfortunately, although these artists are aware these industries have ghettoized blackness, then turned it into a commodity and packaged it for mass consumption, they have been complicit with this stereotype."[20] Ultimately, Hip Hop's entrance into Hollywood was complex. Hip Hop films were celebrated for they allowed Black audiences to see themselves in Black actors on movie screens and White audiences could voyeuristically experience Black culture. However, there was concern of the continued commodification of the Black experience, especially Black male images.[21]

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[15] Robin DG. Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

[16] John Van Maanen, *Representation in Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

[17] Celine Parreñas Shimizu, "Equal Access to Exploitation and Joy: Women of Color and Hollywood Stereotype" *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 33, no. 4 (2016): 303-321.

[18] Monica White Ndounou, *Shaping the Future of African American Film: Color-Coded Economics and the Story Behind the Numbers* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2014).

[19] Ronald L. Jackson and Sakile Kai Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies," *Association for the Study of African American Life and History*, 2010, p. 179.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Robin M. Boylorn, "From Boys to Men: Hip Hop, Hood Films, and the Performance of Contemporary Black Masculinity." *Black Camera* 8, no. 2 (2017): 146-164.

Understanding Rap Music, Rap Styles and Rap Movements

The history, current state and influence of rap music and Hip Hop is much too vast and extensive to outline in this work. However, it is important to note some basic ideas about the categorization of rappers, create an understanding of what rap truly is and means as well as identify some trends, as this helps to lay the foundation for what created rappers' pathway into the movie industry and possibly undergirded their casting.

In 2009, Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson argued there was no consensus in Hip Hop literature on the proper classification of rap music genres, and this author argues that nearly two decades later the same holds true.[22] The variations, contradictions and historical demarcations that exist in both the categorization of rap music styles and rap movements are vast. However, what follows is this author's selection of rap and Hip Hop scholarship that created the foundation for this study, which notably may not be universally accepted by all in the Hip Hop community.

Specific Rap Music Styles

Taylor and Taylor assert there has never been one "all-inclusive" form of rap music.[23] This can be attributed to the styles, ideas and techniques rappers have as a result of their locations within demographic regions, geographic regions, territories and locales.[24] Rap styles, forms and categories are critical to note in this research, because they become the building blocks to understand exactly how rap artists can be situated within the rap music genre, Hip Hop community and quite possibly the Hollywood movie industry. Perhaps, their locations within specific categorizations listed in this work position them differently within the Hollywood movie industry and either assist or hinder their efforts to be cast in a major movie production.

With rap being such a dynamic art form, many scholars have attempted to classify the types, forms and themes within rap music. S. Craig Watkins noted rap various based on "regions, styles, subgenres and gender" and that there is no "monolithic constituency operating within the Hip Hop community…different subjective positions, ideas and experiences are communicated through Hip Hop, thus creating a vastly diverse body of discourses and cultural practices."[25] Don Elligan classified rap into five categories: gangsta rap, materialistic rap, political or protest rap,

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[22] Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson, "Hip Hop Music and Culture: A Site of Resiliency for the Streets of Young Black America," *Handbook of African American Psychology* (2009): 127-141.

[23] Carl S. Taylor and Virgil Taylor, "Hip Hop and Youth Culture: Contemplations of an emerging cultural phenomenon," *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 12, no. 4 (2004): 251.

[24] Ibid.

[25] S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 257.

positive rap and spiritual rap.[26] According to Elligan, gangster rap focused on violence, guns, misogyny and profane language. Materialistic rap focuses on monetary wealth, possessions and women. Elligan noted political/protest rap focuses on political issues, racism, sexism, equality and ethnic identity. In addition, he stated "Positive rap promotes the values of education, responsibility and ethnic pride. Spiritual rap incorporates rap music with traditional gospel music to appeal to young African American men."[27] Matt Diehl clearly defined an additional style of rap music: pop rap. The "pop" is derived from the word "popular" and "signifies music that's reaching for the biggest conceivable audience."[28]

Roy Shuker penned a book titled *Key Concepts in Popular Music* and noted five major forms of rap music, which are gangsta, hard-core, reggae, female and East Coast or Daisy Age.[29] Shuker defined his subgenres as follows: "gangsta rap was machismo in orientation and includes themes of gang violence, drugs and the mistreatment and abuse of women, often with explicitly violent and sexual lyrics."[30] Shuker defined hardcore rap as focusing on serious political messages about the Black community, and reggae rap had a distinctive reggae-style beat and rhythm. In addition, the lyrics are sung, instead of rapped. Female rappers were not simply described by their gender. Instead, Shuker describes them as "female vocalists emphasizing gender solidarity and/or power over men."[31]

Several Key Movements in Rap Music

Since its beginnings, rap has undergone several key movements. Similar to the manner in which scholars and music fans have offered several definitions of the types of rap styles that exist, scholars, too, outline a number of different trends that exist in rap music history. Michael Eric Dyson posits rap has undergone three distinct stages.[32] Initially, rap music was "light-hearted banter and boastful self-assertion."[33] Rap moved to a second phase that was marked by "social critique" because of carrying the message about "the hurt and horror that make urban life a jungle."[34] The second stage has three subgenres – gangsta, hardcore and activists. Finally, the last stage was "pluralization," which involves the experimentation and merging of rap with other musical styles as well as a coupling of elements from the previous stages.[35]

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[26] Don Elligan, "Rap Therapy: A culturally Sensitive Approach to Psychotherapy with Young African American Men," *Journal of African American Studies* 5, no. 3 (2000): 27-36.

[27] Ibid., 28.

[28] Matt Diehl, "Pop Rap," The *Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999), 122

[29] Roy Shuker, *Key concepts in Popular Music*, Routledge, 1998.

[30] Ibid., 248.

[31] Ibid., 248.

[32] Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1996).

[33] Ibid., 143

[34] Ibid., 143

[35] Ibid., 143

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Mtume ya Salaam noted four distinct periods in the creation of rap music.[36] The first period was from 1970 to 1979 and was marked by the early innovators who were perfecting their rap and deejay skills, but were not necessarily conscious of the impact of their overall actions. From 1979 to 1983, rap music began to spread across the United States and the world, but the primary creators remained in the birthplace of the music style, New York. This second phase was now affectionately called "old school" and was birthed alongside breakdancing, graffiti art and other elements of Hip Hop. The third or most creative period was from 1983 to 1989, and it marked a shifting of popularity of rappers away from New York to other areas, such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Oakland. Unlike the other periods, the fourth period was more focused on consumers than rap artists. Salaam acknowledged commercialism was the driving force behind rap music. It was the tastes and morals of the public that drove record sales, and those forces were pushing the creative products of rap artists, not expression or communication.[37]

Still others noted different critical periods in rap music. Sasha Frere-Jones noted prior to 1983, rap rhymes were mostly centered on stories about bragging and boasting of partying and being who you are.[38] Rose also noted key changes in rap music in the 1980s. Rap themes began to denote increased intertextual references and complexity and were reflective of stories from new "Hip Hop crews" from Miami, Boston and Houston.[39] Charise Cheney identified the late 1980s through the early 1990s as the "Golden Age of Hip Hop," which was a time ripe with political expression from certain rappers, such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube, that paralleled historic Black nationalist-masculinist discourse.[40]

Mako Fitts argued since the late 1980s, three distinct, often coexisting movements, in Hip Hop authentication were present, which were Afrocentricity (social consciousness and political awareness), ghettocentricity and ostentatious displays of consumption (i.e., bling bling).[41] The latter two reflected commercial hip hop's movement of showcasing mainstream media representations of violent criminality and wealth accumulation.[42] The early 1990s saw an emergence of the "Dirty South," which was originally promoted as a new type of rap music blending older rap styles with southern music, accents, and themes, but by the end of the decade, rappers from this region had earned attention, critical acclaim and a reputation as "innovators of a fresh, new sound and style in Hip Hop culture."[43] In the 1990s, gangsta rap also found a place

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[36] Mtume Ya Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 303-315.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Sasha Frere-Jones, "Run-DMC," *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999): 61-68.

[39] Rose, *Black Noise*, 58.

[40] Charise Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*. (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

[41] Mako Fitts, "'Drop It Like It's Hot': Culture Industry Laborers and Their Perspectives on Rap Music Video Production," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8, no. 1 (2007): 211-235.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Darren E. Grem, "The South Got Something to Say: Atlanta's Dirty South and the Southernization of Hip Hop America," *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 4 (2006): 55-73.

in mainstream culture.[44] Finally, in the new millennium, with east and west coast rappers dominating rap for years, other parts of the country grabbed the attention of rap fans. It was then more regional acts with established fan bases exploded in the Hip Hop industry.[45] The commercialization of rap music was driven into selling the lifestyle of rap, not just songs, sex, or politics,[46] and it, too, saw the trend of White rock-rap bands or White rock and rap musicians working on collaborations that decontextualized the Black origins of rap and worked to erase the context by which the music and culture emerged.[47]

The Emergence of Rappers in Hollywood and Understanding Blacks in Movies

African-American culture has been persistently exploited in America, but corporate America's aggressive commodification of Hip Hop culture is unprecedented and shocking, especially in the way the declining urban centers that spawned Hip Hop are packaged as a glossy, dangerous, pleasure-filled, tough and racialized space.[48] In particular, Clarence Lusane asserted rap is "the packaging and marketing of social discontent by some of the most skilled ad agencies and largest record producers in the world….it's this duality that has given rap its many dimensions and flavors…empowerment and reaction."[49] Rap is attractive to corporations for it requires little investment, but has great potential for profits, and while most artists are young Blacks, they are not the main purchasers of rap, as most consumers are non-Blacks.[50] This paradox is actually the reverse when it comes to moviegoing. In the early 2000s, Blacks made up less than 12 percent of the population, but constituted about 25 percent of the movie-going audience.[51] However, in 2015, the African-American percentage of the U.S. moviegoing audience nearly matched its U.S. national population, but unlike Hispanics and Whites, African-American moviegoers frequency increased.[52] The clear

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[44] Persaud, E. Jerry, "The Signature of Hip Hop: A Sociological Perspective," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 4, no. 1 (2011).

[45] Rashuan Hall, "R&B/Hip Hop Industry Examines Trends on Eve of Confab," *Billboard*, August 19, 2000.

[46] Margaret Hunter, "Shake it, Baby, Shake it: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip Hop," *Sociological Perspectives* 54, no. 1 (2011): 15-36.

[47] Jason Middleton and Roger Beebe, "The Racial Politics of Hybridity and 'Neo-Eclecticism'in Contemporary Popular Music," *Popular Music* 21, no. 2 (2002): 159-172.

[48] Guthrie P. Ramsey, "*Muzing New Hoods, Making New Identities: Film, Hip Hop culture, and Jazz Music," Callaloo 25, no. 1 (2002): 309-320.*

[49] Clarence Lusane, "Rap, Race, and Politics," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* eds. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Foreman, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 403.

[50] Ibid. 405.

[51] See Karen Grigsby Bates, 'They've Gotta have us," *New York Times Magazine* (14 July 1991), p. 18, and Lewis Beale," 'Boyz' in your Hood?," *Washington Post* (3 March 1992).

[52] Bret. Lang, "Box Office Hits Record, But Number of Frequent Moviegoers Drops 10%," accessed on February 3, 2017, http://variety.com/2016/film/news/box-office-hits-record-but-frequent-moviegoers-down-1201751770/.

connection evident here is that rap music's fan base and the African-American interest in moviegoing possibly made the pathway to rappers in films kismet.

Yet, historically, Black involvement and representations in movies have a noted ebb and flow marked by concentrated moments of production and Black-focused features and years of marginalization; all demarcated by popular tropes that exemplify changing conceptualizations of Blackness.[53] Most notably, following decades of White, patriarchal exploitation in the movie industry, Blaxploitation movies were an intentional anti-establishment movie genre, paralleling rap's development as an alternate and true Black representation.[54] Another key moment was the development of "hood cycle" films in the early 1990s, which included rappers as a way to evoke credibility similar to the way Blaxploitation-era movies cast football players to authentically reflect the Black urban experience.[55] Jackson and Camara argue the movie industry exploded with these images focused with a Black representational gaze "fixated on almost nothing but the ugly aspects of Black existence that celebrate trifling ghetto living and poverty, neither of which are indicative of a composite Black culture, but pretend to be."[56]

Ultimately, realities help develop social knowledge and shape what become cultural norms and values, and much of this can be translated in movies by moviemakers for the benefit of moviemaking and moneymaking as well as the pleasure and consumption of audiences, despite the damaging effects present. While every rapper is not Black and every rapper to earn a Hollywood movie role is not Black (e.g., Marshall "Eminem" Mathers III in *8 Mile* and Vanilla Ice in *Cool as Ice)*, the majority are Black, and the way the movie industry has stereotyped Blacks is well documented and studied. From the groundbreaking book by Donald Bogle *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* to the multiple research studies produced since its publication, the acknowledgment of the Hollywood industry's usage of negative stereotypes and the damage they cause and caused is well noted. What is perhaps better suited for this study than naming and describing the multiple types of stereotypes in existence is to briefly describe how the communication of Black bodies through the usage of those stereotypes is problematic, especially since most rappers are overwhelmingly Black men.

When more record companies and White audiences targeted rap in the 1980s, it created the opportunity for rap artists and moviemakers to form a relationship. Spruell asserts rap artists in movies helped bring legitimacy to movie storylines, gave actor performances "juice" and demonstrated how the best personality needed to bring to life

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[53] Keith Corson, "Ice-T at the Movies: The Hip Hop Film Cycle and the On-Screen Gangsta in Flux," *Rapper, Writer, Pop-Cultural Player: Ice-T and the Politics of Black Cultural Production* (2016): 43.

[54] Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies."

[55] George Nelson, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998).

[56] Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies," 60.

the tools and conventions of Hip Hop to the screen was the rapper.[57] Yet, what is often not considered is the communication and power dynamics present in this partnership needed to transition a rapper from the music industry to the movie industry. The systematic power that exists in the creation of Hollywood movies requires acknowledgement of what is a critical and creative process behind and in front of the movie screen.[58] The Black body in entertainment has largely been negatively portrayed and commodified by Whites for decades. There are certain narratives available to certain bodies, and since this is the case, there is a disruptive impact of those bodies on narratives, especially when they run contradictory to what is status quo or acceptable in a society.[59] For example, Linda Mizejewski specifically investigated this in her review of Queen Latifah's roles in romantic comedies and how the narratives handled the "sexuality of the unruly woman who is black, or conversely, the narratives available for racial unruliness when it is female." [60]

The Black body on the movie screen is also a place where dominant institutions of White masculine power and authority-criminal justice system are present and reflect the public's intrigue with the figure of the menacing Black male criminal body, which rappers like Andre "Dr. Dre" Young, Todd "Too Short" Shaw, Ice-T, Ice Cube, Tupac "2Pac" Shakur and Snoop Dogg have used to construct or reconstruct the image of Black masculinity into one of hyper-Blackness based on fear and dread.[61] To discuss just one example, early in his career, Ice T's image heavily centered on his intimate knowledge of ghetto life and his ability to authentically translate those experiences to creative mediums like music and film.[62] As an actor, his performances are anchored in his celebrity persona, which is informed by his street life and Black experience.[63] In his 1990s movie appearances during the "hood cycle" of films, this "'authentic' ghetto experience rooted in criminality" was privileged over what was the typical leading man. From 2000 to 2017, Ice T's criminal connection was still being utilized, as he moved to the small screen and played the lead role of Odafin Tutuola, a criminal detective, in television show Law & Order: Special Victims Unit.

Elligan noted rap's significant national influence on music, art, media and the social development of youth really began to "take off" in the mid-1980s, which is about the time when Hollywood started to produce rap-influenced films.[64] The appearance of rappers in film and the influence of Hip Hop can be traced back to the 1982 rap movie classic *Wild Style*, which featured Joseph "Grandmaster Flash" Saddler, Fred "Fab Five Freddy" Braithwaite and the Rock Steady Crew. Even with the movie *Breakin'* and *Beat*

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[57] Spruell, "Hip Hop at the Movies," 205.

[58] Shimizu, "Equal Access to Exploitation and Joy."

[59] Linda Mizejewski, "Queen Latifah, Unruly Women, and the Bodies of Romantic Comedy," *Genders*, no. 46, (2007).

[60] Ibid.

[61] Herman Gray, "Black masculinity and visual culture," *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (1995): 401-405.

[62] Keith Corson, "Ice-T at the Movies: The Hip Hop Film Cycle and the On-Screen Gangsta in Flux," *Rapper, Writer, Pop-Cultural Player: Ice-T and the Politics of Black Cultural Production* (2016): 43.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Elligan, "Rap Therapy," 28.

Street arriving in theaters in 1984, it would not be for another year that one might admittedly acknowledge that a true movement had begun. The 1985 movie release, *Krush Groove*, showed movies were a true commercial vehicle for Hip Hop artists.[65] *Krush Groove*, which was loosely based on the creation of rap mogul Russell Simmons' Def Jam Records, was designed, in part, to promote the record label's artists LL Cool J and Run DMC, who are now legends in rap music. Hip Hop musicals, such as *Breakin'* and *Krush Grove*, were groundbreaking movies marketed to teens, as they broke out of the homogeneous teen movies of the past that catered to the troubled racialized contours of the American psyche and made space in Hollywood for the existence of young, confident characters of color.[66]

Purpose and Research Questions

Studies investigating rappers' roles in movies largely focus on certain topics. Much research has focused on the role of highly popular rappers in movies. Additional studies have chronicled the connections of certain types of rappers (e.g., gangsta rappers) in specific genres of films, and still others have looked at the impact of certain acting roles rappers took in Black cinema, Hip Hop cinema or overall in the movie industry.[67] Yet, what then becomes important to understand is exactly what types of movies have been produced over an extended period featuring rappers and what, if anything, can be surmised from the movie roles taken by various rappers and the Hollywood movies that featured them. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to explore the existence of rappers in the movie industry by investigating the appearances of rap artists in Hollywood movies, connections that existed between rap artists' musical personalities and the movie characters they portrayed as well as connections between Hip Hop movements and rappers' roles in Hollywood. This research sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Are certain types of rappers and personas seen more frequently in Hollywood movies?

RQ2: Are there connections between rappers' musical personas, lyrics or rap music styles and the characters played in Hollywood movies?

RQ3: Have themes and trends within Hip Hop and rap music manifested themselves within Hollywood films?

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[65] Spruell, "Hip Hop at the Movies."

[66] Kimberly Monteyne, *Hip Hop on Film: Performance Culture, Urban Space, and Genre Transformation in the 1980s* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

[67] See examples in the bibliography for works by Monica White Ndouno, S. Craig Watkins, Keith Corson and Linda Mizejewski.

Methodology

For this study, a sample was developed that included rap artists who appeared in at least one Hollywood movie. Aspects of movies that were central to the analysis of this study included, but were not limited to, release dates, genres, plotlines, gross ticket sales and character attributes. Movies distributed in theaters from 1982 to 2008 were included in this study. This covers a 26-year period, as the goal was to record 25 years, but one year within this timeframe did not include a single movie featuring rappers.[68] This over quarter of a century sample period is significant and appropriate as it covers the start of the phenomenon and enough time to discover possible patterns in the data. Several roles and movies were excluded from the sample, which were "straight to DVD" movie releases, which are not shown in theaters; roles in which the rapper played "himself" or "herself;" roles for which a rapper did not receive credit; and acting roles within movies solely produced by a rap artist or a record company to specifically promote the rap artist.

Procedure and Data Collection

It was this researcher's intent to ensure the sample under study properly represented rappers from different rap music styles. In total, the sample included seventy-four rappers. (See Appendix A for the full list of rappers.) Rappers within the sample released albums in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. There were sixty-two male rappers and twelve female rappers. The rappers were solo artists and members of rap groups. In total, two hundred and eighty-one movies from their filmographies qualified for this study. Rappers selected for the sample were based on the criteria used by Bruno Nettl, which took into consideration historical priority, popularity, and reputation.[69] They, too, were catalogued based on the common rap categories that were prevalent among researchers, and most importantly, took into consideration S. Craig Watkins' groundbreaking research of Hip Hop and movies that acknowledged variations in rap across regions, styles, subgenres and gender.[70]

With the help of two research assistants, the rappers were placed in categories. This categorization was important to answer RQ1, as it allowed for the data to be compared based on character roles, rap styles, personas, themes and trends. While not necessary in qualitative research, there must have been agreement with at least two researchers to place a rapper in a specific category. This afforded more credibility in the categorization of rappers in the sample. The seventy-four rappers were placed into the

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[68] This researcher did not conduct any analysis to investigate why there were no films in this year, nor offers an explanation in this study.

[69] Bruno Nettl, *Heartland excursions: Ethnomusicological reflections on schools of music* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

[70] S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

following eight categories: gangsta, hardcore, materialistic, knowledge or positive, regional, female, party or pop. Rappers were placed into a primary and, if necessary, secondary category. The primary category represented the category in which the rapper started his or her career as well as the category that best described most of the rapper's artistic works. The secondary rap category was designed to capture changes in a rapper's style because of the rapper separating from a group, maturation in the rapper's career or simply a change in rap style.

As noted by Russell Potter, when representativeness is a goal within a qualitative study, the researcher utilizes the principals in "quantitative research to articulate a complete sampling frame by giving every element within that frame an equal chance of being selected."[71] To answer RQ 2, a smaller sample was selected. It was created by extracting the fifth artist in each category, with a minimum of three selected in each category. This type of selection process is utilized in random stratified sampling. When the number of rappers within a category was not sufficient to allow for the use of this selection technique, the first, middle and last rapper in the category was selected.

The rappers within this smaller sample had a total of one hundred and twenty-two movies that qualified for inclusion within the sample. The movies starring each rapper were placed in order by release date, and three movies were selected for analysis. The first, middle and last film completed by each rapper was selected. The intention behind this selection process was to find a fair and balanced method to analyze patterns within a rapper's filmography. The movies were analyzed using textual analysis. Unlike a content analysis, which lends itself better to more quantitative data, the textual analysis method allowed for the development of richer, more in-depth data that is more consistent with the qualitative paradigm. This method is employed to describe the content, structure and functions of the messages contained in media texts.[72] Since meaning making and interpretation can vary from the creators to the audience, this method was beneficial as those conducting textual analyses "do not assert with absolute certainty how particular texts are interpreted. However, they suggest the kinds of interpretations that may take place, based on available evidence, and likely interpretations of a particular text."[73] Three types of meaning are always co-present, which are the identificatory, representational and actional, and textual analysis can help researchers to identify them.[74]

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[71] Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

[72] Sasha Frere-Jones, "Run-DMC," *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999): 61-68.

[73] Margaret Carlisle Duncan, "Sports Photographs and Sexual Difference: Images of Women and Men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7, no. 1 (1990): 27.

[74] Michel Foucault, "What is enlightenment?," *Michel Foucault: Essential Works Volume 1* edited by Paul Rabinow, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994): 303–19; Fairclough Norman, "Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research," *London and New York: Routledge* (2003): 41.

Findings and Discussion

For decades, Hollywood moviemakers have transformed African-American artists into cinematic superstars, such as Diana Ross, Sammy Davis Jr. and Whitney Houston. The eventual search for rappers to portray characters in movies was inevitable. Through videos, lyrics and appearances, rappers can socially construct their persona to their fans. The findings from this study indicate Hollywood moviemakers capitalized on the socially constructed realities created by rappers and used them in their movie roles. Utilizing the credibility developed in their lyrical narratives, personal experiences and commercial images, rappers' characters reflected their cultural spaces, language and behaviors. Unfortunately, what is important to note is the White-controlled movie industry used rappers as tools to portray familiar and socially comfortable negative images frequently seen and sought after by mainstream moviegoers, which supported the existence of stereotypical roles, usage of the White patriarchal gaze of the Black male body and glorifications of the perils and social ills present in the urban centers rappers often called home.

The question of whether rap personas are real representations of the person who is the actual rapper is not an issue that can be addressed in this work. Instead what can be addressed is whether the socially constructed personas developed by the rapper for consumption were present in the movie industry. It is clear they did manifest themselves in movie roles. Moviemakers tapped into the realities constructed by rappers and used them to their advantage by bringing what at the time was usually an auditory consumption of rappers by fans to a heightened moving, visual and more realistic product to consume. Rappers vivified the movie characters portrayed, provided a shortcut for moviemakers to use to connect characters to moviegoers and perhaps gave them the competitive edge of offering "credible" individuals, not typical actors, to play characters. It became so much of a noted business practice that movie roles even paralleled music trends in Hip Hop.

Actors are critical to a movie, and when rappers were tapped to become actors, Hollywood was an equal opportunity employer. Rappers played diverse characters, and with 98% of rappers in the sample having at least three movie credits, the results showed most rappers had captured the attention of moviemakers and were not simply cast for cameo or single roles. Gimmicks and popular songs were key elements used to capitalize on their personalities. Members of rap groups with dominate personalities or their names within the group's moniker were more frequently cast in movies than their other group members. Similarly, rappers with unique personal lives, personalities or gimmicks, such as Trevor "Busta Rhymes" Smith Jr., Andre "Andre 3000" Benjamin, William "Flavor Flav" Drayton Jr., Clifford "Method Man" Smith, Ludacris, Ice Cube, Luther "Luke" Campbell and Ice T, were also utilized more in Hollywood movies, often having key elements of their rap personas manifesting themselves onscreen. In addition, rappers who broke music chart records, such as Vanilla Ice's multi-platinum Rap album or Shad "Bow Wow" Moss' title as the youngest solo rapper to have a chart-topping hit, were tapped by Hollywood moviemakers.

MAKING MOVIE MONEY

When it came to the types of rappers who were cast in films, Hollywood roles did not stray far from the foundational principles of "good guys" and "bad guys." Rap artists with clearly defined good or bad personalities were often connected directly to comparative movies roles. With hardcore and gangsta rap artists playing mostly bad guys, and the party rappers portraying mostly good guys, moviemakers took the built-in personalities created by the rappers and used them within their movies. This process did not stray far from the media's practice of providing extreme images of Black men situated on opposite sides of the proverbial representational spectrum (i.e., either threatening or nonthreatening, aggressive or nonaggressive, combative or confirmative).

The Rap Styles Most Seen in Hollywood Films

Within the sample, 1989 was the only year in which a rapper did not star in a movie. Further, there were more movies starring rappers in the last eight years of the sample period than the prior years combined. In the 1980s, five movies starred rappers, and in the 1990s, there were 102 movies that starred rappers. From 2000 to 2008, there were 174 movies starring rappers that qualified for the study. Despite variations in the overall progression of movies starring rappers, the trend within the last two decades of the sample period showed an increase in the number of movies starring rappers. (See Figure 1.)
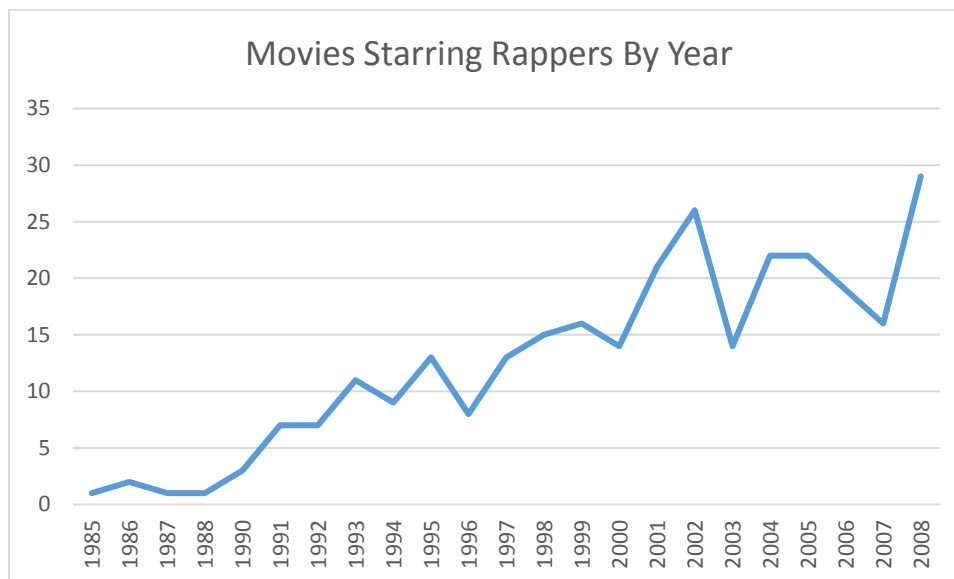

Figure 1: Movies Starring Rappers by Year

From 1985 to 1990, five rappers appeared in movies. Yet, from 1991 to 1999, the number of rappers per year in a movie never dipped below nine. In fact, the average number of rappers acting in movies was fifteen per year. The largest number of actors was in 1998 with 26. With the turn of the century, the number of rappers continued to increase. From 2000 to 2008, the lowest number of rappers to star in movies per year

was 14. In addition, the average number of rappers to star in movies from 2000 to 2008 was 23 per year. There were three years – 2001, 2002 and 2004 – that had more than 30 rappers cast in movie roles. The largest number came in 2002 with thirty six rappers starring in movies. While movies starring rappers seemed to have an overall increase in the last two decades of the sample, what can be seen from the data was a decrease in the number of rappers appearing in movies. What occurred was the same rappers appearing in more movies, instead of different rappers in more Hollywood movie releases, which could have been a result of the industry seeing the bankability and talent in certain rappers and deciding to use them more often. (See Figure 2.)
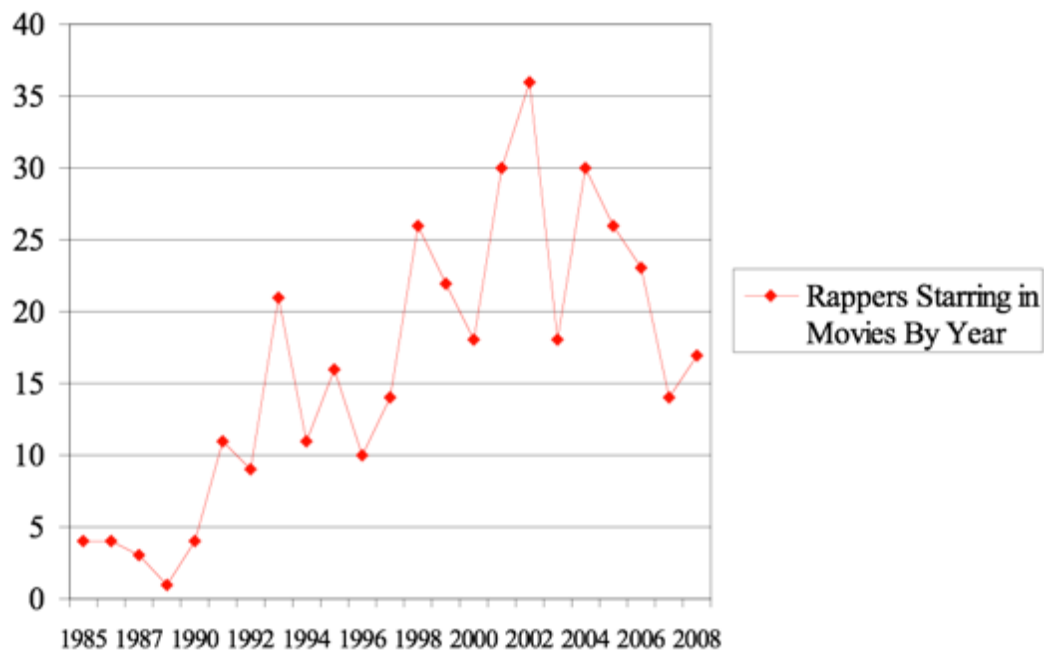

Figure 2: Rappers Staring in Movies by Year

There are certain types of rappers cast more frequently in Hollywood films. The rap categories with the largest numbers of artists to appear in films were the gangsta rap category with 11 rappers, the hardcore rap category with 15 rappers and the party category with 14 rappers. Within the gangsta rap category, rappers had a total of 70 movie roles. Most roles were in crime, action or comedy movies. More than half of the rappers within this category appeared in three movies or less. Yet, three of the most successful rappers turned actors within the overall 74-rapper sample were within the gangsta category. Ice Cube, Ice T and Snoop Dogg were credited with 47 of the cinematic roles. All three of the rappers are from California, had movies released within the last two decades, released commercially successful albums in the 1990s and spoke of similar stories of the harsh realities of their lives. Most importantly, it is critical to note that Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg were two rappers coded in a secondary category, which denoted a shift in their lyrics to less politically and socially challenging topics.

An analysis of rappers in the hardcore rap category revealed similar findings. The fifteen rappers within this category netted a total of 64 movie appearances. Most appearances were in crime, comedy or drama movies. In this category, more than half of the rappers also starred in three movies or less. However, this category had a second tier of rappers that consisted of a group who all stared in between five and seven movies each. This group included popular rappers Earl "DMX" Simmons, Eve "Eve" Jeffers-Cooper, Jeffery "Ja Rule" Atkins, Fred "Fredro Starr" Scruggs, Alvin "Xhibit" Joiner IV and Kirk "Sticky Fingaz" Jones. Eve, Xhibit and Ja Rule all starred in movies between 2000 and 2006. Similarly, DMX, Fredro Starr and Sticky Fingaz released their albums in the 1990s and began their movie careers at the same time.

The fourteen rappers within the party category had a total of seventy-eight movie appearances, which were mainly in comedies and dramas. Like the hardcore and gangsta rap categories, the majority of the rappers in the party category had three movie appearances or less. Rappers who were members of popular rap groups in the 1980s and late 1990s dominated this category. Rappers from the groups Fat Boys, Kid N′ Play and Run DMC all appeared in this category and had three or four movie roles each. What is most noteworthy about the movies starring these rappers is that all of them took top billing and the plots revolved around them. The Fat Boys featured Damon "Kool Rock-Ski" Wimbley, Darren "Buffy/Human Beat Box" Robinson and Mark "Prince Markie Dee" Morales. They starred in three movies in three years. From 1985 to 1987, the group starred in *Krush Groove*, *Knights of the City* and *Disorderlies*. Kid N′ Play, which features Christopher "Kid" Reid and Christopher "Play" Martin, were the main stars of four comedy movies in a five-year period, which were *Class Act, House Party, House Party 2* and *House Party 3*. These movies kept the rap stars within familiar realms and featured them either rapping, beat boxing or involved in plots similar to the themes present in their rap lyrics.

In contrast, the materialistic rappers and knowledge rappers within the sample were least likely to appear in movies. In both categories, most rappers had two movie credits or less, with one actor in each category being credited with most of the movie appearances. Materialistic rappers only netted a total of seven movie appearances and appeared in mainly comedy, romance or action movies. Three of the four rappers only had one qualifying movie, and Lil Kim had three movie credits. In the knowledge category, Mos Def can be credited with thirteen of the twenty-three movie appearances by rappers in this category.

The Elite Rap Stars of Hollywood

There are several rappers who should be put in a category of elite rap actors. LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Mark "Marky Mark" Wahlberg, Snoop Dogg, Mos Def and Fresh Prince are elite rap actors who transcended from merely being rappers who happened to act to actors who happen or happened to rap. Each starred in at least a dozen qualifying films. Although seventy-four rappers were included in this sample, these eight rappers had a total of one hundred and forty-two of the two

hundred and eighty-one movie appearances, which was about 50% of the movie appearances included in this sample. Six of the eight rappers - Queen Latifah, LL Cool J, Ice T, Ice Cube, Mos Def and Fresh Prince - had their first qualifying movie in either 1991 or 1992, and three members of this group starred in their own television situation comedies in the 1990s, which were Livin' Single (Queen Latifah), The Fresh Prince of Bel Air (Fresh Prince) and In the House (LL Cool J). These television shows clearly provided additional acting experience and elevated their popularity to mass audiences. Further, within the overall sample, rappers were least likely to headline horror, romantic comedy and animated movies, but these elite rappers were main characters in over two dozen of these types of movies, including *Shark Tales, Ice Age, Brown Sugar, Bones, Racing Stripes, Hitch, Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later, Just Wright* and *Valentine's Day*.

Queen Latifah's inclusion within this group is significant for three reasons. She is the only woman in this elite group, she had more than twenty qualifying films, and she received an Academy Award nomination for her role in Chicago. Her cinematic appearances span several genres from mystery, drama and science fiction to action, romance and family. However, comedy movies dominated her filmographaphy. Queen Latifah's first role in Jungle Fever as LaShawn, a waitress, fit well within her rap persona, but overwhelmingly her roles depicted longstanding Black stereotypes. In her three roles in *Set It Off*, *Chicago* and *Bringing Down the House*, Queen Latifah played a criminal. While the role of a Black criminal is not new to Hollywood, it does not fit well within Queen Latifah's rap lyrics or style. In addition, her roles as the stern no-nonsense assistant Penny Escher in Stranger Than Fiction and as a rough prisoner and motherly figure, Matron Mama Morton, in Chicago portray her as the Mammie stereotype, as described by Donald Bogle.

With nineteen qualifying films to his credit, Fresh Prince is by far the highest grossing rap actor in the sample. Fresh Prince received top billing in all of his films, after the 1993 release *Made in America*. With the exception of 1994, he starred in at least one movie per year. Action movies dominated his filmography, and he was often seen in very physical roles either running, chasing, jumping or fighting, which, too, supports Bogle's buck stereotype. However, as his time in Hollywood progressed and his involvement in production increased, he played a variety of characters, including two very famous individuals: Christopher Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happyness* and Muhammad Ali in *Ali*. Both of these biographical movies earned him Academy Award nominations. With his categorization as a pop rapper, many of his roles played very well into his rap personality. Often, he was the hilarious, fun-loving, non-threatening good guy character, such as his roles in Men in Black, Men in Black II, Shark Tales and Hitch. What is contrary to his pop categorization is the fact that he was often seen carrying a gun, but his gun toting was usually in the name of fighting crime or protecting himself.

From 1991 to 2008, LL Cool J had a total of seventeen movies to qualify in this sample. In 1998, he starred in a remarkable four films – *Caught Up*, *Woo*, *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* and *Deep Blue Sea*. Crime, drama and action movies dominated his

filmography, and his physical appearance and moniker – Ladies Love Cool James – set him up well to play the brawny, buck type or love interest in many of his movies, including *S.W.A.T.*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Deliver Us from Eva* and *Last Holiday*. LL Cool J also earned top billing in many of his movies, including *Rollerball*, *Kingdom Come*, *S.W.A.T.* and *Deliver Us from Eva*.

While Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch only released one rap album, it was enough to get the attention of moviemakers. Marky Mark, the only White rapper in the elite group, starred in a Hollywood film every year since 1994. From crime dramas and action comedies to mystery thrillers and dramatic horror films, his twenty qualifying films spanned several genres and showcased how versatile he was in Hollywood.

At the beginning of Mos Def's movie career, he starred in The Hard Way with LL Cool J in 1991. It would be nearly a decade before Mos Def would star in a Hollywood film, again. In 2000, his performance as Big Blak Africa in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* exhibited Mos Def's acting skills, and after it, he starred in at least one movie each year. A total of ten movies qualified for this study from 2001 to 2008. In fact, in 2002, Mos Def was seen in three movies Showtime, Civil Brand and Brown Sugar. Coincidentally, he portrayed an aspiring rapper and the love interest of fellow rapper Queen Latifah in the movie Brown Sugar.

Three members of this elite group, Ice T, Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg were a part of the gangsta rap movement of the 1990s. Ice Cube had a total of twenty qualifying movies. He, too, had action, crime and drama films dominate his filmography in his early career, which fit quite well with his gangsta rap lyrics and persona. However, since 2000, comedies dominated Ice Cube's filmography. This could be attributed to the softening of his image and desire to reach a larger cinematic audience. What is notable about Ice Cube is his franchise success, such as the movies *Friday*, *Next Friday* and *Friday After Next; Are We There Yet?* and *Are We Done Yet?* as well as *Barbershop* and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*.

Ice T's first true cinematic acting role came in the 1991 film New Jack City, in which he played a cop, which is a direct contrast to his rap persona. In total, Ice T had 12 qualifying movies. All were released from 1991 to 2001. Ice T's filmography was dominated by action movies, too. Seven of his twelve movies were in this genre. In several instances, his roles were rather violent characters, which are consistent with the gangsta rap category, including his roles in 3000 Miles to Graceland, Ticker and 'R Xmas.

Snoop Dogg's first qualifying cinematic debut was in the 1998 comedy Half Baked, which mirrored his signature marijuana smoking rap personality. In 1998, Snoop Dogg also starred in two other films, Caught Up and Ride, and notably, in 2001, Snoop Dogg starred in Baby Boy, Training Day and Bones. His roles in Baby Boy and Training Day kept Snoop Dogg true to his gangsta style. In both movies, he played a criminal. However, similar to Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg's cinematic career took a comedic turn. Since 2001, his six qualifying films were all in the comedy genre, including voicing animal characters in Malibu's Most Wanted and Racing Stripes.

The Group Effect

For rappers who were once or are a part of a group, there were two distinct patterns present in the data. First, a rapper whose rap group was named after him or whose name appeared as a main component of the group's name was more likely to be separated from other group members and cast in a movie. Three examples were Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince and Heavy D & the Boyz. While some would argue that DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince were not a rap group, but a rapper and deejay team, the pair were marketed and sold as a duo, like the way other rap groups featuring two or more artists were presented. All three of these group members – Marky Mark, Fresh Prince and Heavy D – had tremendous success in Hollywood compared to their partners; many of which had no Hollywood movie roles.

The second pattern was the lead rapper or rapper(s) within a group who possessed the strongest or most unique personalities were often cast more movies. For example, in the group N.W.A., Dr. Dre and Ice Cube seemed to eclipse the other group members. The same holds true for Fredro "Fredro Starr" Scruggs, Jr., and Kirk "Sticky Fingazs" Jones of the group Onyx; Richard "Buschwick Bill" Shaw and Brad "Scarface" Jordan of The Geto Boys; Luke of the 2 Live Crew; Anthony "Treach" Criss of Naughty by Nature, Robert "RZA" Diggs and Method Man of Wu Tang Clan and Busta Rhymes of Leaders of the New School. Again, these rappers appeared in Hollywood films, while their other members either did not appear or did not have their level of success.

Rappers Roles and their Personas in Hollywood Movies

Whether casting a rapper in one scene or several scenes, Hollywood moviemakers capitalized on rap personas and used them to their advantages. Rappers were seen donning their signature clothing, repeating their signature lines and portraying their rap personas in movies. For example, Snoop Dogg's utters his signature "fo' shizzle" slang language in Soul Plane. In the film Max Keeble's Big Move, Percy "Lil Romeo" Miller Jr. did not respond in the traditional "here" or "present," when his teacher called his name in class. Instead, he responded "Yo, what's up. I'm over here Wardy." In the film *3 Strikes*, E-40 used term "weeble" and "weeblization." 50 Cents stated "I'm a gangsta. I'm a rapper. I'm a gangsta rapper" in Get Rich or Die Tryin'. Treach wears his signature black bandana around his face, neck and wrist in Love and a Bullet, and Fab 5 Freddy wore his staple wardrobe accessories, a hat and sunglasses, when he made his brief appearance in *She's Gotta Have It*.

In terms of behavior, gimmicks or unique personality or behavioral traits can play a key role in making a rapper standout in the music industry, and it is quite possible that those same gimmicks or traits caught the attention of moviemakers and found their way into movies. Snoop Dogg was perhaps the most pigeonholed rapper who did not easily break his rap persona's connection to his acting roles. With marijuana smoking playing a key role in his persona and lyrics, his roles in *Half Baked*, *The Wash* and *Soul Plane* were all well connected to Snoop Dogg's persona. In *Half Baked*,

Snoop Dogg was called a "scavenger smoker," which was described as "someone who never has weed of their own, but as soon as you smoke it. Here they come." In *Soul Plane*, Snoop Dogg was not only seen in the plane's cockpit smoking marijuana, but he put in a compact disk and danced to a song with the lyrics "I get high." In *The Wash*, Snoop Dogg was consistently seen smoking marijuana. In addition, he was seen buying and selling it.

Ja Rule and Fredro Starr are two others whose hardcore rap personas were consistently connected into their movie roles. Ja Rule's bandana wearing, tough guy rap persona was seen in his roles in *Turn It Up*, *Half Past Dead* and *Assault on Precinct 13*. Perhaps, the most violent role was in *Turn It Up*, in which he played David "Cage" Williams who was seen disrespecting women, selling drugs, shooting a gun and assaulting a man during a home invasion. Fredro Starr's brash, aggressive and high energy rap personality was seen in his roles in *Clockers*, *Torque* and *Ride*. In Ride, Fredro Starr's character was involved in a robbery, in *Torque*, he promoted drug use and fought constantly, and in *Clockers*, he was a drug dealer.

Lil Kim's portrayal of Tina Parker in *Juwanna Man* is another example of a rapper staying within her rap persona. Categorized as a materialistic rapper, her role as an ex-model and girlfriend of a professional basketball player was easily connected to her rap persona. However, it was her dialogue, clothing and actions that made Lil Kim's role a true replica. When Lil Kim's character was queried about why she accepted her boyfriend's infidelity, she stated "All these tricks is dogs, but if you have to sleep in a dog house, it might as well look like this one." This was a reference to her boyfriend's mansion. When her professional basketball player boyfriend lost his job, Lil Kim's character left the house and stated she only stayed because he was rich and famous.

While a rap artist tended to stay within his or her rap persona early in their movie careers, the more films a rapper appeared within, the more likely he or she would break out of the confines of their rap persona. However, it is important to note that while some of these roles do not match specifically to a rapper's persona they often still reflected stereotypical characters present in Black, Hip Hop and urban cultures. For others, straying from their rap personas early in their rap careers was rare. Examples included the somewhat goofy, gun carrying, camouflage wearing, gangster character Da Bu that Andre 3000 played in *Be Cool*. It was nothing like his rap persona, which was smooth often quirky, free-spirited and friendly. While Lil Romeo's biological father is a successful rap mogul, Percy "Master P" Miller, the rapper had no real personal connections to the "street life," as portrayed in his role of Benny in *Honey*. In two movies, rapper Mos Def, a smooth, calm lyricist who often flashed a smile along with his socially conscious rhymes, played Sergeant Lucas in *The Woodsman*, and Eddie Bunker, a petty thief, in *16 Blocks.* Neither are like his persona.

Connections between Rap Trends and Hollywood Movie Roles

Despite the more than twenty-five years in this sample, the only connections to rap styles were seen in the late 1990s and early 2000. In the late 1990s, there were three

main shifts in rap, which were a renewed interest in New York rappers, increased emphasis on materialism and an emergence of regional rappers, more specifically "Dirty South" rappers. With these shifts, several key rappers obtained Hollywood roles. According to the data, a distinct connection was evident between the increased presence of materialistic rappers as well as rappers from New York and the "Dirty South" in movies beginning in the late 1990s. This timeframe is important, as the moviemaking process is long, as one must take into consideration the development, preproduction, production, postproduction and distribution. Therefore, having a movie in theaters would come long after a hit song is charted or frequently played on the radio.

In total, the following nine rappers were placed in the regional category: Andre 3000, Big Boi, Da Brat, Ludacris, Master P, Clifford "T.I." Harris Jr., Nelly, Malik "Phife Dawg" Taylor and Jonathan "Q-Tip" Davis. Except for the latter three rappers, all represent the "Dirty South." Rappers from this region exploded onto the rap scene in the late 1990s. Except for one appearance by Q-Tip in *Poetic Justice* in 1993, the increased involvement of rappers in Hollywood coincides with their increased recognition and participation in the rap music industry. They had more than twenty-five film appearances and more than 95% were after 1998.

The same parallels between the increased number of rappers touting materialism and an increased presence in Hollywood were seen in the materialistic category. There were only four rappers in this category, including Inga "Foxy Brown" Marchand and Kimberly "Lil Kim" Jones. The eight film appearances by these four rappers were between 1998 and 2005. More than 60% of the roles were after 2002.

The rebirth of the New York rapper that dominated the rap music industry occurred in the late 1990s. If answering the question whether moviemakers noticed the trend and used it to their advantage, the answer would have to be yes. In total, thirty-one rappers in the study hailed from or claimed New York in their rap lyrics. Although this group includes many rappers who were a part of Rap music's beginning stages, such as LL Cool J, Fab 5 Freddy, Run and the Fat Boys, the data concerning the film appearances of New York rappers still showed an increase in their presence in the late 1990s. In total, New York rappers had eighty-five film appearances.

Similarities between Plots and Rap Music Trends

Hip Hop culture helped develop an explosion of "ghetto" or "ghettocentric" films in the 1990s, including Straight out of Brooklyn (1991), New Jack City (1991), Boyz 'n the Hood (1991), Menace II Society (1993) and Juice (1992). What is critical to note from the data is how often rappers were used to vivify the characters in these types of films as well as bring credibility to the plots. More specifically, Ice Cube's role of Darin "Doughboy" Baker in Boyz in the Hood and 2Pac's role of Bishop in Juice brought life to the characters. Other films in this sample that could easily be in the "ghetto" films category were New Jersey Drive (1995), Belly (1998), Paid in Full (2002), ATL (2006) and Waist Deep (2006). Similar to past "ghetto" films, rappers were casting staples,

including T.I. and Big Boi starred in ATL, The Game in Waist Deep, DMX and Nas in Belly.

Film plots in Hollywood do not always depict the harsh themes expressed in rap music. The late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by the emergence of the Fat Boys, Kid N' Play, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince and others who showcased the lighthearted side of rap music. Moviemakers took notice of this trend, too. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an emergence of what this researcher labeled "fun-time rap" movies, which is a combination of funny and good time movies centered upon the exploits of characters played by rappers or Hip Hop playmakers and often employ other rappers in supportive or cameo roles. Movies in this category would include *Disorderlies* featuring The Fat Boys; *House Party*, *House Party 2*, *House Party 3* and *Class Act* featuring Kid N' Play; and *Who's the Man* (1993), which featured more than twenty rappers or rap groups, including House of Pain, Leaders of the New School, Ice T, Run DMC and Kris Kross.

Conclusion

Race and gender play critical roles in America's movie and music industry. After completing this work, it is important to note that this study really chronicles the presence of a select group of African-American men (i.e., rappers) who moved from the music industry to the movie industry. During the timeframe under study, moviemakers and rappers collaborated in hundreds of movies, which netted billions in ticket sales. Ultimately, findings indicated gangsta, hardcore and party rappers were cast in movies the most, and rap artists with popular gimmicks or the strongest or most unique personalities within rap groups were more likely to be cast in movies. However, while most films did have rap artists speaking, acting and looking similar to their rap personas, there were opportunities for rappers to break away from their rap personas. Most notably, the elite rap actors discussed in this research – LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Marky Mark, Snoop Dog, Fresh Prince and Mos Def showed rappers can progress in the Hollywood movie system, transcend their rap personas and become successful actors.

Just as there are demarcations in film studies to chronicle Blaxploitation, race films and hood films, there should be a categorization of the 1990s as the Golden Age of Rappers in Movies, as this acknowledges the breakthrough period where there was an influx of films within Hollywood featuring rappers as well as the period when the elite rappers broke into the movie industry. This, too, was a period that began to develop many of the rap artists who influenced rap trends and key movements in Hip Hop, which, in turn, influenced the casting of rappers in Hollywood movies.

As a result of this study, there are several future studies that could be completed to either build on the findings or answer questions not addressed in this work. First, what can be identified in the careers of rap artists who changed rap genres after their commercially-successful Hollywood movie careers? Could there be a specific model or career trajectory identified that explains how some rappers like the elite rappers

garnered success? Second, a study investigating the roles of rappers in movies produced, written or directed by African Americans could be completed. It would benefit film and Black studies to gleam any differences that might exist in stereotypical representations or negative portrayals of the Hip Hop and Black communities as well as how rappers might challenge the longstanding racism within the movie industry. Finally, an investigation of how maturation plays a role in rappers' movie careers would be beneficial. For example, how does career maturation play a role in rappers' acceptance of certain types of movie roles, and how do their roles as mothers, fathers, husbands and wives influence the types of movie roles they accept?

In conclusion, this research proved rappers were not anomalies in Hollywood, but instead were casting staples for more than two decades. Hollywood moviemakers increasingly utilized rappers in movies since the late 1980s. Commonalities between rap artists' personas and film characters were easily seen, and the content of many scenes starring rappers not only paralleled their life stories and lyrics, but even reflected the trends and themes present in rap music. Ultimately, the Hollywood film industry successfully capitalized on the commercialism of rap music as well as the popularity of rappers to transform them into actors for the benefit of their movies.

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Appendix A

List of Rappers in the Sample

Rapper – Stage Name Only
1. 2Pac
2. 50 Cent
3. Andre 3000
4. Big Boi
5. Big Pun
6. Biz Mark
7. Bow Wow
8. Buffy (Human Beat Box)
9. Bushwick Bill
10. Busta Rhymes
11. Chuck D
12. Coolio
13. Da Brat
14. DJ Pooh
15. DMX
16. Dr Dre
17. E-40
18. Eminem
19. Eve
20. Fab 5 Freddy
21. Fat Joe
22. Flavor Flav
23. Fredro Starr
24. Fresh Prince
25. Foxy Brown
26. Game (The)
27. Heavy D
28. Ice Cube
29. Ice T
30. Ja Rule
31. Kid
32. Kool Rock-Ski
33. Kurupt
34. Lauryn Hill
35. Lil Kim
36. Lil Romeo
37. LL Cool J
38. Ludacris

39. Luke
40. Mack 10
41. Marky Mark
42. Master P
43. MC Eiht
44. MC Hammer
45. MC Lyte
46. Method Man
47. Missy Elliott
48. Monie Love
49. Mos Def
50. Nas
51. Nelly
52. Nick Cannon
53. Pepa
54. Phife Dawg
55. Play
56. Pras
57. Prince Markie Dee
58. Puff Daddy
59. Q-Tip
60. Queen Latifah
61. Redman
62. Run
63. RZA
64. Salt
65. Scarface
66. Snoop Dogg
67. Sticky Fingazs
68. T.I.
69. Tone Loc
70. Treach
71. Vanilla Ice
72. Wyclef
73. Xzibit
74. Yo Yo