

**Bullet on the Charts: Beef, the Media Industry and Rap Music in America**

**Eli Sweet  
April 25, 2005  
Senior Thesis**

## Introduction

“What’s beef?” This question, posed by rap legend Biggie Smalls shortly before his death in 1997, is more relevant today than ever- not only within the esoteric discourse of the hip hop community, but also, increasingly, within the American economy and cultural landscape. The short answer is simple- beef is a type of conflict between rappers, most clearly manifested in songs degrading one another. In actuality however, beef is something much more subtle and complex. Beef is a discourse between people and composed of an assemblage of texts- texts that are often mistaken for the beef itself.

Beef is a plastic concept; its definition and significance have evolved with the changing role of the media industry in hip-hop music, and with the increasing use of the term beef to describe various scenarios. Within the hip hop community there are many different opinions about beef, often expressed through the discourse of beef itself. The experience of beef through a hip hop text is subjective and often detached from the structural context.

My technique is to examine the various texts that make up beefs- songs, articles, interviews, and fan commentary, to find how the discourse connects various agents. My informants are rappers, journalists, DJ’s, and hip hop fans, experts on beef. Yet they experience beef in contradictory ways. I would like to understand the role that each of these actors play in the discourse, how they experience beef from each perspective, and finally, how their participation signifies their awareness of their position within the discourse. I predominantly look at the way that rappers signify themselves with respect to beef, its history and values, as well as the material relations in which the discourse is embedded. This is complicated by the politics of the music industry and the history of hip hop music in America.

## Beef

*What’s beef? Beef is when these niggas be believing they rhymes/ and a nigga like me just take it one day at a time.*<sup>1</sup> – Royce 5’9”

*What’s beef?(...)Beef is when your moms aint safe up in the street/ Beef is when I see you, guaranteed to be in ICU*<sup>2</sup> – Biggie Smalls

The sentiments expressed in the two quotes above illustrate countervailing perspectives on beef within the hip hop community. They suggest dramatically different possibilities of the meaning of beef, one- that beef is a literary game written in rhyme and validated through belief; another- that beef is a life or death battle that endangers even those around you. In fact, beef has proven to represent both of these possibilities- words and actions- negotiated in a complex discourse. It is precisely because of the permeability

---

<sup>1</sup> Royce 5’9”. “Beef.” *Rock City*. 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Biggie Smalls. “What’s Beef?” *Life After Death*. 1997.

of the boundary between words and actions that beef should be examined as a discourse, not as one word with two definitions.

The discourse of beef is composed of an assemblage of texts, circulating amongst hip hop artists, media members and listeners- all participating in the beef. Everybody who participates in beef is engaged in the discourse to some degree, affecting others through their statements and actions and being reciprocally affected. Since the audience of hip hop music, in the US and worldwide, is larger than ever, the discourse of beef has intensified, increasing what is at stake in the interpretation of a text.

Beefs are conflicts expressed through texts, but they are also conflicts about texts. In a song attacking another artist, a “beef track,” a rapper often acknowledges the beef track of the other artist, as well as his magazine interviews and second hand comments. This recognition and response to texts is the essence of the discourse of beef- and the source of its power. Eventually a radio DJ will take calls from listeners about the beef track, and their comments will become a new text whose meaning is linked to the others in the discourse. On the other hand, the beef track may provoke a violent response from the offended rapper, another signal of recognition and affirmation of the power of the discourse.

The fight for control over texts and their meaning is illustrated in a beef between Eminem and Benzino, a rapper and co-owner of the well-known hip hop magazine *The Source*. Eminem, whose initial rise to fame was assisted by his recognition in *The Source*'s “unsigned hype” column, attacked Benzino through the magazine. Eminem raps:

*I done watched Dre get fucked on the Chronic, prolly cause I was on it/ Now you fucked me out of my mics twice, I let it slide/ I said I wouldn't hold my fucking breath to get a five/ Shit I was right, I would of fucking died already trying/ I swear to god, I never lie, I bet that's why/ You let that bitch give me that bullshit review/ I sat and took it, I didn't look at that shit, we knew/ You'd prolly try to fuck us with Obie and 50 too/ (Sound of spitting) Fuck a relationship, we through/<sup>3</sup>*

The subject of Eminem's attack is *The Source*'s system of music review and rating- the magazine rates rap albums on a scale of 1 to 5 microphones (mics). Not only is Eminem upset about the magazines review of his album, he is concerned with the consequences of negative reviews being given to his business partners, Dr. Dre, 50 Cent, and Obie Trice. This underscores the important role of business relationships in beef, a subject discussed more later in this paper. More importantly however, this passage conveys the fact that Eminem recognizes the power of *The Source* and its reviews, not only to affect him, but also his business associates and their fans. In the discourse of beef, texts or many sorts are in direct conversation; a statement in one type of media may be responded to in another.

Benzino responded to Eminem's tracks with a beef track of his own, but also published in *The Source* quotations from an old tape featuring Eminem using racially offensive language. This provoked Eminem to release a song on a mixtape, and later release another song on his album addressing the issue of the tapes. These songs were texts responding to the publication of *The Source*, a text responding to yet another text- the original tapes. In addition to his musical rebuttal, Eminem also responded to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Eminem, “Benzino diss.” Unreleased, 2003.

publication with a copyright infringement lawsuit and an advertising boycott aimed at The Source.

The example above is useful because it reveals that the texts and the discourse of beef do not exist in a vacuum, they are inexorably intertwined with the structures of media markets and the music industry. Although everyone who interacts with texts participates in beef, not all parties exercise equal power in the discourse. This is because the interstitial power of the discourse is defined by the circulation of texts, and texts do not circulate randomly, they move through economic transactions. Every text in the discourse of beef is also a product in the cycle of production and consumption. A CD or magazine sold has clear transactional value, and we can deduce the value of a text broadcast on the radio or internet as its advertising revenue. It is more difficult to envision what texts are produced by hip hop listeners, and what value these hold to rap artists or the media industry. Listener response and feedback is definitely another form of text, but the value or impact of these statements within the system of media production and consumption is unclear. The real statement of consumers is the act of consumption itself. There is proof that consumer choice constitutes a valuable commodity- SoundScan. SoundScan is a subscriber service provided by the media company Neilson, the same company that monitors TV audiences to determine ratings. SoundScan tabulates the weekly quantity sold of every album and sells this information to record companies, artists, and others in the music industry. This audience feedback is a commodity and a text, purchased and re-circulated through the discourse. An example of this recirculation was a recent interview with 50 Cent on a popular New York City radio station. To illustrate his triumph in beef over Ja Rule and record label Murder INC, 50 Cent read aloud the exact number of records sold that week by Ja Rule and other Murder INC artists from a SoundScan data sheet, comparing them to the number of records sold by artists on his label.

The image of calculating the winner of a beef according to sales figures juxtaposes the image of beef as an impassioned exchange of worldviews, insults or violence. This betrays the fundamental duality of action and meaning in beef- it is both economically driven and emotionally charged. Although hip hop fans consume music that is delivered through complex commercial networks with mechanical regularity, listening to the music is still a fundamentally emotional experience, not one of vulgar consumption. Like a soap opera, the more you know and understand about beef, the more interest begets interest. Consuming these texts triggers emotional and visceral interest in the minds of listeners, not structural awareness. Because of this emotional engagement, in the mind of the consumer, beef is often reduced to the act of consuming a beef track. The web of social relations and industrial structures that comprise beef vanish, and beef is fetishized as a commodity.

In fact, beef tracks and other texts are simply byproducts of more complex relationship between beef and the marketplace. Since the rise of commercially successful gangsta rap in the early 1990's, and the highly publicized beef between Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur, beef has proven its ability to attract media and public attention. This has created an economic incentive for media companies to participate in beef- websites, magazines and radio stations all circulating new texts. It has also created an economic incentive for rap artists to participate in beef, since media circulation will determine the values of their songs as commodities. Hence, the symbiotic relationship between beefing

rappers and the media industry, coupled with the insatiable public interest in beef has produced an unprecedented promulgation of, and fascination with beef. This expansion of beef has triggered a discussion within hip hop (and sometimes even within the discourse of beef itself) about the sources of beef, the definition of beef and its negative and positive aspects. Interestingly, this discussion has only elevated the prominence of beef.

For the media industry generally, beef is an asset, not a problem or a moral dilemma. Though criticism of beef has become a standard complement to the publication of beef texts in the media, the media never fails to publicize beef- they cannot ignore the incentive to broadcast sensational material. It benefits media outlets to interview beefing rappers and give audiences the inside information they desire. At the same time, beefing rappers, though occasionally resistant to make beef a media affair, are usually willing to discuss beefs in the media, aware of the economic benefits of press coverage.

The majority of texts in any beef discourse are not direct statements between one artist and another, but responses that engage the structure of the media industry. This derivative commentary- remarks made by a rapper about a beef track, press coverage about those remarks, public response to that coverage, etc- shows how the industrial media structure interactively engages more people in the discourse of beef. In fact, this industrial structure is critical to the existence of beef. As many pundits have mused, if radio stations stopped playing the songs and magazines stopped printing stories about the beefs, they would vanish into thin air. It is not this simple however; media agents have power within the discourse of beef, but it is dependent on other agents, fans and artists. If a single media outlet stopped covering beef, for instance, beef would not simply end- other media outlets would step up to satisfy consumers' wants. Because of these interdependencies, the discourse of beef can be intractable, and hard to change.

## **Beef and the American Media**

The financial stake of media companies in beef, as well as their instrumental role in its construction, has led to criticism of media companies as the source of beef. This criticism has often figured into larger arguments about media ownership, the politics of representation, and racism in America. Norman Kelly analyzes the rap music industry as an extension of colonial economic structures that exploit African Americans. According to Kelly, the white-owned music industry has agency over the content of hip hop because they control the apparatus of distribution and the means of production. Since blacks failed to develop a viable alternative to corporate music production, when hip hop became commercialized, black artists lost their creative control over hip hop to the marketplace.

Kelly suggests one source of hip hop style in the marketplace- in the expectations of white consumers. Negative themes in commercial hip hop, such as materialism and violence, arise from within the values of the media industry and mainstream America as much as they arise from the Black community. Kelly states, "(B)lack music is now an essential and integral piece in a corporate structure that is primarily owned and operated by whites for the benefit of white shareholders." Considering hip hop music as a commodity packaged for a predominately non-black audience, it is unsurprising that people in the black community might feel alienated by some of hip hop's content. Conversely, it is also unsurprising that white consumers would identify with hip hop products coded as counter-cultural yet representative of many mainstream values.

In the context of beef, some critics in the hip-hop community have reduced this argument to mean that beef was conceived by mostly white-owned media companies to manipulate mostly black rappers. Although the criticism of commercial hip hop- that it glorifies violence to make money- is valid, this is not necessarily because most mainstream media outlets are owned by white people, or people outside of the hip hop community. After all, there are plenty of media outlets within the hip hop community that have promoted and profited from beef. Additionally, there are personalities within the hip hop community that have built their careers around facilitating beef- for example “The Drama King” DJ Kay Slay or P-Cutta, the DJ behind the “Street Wars” mixtape series. The fundamental oversight in the argument that beef was imported into hip hop by the white-owned media is the conception of beef as a fixed phenomenon, rather than a discourse whose meaning is being constantly renegotiated. Beef as we know it evolved through dialog between the hip hop community and the media industry, it was not imposed by one on the other.

It was not only the expansion of beef that prompted members of the hip hop community to examine its origins and meaning, but also the recognition of the discursive power of beef made clear in the murders of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. The two legendary rappers, each representing a different coast, engaged in a highly publicized musical feud that eventually led to the death of each. Their beef stirred up a tremendous amount of animosity and competition between the hip hop communities on each coast. The murders of Tupac and Biggie showed that the beefing rappers do not entirely control the beefs themselves; all of the fans who take sides or become emotionally invested in a beef are also participating. Participating indicates that the audience and the media are being affected by beef, but also that they can affect others through the discourse.

Since the death of Tupac and Biggie, people have become more aware not only of the possible consequences of beef, but also of the power of the media to captivate public interest and factionalize groups of listeners. Some within the hip hop community who oppose beef attribute it to a single source, such as the media, others recognize that the discourse of beef is not produced by a single agent. Any attempt to assign blame must consider that beef is composed of interdependent relationships between the fans, the media and the artists. Tupac and Biggie’s deaths brought the media and the public a sense of guilt and responsibility for their complicity in loading beef with emotional artillery. Artists also became more aware of possibility that their lyrical feuds could be transformed into violence among others. Talib Kweli’s shocked introduction to one song poignantly illustrates this awareness:

*Yo, you think that shit is crazy man? This brother from South Africa told me that there's like a Tupac tribe and a Biggie tribe, right, and heads got AK-47's and machine guns... and and... Africans is killing each other over some east-coast west-coast bullshit, know what I'm saying. And we dead-ed it a long time ago, but lives is being lost... over some bullshit... I don't really understand yo.*<sup>4</sup>

Although Kweli’s incorrectly attributes the source of the urban gang violence in South Africa to the actual beef between Tupac and Biggie, the quote nonetheless illustrates the

---

<sup>4</sup> Talib Kweli. “The Afterlife.” Sound Bombing Volume 1. 1998.

powerful symbol of conflict that beef has become, as well as the consciousness of rappers that beef engages people other than themselves in meaningful ways.

One radio DJ in Philadelphia expressed awareness of the possible consequences of beef when a new beef track by 50 Cent was released. The DJ prefaced the track by saying that he did not want to contribute to any further violence by playing the track however, if the beef was just going to be a musical competition, he would love to watch it. Despite the genuine concern the DJ expressed, he still played the track. He really didn't have a choice; he would be jeopardizing his position in the discourse- and his job- if he failed to meet the expectations of his audience.

When beef tracks are released, they circulate rapidly, driven by competition among media outlets. Radio stations often broadcast them repeatedly and devote program segments to call-in forums. Magazines publish articles and interviews with beefing rappers. Hip hop websites like [hiphopgame.com](http://hiphopgame.com), [allhiphop.com](http://allhiphop.com), and [undergroundhiphop.com](http://undergroundhiphop.com) serve online discourse with comment boards and audio streaming. These media outlets pass music along to listeners, but also serve as the only forums in which listeners can express their opinions about beef. While many people in these forums voice disapproval towards beef, posting online, or calling the radio station to oppose beef is still a form of participation. Ultimately, responding to beef tracks re-affirm the discourse of beef, even if the response is intended to condemn the beef.

After all, the feedback of listeners would not be heard if not for the DJ taking calls, the DJ wouldn't take calls if there was no feedback, and there would be no feedback without the beef. Thus, the act of calling in confirms that you are interested in beef- even if you call to oppose it- and encourages the DJ to broadcast future beef tracks.

Another way to think about the discourse of beef is to follow the circulation of one text as its meaning is reinterpreted in various contexts. Instead of looking at the discourse as an interplay of texts, we can examine the production process of one text as a feedback loop through which new meanings are cycled. The loop begins with the inception of the music in the mind of the artist and its meaning evolves with each new person and each new location the text reaches. First involved is the producer who records the track, then the advertising agent that markets it, the DJ who plays it and the listeners who hear it. First the music is heard in a studio, then the office of a record label, then a radio station, then a portable mp3 player, a car, and a house party. Pretty soon the track is being consumed in vastly different environments, through widely varying media, and being interpreted different ways. The text is beyond the control of the artist who birthed it; its meaning has been transformed as it was packaged, delivered and consumed in different conditions. There is no objective meaning of the text, only a culmination of all of the meanings encoded and decoded at various points in its creation and circulation. The cycle of production and reception comes full circle with the interpretation of public response by the media. After the music is consumed, the public analyzes and critiques it. The public response to a song is partially measured simply by commercial success, but also by the public discussion and interpretation of the text. Large media companies as well as the independent media agents (like DJ's and promoters) pay attention to this public response because it is their job to give the public what they will like. As a result, the feedback filters back to media companies and artist through the many of the same commercial channels that deliver the text.

In all of the sites of analysis and critique of hip-hop, beef provokes special attention and discussion. This is especially obvious when the outlet that delivers the media is the same one that gauges the response. Hiphopgame.com, for instance, is a very popular hip hop website that post tracks that can be listened to (“streamed,” not downloaded) in their entirety for free. New tracks are posted almost daily, and the response to each one is carefully gauged with a counter that measures the number of times a track has been listened to as well as how many people have posted a response to the track on a message board. These message boards clearly illustrate the instrumental nature of websites in the construction of the discourse of beef, both as the disseminators of new hip hop and forums of response and reinterpretation. Even more interesting than the amazing volume and consistency of the public discourse on these message boards is the clarity with which this data portrays the public’s fixation on beef. 50 Cent’s newest beef track, “Piggybank,” which was posted on the website on February 23, 2005 had been listened to over 136,000 times and commented upon 1259 times within three weeks. This was far and away the most number of comments on any track- and there were over 200 tracks. The track with the next closest number of comments was a freestyle in which Jay-Z allegedly impugned Game. It was released a week later and garnered 589 comments and over 79,000 listens over the same period. In fact, four out of five of the longest message board threads (as of March 20, 2005) were posted on beef tracks. Much like the radio call-in forum discussed above, the postings on these message boards manifest one form of popular participation in beef, additionally, they reveal how meaningful public participation in beef discourse is enmeshed in the network of media broadcast and consumption.

The content of discussions on message boards about beef reveals the true heterogeneity of opinions about beef within the hip hop community. It is paradoxical to discover a number of people who oppose beef actively discussing it since ostensibly, any comment on a beef, pro or con, reaffirms its existence. Much of the content of the message boards is not statements of support for one rapper or another’s, but rather, broader commentary on the music industry and the role beef within it.

Some within the community oppose beef on the grounds that it doesn’t represent authentic values of hip hop culture, arguing that it is a function of the media, or mainstream American values. Other members of the hip hop community, including many rappers, insist that beef is an integral part of hip hop, entirely enjoined with all of hip hop’s underlying values. This conflict suggests that we cannot assume too much about the origins of beef in hip hop, because the hip hop community encompasses diverse, heterogeneous values, and also because the identity of the community is perpetually evolving in relation to broader American culture. Also, this raises an important point: the battle over “what’s beef” is not just a battle over the physical and material outcomes of beef- beef being used to sell records or resulting in violence- but also about values, and what people think beef should be. The productive relations embodied in the creation of hip hop texts are inter-woven with the values that are expressed in the texts. Thus, a rapper’s ideal of beef is part of the way that he signifies himself with respect to the commercial structure of rap music’s production and circulation.

While some cultural critics within the hip hop community oppose beef on the grounds that it is not true to the values of hip hop, there is a more common critique of beef that does not deny it a place in hip hop. This argument is that real beef has a



legitimate place in hip hop music and culture, but what we think of as beef is not real beef, it is glamorized image. This critique reflects an awareness of the structural relationship between the music and the media industry; however it tends to create an unrealistically rigid dichotomy between violence in entertainment and violence in life. A promising upstart in the music business, rapper Quan offers his perception of “real” beef in a recent interview on Allhiphop.com:

*I can show a rapper some real beef. (...) I can show him beef sitting outside his mother's house with a chopper, waiting for him to come home. I can have your mother duct taped to a chair, while a nigga run through the crib trying to find where the money and the coke are at. That's beef. You holding your man's body, and half of his head is spread out across the street, and what was a beautiful white tee is now a messed up red one. What these niggas are talking about is no more than friendly competition.<sup>5</sup>*

Quan portrays beef as something completely different than a discourse with multiple agents and channels of influence. Quan sees beef as something more serious than wars for public opinion. Many rappers have similarly engaged the question of whether or not beef is good through the question “what’s beef?” Questioning whether something qualifies as beef allows room for criticism of particular beefs without impugning the greater ideal of ‘real’ beef. This interpretation of beef in the most serious light was outlined in landmark song “What’s Beef?” by Biggie Smalls. Biggie’s song explained the severity of true beef, such as his beef with Tupac, but it also began a conversation that continues to this day about what qualifies beef as beef.

The discussion of “what’s beef?” within beef has yielded its own answer over time. Beefing rappers sometimes talk about “what’s beef?” directly, but more often indicate the meaning of beef to them by making reference to past beefs and established standards. Thus a history of beef has been stitched together from portions of various narratives referencing each other. One example of this is an allusion to a confrontation between Suge Knight and Vanilla Ice made by Benzino in his attack on Eminem. According to a commonly known, perhaps apocryphal tale, Knight held Vanilla Ice off a hotel balcony by his ankles in order to force him to sign royalties over to Knight. In his song attacking Eminem Benzino calls him “the 2003 Vanilla Ice,” and threatens to drop Eminem off a balcony, as Knight might possibly have done Ice. Benzino also degrades Eminem by comparing him to another previously beefing rapper, Canibus. The fact that in his response, Eminem responded directly to both of these comparisons directly indicates the saliency of historical connection as an issue in beef. The power of historical reference within beef is not only revealed by directly referencing previous beefs, but frequently by using phrases or ideas that call public discussions and common knowledge about beefs into play. Put another way, all beefs (and their accompanying texts) become fodder for the public discourse of beef, and the history of beef is comprised of our discussions about beef, not the beef tracks themselves. As beefing rappers reference and reformulate public knowledge into their musical text, the historically significant meaning of one component of beef is re-circulated from the consumers to the artists. The now infamous beef between Canibus and LL Cool J provides an illustrative example, not only of the historical narrative of beef that is written within beef, but also the indirect ways that it is told. Since Canibus has now become the object of reference in beef- he was

---

<sup>5</sup> Quan. “Quan: Man Up.” [www.Allhiphop.com](http://www.Allhiphop.com). March, 2005.

referenced by Shaq in a song dissing Skillz as well as by Benzino and Eminem- it is interesting to note that Canibus himself references other previous beefs, directly and indirectly in his beef track attacking LL Cool J. Canibus tells LL, “I see the bitch in you,” in reference to the title of the Common Sense beef track attacking Ice Cube. More circuitously however, Canibus states:

*That shit was the worst rhyme I ever heard in my life/ Cause the greatest rapper of all time died on March 9<sup>th</sup>/ God bless his soul, rest in peace kid/ It's because of him now at least I know what beef is/ That's not what I would call this, see this is something different/A faggot nigga trying to make a living out of dissing<sup>6</sup>*

Canibus refutes LL Cool J's assertion that he is the greatest rapper of all time (the title of LL's album at the time was G.O.A.T.- greatest rapper of all time) with a reference to Notorious B.I.G. who died on March 9, 1997. Furthermore, Canibus professes the influence of Biggie's song “What's Beef” on his concept of beef. This song is the keystone of a meta-discourse about the nature of beef that has emerged through the history of the discourse.

This meta-discourse about beef is primarily focused on discounting beefs that are seen as not worthy of beef status. Often, the fans or the media will discuss and discount a potential beef as a ploy for attention, wary how artist manipulate the media. In other cases, the issue of “what's beef?” comes out in the context of something that clearly is beef. When rapper Canibus insulted LL Cool J on record, he suggested that feuding with the LL Cool J was so insignificant as to not even constitute beef. The mantra of the meta-discourse of beef (discussion about beef within beef) seems to be that beef is something significant, not something minor that is magnified by publicity. In his remake of the classic Biggie song, “Whats Beef?” Mos Def discounts two of the most famous beefs (Jay-Z and Nas and 50 Cent and Ja Rule) as not beefs, and offers a hyper serious standard for judging beef.

*Beef aint the summer jam at Hot 97/ Beef is the cocaine and aids epidemic (...) Beef is oil prices and geopolitics/ Beef is Iraq the West Bank and Gaza Strip (...) Some beef is large and some beef is small, but what yall call beef is not beef at all/ Beef is real life happening every day and it's realer than them tapes that you gave to Kay Slay<sup>7</sup>*

While Mos Def doesn't say that beef shouldn't exist, he suggests that what we see as beef is insignificant with respect the larger social issues of beef. While this formulation of beef is useful to help us to understand the mixed feeling that the hip hop community holds towards beef, in practice Mos Def's definition is incongruous with beef as most people experience it. The Hot 97 summer jam concert where Jay-Z attacked Nas and Mobb Deep is exactly the sort of event that fits our participatory, discursive model of beef. Mos Def excludes these obvious cases to show how comparatively trivial are the conflicts that we have given the meaningful, serious status of “beef.”

The critique of beef has led rappers, industry workers and fans to regard trivial beefs more skeptically, but also to view potentially dangerous beefs more seriously. On several occasions, media institutions, in coordination with public figures such as Louis Farrakhan have played an active role in ending, or “squashing” beef between artists.

---

<sup>6</sup> Canibus. “Second Round KO.” Canibus. 1998. Universal.

<sup>7</sup> Mos Def. “What's Beef.” Unreleased.

While these efforts have always been in the name of peaceful solutions, they inevitably seem to draw more attention to beef, and reify its power. Squashing beef usually entails some sort of arbitrated discussion between the parties, a public announcement, and ecstatic press coverage of the event. The phenomenon of publicly squashing beef in the media demonstrates how beef is a discourse and publicly owned entity, more than just a personal conflict. Squashing a beef doesn't entail making friends or reconciling personal differences, but simply making a statement that open hostilities have ceased. Reporting the squashing of a beef is the ultimate recognition of the significance of the beef to the media and the public.

One of the reasons that beefs get squashed is due to the hard work of people who believe that beef mis-represents hip hop. A disproportionate amount of the coverage of hip hop in the mainstream media is devoted to beef, also many of the media conglomerates and record companies that promote beefing rappers. For these reasons, some critics of beef suggest that it is a performance forced upon rappers by the media corporations that control the means of production. While it is true that many record companies are owned outside of the hip hop community, and it is also true that the structure of the music industry has had played an instrumental role in developing beef as we understand it, however, it does not necessarily follow that the concept of beef was imported into hip hop. The values that beef represents have their roots in both the tradition of glorified violence in the media and in the tradition of competition in hip hop. In fact, beef offers a rare case where the values of mainstream America and hip hop work together to produce synergistic popularity. It represents the unity and symbiosis of arguably dominant American values- independence, entrepreneurship and heroic violence, with arguably dominant values in hip hop- rebellion, self-sufficiency and loyalty. Though frequently in conflict, the values of the hip hop community and those of the majority of America are not diametrically apposed, they have a dynamic relationship that can be viewed at a particular point through the discourse of beef. In beef, these values coexist, conflict, but also cross pollinate.

Ironically, the grounds on which mainstream cultural critics indict hip hop as vulgar – its unbridled materialism, glorified violence and sexual objectification – are also the symptoms that intellectuals within in hip-hop point to as evidence of hip-hop's contamination by the mainstream. While this cultural cross-pollination creates encouraging and frightening cultural blends, neither culture can subsume the other, nor has the identity of either ever existed independently from the other. Hip hop remains a vast, complicated entity, as assimilated and as rebellious as ever.

Commercialization of hip hop has dampened some of the traditional forms of political resistance and cultural dissonance expressed in hip hop, but simultaneously contemporary and neo-traditional modes of resistance have evolved. Many of the neo-traditional modes of resistance embodied in hip hop have roots in the histories of resistant cultures, particularly African Americans in America. Hip hop can serve as a modern version of the slave/master narrative, exploring the angst of those dominated, and the dependency of those ruling. (Stallings) It can also serve as a performative ritual and a linguistic tool for negotiating cultural boundaries and forming identity. (Saddik)

In other ways, the actual sounds of hip hop can function to access types of historical culture and traditional resistance. (Walser) These include the traditions of oral history among the griots, the organizational and political function of the drum, and the

fight for recognition of a-melodic music in Western culture. These traditions of resistant culture and dissident expression are re-emerging in hip hop lyrics and beats in remarkable ways. One interesting countercultural component of hip hop remains the disruptive boom of the drum line. (Rose article) This “sonic power” of hip hop, aside from the messages in the music renews an old form of political disturbance and perhaps is why the audio texture of hip hop is labeled as dangerous and unfamiliar.

A quote from the song “Grinding,” by the rap duo “Clipse” illustrates the interplay between sonic rebellion and legal disobedience. In the song, over a simple beat comprised of heavy bass loops and catchy kick drums, Clipse raps, “call me subwoofer ‘cause I pump base.” Superficially, this statement is a metaphor for the booming power of the beat and the voice of the rapper, but for listeners familiar with urban slang, it conveys a simultaneous statement of legal rebellion. “Bass” is a slang term for crack, and “pump” is a slang term for sell, akin to the term “push.” Thus Clipse is asserting not only the sonic power of their music, but simultaneously their defiance for anti-drug laws.

One way that the culture of hip hop is unique within America is the way it defines itself in relationship to place. In *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and Hip Hop*, Murray Forman suggests that the importance of locality to hip hop distinguishes it among American musical genres that are otherwise divided by cultural bandwidths rather than spatial constructions. In their music, artists use locality as a means of authenticating their identity, in the music industry, hip hop is divided into regional markets, and in the listening audience fans get gratification from having their housing project, neighborhood, city or region of the county recognized. At every point in the cycle of media production, the meaning of the musical text is affected by the spatial concepts through which hip hop is experienced.

Forman offers several angles on how spatial modalities play a significant and distinctive role in hip hop in the meaning of hip hop. First he focuses on the importance of the sites of production and consumption and on the geo-cultural and socio-economic origins of hip hop. Next, he tackles the “unique spatial discourse within rap and hip hop culture,” (Foreman pp xx) and how spatially referential meanings are constructed and decoded through music. Finally he addresses the spaces of hip hop commerce and industry and their effects on hip hop’s development and identity. This is essentially an interrogation of space and meaning in the context of media conveyance. In each examination of the spatially modality, the importance of particular place is imbedded in an understanding of the transcendent and discursive power of music.

The rap industry both reacts to and reaffirms patterns of locality and spatially constructed identity in the markets they reach. Regional archetypes of east coast, west coast, dirty south and mid-west music play a large role in the marketing and promotion of hip hop by corporations, but these commercial categories are also rooted in diverging traditions of regional promotion and spokesman-ship in hip hop.

In the context of production, rap artist have a long history of expressing themselves through place, making odes to their city, discussing their identity through their hood, their block, their borough or their city. The association of a celebrity identity with a particular region contributed to the Biggie and Tupac conflict. Biggie declared himself the king of New York while Tupac recorded “To Live and Die in LA.” Sometimes relationships to space can factor into broader notions of how one should act. For instance the adage that rappers should keep their music “true to the street,”

illuminates how authenticity in hip hop is associated with local space. This spatial orientation is also implicit in the notion that rappers express their loyalty by representing, or ‘repping’ their hood.

In the context of “beef,” conflict between rappers, the importance of spatially constructed identities to artists and their fans reveals itself clearly. A good example of this is a recent feud between Atlanta based rapper T.I. and Houston based rapper Lil’ Flip. At a large annual concert in Atlanta, T.I. took the stage and accused Lil’ Flip of claiming that he was the “king of the south,” a title that T.I. himself claims. Lil’ Flip, denying that he ever made such a claim, responded that “everyone knows Scarface (another rapper from Houston) is the king of the south.” In addition to several songs that each rapper has made disparaging the other, a public awareness and emotional investment in the rivalry has been fueled by the attention of hip hop magazines, radio and other media. For his part, T.I. released a mixtape (a theoretically, but frequently not, purely promotional CD) called *Down with the King* addressing the beef. In a series of interludes throughout the CD, T.I. calls Scarface on the phone and discusses the beef. In the interchange between the two, it becomes clear that identity and place are functioning on multiple levels in the conflict. Not only is the “king of the south” label at the crux of the conflicts origin, but also, the veracity of Lil’ Flip’s connection to his claimed locality becomes the basis of T.I.’s attack on his character.

*T.I.: That nigga say he from your hood.*

*Scarface: Naw naw, like, I ain’t never seen that nigga over there man, I swear man, and you know, when I started seeing ole dude- man, he was rhyming, but you know, before then, like all those other little niggas that claim Cloverland man, straight up... you know, like C- note out of Cloverland, Dirty Red out of Cloverland man, but I ain’t never seen this nigga before man. (...)*

*Scarface: Man, I love that kind of shit man, I love what it brings to the game.*

*T.I.: Thats real.*

*Scarface: I love it. But on the coolie high man, I’m a be straight up with you G, you know, you my little nigga, man, but I from ‘round there, I’m from ‘round that way.*

*T.I. That’s real.*

*Scarface: And I aint never ever ever, ever ever ever, ever... never. I think I seen dude when he first started rhyming man.*

*T.I.: You say you ain’t never ever, ever ever ever?*

*Scarface: Ever ever ever ever... (laughs)*

*T.I.: So you saying this nigga aint never been spotted in the cut?*

*Scarface: Oh no, (inaudible) oh no! And you know what too? That’s a mo’fucking problem with the older niggas around there too, cause we(re) like ‘nigga, we stood out there in the mo’fucking trenches, nigga, and dug that shit up!’<sup>8</sup>*

Talking to Scarface, the most renowned rapper from Houston, T.I. is essentially checking the references on Lil’ Flip resume as a rapper. The implication of Scarface’s statement that he has never seen Lil’ Flip in the neighborhood he claims is that Lil’ Flip has fabricated his background.

In order to make sense of the complex set of values and productive relationships being signified in the texts of a beef, we must examine the historical context of cultural expression and business in America. The artists that who pioneered hip hop music, predominately minorities from the inner city, used hip hop as a form of economic

---

<sup>8</sup> T.I. “Scarface and T.I. phone convo #2.” *Down with the King*. 2005.

liberation and cultural ascendancy- a homespun path out of marginalization. They found that by returning to the grass roots and simply portraying their impoverished lifestyle they were able to liberate themselves from such a lifestyle. The rise of hip hop in the 70's and 80's together with the Black Power and La Raza movements paved the way for a reinvention of Black and Latino identity. The political and economic influence achieved by hip hop's cultural renaissance has met with traditional forms of suppression as well as new forms of structural racism.

One form of structural racism described in theory and experience by Cornell West and bell hooks is the coding of minority cultural products such as hip hop with negative symbolic value. The hegemonic white culture that grounds most Americans' world view continues to denigrate and undermine the legitimacy of the messages conveyed through hip hop, despite hip hop's saturation of mainstream American music. Perhaps because of the marketability of the exotic other, rap artists and the minority cultures are symbolically pushed toward the margins of American society, even as their actual economic and cultural influence continues to grow. Hence the position of hip hop in America is paradoxical- it is more profitable and acceptable in economic terms, yet it is still not taken seriously as music or cultural expression. Although hip hop values have influenced American values and vice versa, to the extent that hip hop values coincide with dominant American values, hip hop is still regarded with suspicion and contempt. American values shared by hip hop- like family, patriarchy, god, guns, and individual prosperity- acquire a vulgar or pejorative connotation simply by association with hip hop.

In fact, the glorification of violence and materialism displayed in rap generally, and in beef particularly, bear both the characteristics of hip hop culture as well as of the American society in which it is circumscribed. The hip hop community is a heterogeneous body lodged within the larger heterogeneous body of American society. The discourse of beef engages people on both sides of the diffuse cultural border between hip hop and non hip hop America. For some in hip hop, beef is an anathema to their notion of hip hop; for others in hip hop, beef represents a quintessential component of hip hop. For some outside hip hop, beef is consistent with their American values; for others outside of hip hop, beef is in conflict with their American values. Each one of these perspectives represents a participant in the discourse of beef and a cross section of the values embodied in beef.

Some of the themes that characterize the rhetoric of beef are violence, materialism, homophobia, misogyny, objectification of women, hyper-masculinity and a fierce competition. It has been argued that many of these themes are also dominant in American media representations. It is not hard to see why the expression of dominant American values in beef could alienate someone who believed in hip hop as a progressive political force. Nor is difficult to see why the statements of beefing rappers or the values they symbolize might resonate with someone inculcated in popular American values.

We can glean more about the dominant notions of masculinity and sexuality in the hip hop community through the homophobic and misogynist insults in beef. The representations of male masculinity in beef, for instance, offer an example where the dominant notions are very much in-line with dominant American notions. Strong heterosexist, aggressive masculine imagery pervades beef in music. Beefing rappers often degrade one another with feminine epithets (pussy, bitch, ho) or attribute more nuanced feminine characteristics to their opponents such as perfume, a purse or a skirt. One rapper

indirectly insulted his adversary by saying that he had to sit down to urinate. Aside from degrading each other by calling one another women, rappers also introduce women into beef as objects through which to attack the masculinity of their rivals. On the famous beef track “hit ‘em up,” on which he attacks Biggie, Tupac declares “that’s why I fucked your bitch, you fat mother fucker.” This type of insult has been echoed in many other beef songs, often slightly changed, but always suggesting sexual dominance or violence aimed at the lovers or female family members of a particular rapper. Underlying these insults are certain notions- prominent in the hip hop community as well as in America at large- that women are objects belonging to men and that men manifest their masculinity by protecting their women, or conquering the women of other men.

Like other types of signification occurring in beef texts- signifying in relation to the commercial structure of beef, or signifying in relation to past discourses of beef- when rappers signify themselves with relation to a set of values, they rarely do so directly, but rather through a system of symbols that is recognizable within the discourse. Jay Z provides us with an example of this in his personalized attack on Nas:

*I came in your Bently back seat, skeeted in your Jeep/ Left condoms on your baby seat  
(...) Since you infatuated with saying that gay shit/ Yes, you was kissing my dick when  
you were kissing that bitch<sup>9</sup>*

Jay Z’s statement that he ejaculated in Nas’ car is a reference to the fact that Jay Z had a relationship with the mother of Nas’ child. In the second part of the attack, the idea that a woman is claimed by one man through sex is compounded with a homophobic insult. The logic of the insult follows that Nas is not a man because he kissed a woman who had had oral sex with another man, thus making Nas a party to a homosexual act. It is essentially an assault on Nas masculinity on the basis of certain values.

The attention paid to beef among fans and the media has made artists more aware of the possibility that their statements and actions may spark beef. This has brought the question of “what’s beef,” to an individual level, with rappers evaluating the relative seriousness of their own conflicts in the media as they happen. Sometimes, it is ambiguous to the media, to the public and to rappers themselves whether a particular conflict qualifies as beef. A popular rapper might qualify a business conflict as not beef to avoid a backlash among adversaries. More frequently however, an upcoming artist will declare a conflict as a beef to attract attention. In both cases however, the opinion of the artist on the subject do not necessarily make or break a beef. While it is unlikely that any conflict not documented on record would be considered beef, every beef includes comments “off the record,” by rappers as well as the reactions of the press and the music industry to the extent that they fuel the conflict. If the comments of the up-and-coming artist are ignored by the press or his potential adversary, there is really no beef. Beef is a reciprocal state, like war, if hostilities are not dignified with a response, there really cannot be said to be beef. On the other hand, our popular rapper trying to diplomatically avoid beef may be attacked in print or on a record for his comments. He could be thrust into beef unwillingly or face being portrayed as running away, or losing a beef he denied.

The bizarre and complex role that various sectors of the media industry play in forming and classifying conflicts presents itself in an interesting interchange between 50

---

<sup>9</sup> Jay Z. “Supa Ugly Freestyle.” Unreleased. 2003.

Cent, a rapper involved in several beefs, and Funkmaster Flex, a popular DJ in New York City, talking about the qualified status of lyrical feuds involving 50 Cent.

*FF: Everything is mad peaceful right now, young brother (...) Jersey, Connecticut, and everyone is peaceful man...artists are moving good and we got to keep this easy...50c: (interrupting) I've been listening to every line...FF: (overlapping) And only you can do it...I know, I KNOW MAN, but its only tapes, its mixtapes, its only mixtapes, its mixtapes, we aint playing none of that on the radio. 50c: Aight, Aight. FF: I love you man. 50c: You know what, you know what, Imma chill...when I start hearing they records make it past the mixtapes...Imma bash em in. FF: Alright, Alright, and that's fair, THAT'S FAIR, that's fair. As long as it's on the mixtapes...50c: Its all good.<sup>10</sup>*

In this peculiar interchange 50 Cent and Funkmaster Flex are discussing antagonistic records made about that have not surfaced in mainstream music outlets, only “unofficial” mixtape releases. With friendly coaxing, 50 Cent agrees to let the insults slide as long as they don't get played on the radio.

Interestingly, 50 Cent was eventually back into beef with several old adversaries because of mounting media and public pressure. 50 Cent's business associate, Eminem, describes this external pressure in a recent song that takes a critical view of beef.

*We actually tried to stop the 50 and Ja beef from happening/  
Me and Dre had sat with him, kicked it and had a chat with him/  
Told him not to do it- he wasn't going to go after him/  
Till Ja started bragging in magazines how he stabbed him/  
Fuck it 50, smash him, mash him and let him have it<sup>11</sup>*

This interchange illustrates the different roles that different types of media play in the production of beef. The previous interchange between 50 cent and Funkmaster Flex shows that the significance of adversarial comments published on mixtape CDs was less because they were only published on a mix-tape cd. This illustrates how different forms of media- print, internet, radio, CD, mixtape- can contribute more or less significantly to the construction of beef. Eminem's remark that Ja's “bragging in magazines” led him to change his position on whether or not 50 Cent Cent should pursue beef with Ja Rule suggests that he recognized the significance of magazines publishing Ja Rule's opinions about beef with 50 Cent. Although the significance of different types of media publishing in beefs' production is not fixed, the previous two examples seem to indicate that from the perspective of the artist, the most threatening media “beef products” are those that will reach the most fans. 50 Cent overlooked responding to mixtape attacks that would not be heard by many; Eminem changed his mind about beef based on magazine reports that would reach many hip-hop fans. Thus an artist's relationship to the sites of production and transmission determine the significance of a particular text of a beef. 50 Cent and Eminem are aware of the expectations of their audience that they uphold a certain code of behavior when faced with a public challenge. They are also aware of what forms of publishing reach more consumers and fuel a public pressure to respond.

With an annual gross of \$1.8 billion (Kelly) the hip hop music industry is a high stakes game. The commercialization of hip hop and the increasing technological

<sup>10</sup> 50 Cent. “50 Cent Speaks Vs. Murder Inc.” *Street Wars Vol. 9*. 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Eminem. “Toy Soliders.” *Encore*. 2005. Shady/Aftermath/Interscope.



complexity of music has enabled hip hop artists to reach listeners farther and farther away, and at the same time, the circulation of texts has become more complicated. The network of people involved in music production, promotion, and distribution is highly specialized, and their roles illustrate the way that the commodity of hip hop is carefully crafted on its way to the consumer. In the industrial chain that ties artist to listener, each link contributes to the way the chain hangs, the way the industry orients itself to the consumers. It's reasonable that artists and investors in hip hop business would carefully consider what their listeners want to hear, after all, their financial futures will be determined by the purchasing public's response to their music. Whether or not media producers (and conveyors) imagine their audience (and their audiences expectations,) accurately, their conception of who they are catering to shapes the meaning of media- in this case the music- as it is created and transported to the consumer.

Hip hop consumers may not conceive themselves in the same mold that hip hop artists conceive their audience but reversely, hip hop listeners may also imagine hip hop to be something that it may not be. This presents an apparent contradiction, yet considering the complicated process of media commodification and cultural signification we can understand why it is not experienced as a contradiction by those involved. For example, many rappers perceive their audience as the "streets" or the "hood" - some embodiment of the impoverished roots of hip hop. Yet a majority (66% according to Kelly) of hip hop music is purchased by whites, an audience demographically more likely to be wealthy. Conversely, a white person might purchase a hip hop album - albeit from a multinational corporation- because of its counter-cultural significance. What is amazing is that despite the probability that the rapper and the listener are both deceiving themselves, there is also a fair probability that they both are correct for one reason or another.

Our hypothetical rapper may be genuinely crafting his message for the streets, in fact, his street credibility (and the non-mainstream audience he addresses) may be the very reason why he has sold so well in the mainstream. As Kelly quotes from Ivan Juzang about marketing, "If you don't target the hard core, you don't get the suburbs" (Kelly, 19) When our street-conscious rapper plays his music for his hard core audience, they will still identify with his music despite his adoption by mainstream audiences. The music still speaks to the streets, but it is also consumed as a cultural commodity by an audience beyond that intended by the artist.

Our hypothetical white hip hop fan may be listening to hip hop as an act of genuine rebellion, even though she is part of a larger pattern of consumption that is only symbolically countercultural. Nonetheless, when the parents of our average fan hear the hip hop that she has purchased, the fact that her friends like it, or that it is broadcast on many familiar media outlets will not change the music's lack of cultural resonance or intelligibility in their mind. Thus, because of her angry parents, our rap fan still identifies her album purchase as countercultural even though it came from the outlet of mainstream commercial media. The context of her consumption reduces her cognizance of the music's creation to its cultural symbolic values, blinding her to the construction and delivery of the music, as a literal and a culturally symbolic product. In essence the cultural commodity purchased is fetishized. The social relations and commercial structures that comprise the symbolic commodity being purchased are mistaken for the music itself.

The truly paradoxical power of corporate hip hop however is its potential to reveal and destroy the exact standards and expectations that it has been slyly conditioning us with. Corporatization of hip hop has not stripped it of its revolutionary flair entirely, after all, that is part of what made it seem so alluring and salable.

Consider another average white hip hop consumer, again, purchasing what she sees as a counter-cultural product. This time however, our white hip hop fan *is* actually purchasing a politically radical, perhaps even an anti-corporate hip hop album that happens to be distributed by a multinational media company. Now the product with a counter cultural label is questioning what it means to be counter cultural. The music's acknowledges the corporate influences that construct its meaning in society and in doing so lays bare how our notions of what is a counter-cultural product are themselves culturally constructed. When our progressive hip hop fan listens to Mos Def, on his recent album, *The New Danger*, distributed by Universal Music Group, rap: "old white men are running this rap shit/ corporate forces running this rap shit," she will identify with the anti-establishment sentiment while knowingly disentangling it from the mainstream media channel that conveyed it.

Adam Krims analyses the commodification of hip hop from a Marxist standpoint. Krims suggests that images of poverty are central to the idea of "realness" in hip hop. This "realness" is part of the cultural coding of hip hop products, but is also central to the meaning of the text in every context. "Reality rap," as Krims terms it couples descriptions of this impoverished realness with the disjunctive sonic structure of beats. In this synthesized form, the poverty of the post-industrial urban landscape is transformed into a new form of value in the music business- surplus value- which is subsequently appropriated by the corporate forces of the record industry. In this formulation, the efficiency of capitalism is ironically convoluted; capitalism's most abject failure- urban poverty- is converted a multi-billion dollar cultural product. Moreover, this new value does not serve to alleviate the conditions of poverty; it is extracted by the same mechanisms of capitalism that produced the conditions to begin with.

In the context of beef, there are several ways that rap artists signify themselves and their rivals in regards to the mechanisms of the media industry. Usually in song rappers align themselves with the economic power of the industry or degrade their rival for their lack of such power. One way is by impugning another rapper for his relationship to the commercial apparatus of music publication. An example of this is Jay-Z's response to Nas assertion that Jay-Z sampled Nas voice for one of Jay-Z's song. Jay-Z response was to put his sampling of Nas work into the context of Nas relationship to the commercial media structure around him- the means of distribution. Jay-Z responds:

*So I sampled your voice, you was using it wrong/ You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song/ And you didn't get a dime, you was getting fucked then/ I know who I paid god, Searchlight publishing<sup>12</sup>*

In this passage Jay-Z is suggesting that Nas is being exploited because of his financial relationship to the media company that distributes his music- Searchlight Publishing.

If a rapper has knowledge of how the structure of the discourse beef functions, he can use it to his advantage, however, structural awareness does not liberate any

---

<sup>12</sup> Jay Z. "The Takeover." [The Blueprint](#). 2003. Rocafella.

participant from the material relationships in which the discourse is imbedded. When an artist uses beef as a strategic tool to reach a certain audience or give him leverage with the marketers and distributors of music, it illustrates the interstitial mechanisms of discursive power, but also demonstrates the rapper's awareness of the commercial structure surrounding beef. Rappers can signify their relationship to the music industry and their knowledge of this relationship explicitly, but also through their actions. One example of this is 50 Cent's new beef track, Piggybank, and the way that 50 Cent used it to promote his upcoming album.

## **Reading Beefs**

On December 22, 2004 50 Cent appeared on the radio show of Funkmaster Flex, a popular radio personality on New York's largest hip hop station, Hot 97. 50 Cent was there to promote the approaching release of his album, "The Massacre," and to deliver to Flex a new song that 50 had recorded, entitled "Piggybank." In the song, 50 Cent lyrically attacks four well-known, successful rap artists- Nas, Jadakiss, Shyne, and Fat Joe- for various reasons. Even though "Piggybank" was not played on the radio that day, 50's appearance with Funkmaster Flex marked the emergence of beef between 50 and several of the aforementioned artists- personal conflicts and business rivalries that are being battled out in music.

When 50 Cent visited Funkmaster Flex that day, he played "Piggybank" for Flex off the air, and they discussed the content of the song on the air. Flex promised that he would play the track, but came back on the show later to say that he had decided not to play the track. The next day, the popular website Hiphopgame.com reported the names of the rap artists targeted in "Piggybank," as well as the fact that Funkmaster Flex had decided not to play the song because of the "possible impact that it could have."

On February 21, "Piggybank" was finally released to the public. It was played on radio stations around the country and the same day became available to listen to online at Hiphopgame.com and Allhiphop.com. In the two months after news of "Piggybank" initially broke, was the focus of much discussion on both of these websites, as well as other websites, magazines, and radio and television stations. On January 22, 2005, Jadakiss paid a visit to Funkmaster Flex's radio show to discuss the yet unreleased "Piggybank" attack on him. Jada did not address the substance of any alleged attacks in the song, but rather, defended his choice to work with Ja Rule on his hit 2004 single "New York, New York." For Jadakiss, and all those in the hip hop community familiar with 50 Cent's longstanding and well publicized beef with Ja Rule, it seemed evident that 50 had attacked Jadakiss because of his collaboration with 50's rival. The fact that Fat Joe, another collaborator with Ja Rule on "New York, New York" was also targeted on "Piggybank," supported this causal association. Jadakiss asserted that his collaboration with Ja Rule was pure business, and obviously not an attack on 50, remarking, "It ain't like when him and Ja was in the nucleus of what they was going through, I hopped on a song with Ja and it looked like I was going against (50)."

News of this interview was posted on Allhiphop.com the same day. The brief said of Funkmaster Flex, "The Hot 97 DJ refused to play 50's highly controversial dis record "Piggybank" due to disputes it might cause." Two days later both Allhiphop.com and Hiphopgame.com posted news items about the developing beef, for the first time

revealing portions of lyrics taken from “Piggybank.” Allhiphop.com also included comments on the situation by Needlz, the producer of “Piggybank.” Although he made the beat for the song, Needlz had never heard 50’s accompanying raps. Needlz was diplomatic, saying “He (50) felt how ever he felt, it’s freedom of speech. (...) I don’t have problems with anybody.”

The day after the “Piggybank” audio broke the surface, 50 Cent’s album was moved forward from March 8 to March 3 due to pirated copies rapidly circulating online. When the album hit stores however, it was an immediate commercial success, selling over 1.1 million copies in the first week. Undoubtedly, the hype surrounding “Piggybank” was not the only reason for the robust sales of “The Massacre,” but the song and its lyrical content were the subject of intense discussion in the week following the release of “The Massacre.” In the (brief) portion of the song where he attacks Jadakiss and Fat Joe, 50 raps:

Im in the hood, in a drop, Teflon vinal top/ I got a hundred guns, a hundred clips, why I aint hear no shots/  
That fat nigga though “Lean Back,” was “In the Club”/ My shit sold 11mil., your shit was a dud/ Jada don’t  
fuck with me, if you want to eat/ Cause I’ll do your lil’ ass like Jay did Mobb Deep/ Yeah, homey in New  
York, niggas like your vocals/ but that’s only New York, dog, your ass is local.<sup>13</sup>

This passage reveals a little bit about 50’s motivation in the beefs and the perspective he places them in. The second bar (bars are divided by ( / )’s) contains a reference to the chorus of the Ja Rule song “New York, New York” –“I got a hundred guns, a hundred clips, I’m from New York.” The attacks on Jadakiss and Fat Joe in the next six bars suggest an extension of 50 Cent’s beef with Ja Rule. However, 50 lays out how his beefs with Jadakiss and Fat Joe are intertwined with his prior beef in comments to Allhiphop.com

I had beef with an old head, he been around forever and everyone know who he is," 50 Cent recently told AllHipHop.com, in apparent reference to a feud with Kenneth "Supreme" McGriff. "That is beef. Because of the extent our beef, we are married until death do us part. And if they [Jadakiss and Fat Joe] want to stand so close to him that they become a part of our relationship, then I make their life hard."<sup>14</sup>

Kenneth “Supreme” McGriff is a part owner of The Inc. Records, along with Ja Rule. His conflict with 50 Cent predates the beef between 50 and Ja Rule, and unlike the beef between 50 and Ja has not been expressed directly in any songs. 50’s comment reveals that, to him, the underlying beef is not a lyrical battle but a personal vendetta, and furthermore that the reason for the new beef is not that Jadakiss and Fat Joe are collaborating with 50’s musical rival, Ja, but that they are economically supporting someone 50 holds a grudge against, Supreme. At some level then, 50 felt that “Piggyback” was not initiating beef, but simply responding in kind, based on his outstanding beef with Supreme. The grounds on which 50 attacks Jadakiss and Fat Joe in “Piggybank” however, do not express retribution for a personal vendetta, but simply an assertion of 50’s dominance in the music world. 50 compares Fat Joe’s hit “Lean Back” to the single from 50’s first album, “In the Club,” to illustrate how his record sales dwarf

---

<sup>13</sup> 50 Cent. “Piggybank.” *The Massacre*. 2005. G-Unit/Aftermath/Shady

<sup>14</sup> 50 Cent. “50 Speaks on Piggybank, beef with Murder Inc.” [www.Allhiphop.com](http://www.Allhiphop.com). March, 2005.

Joe's. 50 similarly maligns Jadakiss for his lesser status, saying Jadakiss is not popular outside of the regional market of New York.

There is another interesting issue raised in "Piggybank" when 50 Cent tells Jadakiss "I'll do your lil' ass like Jay did Mobb Deep." This reference to Jay Z's attack on Mobb Deep at the Hot 97-sponsored Summer Jam concert in 2001 illustrates how beef is described in terms defined in relation to past beefs.

Jadakiss and Fat Joe responded differently to the similar insults thrown at them in "Piggybank." Their responses each demonstrate different interpretations of beef and of the proper course of action for those involved in beef.

In the week between the release of "Piggybank" and the release of "The Massacre" Jadakiss reacted to "Piggybank" in a Hiphopgame.com news item entitled "Jada thanks 50 for the opportunity." Taking a business savvy interpretation of the beef Jadakiss remarked

When I heard 'Piggybank, I was happy (...)This is the best thing that could ever happen to us (...) As long as we do it right, we can't go wrong from this. I can sell, I can make Styles' album double platinum alone just off this whole thing. My album sales for Kiss of Death is gonna start going up off this whole thing. It's just swinging the momentum our way, which we needed.<sup>15</sup>

Jadakiss's response tells us several important things about his perception of beef- first, that Jada knows involvement in beef will bring him more media attention and record sales, and second, that Jada assumes that the beef includes his label-mate and former band-mate, Styles P.

On March 10, a week after "The Massacre" arrived in stores, both Jadakiss and Fat Joe released songs responding to "Piggybank." Jadakiss' response, "Checkmate," which borrows the beat from a song on "The Massacre," opens with Jada congratulating 50 on the first week sales of his album- a sardonic insinuation that beef is a mere marketing gimmick. Jadakiss' rebuttal however not only reflects an understanding of the commercial forces involved, but also launches a very personal attack on 50 Cent's character. While Jadakiss may believe that his beef with 50 Cent is a marketing gimmick, Jada doesn't challenge the validity of 50 Cent's attack on that basis. On the contrary, Jadakiss recognizes the status of the conflict as beef by attacking 50 Cent on issues that have been historically used in judging beef. Jadakiss raps:

Yeah, you got a felony but you aint a predicate/ Never the king of New York, you live in Connecticut/ You don't be in the hood, you be in the woods/ Fucking with me that's where you're really gonna be for good<sup>16</sup>

Ideas about place and relationships to place play important roles in the construction of identity within hip hop. This issue is discussed at greater length elsewhere in the paper, but it suffices to say that spatially oriented identities frequently factor into beefs because idea's about an artist's authenticity or "realness" are often rooted in local or regional affiliations. Jadakiss questions 50 Cent's connection to New York, and to the proverbial "hood" based on the location of 50's new residence. Jadakiss' attack on 50 Cent points out the same set of spatial relations that 50 pointed out in attacking Jada, only from a different perspective. Whereas 50 Cent derided Jadakiss for having a fan base

---

<sup>15</sup> Jadakiss. "Jadakiss thanks 50 Cent for the opportunity." [www.Hiphopgame.com](http://www.Hiphopgame.com). March, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Jadakiss. "Checkmate (50 Cent diss)." Unreleased 2005.

limited to his hometown of New York, Jada indicts 50 for abandoning his hometown of New York. Jadakiss follows this attack with an implied threat of violence, reiterating his status over 50. Lyrical violence is another mainstay in beef, in “Checkmate,” Jadakiss both utilizes it and criticizes 50 Cent for using it. Jadakiss raps: “And don’t try to pull rank on kiss/ Cause the niggas I’mma send to do it aint going miss.” This statement introduces another threat of violence to empower Jadakiss relative to 50’s higher “rank.” Later however, Jadakiss asserts his relative status by ridiculing 50’s reliance on musical violence. Jada raps, “And I don’t got a problem with clout/ You aint got shot again, so what’s your second album about.” These two statements represent the countervailing elements of traditionalism and cynicism that are balanced in the Jadakiss’ approach to beef, and in the discourse in beef generally. Considering Jadakiss’ initial response to “Piggyback,” however, something of a paradox emerges. The knowledge that would make someone cynical about the veracity of beef- knowledge of the instrumental role of the media in marketing violence imagery, for instance- clearly reveals the financial incentive to shed ones cynicism and confirm the veracity of a beef through participation. This dangerous knowledge- knowledge of the commercial power structures that encapsulate beef- emerged over time with discourse around the question “what is beef,” and was transmitted through a narrative that spans the history of beef, continuously documenting the old through the new, and experiencing the new through the old.

I would assert that Jadakiss’ response to “Piggybank” was an attack on 50 Cent tempered with a critique of the beef itself. Fat Joe’s response, on the other hand is a more straightforward attack on 50 Cent. Fat Joe begins his verse: “50 you going end up dead when you fucking with Crack/ Talking like you ‘bout to pop off, where the fuck you be at.” In this rhyme, Fat Joe, referring to himself as Crack, a shortened form of his pseudonym Joey Crack, threatens 50 Cent directly, challenging him through the mantle of violence. Fat Joe also impugns 50 Cent on the basis of association with the police. “Yeah, you got 65 niggas on your team/ but their not from south side Jamaica, Queens/ They’re the boys in blue, I’m just telling the truth/” The nature of Fat Joe’s attacks on 50 imply certain things about Joe’s conception of “what’s beef,” and of what the standards of behavior for beefing rappers should be. Joe insults 50 Cent on the grounds that despite his tough talk he hires professional protection. Nowhere in Fat Joe’s response however, does he pose any opposition to the message implicit in 50 Cent’s original- that working with an enemy is justification for engaging in beef.

Aside from 50 Cent’s official explanation that his attack on Fat Joe and Jadakiss was retribution for old beef between 50 and Murder Inc., certain things about “Piggybank” and the way it was released suggest that it was also a move calculated to re-affirm 50’s status in the media arena shortly before the release of his new album. 50 has given every indication that he understands not only that power of beef, but also the inter-workings of the media industry and how to manipulate them in his favor.

50 Cent’s choice to reveal the names of the artists targeted on “Piggybank” without making it available was a calculated move designed to create hype and anticipation around the track. The move prompted media coverage and responses by targeted rappers before the track itself had been released. 50 Cent knew not only that public anticipation for “Piggybank,” would directly increase his press coverage, but also that it would force his targets to respond as well, generating even more attention to the

beef's surrounding him. At the end of "Piggybank," 50 Cent calls out to the rappers he has defamed, taunting them with the self-assured importance of his own claim:

Yall niggas got to do something baby. Come on now, everybodys listening! Nigga, everybodys listening! I know you aint going just let 50 do you like that! Rep your hood, right? You hard, right?<sup>17</sup>

50 Cent's comment that "everybody's listening," is so prescient because it is exactly correct, the attention of the public was provoked before the release of the song, and when the track was released, everybody was listening immediately. 50 Cent knows that a track attacking rap veterans Nas, Fat Joe, Jadakiss and Shyne will attract lots of attention, and knows that these rappers will have to respond to him, and give him more publicity, or else risk being labeled losers. 50 Cent fully expects his enemies to respond and the beef to continue- that is what he wants. As 50 Cent states "This is chess not checkers, these are warning shots/ after your next move I'll show you what I got." The meaning of this line was brought even more into focus with 50 Cent's comments on a Hot97 radio show with host Angie Martinez (March 9) before the release of Jadakiss' and Fat Joe's responses. When asked by Martinez if he would feel compelled to make another song retaliating against any response that emerged, or if he would be able to "let it ride," 50 Cent told Martinez, the live crowd and radio audience,

I'll let everyone in on this alright. I said on "Piggybank," this is chess not checkers, these are warning shots... I've already created responses. I'm just waiting to release them. Everything has been well calculated. Everything I do is premeditated.<sup>18</sup>

Whether or not it was planned in advance, 50 Cent did release a song responding to Jadakiss about a month after the release of Jada's song. The chorus of the song: "I gets busy lil' nigga, I run New York/ Yeah I live in CT lil' nigga, but I run New York," seems to respond to Jadakiss' attacks on 50 Cent's place of residency, however 50 Cent also offers a revealing appraisal of his industrial clout when he raps:

Man I run Interscope, bitch trying to annoy me/ Nothing but another disgruntled employee/ (...)  
But he keep running his yap like I'm going take all that/ One more word out his mouth I'll push Styles shit back<sup>19</sup>

50 Cent claims power over Jadakiss and his partner, Styles P based on the fact that they are all signed to Interscope Records and 50 Cent has significantly higher record sales. 50 Cent's statement that he will "push Style's shit back," is a reference to Styles P's upcoming album- 50 Cent is saying that he might choose to have Interscope move back the album's release date because he can. More importantly 50 Cent is signifying his awareness of his position in the industrial structure in the way that he relates to his competition.

Beef can include elements of symbolic violence, actual violence or both. Beef is not just real violence, as Quan suggests, nor is beef just competitive music. Beef as a discourse transforms words into real action and action into verbal interchange. Many of the participants in beef, fans, artists and members of the media alike, recognize that beef

<sup>17</sup> 50 Cent. "Piggybank." *The Massacre*. 2005. G-Unit/Aftermath/Shady

<sup>18</sup> 50 Cent. "Interview with Angie Martinez." *Hot 97*. March 2005.

<sup>19</sup> 50 Cent. "I Run New York." *Unreleased*. 2005.

has the potential to spill from entertainment into violence, but there is a countervailing sentiment, expressed in Quan's words, that there is a boundary between violence portrayed in entertainment, and real violence.

This is the difference between the performer and the performance. Rappers can portray themselves as they are or chose to project themselves differently. The music is a projection, a manifestation of the rapper's super ego, not necessarily an accurate portrayal. The pretext of selling your performance makes exaggeration, or conforming to audience expectations profitable and probable. Beefing rappers themselves cast doubt on the tough talk of one another, and offer us clues to why we should consider the violence portrayed in music skeptically. For instance, if a gangsta rapper is living by the violent code that he preaches, why would he act as an entertainer, making a violent song, rather than simply being violent. It is evident then, that at some level, beefing rappers know when they are participating in the theatrics of beef that they are playing a role, even if their concocted identity resembles themselves.

A further extension of the duality of beef, as performance and reality is the intermingling of business and personal elements in beef. Sometimes, a subtle shift in the balance of social and economic forces in the music industry can result in a particular rupture, between friends or business partners. An example that illustrates this point is the beef that has emerged recently between 50 Cent and fellow G-Unit artist Game. According to 50 Cent the origin of the conflict was no dramatic event, but simply that Game was not pursuing the same business strategy as the rest of the G-Unit. This is somewhat unsurprising considering that Game only recently joined G-Unit, a former gang before its meteoric ascent to commercial success as a label. 50 Cent expressed his displeasure that even before the label had decided what single from of Game's album to promote first, they learned that Game had made a guest appearance in the video of another rapper. This lack of harmony culminated in an interview where Game expressed desires to work with Nas, one of the rappers that 50 Cent currently has beef with. In an interview with prominent New York City radio personality Funkmaster Flex, Game expressed frustration that none of his new label mates had supported him or his beefs when he joined the crew. If the sources of this conflict are a blend of business and personal factors, the outcomes of this beef so far have been very clear-cut in their purely personal nature. In another interview with Funkmaster Flex March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 50 Cent publicly drew a line between Game and the rest of G-Unit. While the interview was taking place members of Game's entourage entered the radio station and were confronted by members of 50 Cent's entourage. An altercation ensued and one man was shot in the leg. The shooting attracted significant media attention, as did 50 Cent's public renouncement of Game. Of the interview, one hip-hop website reported 50 Cent had fired Game from G-Unit, but this was not entirely accurate. After all, Game's contract with G-Unit records was unchanged by 50 Cent's comments and the shooting. Any personal dispute doesn't change their business relationship. As 50 Cent declared in the interview, he makes a higher percentage off the sales of Game's album than Game does, since 50 Cent is backing the project as an executive produce whilst Game is signed as a first time artist. While the move may have no immediate economic consequences for 50 Cent, for Game, becoming estranged from his G-Unit business associates may be economically harmful in the long-run. This situation illustrates how personal and business conflicts can intermingle freely in beef, or remain somehow separate. It also reiterates the role of labels



as agents in beef, assisting to define the identity of rappers and determining the circulation of texts.

The short-lived 50 Cent/Game beef did not include any musical texts. The beef was defined predominantly by radio interviews, news articles, public discussion, and a press conference. In the March 3<sup>rd</sup> interview with Funkmaster Flex, Flex told 50 Cent that he had never seen someone beefing with 4 rappers and someone on their own team before, effectively diagnosing 50 Cent's conflict with Game as beef. Although this certainly makes this beef unique, Funkmaster Flex is certainly qualified to identify it as such. After all, Funkmaster Flex is one of the chief moderators of the public space in which beefs take place. Funkmaster Flex's statement (that what 50 Cent and Game have is beef) guarantees its own truth because the weight of his opinion broadcast throughout the tri-state area will convince the masses to recognize it as beef.

DJ's play a particular role in the formation and promotion of beef. Although many famous DJ's have professional affiliations with radio and record companies, they serve a different role in the construction of beef than these other of the media industry. They are the links in the supply chain that connect media companies to the audience and audiences to the artists; they deliver new hip hop to the public and gauge the reaction. Artists respect their importance because these DJ's control the flow of and content of music played almost everywhere. At the end of one of his lyrical attacks of Benzino, Eminem calls out the names of three famous DJ's in New York, saying:

*And it's pitiful cause I would have never said shit if you'd/ Kept your mouth shut, bitch now what, get it Clue, Spit is Slay 'New Shit! Exclusive!' You're laying it Whoo Kid, you know what to do/ Just use it, it's though, this is stupid, I can't believe I stooped to this Bullshit to do this...*<sup>20</sup>

It seems as though Eminem is lamenting being drawn into the beef, while knowing exactly what his song will become in the hands of the three famous DJ's (Clue, Whoo Kid, and Kay Slay) he mentions. The calls "New Shit!" and "Exclusive!" are typical exclamations overdubbed by DJ's on their mixtapes in order to entice the listener and mark the tape as theirs. Artists respect these DJs because they wield control over so many formal and informal channels of music broadcast and distribution. While a good-sized record company (G-Unit, Rocafella, Shady, for instance) may release a hand-full of albums a year, a *single* DJ can release dozens of mixtapes over the same period. Because these albums are printed on a smaller scale and designed for promotional use only, the intellectual property rights of the material on these mixtapes do not have to be paid for, and subsequently music can be published much sooner than it could pass through any commercial channels. In addition to mixtapes, DJs control the flow of new music to consumers in nightclubs, over the radio, and even on websites like Hiphopgame.com, which is run by a DJ. In this way, DJ's publish beef texts- mixtapes, artist interviews and public discussion forums, both on-line and over the radio.

DJ's are also historians of beef- they link hip hop listeners, artists, and corporations to each other and locate them within the historical context and established discourse of beef. On March 9, 2005, the anniversary of Biggie Smalls' death, New York's Hot 97 hosted a call-in pledge drive to raise money for a charitable foundation in his honor. Callers, many of them celebrities, called and pledged money in exchange for

---

<sup>20</sup> Eminem, "Benzino diss." Unreleased. 2003.

the radio station playing a Biggie Smalls song of their request. One celebrity caller was Game. He was on his way to a press conference to squash his beef with 50 Cent and he took a minute to reflect on the significance of the event, given the historical context, with radio DJ Angie Martinez.

Game: I think its so much bigger, being that the date is March 9. I felt like I had a chance to be both Biggie and Tupac on my end, and, you know, I got a chance to rewrite my future, so I'm definitely going to come in on a positive note and see what we have to do to put everything to bed. (...)

Angie Martinez: Where is the press conference?

Game: I don't have no idea. I just hopped on a private jet this morning, and I just got here... See when you have a press conference, they let you take the jet... this is my first time on a private jet.<sup>21</sup>

These two excerpts hint at the commercial importance of the press conference as well as the meaning that was publicly projected into the event by participants. They also testify to the way that this meaning is shaped by public discourse. The fact that his record company flew Game to New York on a private jet suggests that they believed it was worth a significant cost to hold the press conference on that date. The implied connection between Game and 50 Cent's beef and Biggie and Tupac's beef was made explicit in the prepared statement that 50 Cent read at the press conference:

In the shadow of the untimely death of Biggie, today marks the anniversary of his death, we're here today to show that people can rise above even the most difficult circumstances and together we can put negativity behind us.<sup>22</sup>

Commemoration aside, the press conference marked the donation of over \$250,000 to the Harlem Boys Choir by Game, 50 Cent, and their four sponsoring labels. A similar gift was made to the Compton Public School District in Los Angeles, so that the hometowns of both rappers benefited from the settlement. While the rappers themselves, or the fans following their beef may have felt that the press conference was a type of resolution to the legacy of east/west coast beef, in fact it was (also) a resurrection and a celebration of this beef. The hip hop community's feelings of remorse about the Tupac/Biggie beef were being used to draw attention to the conclusion of another east/west coast beef in tacit comparison of their significance. In fact the conflict between Game and 50 Cent could hardly be considered beef if not for the historical gravitas with which it was portrayed in the media. The press conference's solemn condemnation of beef shrouded the fact that the media attention that had fueled the beef to begin with was still being given, only fixated on a different end. The importance of and newsworthiness of the beef was only confirmed by its ceremonial public resolution. Furthermore, the historical resonance of the event and the media portrayal cannot be separated from the practical effect of the press conference- to recast the media attention paid to the radio station shooting in a positive light.

## Conclusion

In summary, the meaning of beef for its participants is determined by their relationship to the established standards of beef- its values, history, spatial relations- and

---

<sup>21</sup> Game. "Pay for Play Call-in." *Hot 97*. March 9, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> 50 Cent. "Press Conference Statement." *Press Conference*. March 9, 2005.

also by their relationship to the means of production and dissemination of texts. Although these matrixes of material, cultural and social relations are interwoven and always simultaneously in effect, participants do not always experience them in equal measure. Rappers and fans alike often describe the meaning of beef, or interpret a beef text with regards to only one of these sets of factors. These conflicting interpretations fuel a discussion within the hip hop about “what’s beef?”

The discourse of beef is territorialized, historicized and commercialized. Rappers signify themselves, through beef, relative to these forces, but often detached from structural relationships between these forces and between the parties they connect. When a beef is discussed in terms of values it is more difficult to understand what rappers are aligning with themselves and their rivals. The values of the hip hop community are heterogeneous and have evolved both in resistance to hegemonic American values, and in cooperation with the growth of commercial hip hop industry. An individual’s experience of beef is only one component of the real meaning of beef; the real meaning is the total discursive power enacted on all the participants.

## Bibliography

- Alim, Samy. "Street-Conscious Copula Variation in the Hip Hop Nation." American Speech Vol.77 No.3, 2002.
- Baker, Houston. Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991.
- Cross, Brian. It's Not About a Salary... Rap, Race and resistance in Los Angeles. Verso: London, 1993.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex Culture and Religion. Basic Civitas Books: New York, 2003.
- Fernando, S.H. The New Beats: Exploring the Music, Culture , and Attitudes of Hip-Hop. Anchor Books: New York, 1994.
- Hooks, Bell. Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations. Routledge: New York, 1994.S
- Forman, Murray. The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop. Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, CT, 2002.
- Kelly, Norman. R&B, Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music. Akashic Books: New York, 2002.
- Ho, Fred Wei-han, and Ron Sakolsky, ed. Sounding Off! Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution. Autonomedia: Brooklyn, 1995.
- Keyes, Cheryl. Rap Music and Street Consciousness. University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 2002.
- Krims, Adam. Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity. United Kingdom at the University Press: Cambridge, 2002.
- Potter, Russell, A. Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism. State University of New York Press: Albany, 1995.
- Qureshi, Regula, ed. Marx and Music: Ideas, Practice, Politics. Routledge: New York, 2002
- Rose, Trisha. Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. University Press of New England: Hanover, 1994.
- Saddik, Annette. "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage." The Drama Review Vol. 47 No.4, 2003.
- Sexton, Adam, ed. Rap on Rap; Straight-up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture. Dell Publishing: New York, 1995.
- Smith, Christopher. "'I Don't Like to Dream about Getting Paid' Representations of Social Mobility and The emergence of the Hip-Hop Mogul." Social Text Vol. 21, No. 4, 2003.
- Stallings, L.H. "'I'm Goin Pimp Whores!' The Goines Factor and the Theory of a Hip-Hop Neo-Slave Narrative." University of Florida, 2002.
- The Vibe History of Hip Hop. Three Rivers Press: New York, 1999.