

THE CHARISMA OF CRACK COCAINE: THE IMPACT OF CRACK ON BLACK
AMERICA, 1984-2010

BY

DANIEL RYAN DAVIS

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ABSTRACT

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Crack cocaine has negatively impacted the African American community in a multitude of ways. African Americans, particularly in the inner cities of the United States, have experienced alarmingly high rates of imprisonment, violence, child neglect, and HIV/AIDS transmission due to their involvement with crack cocaine. Scholars have scarcely isolated individual issues related to African Americans and crack for analysis, and these minimal examinations have not captured the full scope of this problem. Due to the interconnectedness of many factors regarding this epidemic, an all-encompassing multifaceted examination is required to properly identify the severity of African American's involvement with crack cocaine. This dissertation serves as the first scholarly endeavor to synthesize a wide range of issues regarding this matter, while contextualizing this reality within the scope of African Americans over century long relationship with cocaine. The utilization of this approach effectively places the crack epidemic within the contexts of history and larger society. This method allows a focused examination of the crack epidemic within the scope of interconnected variables including: family, foreign relations, the global economy, deindustrialization, poverty, racism, law, unemployment, politics, film, psychology, music and hip hop culture. This dissertation highlights

the long ignored intersections of these variables which combined to create the devastating crack epidemic within inner city Black America. As a result of this broad discussion, scholars and activists are equipped with the information necessary to take educated, efficient, and solution based action.

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To Willard Ave.

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INTRODUCTION

“I would say that in the last 25 years of every invention or innovation that’s occurred in this country the biggest one in terms of impact on the well-being of people who live in the inner city was crack cocaine, for the worst.”¹ - Steven Levitt

Although African Americans have been connected to cocaine in different manners and capacities since the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans’ relationship with cocaine, in the form of crack, has severely harmed the Black community since the mid-1980s. This relationship has accounted for a disturbing number of deaths, arrests, and broken families due to incarceration. For example, “in 1995, 88 percent of individuals sentenced for dealing crack-cocaine were African American!”² Further, cocaine abuse has even reached African American celebrities, causing many serious problems. Athletes such as Lawrence Taylor, who was caught buying crack in 1994 and 1998, and Len Bias, who died from complications related to using cocaine in 1986, are two very popular cases of cocaine bringing destruction and even death to young athletes in the primes of their careers.³ Additionally, professional baseball players Dwight Gooden and Darryl Strawberry witnessed their careers plagued by crack and cocaine use during the late 1980s and 1990s.⁴ Marion Barry, the former mayor of Washington D.C., had his crack cocaine use exposed in 1990, which did not reflect well on him or Black politicians. Singers Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown witnessed their careers greatly impacted and reputations virtually ruined by consistent rumors of cocaine use during the late 1990s and 2000s.⁵ Despite the fact that crack cocaine represents a major problem in the Black community, there is surprisingly a relative lack of published scholarship on this pressing topic. The purpose of my dissertation is to critically examine various dimensions of the crack cocaine epidemic within the

Black community. This research project is an example of what I believe Black Studies entails; researching and disseminating information with the purpose of contributing to the progress of the Black community.

This dissertation focuses on African Americans' involvement with crack cocaine from 1984 until 2010. I begin my study in 1984 because it is the starting point for crack cocaine's presence in the United States. My research lasts until 2010 because information such as that from hip hop artists up until that year is relevant to this dissertation, and this year witnessed the repeal of the controversial Anti-Drug Enforcement Act of 1986. During this period, crack cocaine exploded onto the American drug scene and overwhelmed the Black community in particular. At the same time, I also explore the relationship between African Americans and cocaine from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1970s in order to establish the historical context for the main focus of my research. The chapters of this dissertation cover several important areas concerning African Americans and cocaine, including crack cocaine's impact on Black women, the Black family, incarceration rates, violence, HIV/AIDS, hip hop culture, children, film, and the overall health and status of the Black community. The problem of crack cocaine in the Black community is among the most pressing challenges and obstacles hindering the progress of African American people. However, it is worthy of note that crack cocaine, while devastating and incredibly harmful in many ways, is part of a continuum of Black problems. This history of misery has witnessed slavery, Jim Crow segregation and discrimination, and rampant heroin use, among other detriments, as predecessors to the crack era.

Methodology

To effectively conduct this research study, I closely examined the important and relevant scholarship on African Americans and crack cocaine. I also examined statistical information related to African Americans and crack cocaine including incarceration rates, HIV/AIDS rates, and other relevant issues. I consulted historical scholarship, scholarly journal articles, newspaper and magazine articles, government and legal documents, and analyzed several interviews with crack addicts and those directly involved with the drug--specifically, "Freeway" Ricky Ross who is largely responsible for the spread of crack in the Black community. This research also required the examination of drug treatment literature, treatment facilities policies, and the strategies of community activists doing work in this area.

While contemplating the crack cocaine problem in the Black community, I was constantly looking for or attempting to discover the most significant avenues this drug impacts African American life. In addition to the aforementioned topics of examination, I decided that depictions of crack and people involved with crack in film was also relevant and significant to this research. Film whether on the big screen or movies made specifically for DVD release is digested by the masses of African Americans. As I argue, crack cocaine's presence in the Black community has been overwhelming since it made its arrival. This devastating presence in Black life has created what I call a "culture of crack" which is very current in much of Black culture and youth culture specifically. In this dissertation, I offer my analysis of various popular urban films such as: *Paid in Full* (2002), *State Property* (2002), and *Clockers* (2004) among others. Particular attention is paid to the depiction of now iconic fictional character "Nino Brown," a crack kingpin, in the film *New Jack City* (1991).

Another method of research I employ is song and lyric analysis. This research required an examination of hip hop music –rap- and culture. A major motivation for this research project is the consistent references to crack cocaine found in various sections of hip hop culture. Specifically, many rap artists and groups, such as NWA, Notorious BIG, Tupac Shakur, Master P, T.I., 50 Cent, Pusha T, Young Jeezy, Jay-Z, T.I., Gucci Mane and Rick Ross, among a multitude of others, refer to crack cocaine in their lyrics. These artists refer to crack cocaine by discussing the act of selling the drug, as well as growing up in crack infested homes and neighborhoods. I listened to, read, and critiqued hip hop artists lyrics in an effort to analyze their music and understand their messages. Other expressions of hip hop culture including clothing styles, videos, movies and books also refer to crack cocaine with regularity. An examination of this culture with relation to cocaine is important because of its undeniable influence on and participation by young African Americans.

Theoretical Approach

The scholarship on African Americans and cocaine has mainly been approached from historical, sociological, and medical perspectives. My research is shaped most by Black Studies; I employ a Black Studies approach to studying African Americans and crack cocaine. Though there are numerous definitions of African American Studies, I am most influenced by Manning Marable in my theoretical approach. According to Marable, Black Studies is descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive.⁶ Using these principles as my guide, my research will be descriptive because I am describing and identifying the problems African Americans have related to crack cocaine. My study is corrective because it aims to build upon and in some cases challenge the minimal amount of relevant useful research done on this topic. Most of the work done in this area has been done in passing. The existing scholarship has not exclusively focused on

synthesizing information about African Americans and crack cocaine with the goal of solving the problem. This dissertation project is also prescriptive, because I examine pre-existing prevention and treatment strategies and offer new suggestions to influence positive change in the African American community.

I also employ a historical approach to this research. By approaching this study from a history perspective, I am setting the current issue within a historical context. This allows the examination to be more efficient by exposing how this problem began, highlighting what has previously been done to solve this issue, and informing us of how to approach this topic in the future. Without approaching this issue from a historical perspective, we are doomed to repeat failed behavior and continue to nurture conditions which perpetuate African Americans' involvement with crack cocaine. It appears that a thorough examination of African Americans' history with cocaine has not been done, therefore, it is my belief that there has not been a truly serious plan to effectively end this problem.

Purpose of Dissertation

The purpose of my research is to help significantly address crack cocaine as a plague to the Black community. There is no comprehensive examination of crack cocaine and African Americans. My research is unique because it covers multiple intersections of the Black community in relation to crack cocaine. Unlike previous works that have mentioned aspects of this serious issue, my dissertation project addresses a range of interconnected issues. This study intends to be a tool made to help repair the problems crack cocaine has caused in the Black community. By exposing the problems related to crack cocaine and offering a multitude of

solution ideas, this dissertation will hopefully be a great addition to the scholarship and an example of what Black studies is all about.

The review of relevant scholarship on African Americans and crack cocaine exposes several scholarly voids that deserve to be filled. My research seeks to fill many of these vacancies and contributes to this body of scholarship. Relevant issues ranging from conspiracy theories about how cocaine reached the Black community to African American women's crack cocaine use have been understudied and as a result are not fully understood.

The work on conspiracy theories, such as that done by Gary Webb *Dark Alliance* (1998), or Patricia Turner *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* (1993), served the purpose of exposing the possibility of government involvement in cocaine flooding the United States. This scholarship also gave insight into how the government contributed to the presence of crack cocaine in the Black community. However, there is an apparent void in the research in this regard from these authors, specifically Gary Webb's *Dark Alliances* publication in 1998 until 2010. This gap in research on the government's involvement is problematic since crack cocaine's presence and impact is still felt in the African American community. My research expands on the work of Turner and Webb, as I continue to examine the affect the government's possible connection to the cocaine trade has on the Black community.⁷

The scholarship on African American women and crack, while scarce, has delved into the issues related to this association as well as the reasons why this relationship exists. While scholars writing in this field have mentioned Black women's crack cocaine use in relation to the family, prostitution, and personal health, these works are few and fail to thoroughly address other key issues. My dissertation explores how African American women's crack use impacts the

extended family. How are childcare responsibilities assigned when the mother is unable to care for her child due to her addiction? How are grandparents, specifically grandmothers, impacted once becoming the primary care taker for children of crack addicted mothers? The scholarship on African American female crack dealers, and the resulting incarceration is also minimal at best. I also explore that reality in this project.

The scholarship on African American males mainly mentions them in connection with distribution activities for street gangs and their rates of incarceration. I expand on that research as well by furthering the discussion of unfair sentencing and the consequences of incarceration on the individual, family, and community overall. The existing research fails to emphasize the impact that incarceration has on not only those imprisoned, but on the larger African American community. I examine the correlation between crack incarcerations and single parent households, perceptions of masculinity, and the formation of a “crack culture.”

Another way I aim to contribute to the scholarship on African Americans and cocaine is through my examination hip hop culture. A thorough examination of crack cocaine’s influence on hip hop culture is virtually absent from the current scholarship on this topic. Hip hop’s influence on African American culture and youth in particular cannot be overstated. Therefore, the role crack cocaine plays in this cultures’ music, fashion and collective perspective must be dissected and analyzed.

Questions Guiding my Research

Below is a list of questions that will guide my research. The chapters of my dissertation will analyze and attempt to respond to these various inquiries.

- How has crack cocaine impacted various facets of the Black community?

- How can the crack cocaine epidemic possibly be addressed?
- How do patterns of cocaine use differ between males and females?
- What is the connection between crack cocaine and violence in the Black community?
- What is crack cocaine's relationship with African American incarceration rates?
- How does African American's involvement with crack cocaine affect the family?
- What is the connection between race, poverty and crack use?
- What is the relationship of African American youth with crack cocaine?
- What was the government's role in the availability of crack cocaine?
- Why do hip hop artists discuss crack dealing so often in their music?
- How influential is the apparent glorification of the drug dealer lifestyle in rap music and film to young African Americans?
- What is being done to combat crack cocaine use and distribution?
- How are street gangs involved in the crack cocaine trade?
- What is the connection with crack use and HIV/AIDS?

Chapter Breakdowns

Chapter 1, "The Prelude to Calamity: African Americans and Crack Cocaine Before the Crack Era," discusses the beginning of African Americans' involvement with cocaine and traces this connection up until the early 1980s. This relationship began at the turn of the twentieth century. In this historiographical chapter, I examine various newspaper articles that serve as the first writings related to African Americans and cocaine, and books relevant to the topic. Through this historiography, the early trends of cocaine use among African American men and women will be identified and the foundation for the discussion on African Americans and crack cocaine is established. The main questions guiding my research for this chapter are: What were scholars,

journalists and general commentators saying about African Americans and cocaine between 1900 and the early 1980s? What were the characteristics of African Americans who used cocaine? What was the impact, if any, of cocaine use on the African American community during this era?

Chapter 2, “Birth of an Epidemic: Ronald Reagan, “Freeway” Ricky Ross and the 1980s,” identifies when crack cocaine first entered the United States and infiltrated the Black community. Generally considered to have entered the United States in 1984, crack cocaine instantly became a plague to predominately African American inner city neighborhoods. In this chapter, I discuss the conditions of inner city Black America prior to the arrival of crack cocaine. The largely diminished status of these neighborhoods seem to have contributed to the rise of crack cocaine’s popularity among residents.

This chapter examines how crack cocaine reached the Black community. How does cocaine get across the United States border? Who is transporting it to the inner city neighborhoods of cities across the entire nation? Why did crack cocaine become so popular specifically among poor ghetto African Americans? This is a necessary discussion, because the availability of cocaine in the Black community is clearly a major contributing factor to its popularity. Theories attempting to explain how crack reached the Black community such as those found in Patricia Turner’s *Heard it Through the Grape Vine* and Gary Webb’s *Dark Alliance* among others, are closely examined.⁸ In these and other works, the government’s involvement in this epidemic is discussed in detail. Chapter 2 specifically highlights ex crack kingpin “Freeway” Ricky Ross, and closely examines his connection to the flooding of Black urban America with crack in the 1980s and 1990s. Simultaneously, this examination includes a discussion about the Iran-Contra scandal involving the CIA and other government officials during the Ronald Reagan

presidential administration. After analyzing several interviews and first-hand accounts from ex law enforcement officers, military personnel, and drug traffickers, there appears to be a clear connection between the government and cocaine trafficking. This connection is explored in depth.

Chapter 3, “The Black Family’s Insidious Relationship with Crack Cocaine, 1984-2010,” delves into the matter of Black incarceration as a result of African Americans’ relationship with crack cocaine. I examine the statistical data such as federal arrest and incarceration reports related to this problem and discuss the personal and social conditions experienced by those who have fallen victim to crack related incarceration. This chapter also examines and critiques the drug laws related to crack cocaine from 1986-2010. The sentencing practices of the United States court system, concerning cases dealing with crack cocaine, are blatantly unfair and nonsensical. The harshness of sentences for crack related crimes due to mandatory minimum sentences have understandably been considered racist and part of a larger scheme of the government to oppress African Americans. Since African Americans are disproportionately involved with crack cocaine, the harshness of penalties specifically related to the drug gives much credence to those suspicions. The goal of this chapter is to not only highlight the harshness of sentences related to crack cases, but to also illustrate the severe harm these sentences are inflicting on the African American community-Black family in particular.

I also explore crack’s influence on various aspects of the Black family. Each of the deaths related to crack overdoses and the incarcerations from crack convictions impact many people. Moreover, the lifestyles of those addicted to the drug and the murders connected to the crack cocaine trade affect more than just the individuals immediately involved. Every individual who is harmed by anything related to crack and crack dealing is a mother, father, son or daughter of

someone else. Becoming addicted to crack cocaine can create catastrophic consequences for the abuser's family. These consequences affect the economic, educational and psychological status of the families involved. This chapter examines these impacts and discusses the severity of this issue. African Americans' involvement with crack cocaine has clearly contributed greatly to many of the problems within the Black family.

The other specific focus of this chapter is African American women and their association with crack cocaine. The damage done to the psychological, economic, physical, and social state of women addicted to crack cocaine inevitably impacts every segment of the family intimately. Statistically, women are usually the head of the Black household due to being unwed mothers and absent fathers. Therefore, the effects of crack cocaine addiction on women, which promote child neglect, unemployment and homelessness, undoubtedly have an enormously harmful impact on the family structure. Specifically, crack cocaine addiction for Black women has largely been connected to prostitution. In this chapter, I analyze the connection African American female crack cocaine users had with prostitution. This connection started around the year 1900 and has continued into the twenty first century.

I critically examine and build upon previous work on crack addicts and prostitution done by researchers Tonya Telfair Sharpe and Terry Williams, among others, and discuss the impact this behavior has on the family.⁹ There are several questions that guide my research for this chapter. What are the differences in sentences for crack offenses between White and Black offenders? What is the government's reasoning for punishing crack offenders more harshly than cocaine convicts? What impact do the often lengthy prison sentences endured by crack convicts have on the Black family? What factors contribute to African American women's decision to start using crack cocaine? What are the conditions surrounding African American female crack

prostitutes? How does this behavior contribute to the spread of HIV in the Black community? What impact does the birth of “crack babies” have on the Black community? How does female crack cocaine use affect children and care giving responsibilities throughout the family? Among others, these questions guide my discussions throughout chapter three.

Chapter 4, “From Dope MC to Dope MC: The Genesis of Hip Hop and the Fusion of Crack and Rap,” focuses on the impact crack cocaine has had on hip hop culture—specifically rap music. By hip hop culture I mean the clothing, music, movies, beliefs and attitudes of the millions of African Americans who are apart of “the hip hop generation.” Several scholars have attempted to define the hip hop generation as it is a difficult task to identify. A popular definition of this era, offered in Bakari Kitwana’s *The Hip Hop Generation* (2002), includes individuals born between the years of 1965-1984. As noted by scholar Pero Dagbovie, this identification “is problematic in delineating such a large generation spanning nearly twenty years.”¹⁰ I consider the hip hop generation to consist of individuals born after 1965 who identify and participate in some form of hip hop culture. While this culture has had an impact on a national and global level, African American youth are its primary practitioners. This chapter argues that crack cocaine has had an overwhelming influence on hip hop culture which has resulted in African American youth possessing destructive and harmful positive attitudes toward drug dealing.¹¹

In this chapter, I discuss the history of hip hop from its inception in New York City in the mid-1970s through the late 1990s. During this twenty year span, the content and culture of rap music changed in response to the arrival of crack cocaine. The celebratory and socially conscious rap content performed by hip hop pioneers increasingly became replaced by much more grim tales of crack’s destruction on the “hood” and crack dealing activity. This content mirrored the harsh realities of inner center living during the crack era. I utilize rap lyric analysis in this

chapter as a tool to understand the perceptions and behaviors of these artists in response to the presence of crack cocaine. Rap artists are not only performers, they are themselves often ghetto residents and members of the Black community-thus making them, in many ways, “hood ambassadors.” The attitudes, explanations, and feelings expressed by these artists’ lyrics are valuable for understanding the overall climate of the crack ridden ghetto during the crack era.

By dissecting the various expressions of hip hop culture, rap lyrics in particular, along with rap artists’ monikers, clothing, and backgrounds, this chapter critiques their behavior and its acceptance by the African American community. I also explore the why hip hop culture has such an amazingly strong influence on African American youth, and the possible consequences of this strong hold. Questions guiding research in this chapter include: How did rap music change once crack arrived in the mid-1980s? How representative of reality were rap artists’ lyrics and songs during the crack epidemic? Why do many hip hop artists appear to glorify involvement with such a destructive and harmful drug? Why are hip hop artists who do not speak of drug dealing in their music often less popular than those who do?

In Chapter 5, “The Honorable” Nino Brown: Problematizing the Legacy of *New Jack City* and the Rise of the Dope Boy,” I argue that the film *New Jack City* (1991) greatly contributed to harmful changes in hip hop and African American youth culture. This film is centered around the charismatic crack kingpin “Nino Brown” and his drug dealing posse. It is considered not only the first film centered around crack dealing culture, but also the best and most influential. I contextualize this film within the history of African American depictions in film. What becomes present is that there are consistent themes throughout the over century long history of Blacks in motion pictures.

The analysis of *New Jack City* will be guided by the concepts and historical discussions presented by African American film historian Donald Bogle in his classic bestselling *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks* (2001). This chapter also discusses the ideas of naturalization, justification, and triumph as they pertain to African Americans in film, and eventually in rap music. The themes of naturalization and justification were introduced by African American film history scholar Vincent Rocchio. Naturalization refers to the apparent *naturalized* position of African Americans in depressed and marginalized environments separate from majority society. Justification refers to the acceptance and expectation of deviant behavior perceived as a *justifiable* response to their *naturally*, depressed and disadvantaged status in American society.¹² Lastly, the idea of *triumph* regards the celebration and glorification of individuals who appear to have triumphed over their low status in society regardless of the often criminal, dangerous, and harmful methods utilized to attain success.

As a result of *New Jack City*'s apparent glorification of crack dealing, the turn of the twentieth first century witnessed a new harmful "dopeboy" persona which evolved from the "new jack" character this film introduced in 1991. This dopeboy attitude, which is about "getting money" by any means necessary, usually through crack dealing, has dominated African American youth culture-via its dominance of rap music. Additionally, many urban films have emulated *New Jack City*'s blueprint, and Black America has endured several more "crack" films over the last twenty years. Since 1991 to 2010, most "street" or "hood" films created for predominately African American audiences, include references to crack cocaine abuse and dealing. What is both clear and telling, is that a significant part of the African American community can relate and identify with the characters, plots, and emotions attached to these "hood stories" riddled with references to crack cocaine. The real lives and experiences of regular

African American people, both male and female, child and adult, are often mirrored in these films, however, it is the obvious glorification of crack dealing activity that I argue is extremely problematic and harmful.

Similar to chapter 4, in this chapter I continue to employ lyrical analysis for my examination of the new age dopeboy. Several songs, which feature rap artists referring to themselves as dope boys will be presented. Rap artists clearly and effectively define the characteristics, expectations, and attitude of a dopeboy, and millions of impressionable youth are following these instructions-often to their demise. Several songs will be cited in segments within the chapter and in their entirety in the appendices to allow for a thorough consumption and understanding of the songs purpose. It is extremely important to witness these songs in their entirety, because this is how audiences consume this material. Rap artist write these lyrics for a reason, and they are aware of every word they perform, thus they are deserving of acknowledgement and critical examination.

The significance of *New Jack City* and the resulting dope boy culture, should not be overlooked when discussing the impact of crack cocaine's overall influence on African Americans. Psychologically, the constant onslaught of drug references (mainly crack) that make their presence in Black film and rap music, undoubtedly influence viewer's and listener's opinions toward "dopeboy culture." These urban films and rap songs are especially influential since the demographic of the African American community they reach is not only adults, but impressionable children and adolescence. Among others, some of the questions guiding my analysis of Black film and dopeboy music are as follows: Why are African American youth so attracted to the imagery and attitude of behavior related to drug dealing? How has the social deprivation of African Americans influenced the idolization of "the hustler" or "the dopeboy" in

hip hop culture? Why do so many films surround crack cocaine activity? What impact does this imagery have on the viewer? Is “dope boy culture” being depicted as solely a negative reality or is it being glamorized in film and rap music? An examination of this kind is necessary when analyzing the relationship between African Americans and crack cocaine.

In the conclusion, I briefly summarize the previous five chapters and suggest new ideas to prevent African Americans from continuing their relationship with crack cocaine. These suggestions are based upon the analysis of the research and data discussed in the previous chapters. The goal of this conclusion is to offer practical solutions to the problems which have been highlighted. This conclusion is distinctively an example of Black studies corrective characteristic. Chapters 1 through 5 identified and discussed the problems and offered causal explanations while the conclusion is dedicated to resolving and exterminating those issues. Ultimately, the goal of the conclusion is to discuss solutions to the list of problems African Americans are experiencing due to their association with crack cocaine.

The conclusion also includes recommendations for future research related to crack cocaine and African Americans. I reiterate the importance of addressing the issue of crack cocaine within the African American community. I discuss other possible areas of research similar to this topic which require attention such as other substances that have and are harming the African American community- marijuana, heroin and alcohol. Further, I suggest researching drug use in prisons, crack use among athletes and entertainers and crack cocaine use among wealthy African Americans. These are other important and relevant sections of the African American community and worthy of examination. Perhaps most importantly, I discuss how changing the message of many hip hop artists can promote positive change in the Black community.

NOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PRELUDE TO CALAMITY: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND COCAINE BEFORE THE CRACK ERA

*“Physicians say that if the habit [cocaine use] among the negroes is not suppressed and radical steps to this end taken very quickly it will mean the utter ruin and final extermination of the race in the South.”¹ - “Cocaine Evil Among Negroes,” *New York Times*, 1902*

Introduction

The drug cocaine is extracted from a plant, the coca leaf, which has been cultivated in South America for thousands of years. “Europeans began to learn about the coca leaf soon after the discovery of America.” Originally, the effects of the coca leaf could be felt by chewing it. According to Pedro Cieza de Leon, a traveler from the sixteenth century and one of the first writers to describe coca chewing for a European audience, Indians told him that coca leaf chewing prevented them from feeling hungry and gives them “great vigor and strength.” Scholar Joseph Spillane cites Von Schuldi, a Swiss naturalist, who visited South America in 1838 as stating that “modern use of Coca is not merely innocuous, but that it may even be very conducive to health.” “He marveled at the Indians who chewed coca three times a day over the course of years and who nevertheless enjoyed perfect health.” Other positive comments appeared by European writers in the nineteenth century. Travelers and observers, including Johann Jakob von Tschudi, Clements Markham, and several others were also impressed with the coca leaf’s “power of physical invigoration.”²

The coca leaf reached its zenith of praise in Europe in 1859 when neurologist Paolo Mantegazza wrote a popular essay, *Sulle virt igieniche e medicinali della coca e sugli alimenti nervosi in generale* (“On the hygienic and medicinal properties of coca and on nerve

nourishment in general"), about the powers of the coca leaf that inspired the famous Sigmund Freud, among many others, to experiment with the drug. In praise of the coca leaf Mantegazza stated that "...I sneered at the poor mortals condemned to live in this valley of tears while I, carried on the wings of two leaves of coca, went flying through the spaces of 77, 438 words, each more splendid than the one before...An hour later, I was sufficiently calm to write these words in a steady hand: God is unjust because he made man incapable of sustaining the effect of coca all life long. I would rather have a life span of ten years with coca than one of 10 000 000 centuries without coca." "Through the late 1870s and early 1880s the literature on coca and cocaine continued to grow."³

The praise and excitement about coca and cocaine was understandable being that invigoration, increased strength, and prevention of hunger can all be considered positive effects. Cocaine was also recommended for treatment of many illnesses and their symptoms such as "fatigue, nervousness, and small physical complaints." The drug impressed Freud so much that he even endorsed cocaine as a cure for addiction to morphine and alcohol. Freud's writings during the mid nineteenth century described his personal cocaine use. He noted feelings of "exhilaration and lasting euphoria;" he also stated that cocaine "increased his self control and vigor." The praise of cocaine was so popular that many optimists mistakenly presumed that if all these claims were true "cocaine will indeed be the most important therapeutic discovery of the age, the benefit of which to humanity will be incalculable."⁴

Cocaine's presence in the United States came in the late nineteenth century. The overwhelming praise of this new drug in Europe undoubtedly led to its arrival in the United States. Cocaine was used in the United States largely for its medicinal capabilities but also served other purposes. The drug was sold in "cigarettes, in an alcoholic drink called Coca

Cordial, and in sprays, ointments, tablets, and injections. One of the most popular drinks containing coca extract was Coca-Cola, first concocted by John Styth Pemberton, a Georgia pharmacist, in 1886.”⁵

At the turn of the twentieth century, cocaine became a “drug menace” because of what had been regarded as the very sign of its curative power. The pleasure it gave became a source of what we now call drug dependence and drug abuse. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, doctors began to conclude that cocaine abuse was “a habit that develops more easily and destroys the body and soul faster than morphine.” In spite of these negative reports on cocaine, its “potentialities as a recreational drug soon became obvious; along with those older euphoriant and panaceas, opium and alcohol, it now became a drug with a dubious social reputation. Its users were described as “bohemians, gamblers, high-and low-class prostitutes, night porters, bellboys, burglars, racketeers, pimps, and casual laborers.” During the nineteenth centuries’ conclusion and start of the twentieth century, African Americans would be added to that list of cocaine users.⁶

In the historiography on cocaine, African Americans’ relationship to this drug has been severely under acknowledged. One can assume, perhaps pessimistically, that the lack of scholarly attention paid to this detrimental issue in the African American community is yet another slight to Black people. While it may be true that Black scholars could have appropriately addressed this issue, despite the existence of historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) African Americans have historically been ousted from academe in large numbers. This is especially true during the turn of the twentieth century up until the civil rights movement of the 1960s as a direct consequence of continued racism, unequal education, and discrimination in higher learning as well as primary and secondary education. During the last quarter of the

twentieth century, African American scholars have created several works, although not enough, that explored crack cocaine in the Black community beginning with the crack epidemic in the 1980s. Somewhat surprisingly, even these publications largely ignore the foundation of this pressing issue which is Black cocaine use during the early 1900s. African American cocaine use during this period draws several parallels to Black crack-cocaine use in the 1980s and beyond. Like crack in the latter twentieth century, cocaine during the early 1900s was desirable for African Americans because “it was cheap” and “brought happiness . . . causing him or her to forget hunger and become insensible to pain.” It is necessary to review and understand the causal factors related to Black cocaine use at the turn of the twentieth century to gain insight into the current problem with crack cocaine facing African Americans.⁷

This chapter critically analyzes the available scholarship on African Americans and cocaine. It includes an in depth analysis of several published studies that examine and delve into African American’s relationship with cocaine throughout the early to middle twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, scholarly attention to African Americans and cocaine use was not nearly as common as it became later in the 1900s. Due in large part to the “crack epidemic” beginning in the mid-1980s writing on African Americans and cocaine increased dramatically. Understanding the history of cocaine use in Black America is important for understanding the crack era of the late twentieth century, however there are significant distinctions between the two drugs. Cocaine, largely a result of its higher price, has mainly been connected to upper middle to upper class users. Conversely, crack cocaine, a much cheaper and more intense by product of cocaine, is widely used by poorer individuals. This class distinction is an important aspect of this research with meaningful political, social, and legal ramifications.

The history of writing on African Americans' involvement with cocaine is not vast. Few publications during the Progressive Era or "the nadir," generally considered to be from 1890-1920, discuss African Americans and cocaine use. The references to African American drug use during that period are all very similar to each other. African Americans who used cocaine were either part of society's underworld or given the drug by their employers. While cocaine was believed to be a popular drug for White Americans of all social classes and societal ranks, only marginalized African Americans were believed to have been involved with cocaine. This belief could be due to a lack of research focusing on upper class Black cocaine use, or simply a result of cocaine's low cost and availability to lower or under class blacks. Naturally, economically depressed individuals looking for recreational drugs will seek them at a low cost. Additionally, as noted by Sociologist William Julius Wilson, "the Black underclass were plagued by massive joblessness . . . and . . . low-achieving schools" making a cheaper recreational drug more attractive to this impoverished segment of the Black community.⁸

"By 1903, despite the decline of medical interest in cocaine for therapeutic purposes, the level of cocaine consumption in the United States had grown to about five times that of 1890. Nonmedical use accounted for nearly the entire increase. In the process, the image of cocaine as an exclusive drug for "brain workers" gave way to the image of cocaine as the common man's drug, associated with laborers, youths, blacks, and the urban world." James B. Bakalar and Lester Grinspoon offer one of the earliest texts discussing African Americans and cocaine use in the early twentieth century. In *Cocaine* (1971), Bakalar and Grinspoon discuss some of the earliest references to African Americans or "Negroes" and cocaine use in various press releases. The authors also discuss how African Americans' use of cocaine was viewed by pharmaceutical companies during this same period. One of the first press releases to touch upon this subject was

an article titled “The Growing Menace of Cocaine” published in *The New York Times* in 1908. In this article the authors stated that cocaine “was easily available in patent medicines and popular among Negroes in the South, where ‘Jew peddlers’ sold it to them.” This statement implies that while cocaine was available as medicine, African American’s went to “peddlers” to obtain the drug. This could be due to rejection from medical practitioners to serve African Americans based on racism, or their fear of “negroes” getting high off the drug. African American reliance on peddlers to supply cocaine may have also been based on their usually low financial status as well.⁹

Early Cocaine Use

The fear of African American cocaine use began to impact the medical world’s view of the drug. During a meeting of the American Pharmaceutical Association in 1901, one member of the association stated “Indiana reports that a many good negroes and a few white women are addicted to cocaine”; the negroes, the lower and criminal classes, are naturally most readily influenced.”¹⁰ At this same meeting, Vice-President S. F. Payne presented the issue of “Negroes using cocaine.” Payne remarked that:

I simply wish to make a few supplemental remarks to that paper, touching state legislation in Georgia on the subject of the sale of cocaine. Before legislation in Atlanta, we found that the negroes had become very much addicted to the use of cocaine, and there were several stores in the negro quarter there were supposed to derive three-fourths of their income from the sale of cocaine-that is some people believe this; I cannot say how true it is. This seems absurdly high to me, but I know they have, and do, sell a great deal of it. I have talked to their clerks about it, and they corroborate what I have heard in

a general way. The city found that in our poison law the word 'cocaine' is not included, and they went to work and passed an ordinance prohibiting the sale of it in the city and some of the stores immediately established branches just outside the city limits and ran cocaine joints there. Then they came back at them under State law and made it apply. They appealed to me as State Chemist and member of the State Board of Pharmacy to see whether it was not adulterated. I have just finished some of my work on this line, and it has gone to the grand jury, and they have been indicted and held under very high bond. That cocaine I examined was twenty- five percent cocaine, and seventy- five acetanilide. But the darkeys seems to be very well satisfied with that kind of cocaine. I asked one of these darkeys about it-how it made him feel-and he said, "I can't say nuthin' bout it, boss, but it makes me feel like a H banker." [laughter] I do not know what an H banker is, but I suppose it is a high grade banker. I simply wanted to call your attention to our city ordinance and state law in regard to this matter.¹¹

Several articles at the turn of the twentieth century reference cocaine use among African Americans. Early references on the subject unanimously state that "by 1900, cocaine had become by far the most common hard drug taken by poorer blacks and the prostitutes." In addition to poorer Blacks and prostitutes, rapists and convicts would also be added to the list of Black cocaine users. For instance, an essay, entitled "The Increase of the Use of Cocaine among Laity in Pittsburgh," (1903) by professor of clinical medicine Thomas G. Simonton indicated Black convicts favored cocaine over any other drug at that time. This article goes on to discuss the availability of cocaine for Black people at the turn of the twentieth century in Pittsburg. Simonton asserts that "Negroes in Pittsburgh called one thoroughfare 'Cocaine Street.' In Pittsburgh at the turn of the century, cocaine was sold with "glass tubes for sniffing." In 1902 an

unknown author of an article titled “Cocaine Evil Among Negroes” somewhat prophetically stated that “physicians say that if the habit among the negroes is not suppressed and radical steps to this end taken very quickly it will mean the utter ruin and final extermination of the race in the south.” A 1908 *New York Times* article, by another unknown author, “Cocaine Forbidden in the U.S. Mails” stated that “It developed that in the south the habit had fixed itself to an alarming degree on the negroes.”¹²

One of the first recorded publications to directly discuss African American cocaine use was published in 1902, “The Cocaine Habit Among Negroes” by an anonymous author, in the *British Medical Journal*. James Bakalar and Lester Grinspoon (1971) mention White people’s fear that cocaine increased the strength of “Negroes” by referencing this article. Whites often believed that cocaine “increased [Negroes] cunning and strength and enhanced their tendency toward violence.” This attitude towards Blacks and cocaine use was mirrored and expanded upon in perhaps the most influential published report on African American cocaine use during the Progressive Era, “Negro Cocaine Fiends, New Southern Menace” published by Edward Williams in 1914. Williams serves as a prime example of writing on African American cocaine usage during this period in history.¹³

In “Negro Cocaine Fiends, New Southern Menace,” Williams also offered his explanation for why African Americans “dabbled” with cocaine during that time period. Williams believed that their lack of access to whiskey was the main cause in African Americans’ cocaine use. During an interview with an African American male cocaine user, Williams claimed that when asked, the man claimed that he used cocaine “cause I couldn’t git nothin’ else boss.” Williams claimed that Blacks could not get anything else to get high with, since laws were put in

place to keep poor Blacks from drinking whiskey. Based on fear of the “crazed Negro,” Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, and West Virginia passed laws intended to abolish the saloon and keep whisky and the negro separated.”¹⁴ In defending his point of view, Williams asked “Should anyone doubt that prohibition is directly responsible for the introduction, and increase, of cocaine-taking in the South? Hospital and police records show that during the prohibition period drug habits have increased with alarming rapidity. Physicians, officers, and ‘fiends,’ with very few dissenting opinions, attribute the rise of cocainism to the low-class negro's inability to get his accustomed beverages.” Is it possible that this African American cocaine user could have meant something different with this statement? Could he have been referring to his lowly status in American society and his inability to “git” ahead or his lack of access to “anything else” that brings him pleasure?

In the early years of the Progressive era, African Americans endured stifling amounts of oppression, discrimination and social isolation. “For the vast majority of African Americans, the Progressive Era was synonymous with a period of widespread Jim Crow segregation, unprecedented racial intolerance and violence, political disenfranchisement, labor restrictions, and economic exploitation.”¹⁵ In fact, the realities of African Americans during this time period could have been perceived as anything but progressive leading many scholars to refer to this period, for African Americans, as the “nadir.” As a result of these harsh realities, cocaine could have been desirable to African Americans more than other ethnicities of people due to these strenuous circumstances and their oppressed status. As noted in a *Chicago Tribune* article in 1903, “among the more debased negroes the use of cocaine in various forms has become most widespread, and the habit is on the increase.” The “brief euphoria” presented by cocaine could have been an escape from an otherwise deprived, depressing existence.¹⁶

Of all the references to Black cocaine use during the Progressive Era, Williams' claims in "Negro Cocaine Fiends" offer us one of the first and most important published reports dedicated exclusively to African Americans and cocaine use. Since it is believed that cocaine's significant presence in the United States did not occur until the late twentieth century, this article can also be considered one of the first articles of its kind all together. The commentary offered by Williams is the foundation for most historical writing about African Americans and cocaine use for generations to come. More writings about African Americans and cocaine use appeared only sparingly in the future.¹⁷

Situating the next significant period of writings that are specifically about African Americans and their cocaine use is a difficult task, since writing dedicated to this subject is so scarce. Books and articles dedicated exclusively to African Americans involvement with cocaine immediately following the Progressive Era are limited. During this period, the lack of writing on African Americans' and cocaine appeared to be caused by the increase in heroin use. When discussing American drug use during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, William H. James and Stephen L. Johnson say that "heroin addiction, concentrated in urban areas, constituted the largest drug problem in African American communities during this period."¹⁸

In *Heroin Use in the United States*, Timothy W. Kinlock, Thomas E. Hanlon, and David N. Nurco assert: "the 1950s were characterized by increases in heroin use among inner-city residents, particularly blacks and Hispanics." Heroin use after World War II increased throughout the United States; however, along with Hispanics, the number of Black heroin addicts dramatically increased with these two groups consisting of 51% of the heroin addict population by 1960. Kinlock, Hanlon, and Nurco credit this trend to changes in the ethnic composition of

inner cities. Following the Great Migration of an estimated 1,500,000 Black people from the South during the early part of the century, many African Americans found themselves settled in areas where heroin was easily accessible. Interestingly, Kinlock, Hanlon, and Nurco state that “most immigrants to inner cities worked in blue-collar jobs and avoided heroin addiction, many of their children did not.”¹⁹

Deindustrialization, which greatly impacted blue collar job opportunities during the mid-1950s, could have been the cause of this change in heroin addiction. With big industry and factory employment leaving the inner city, the Black community in some areas, such as Chicago and Detroit, began to wear down due to the depletion of economic resources. As noted by Detroit scholar Richard Thomas, “when the 1920-21 recession hit Detroit, 17,000 black workers found themselves on the streets with no jobs. Many had never experienced urban unemployment.”²⁰ Overall, community depression in some spaces caused by this decrease in economic stability contributed to second generation Black immigrants from the South’s increased heroin addiction. Poverty is “significantly associated with heroin use.”²¹

Conversely, another possible explanation for second generation heroin addiction could be increased financial status in comparison to first generation immigrants from the south. First generation Black immigrants from the South migrated to the northern industrial centers in search of employment and financial opportunities. For example, in the 1920s Black workers at Ford Motor Company in Detroit received an average wage of about 54.2 cents per hour compared to 26.5 cents per hour in the South. The ability of some of these immigrants to form working to middle class communities benefited their children. Initially, their financial status may not have afforded them the ability to purchase recreational drugs in comparison to their children whose

work ethic and financial outlook may have been different from the first generation. This idea is supported by the fact that most African American heroin users were between the ages of 15 and 21 for second generation Black immigrants. In most cases, this is too young to support a family and hold the same work ethic as one's parents; yet old enough to experience the benefits of one's elder's increased financial status.²²

Whatever the cause, during the mid-1900s, heroin was the drug of choice for Americans and African Americans, rather than cocaine. Referring to heroin use, John C. Ball and Carl Chambers (1970) reported that the number of Lexington Hospital patients admitted during each year of the period from 1950 to 1953 doubled that for 1946. This increase was particularly evident among Blacks, for whom the total for 1950 was twice the 1949 total and five times the 1948 total. During the 1950's, approximately one third of both male and female heroin admissions were Black, as opposed to 10-15% in earlier years. Black admissions were largely from New York City, Chicago and Washington D.C.²³

A second factor impacting the amount of scholarship written on African American cocaine usage was the lack of availability. Cocaine was practically unavailable for African Americans and the cocaine industry overall "had been a cottage industry largely limited to Chile" until the mid 1970s. James and Johnson state that even during the 1970s, "the high cost of 'powder' cocaine, used intravenously or intranasally, limited its use among African Americans." Thus, there may not have been much reason to write about Blacks and cocaine use. It was not accessible geographically or financially for African Americans. In 1971, James Bakalar and Lester Grinspoon wrote *Cocaine*. This book was about cocaine in general, discussing the drugs' creation and expansion across different parts of the world. Its only references to African

Americans and cocaine use concerned cocaine use during the Progressive Era. Other books and articles such as, *The Mugging of Black America* (1990), *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (1993), *Women and Crack Cocaine* (1993), *Doin' Drugs: Patterns of African American Addiction* (1996), *Cocaine: From Medical Marvel to Modern Menace in the United States 1884-1920* (2000), and "Jim Crow's Drug War: Race, Coca Cola, and the Southern Origin of Drug Prohibition" (2006) all mention African Americans and drug use; however, none of these narratives is dedicated solely to this issue.²⁴

In *The Mugging of Black America*, Earl Ofari Hutchinson briefly discusses cocaine's presence in the Black community, highlighting that cocaine abuse is not an African American problem but an American problem, "despite the carefully contrived impression given by the media". Hutchinson suggests that America's cocaine problem is lead and maintained by international politics, namely the American government beginning with the Reagan Administration. "The Reagan-Bush administration, for instance, provided Afghan insurgents with weapons, supplies, and cash to the tune of \$625 million, but looked the other way while the guerillas earned more cash through drug trafficking." While Hutchinson's examination is inclusive of America as a whole, he does specifically discuss the problems cocaine and other illegal drugs pose to the Black community.²⁵

Joseph Spillane's *Cocaine: From Medical Marvel to Modern Menace in the United States 1884-1920* discusses some of the various reports which mentioned African American cocaine use during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spillane discusses how African Americans received cocaine from their employers to increase productivity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Initially, cocaine was seen as a positive drug and a potent

tool which could be used for financial benefit. “Medical opinion, shared by most employers, held that Black workers were not only better able to endure physical labor but to endure environmental conditions that white workers could not. Cocaine supposedly increased these advantages, adding strength, endurance, and making the black user ‘impervious to the extremes of heat and cold.’ Again, the racist and ignorant beliefs and attitudes of Whites during this time period reveal themselves in connection with Blacks and cocaine use. According to Spillane, cocaine’s reputation would quickly change and reports began to caution against providing cocaine to African Americans.²⁶

Spillane cites an 1884 letter in the *American Druggist* as the earliest popular reporting of cocaine use in Dallas, Texas. This letter stated that “the use of cocaine embodied a social threat far beyond simple health effects and that the drug held a special appeal among blacks and in “the lower quarters of the city.” Many assumed that “the cocaine habit has assumed the proportions of an epidemic among the colored people.” These feelings motivated White’s action to keep cocaine away from African Americans. “Whites perceived cocaine taking as the manifestation of a newer, bolder attitude on the part of a “new generation” of young, urban Blacks. In 1900 the *Atlanta Constitution* complained that “negroes can be seen at any time on the streets or in the Police Court sniffing the white powder.” As was the trend throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, extremely racist and fearful views towards Blacks by Whites fueled their commentary on African American cocaine use. Both movements to provide cocaine to African Americans and take it away were fueled by racist stereotypes, fear, and overall ignorance. The belief that African Americans were “strong as mules” and born to work carried over from the days of American slavery. Therefore, the belief that cocaine use would make the

“working buck” that much more effective and productive would make perfect sense to White employers during that time.

African American men have been viewed by Whites as strong physical creatures for centuries. Whites have also been known to view Black males as “crazed,” violent, and “sexually aggressive” as discussed previously. The deep fear of unruly Blacks held by Whites during the early twentieth century greatly contributed to their overreaction to black cocaine use which ultimately led to their push to prevent African American’s use of the drug.²⁷

African American Women and Cocaine: The Progressive Era

“It is generally recognized that immoral women and their cadets [pimps] are addicted to the use of cocaine”-Vice Commission of Chicago, 1911²⁸

Historical writing about African American women and cocaine use, like African Americans and cocaine use overall during the Progressive Era, is scarce. However, references to African American women in connection with cocaine use during this era do exist and they mostly share the same theme. Virtually every reference to African American women using cocaine is connected to prostitution. In the previously cited meeting of the American Pharmacological Association in 1901, a member from Georgia stated that “almost every colored prostitute is addicted to cocaine.”²⁹

Spillane states that African American women’s introduction to cocaine was connected to prostitution. Further, Spillane states that, “some suggested that cocaine was a lure to prostitution, an idea often linked to the Progressive Era crusade against ‘white slavery.’ The fight against prostitution emphasized the victimization of young women, enticed or forced to prostitute

themselves by predatory white slavers. Entrapping women with a ready supply of drugs seemed to be an obvious way in which agents might, as one journalist described, ‘cunningly persuade young girls who have fallen into their power to take up cocaine.’ Spillane writes that “By 1900, cocaine had become by far the most common hard drug taken by poorer blacks and the prostitutes, black and white.” This claim is supported by other authors discussing African American women and cocaine use during this era. For example, Bakalar and Grinspoon, in *Cocaine: A Drug and its Social Evolution*, also support the notion that African American women’s use of cocaine was originally connected to prostitution. Citing a report from 1903 by the Committee on the Acquirement of the Drug Habit, they point out that the state of “Georgia reports almost every colored prostitute is addicted to cocaine.” This claim was not supported by any qualitative or quantitative research and is a clear illustration of the blatant racist climate of that time period.³⁰

Repetitive references to African American women and cocaine use in relation to prostitution make the historiography on their cocaine use very narrow. Information about African American women’s cocaine use during the Progressive Era in relation to something other than prostitution would be beneficial. Evidence exists which suggests cocaine was used for many different reasons during this era, by several segments of the population. In fact, “the best documented cases of cocaine abuse were white professional men, especially physicians.” Since cocaine was very popular among white professionals during this time, it would be interesting to find out if women who were considered Black elite, while small in number, used cocaine. Was cocaine use looked down upon by the Black elite because of its use by the poorer classes of Blacks and criminals? Were upper class Black women during this able to use cocaine for medicinal purposes like many Whites during the time? Answers to these questions are not found

in writings about African American women's use of cocaine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³¹

African American Men and Cocaine: The Progressive Era

As previously mentioned, one of the few and perhaps the most important and cited works discussing Black cocaine use during the Progressive era was "Negro Cocaine Fiends" in 1914. Williams discussed, what were considered at the time, some of the positive and negative aspects of Black male cocaine use. Williams clearly believes that the use of cocaine only enhanced or confirmed the racial stereotypes already held by Whites of this era. Medical opinion, shared by most employers, held that black workers were not only better able to endure physical labor but to endure environment conditions that white workers could not. Cocaine supposedly increased these advantages, "adding strength, endurance, and making the black user impervious to the extremes of heat and cold." These beliefs in cocaine and increased worker productivity were so strong that some believe "the popularity of cocaine in workplace settings dominated by black laborers, often promoted by employers, suggests one way in which the generalized use of cocaine could have begun in Black communities."³²

The generally accepted positive aspects of cocaine use among African Americans during the Progressive Era fail in comparison to the negative references and ideas Whites had about Black male "cocaine fiends." Around the turn of the century, Whites expressed a significant amount of fear of their white women being raped by "coke crazed" Black men. While the use of cocaine in the late nineteenth century was not unusual for the general population, Bakalar and Grinspoon note that negative ideas about the drug were connected to male African American users specifically. "It is obvious that the race issue exposed sometimes directly and sometimes in

the guise of a fear of crime, appears prominently in the condemnations of cocaine. Just as opium was associated with the Chinese in the drive to outlaw it, so cocaine was associated with blacks.”³³

Whites began to fear the power and effects of cocaine on Black men. Some whites during the progressive era believed that “cocaine made black men invulnerable to bullets.” Williams (1914) stated that while Whites used other drugs including opium and morphine “the negro drug fiend uses cocaine almost exclusively.” Williams argued that cocaine created “crazed negro fiends” who, among other unique qualities were criminals immune to bullets. Williams writes, “The drug produces several other conditions which make the fiend a peculiarly dangerous criminal. One of these conditions is a temporary immunity to shock--a resistance to the knockdown effects of fatal wounds. Bullets fired into vital parts, that would drop a sane man in his tracks, fail to check the fiend--fail to stop his rush or weaken his attack.” Williams provides a specific account by a police chief who reportedly encountered a “crazed negro fiend” firsthand. In describing his experience with the “crazed negro,” the chief was quoted as saying, “the crazed negro drew a long knife, grappled with the officer, and slashed him viciously across the shoulder. Knowing that he must kill this man or be killed himself, the Chief drew his revolver, placed the muzzle over the negro's heart, and fired- ‘Intending to kill him right quick.’ And a second shot that pierced the arm and entered the chest had as little effect in stopping his charge or checking his attack.”³⁴

Similarly, while detailing an alleged shooting spree by an African American male, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article from 1909 stated that the shooter “is believed to have been crazed by an overindulgence in whiskey and cocaine, and as a result of his rioting a crusade will be

started to prevent any more negroes getting either liquor or the drug.” Depictions such as this are the byproducts of historically rooted stereotypes about African American men. White Americans fears of Blacks are continuously exposed in newspaper articles and reports discussing African American cocaine use at the turn of the century.³⁵ In the south some police departments “convinced that black ‘cocaine fiends’ could withstand normal .32 caliber bullets reportedly switched to .38 caliber revolvers.” “They thought it increased the cunning and strength of blacks and enhanced their tendency toward violence-especially of course, sexual violence against white women.”³⁶

In 1910, a State department official responsible for drug policy by the name of Hamilton Wright is reported as saying that “cocaine is often the direct incentive to the crime of rape by the Negroes of the South, and other sections of the country.” The comments of these individuals are significant given the racial climate and horrific activities such as lynching during this time. Commonly, the excuse for lynching African American males during this period was accusations of raping White women. White men have famously had an exaggerated fear of their women being raped by sexually driven, wild African American males. Therefore, these comments show that White men were channeling that fear in connection to cocaine which presumably made this a serious issue. Those statements regarding African American males and cocaine use are among the earliest acknowledgements of the drug’s presence in the Black community.³⁷

Again, as was the racial climate of the time, it is clear that White Americans had a major fear of male Black “coke fiends” raping their women which was the popular belief in the beginning of the twentieth century. Michael Cohen expanded on this discussion in his article titled, “Jim Crow’s Drug War: Race, Coca Cola, and the Southern Origin of Drug Prohibition.” Here, Cohen cites the 1902 article “Negro Cocaine Fiends” that stated “Cocaine users themselves

did not become criminals until urban police and civic leaders in the New South generated a moral panic over the casual use of cocaine among urban blacks, blaming everything from rape to urban riots on the drug's influence. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the South's fear of Negro cocaine fiends running amok trumped the drug's commercial profits and medical benefits." The idea that fear of the male "Negro cocaine fiend" was able to cause businessmen to lose profits, illustrates the overwhelming feelings of panic and paranoia experienced by whites concerning cocaine use and Black men. Also, this action illustrates their strong belief that Black cocaine use was prevalent during this time. However, Cohen as well as Bakalar and Grinspoon agree that cocaine use was far more prevalent among whites, including white women. "Progressive reform measures focused on a single aspect of the complex social problem of mass drug addiction; by scapegoating Black male cocaine users, reformers overlooked the far more deeply rooted problem of an epidemic of narcotics addiction among southern white women at this time."³⁸

In reality, "the best-documented cases of cocaine abuse were white professional men, especially physicians." It is probable that black people used cocaine at a much lower rate than White people being that "they had less money and less access to physicians." In fact, "a report in 1914 on 2,100 consecutive black admissions to a Georgia insane asylum, for example, indicated that only two were cocaine users." Given the high probability that these Black insane asylum admissions were most likely poor and possibly vagrants, which was the presumed population of Black cocaine users, the fact that only two used the drug speaks to the probable lack of use throughout the community.³⁹

Although the writing on African American men and cocaine use during the Progressive Era is scarce, it appears to be unchanging. It is evident that at least some within White society

believed “Negro” cocaine use was common. Whether or not Black male cocaine use was actually common or a serious problem is not important since “in any case, the cocaine-crazed black dope fiend played an important role in the campaign to prohibit the drug.” This campaign to end the legalization of cocaine led to the Harrison Act of 1914. The Harrison Act “forced every opiate addict and cocaine user outside the law.” The public’s fear of cocaine also contributed to its “adamant anti-cocaine sentiment, which had reduced the drug’s appeal after the turn of the century.” According to Inciardi and McElrith, the Harrison Act coupled with the general public’s growing dislike for cocaine made it far less common, illegal, and basically an underground unpopular drug for decades to come. The prohibition and de-popularization of cocaine presumably drastically decreased African American consumption as well. Consequently, the already scarce writing about African Americans and cocaine use virtually disappeared after the Progressive Era until its re-emergence into the public during the last quarter of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

African Americans and Cocaine: The Mid-20th Century

The overall de-popularization of the drug in addition to it becoming illegal during the Progressive Era are among the factors that help explain the scarcity of writing on African American’s use of cocaine. The historiography on African Americans and cocaine use consists of minimal references during the Progressive Era and virtually no mention during the mid twentieth century. As discussed earlier, during the mid twentieth century cocaine use decreased among all Americans, particularly African Americans. David F. Musto offers this idea in an article, titled “America’s First Cocaine Epidemic.”⁴¹

Musto argues that America's first cocaine epidemic started in the late nineteenth century and ended shortly after the Harrison Act of 1914. Commenting on the end of the first cocaine epidemic, Musto writes "the public's adamant anti-cocaine sentiment, which had reduced the drug's appeal after the turn of the Century and resulted in legal restrictions, now facilitated operation of the laws. Unlike Prohibition, which was not backed by a public consensus, the Harrison Act, which Congress made more restrictive over the years, was largely successful." Musto posits that "of course some Americans continued to use it, but their numbers eventually shrank. By the time I was in medical school, during the late 1950s, cocaine was described to medical students as a drug that used to be a problem in the United States." Bakalar and Grinspoon appear to agree with Musto and believe that cocaine use and popularization decreased dramatically during the mid twentieth century. "Between 1930 and the late 1960s the use of cocaine and medical and general interest in the drug seem to have declined greatly." They suggest that "most of the books that deal with cocaine as a social issue or a clinical problem were published in the 1920s; most of the novels, stories, and memoirs that show familiarity with its recreational use are from the same period. Even in the first decade of the new drug culture's flowering, cocaine remained relatively unpopular, expensive, rarely available, and bracketed with heroin as a drug to be avoided."⁴²

According to James A. Inciardi, Duane C. McBride, and Hilary L. Surratt in "The Heroin Street Addict: Profiling a National Population," "from the 1920s through the late 1950s, heroin addiction was a visible part of the American drug scene." The authors also stated that "in 1965, based on the number of narcotics-related hepatitis cases being reported to the Centers for Disease Control, it appeared that an epidemic of heroin use was under way in the United States. Moreover, empirical studies of crime and drugs were finding that heroin users accounted for

growing proportions of felony arrestees in major metropolitan areas.” A 1969 article in the *New Pittsburg Courier* titled “Heroin Deaths in Nation Show Marked Rise” also spoke to the trend of heroin use during this period stating that “deaths from heroin rose to 28 within a 10 day period in New York City alone, with an increase in heroin deaths also being reported in other cities across the nation.”⁴³

According to William H. James and Stephen L. Johnson in their study *Doin' Drugs: Patterns of African American Addiction*, after 1914, “The Harrison Act put habit-forming drugs under federal control closed the drug stores that were dispensing addictive drugs, and for a time forced the sellers of these drugs underground.” Although Blacks’ use of cocaine decreased after the Progressive Era, drug use altogether in the African American community did not. James and Johnson note that the decreasing availability of cocaine after the Harrison Act along with the rising price of the drug led “African Americans to be numbered among those selling as well as using opium, heroin, and morphine.” In fact, in their discussion of African American drug use during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, James and Johnson say that “heroin addiction, concentrated in urban areas, constituted the largest drug problem in African American communities during this period.” There was not much availability of cocaine for African Americans, and the cocaine industry overall “had been a cottage industry largely limited to Chile” until the mid 1970s.⁴⁴

While the use of cocaine may have indeed decreased after the Progressive Era, its use likely did not entirely disappear. The gap in research on African American’s cocaine use from the 1930s and into the 1970s needs improvement. The likelihood of cocaine use completely ceasing, being that it was so highly addictive, is minimal. More research in the African American “underworld” during this time period would undoubtedly expose the presence of cocaine. If not

in the “underworld,” research on the recreational practices of the Black elite of this period could possibly bring cocaine use to the surface.

Conclusion

The historiography on African Americans and cocaine dates back to the early twentieth century. This scholarship does not include many books and articles dedicated solely to the issue of African American cocaine use. Writings about African Americans and cocaine during the Progressive Era were scarce. Positive references to African American cocaine use during this time would mention cocaine’s aiding in the believed “increased strength and endurance” of African American laborers. Writing about the negative aspects of Black cocaine use during this time far outweighed positive narratives. References to prostitution, sexual aggression, and an overall “crazed negro state” dominated comments made in writing about African Americans during the progressive era. This is not entirely surprising given the racial climate of the time. African American males were consistently victimized by way of lynching among other forms of crime and oppression. Enraged mobs of White men would seek an African American male under the pretenses of a rape accusation. Whether these accusations were true or false was not of any concern.

Interestingly, the references to Black cocaine use during this period pertaining to both males and females share the common theme of sex. Either in the form of female prostitution or male’s raping White women. This is a telling reality and again parallels the hyper sexualized attitude history shows us Whites have had towards African Americans.

The writings on Black cocaine use during this era only focused on poor Blacks and lacked any mention of other classes of African Americans who may have used cocaine. Also,

firsthand accounts from African American cocaine users themselves appear to be absent from writings during that time. Unfortunately, the absence of primary accounts and more in depth research on African Americans from all social classes during the progressive era severely limit and impair the writing from this period.

In the decades following the Progressive Era, writing about African American cocaine use virtually disappeared. This was due to many explanations, ranging from lack of use among African Americans to an increase in heroin addiction during the mid-twentieth century. Whatever the reason, writings about African American cocaine use were dormant until the later years of the twentieth century and the rise of cocaine in a hardened form called crack. Even more so than in the Progressive period, the mid twentieth century witnessed a severe lack of information about African American cocaine use. Without more information about cocaine habits concerning African Americans during this period, an accurate, efficient and fluid history of African Americans cocaine use in the twentieth century is impossible.

The arrival of crack cocaine in the United States, beginning in 1984, sparked a new trend of journal, periodical and full length scholarly text publications regarding crack cocaine. During the “crack era” of the mid-1980s and 1990s, crack was reported as a new dangerous drug and menace to society. Multitudes of newspaper articles were dedicated to this development. However, despite the consistent references of crack cocaine and African Americans in newspapers, academic journals, and occasional book chapters, since crack’s arrival there no scholar has produced a full length text focusing exclusively on the history of African Americans and crack cocaine.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BIRTH OF AN EPIDEMIC: RONALD REAGAN, “FREEWAY” RICKY ROSS

AND THE 1980s

“How we stop the Black Panthers, Ronald Reagan cooked up an answer”¹-Kanye West

“How you think the crack rock gets into the country? We don’t own any planes, we don’t own no ships. We are not the people who are flying and floating that shit in here.”²-Boyz in the Hood

Introduction

The decade of the 1980s was the offspring of the 1970s and the grandchild of the 1960s defined by the civil rights and Black power movements. The 1970s, recognized by many in the African American community for the Black power movement, will be widely documented in the annals of history as a positive decade for Black America, much like the 1960s. The story of African Americans during that twenty year span are filled with uplifting references to Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party of Self Defense, and an acknowledgement or widespread awareness of “Black is beautiful.” The Black power years, which “arrived on the national news scene” in 1966 and ultimately declined in 1975 when “many of the most vocal activists had been silenced, either willingly or otherwise...reveal that a distinctive group culture has continued to promote resistance to oppression and to facilitate the development of positive self-worth among those who have “grown up black” within white society.” During this period, Black power activists aimed to “preserve, not destroy. Its adherents vowed to fight racism through black solidarity. They would promote color consciousness, but in a positive way-to uplift their own group, not to tyrannize others.”³ As described by Peniel E. Joseph, “Black power activists trumpeted a militant new race consciousness that placed black identity as the soul of a

new radicalism.”⁴ Undoubtedly, African Americans still had a multitude of problems related to centuries of oppression. However, these stories of struggle are not the billboard for this block of Black history. As noted by Joseph, many reviewers of this time period believe that the Black power movement “contains virtually no redeeming qualities, except perhaps for its promotion of Black pride.”⁵ Although undoubtedly flawed in its over simplicity, analysis such as this-which primarily focus on this time period’s emphasis on the appreciation of the Black aesthetic-are a common theme concerning the Black power era. In stark contrast to the largely positive historical references to this era, the dominant theme of the 1980s and 1990s in regards to the Black community will be the history altering arrival of crack cocaine.

During the 1980s, African Americans witnessed extreme devastation, erosion, and long lasting harm to their communities. This period in history cradled the rise of crack cocaine, and its negative impact on the African American community remains present today. The wreckage and oppressive characteristics presented during the crack era, which began in the mid-1980s and lasted through the late 1990s, is another era in a string of periods of sadness, misery, and tribulation for Black people. This lineage of hurt includes the eras of enslavement, the nadir, and Jim Crow, which cover over four centuries of destitute conditions for African Americans. When one critically examines all the relative factors connected to the 1980s crack epidemic and its consequences, it is arguable that the crack era is the “fourth segment” of historical disaster for African Americans. Additionally, it also becomes evident that the crack era, particularly the social, economic, psychological, and environmental conditions which fostered it, are direct extensions of these previous eras of Black struggle.

In economically depressed areas, such as urban ghettos across the United States, the crack cocaine market became the leading supplier of financial opportunity for many. In

particular, young people began to see crack distribution as a means of employment. Scholar Carl Taylor speaks to this point in his 1989 offering *Dangerous Society*. In an interview with a young African American crack dealer, the motivations for deciding to deal crack cocaine are expressed. The young man stated “I didn’t do shit in school, my people ain’t got no paper. I tried to join the Marines, I couldn’t pass their written test. Ain’t got no transportation to get a job. So what’s a fella to do? You talk all that righteous shit, but you got a job. Got one for me? So I’m going to get with somebody rolling...that’s the only job for me.”⁶

The complexities attached to this market including, territorial disputes, thefts, violent crime, addiction, arrests, etc., created an environment that arguably revolved around the crack trade. Individually, a person addicted to crack has one goal throughout the day-find more crack. In many cases, an addict’s daily activities revolve around crack. This idea is supported by an admitted “crack junkies” in the documentary *J is for Junkie*. In this documentary, the interviewer, Corey Davis, interviews several crack addicts in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010. During these interviews, the crack addicts candidly described how their lives have been virtually ruined as a result of their abuse of crack cocaine. Each of the crack addicts interviewed were homeless and their physical appearances, attire, and speech suggested years of drug use, hard lives, and neglect of personal health. One interviewee, who claimed to have been on crack for 21 years, was missing multiple teeth; he attributed his missing teeth to crack cocaine abuse. He asserts that “dope make your teeth fall out...everybody you see that smoke crack can’t you see they teeth bout to fall out.” Another interviewee, a woman crack addict, claimed to have been on crack for nearly a decade. While explaining her addiction to crack cocaine she stated “I been walking these streets for about nine years, sometimes I got to sleep outside in the cold sometime I don’t have

shit to eat, but these are the sacrifices I made to in order to feed my addiction to crack cocaine, I lost control of my life.”⁷

If everything an individual does revolves around crack, one can deduce that getting someone “strung out” on crack cocaine can be used as a method of control. To take this idea of control further, Black communities across the nation are often distinct and separate from the rest of the city or other parts of town. Disproportionately, these areas are frequently occupied by low-income families, and plagued by high unemployment rates, low education, high crime, and drug infestation. These conditions are ripe for crack cocaine use and distribution and all of the baggage that comes with it. Therefore, individuals in these environments are highly susceptible to falling under the control of crack cocaine. The question remains-“who controls the crack?”

There is evidence which supports the notion that crack cocaine has purposely been placed in the inner cities of America. There is also evidence which supports the idea that the activities surrounding crack cocaine’s presence in Black communities (distribution, violence, prostitution etc.) are more harshly punished by the United States Justice Department and support a multi-billion dollar prison industrial complex. These theories are reasonable hypothesis given America’s history of dishonest dealing with African Americans and the resulting disproportionate numbers of Black people living in poverty, undereducated, incarcerated, and unemployed.⁸

This chapter not only discusses crack cocaine’s introduction into the United States, but also the societal conditions which preceded it, and more importantly, its method of arrival into this country. What is revealed is a sinister allowance of destruction by trusted government officials- the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Colonel

Oliver North, and Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. Specifically, it is painfully clear that African Americans were not only most directly impacted by the presence of this horrific drug, but in the minds of many, intentionally targeted to be victims as well beginning in the mid-1980s. Many African Americans believe that the United States government purposefully placed cocaine in predominately Black neighborhoods during the 1980s. This belief is grounded in common feelings of mistrust towards the government held by African American people that are as old as this country itself. In this chapter I highlight these varying conspiracy theories, based in governmental skepticism, and analyze their value. Additionally, this chapter also examines the impact former crack dealer “Freeway” Ricky Ross had on the nation-wide spread of crack cocaine in African American communities. Ross is believed to have been connected to the CIA and a participant in their financially lucrative and socially destructive international cocaine distribution operation. In this chapter, the complex relationship between Ross, the government, and international characters will be examined. Also, Ross’ millionaire status and the resulting influence he has had on the Black community is a topic of discussion.

The Setting: The 1970s and 1980s

“Despite a high rate of poverty in ghetto neighborhoods throughout the first half of the twentieth century, rates of inner-city joblessness, teenage pregnancies, out-of-wedlock births, female-headed families, welfare dependency, and serious crime were significantly lower than in later years and did not reach catastrophic proportions until the mid-1970s.”⁹ This analysis of the ghetto by Dr. William Julius Wilson, in 1987, illustrates the conditions of many African American urban poor in the 1970s immediately preceding the arrival of what would prove to be its most lethal adversary-crack cocaine. This portrayal of the ghetto describes an area and a people that are on the margins of society, and experience life outside of the “norms” of majority

culture. Renowned social scientist Dr. Kenneth Clark adds this analysis of the ghetto, “the symptoms of lower-class society affect the dark ghettos of America-low aspirations, poor education, family instability, illegitimacy, unemployment, crime, drug addiction, and alcoholism, frequent illness and early death...but because Negroes begin with the primary affliction of inferior racial status, the burdens of despair and hatred are more pervasive.”¹⁰ The chore of living under these social, physical, and psychological constraints understandably creates an atmosphere conducive for any behavior which proffers relief or an escape from a hellish reality. The fusion of this environment and the overwhelming availability of crack cocaine, to either sale for economic gain or use for a euphoric intermission from strife, produce explosive results.

“After World War I and continuing into the 1960s, a massive wave of African Americans migrated to cities in pursuit of industrial jobs. They were forced into a few increasingly crowded, dilapidated neighborhoods through violence, restrictive covenants (from 1900 until a 1948 Supreme Court decision), and discriminatory practices by real estate agents. Meanwhile, white families were moving to segregated suburban areas, especially following World War II.”¹¹

In the 1970s “with legal segregation finally gone, thanks to the civil rights movement, upwardly mobile black families headed for the suburbs.”¹² By 1980, deindustrialization caused numerous American workers to lose their jobs nationwide, and in many inner cities, “factories and retail outlets...had closed shop, leaving empty lots and burned out-buildings in their wake. The dominant retail outlets by the early eighties were bars and liquor stores.”¹³ However, like most other harsh realities in the United States, African Americans were most severely affected. African American men in particular usually were employed in the automobile, steel and rubber industries. Each of these industries was hit hard by deindustrialization.¹⁴ Additionally, “in virtually every case of recession, African American workers were the ‘last hired and first

fired.”¹⁵ After employers moved their businesses outside of the United States or at least outside of the urban city environment, many working class African Americans were left behind. Whites and upwardly mobile Blacks were able to relocate to find employment, while the formerly working class African Americans became poor and virtually isolated from employment opportunities and avenues to progress.

As noted by historian Robin D.G. Kelley, during the 1970s and early 1980s, “as jobs disappeared, so did most of the White and Black middle-class residents.”¹⁶ Researcher Gabriel Stepto describes the conditions of Black America in regards to the impact of deindustrialization in the 1970s by stating “a black middle class-including teachers, civil servants, politicians, doctors, lawyers, and corporate executives-has expanded dramatically since the 1960s, but a large percentage of urban blacks remain trapped in poverty. In a process known as “capital flight,” corporations have moved hundreds of thousands of high-wage factory jobs from America’s urban centers to suburban and rural areas and abroad to Mexico and Asia. The resulting deindustrialization has devastated the nation’s inner cities, drying up the employment opportunities once available to urban black workers.”¹⁷ Some scholars posit that this relocation of industry and employment nearly exclusively to middle class families not only denied the lower class economic opportunities, but also robbed them of cultural guidance and stability. As noted by Wilson, unlike the mid twentieth century, “today’s black middle-class professionals no longer tend to live in ghetto neighborhoods and have moved increasingly into mainstream occupations outside the black community...in the earlier years, the black middle class and working classes were confined by restrictive covenants to communities also inhabited by the lower class; their very presence provided stability to inner-city neighborhoods and reinforced and perpetuated mainstream patterns of norms and behavior.”¹⁸

Despite the inarguable hardships Black Americans faced throughout the 1970s, several Black progressive revolutionary groups such as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense were popular. Primarily, the early years of the 1970s “was marked by violence, militant campaigns, racial tensions, and new movements demanding social justice.”¹⁹ In 1970, “the Black Panther party and activists from the women’s and gay liberation movements organized the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, which attracted some six thousand people to the city of Philadelphia with the goal of rewriting the U.S. constitution.”²⁰ Unsurprisingly, these revolutionary and rebellious acts by Black activists groups annoyed many in middle class White America. In combination with drastic societal and legal changes witnessed during the 1970s, this continued “rabble rousing” by Black militants was viewed as unnecessary and “overkill” to many Whites—a reality that politicians used to their advantage.²¹

One of Nixon’s campaign promises was to get rid of “troublemakers,” especially militant Black nationalist organizations like the Republic of New Afrika, the National Committee to Combat Fascism, the Black Liberation Front, and the Black Panther Party—whom FBI director J. Edgar Hoover once called “the greatest threat to the internal security of this country.” During the Nixon years, the FBI and local police forces intensified their efforts to squelch dissent of any kind. And it did not matter if their tactics were legal or not. In Chicago, for example, local police not only raided the headquarters and homes of black activists frequently but they also kept files on prominent outspoken African Americans, including future Presidential candidate the Reverend Jesse Jackson. At the time, Jackson led Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity), a fairly mainstream grass-roots organization that sought to help African Americans get off welfare, find jobs, and motivate poor children to stay in school. Jailings, beatings, and constant surveillance

conducted by local police and the FBI were part and parcel of what most political movements during this had to contend with.²²

The surveillance and repressive activities towards Black activists groups by government officials such as the FBI in the 1970s, which were apparently endorsed by President Nixon, would add fuel to conspiracy theories accusing the government of intentionally flooding predominantly poor African American neighborhoods with crack cocaine in the following decade. “Many African Americans and movement sympathizers believed that federal, state, and local governments arrested activists on false charges in order to stop them from protesting and organizing.” Similarly, many African Americans would later feel that crack cocaine was a tool used by the government to suppress Black activism and progression.²³ Further, “the release of secret files of the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) and the voluminous files local police departments kept on suspected dissidents revealed that some activists were indeed jailed and harassed because of their politics”—often, pro-Black politics.²⁴

Regardless of whether or not crack cocaine would enter the communities of urban Black America as part of a complex government conspiracy, the reality is that crack appeared and brought devastation, despair and misery along with it. Further, while the Black power movements, revolutionary ideologies, and activism of the 1970s certainly did not entirely disappear in the 1980s, however the presence and impact of these happenings most definitely declined as crack cocaine entered the lives of many Black Americans. The social, economic, political and environmental climate of the 1970s and 1980s unfortunately established the perfect foundation for crack to build its empire of destruction in urban Black America.

The Arrival of Crack

The economic, social, and environmental climate of urban poor African American communities was established and unwittingly prepared for the arrival of its new enemy and best friend: crack cocaine. As noted in 1990 by John E. Jacob, former President and CEO of the National Urban League:

The decade of the 1980s saw a sharp increase in the proportion of black children living in poverty, in single-parent households, and in homes where the family head is unemployed. The 1980s also witnessed the crack invasion of our neighborhoods, a virtual epidemic that threatens the future of our young people. Despite the rhetoric about wars on drugs, treatment centers are understaffed and underfunded. The explosion in drug trafficking has resulted in some big-city clinics having backlogs that require waits of 15 months for admission.²⁵

Crack is a purified form of cocaine that after a few minutes produces “an intense but brief euphoria.” Preparing crack is a very easy process, and requires only powder cocaine, baking soda or sodium bicarbonate and water. All ingredients are mixed together and boiled until the water evaporates creating small crystalline pebbles or rocks. Users smoke crack in pipes or other improvised devices such as soda cans. Crack gets its moniker from the crackling sound it makes while being smoked.²⁶ Similar to the turn of the twentieth century and cocaine’s popular use among poor Black people, crack cocaine would become the drug of choice for the contemporary urban poor during the mid-1980s until the turn of the twenty-first century. While crack cocaine use and distribution in the Black community remains widespread, the endemic proportions of crack activity witnessed during the last fifteen years of the twentieth century have slowed

considerably; this is likely due in large part to the stifling effects of mass incarceration because of harsh crack sentencing laws and a generation of Black youth who witnessed the horrors of crack use by their elders and avoided this behavior.

The emergence of crack cocaine in areas such as these described is due to several factors in addition to its overwhelming availability in inner city neighborhoods. Every state, and big city alike, has a “ghetto” or an area of concentrated poverty. Many of these areas are occupied primarily by African Americans; this reality allowed crack cocaine to become endemic in every corner of the United States beginning in the 1980s onward.²⁷ One explanation for crack’s rise is its affordability among the urban poor. Crack was “typically sold in tiny vials or envelopes that cost between \$5 and \$20.”²⁸ Crack also became popular because in comparison to other drugs, such as heroin, “it is much more convenient to use, because it does not require needles.”²⁹ Other contributing factors to crack’s emergence is its extreme addictiveness, extremely intense “high” and almost instantaneous euphoria experienced by the user. “Crack cocaine is nearly always 10-20 times more potent than the available street cocaine. Additionally, the crack ‘high’ is extremely intense and almost immediate in onset.”³⁰ According to researcher, William T. Atkins, “crack reaches the brain in less than 30 seconds.”³¹ Further, “researchers report that the average heavy crack user will become addicted within 2 weeks, as compared with an average of four years for persons to become addicted when snorting cocaine.”³² Human beings yearn for feelings of joy and happiness and utilize many methods to achieve those emotions. For those existing in positions virtually prohibited from “normal” means of attaining happiness, convenient “deviant” methods of acquiring pleasure will be employed-making crack an attractive panacea.

Cocaine made its comeback in the United States beginning with the rise of drug lords like Escobar, Ochoa, and Lehder in Colombia beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These

drug traffickers began to send large amounts of cocaine into the United States. According to authors James and Johnson, “by 1980, the DEA estimated that the cocaine trade brought \$7 billion annually into southern Florida...large amounts of cocaine were coming into the United States, and much of it was heading directly into African American communities.” This flooding of the black community with cocaine became the foundation for the “crack era” or crack epidemic of the 1980s and beyond. “Crack first received major media attention in 1984.” Scholars like Patricia Turner have suggested that crack’s introduction into the Black community was a government plan to destroy African Americans. As will be discussed later, several scholars, former law enforcement officers, and many in the larger African American community have intriguing reasons why they believe this to be true. Unfortunately, given the racist, antagonist position of the government towards Blacks, these “conspiracy theories” deserve attention and analysis.³³

James and Johnson (1996) connect the influx of cocaine in the United States with Colombian drug cartels and their domestic drug market. “By 1983, in Medellin, Colombia, 80 percent of the drug users had switched to a smokeable form of cocaine base called *bazukos*. This type of cocaine is highly addictive. Soon those who marketed cocaine found a way to chemically transform the cocaine base into a more purified form called ‘crack.’ It became the mass-market drug on which the Colombian cartel placed their hopes.” By the mid-1980s, African American communities across the United States were in the midst of a crack epidemic. In 1985, the number of people who admitted using cocaine on a routine basis increased from 4.2 million to 5.8 million. Also, “in 1985, cocaine-related hospital emergencies rose by twelve percent, from 23,500 to 26,300. In 1986, they increased 110 percent, from 26,300 to 55,200; between 1984 and 1987, cocaine incidents increased 400 percent. By 1987, crack was reported to be available in all

but four states in the United States.” A report published by the Arizona Center for Health Statistics states that African Americans had the highest rate of drug related deaths between 1985-1995, with crack cocaine being the most popular drug of choice. According to this report, “Cocaine-type drugs were responsible for the majority of drug-related deaths among Blacks. The eleven-year rate of cocaine-related deaths among Blacks (2.8/100,000) was 4.7 times greater than that of non-Hispanic whites or American Indians.” Hutchinson also adds that of all emergency room admissions for cocaine addiction African Americans make up 55 percent. The history of African Americans’ relationship with cocaine is over a century long. There have been many changes over the years in the ways African Americans have been involved with cocaine.³⁴

The rate that African Americans began using and distributing crack cocaine during the 1980s was alarming and could not be ignored. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reported that in 1991, one out of eight African Americans had tried crack cocaine.³⁵ According to Earl Ofari Hutchinson, in his study *The Mugging of Black America (1990)*, “in the minds of white America the typical drug user is a Black, male, high school drop-out, unemployed, and living in a large urban ghetto.” As a result of this image and the reality of large amounts of cocaine in the black community, “African Americans bear the brunt of crime, disease, death, and prison that result from the lucrative trade.” This image is also likely responsible for Whites virtual lack of concern for this catastrophic issue of crack cocaine in the Black community. If an individual believes that crack addicts are those who live on the margins of society, it makes it easier to accept them staying there. These “ghetto”, uneducated, unemployed, Black people are “different” and separate from White society therefore out of sight and out of mind. Many Whites’ feelings of Black inferiority, based in historical racism, could have also created a self-fulfilling prophecy related to African American strife. If you already assume a certain people

will not succeed and live a certain way, then you may fail to see the causal explanations for their situation-even when they are right in front of you. It is also worth noting that if White America's view of the typical crack user is indeed this negative, then it is not difficult to believe in conspiracy theories accusing a White administration of "sacrificing" this section of the community for economic and political gain.³⁶

Some have blamed the "crack epidemic" within the African American community on a conspiracy by the predominately White United States Government to specifically destroy Black people. In *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* (1993), Patricia Turner discusses why African American cocaine use became an epidemic by examining various conspiracy theories which are prevalent in the Black community. While Turner's work is certainly limited by a small sample size and its dependence on hearsay, Turner's research is useful because it offers a glimpse into the collective consciousness of African Americans regarding the crack epidemic. Much of Black America believes that neighborhoods predominately populated with African Americans were targeted by the White U.S. government as locations to distribute crack cocaine. This theory of purposeful cocaine infestation in Black neighborhoods fits perfectly within the context of the overall belief that they (White people) "will do anything to keep the black race down." Turner asked several individuals to "describe any theories you may have heard linking drug abuse among blacks to a white conspiracy or plot." Most of her respondents noted that either "the government," "the powers that be," or "higher ups" were conspirators in infesting the African American community with crack cocaine. Turner reports that 10 percent of respondents cited the CIA as responsible for this problem, and another 10 percent cited the Reagan Administration specifically as the major conspirator.³⁷

Among other responses cited by Turner, one respondent stated that “I’ve heard that it is the work of the government or an even more powerful group to destroy the black race with drugs, mainly the powerful artificial substance today-crack cocaine. It is an effort to rid the country of an unwanted element. Crack cocaine became a major problem during the term of Ronald Reagan, as did an increase in black on black crime. Some say he is the devil in human form.” Another respondent stated that “I have heard on several occasions that drugs were brought into black communities by whites so that the blacks could be controlled. Blacks would die out due to the power struggle in the drug market.” Interestingly, many respondents to Turner’s questions about possible conspiracies would point to “illegal drugs” overall; however, when asked specifically what drugs were involved in the conspiracies most specified cocaine, crack cocaine, and heroin. This illustrates a clear connection between conspiracy theories involving drugs and African Americans-with crack cocaine as the particular drug of emphasis. Perhaps the most popular and significant publication attempting to expose the alleged connection between government corruption and crack cocaine is Gary Webb’s *Dark Alliance* (1998).³⁸

Reagan, the Nicaraguan Contras and “Freeway” Ricky Ross

In *Dark Alliance*, Webb presents a persuasive and document driven argument accusing the government of being directly involved with crack cocaine’s importation into the United States. While exposing a complex system of cooperation between international drug cartels and United States government officials, Webb also manages to express the particular consequences of this corruption for Black Americans. Webb states, “Dark Alliance does not propound a conspiracy theory; there is nothing theoretical about history. In this case, it is undeniable that a wildly successful conspiracy to import cocaine existed for many years, and that innumerable

American citizens-most of them poor and black-paid an enormous price as a result. This book was written for them, so that they may know upon what altars their communities were sacrificed.” Webb’s assertions are explosive and jaw dropping. The possibility that African Americans’ very own government has basically plotted against them in the late 20th Century is as much heart wrenching and disgusting as it is sadly unsurprising and somewhat expected. The fashion in which Webb presents his research, leads one to believe that the reality of crack cocaine plaguing African American communities, by way of United States government conspiracy, is not at all a theory, but a depressing and staggering fact.³⁹

Expectedly, claims as controversial as Webb’s created a mixture of passionate responses from activists, law enforcement officials, and his colleagues in the print media. Many praised Webb for his investigative efforts when he first published his findings in *The San Jose Mercury News* in 1996. In fact, Webb was given the esteemed Journalist of the Year Award in 1996. Conversely, several others have challenged Webb’s findings and criticized his work. The managing editor of the Northern California chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists proposed that Webb’s award be stripped in 1997.⁴⁰ Webb’s employer, *The San Jose Mercury News* removed Webb off the story while he prepared to release a second part to his report; this action was apparently in response to the criticism and pressures from the journalistic world and beyond. As reported by journalist Howard Kurtz in 1997, “editors at the California newspaper have yanked Webb off the story and told him they will not publish his follow-up articles. They have also moved to transfer Webb from the state capital bureau in Sacramento to a less prestigious suburban office in Cupertino.”⁴¹ The executive editor at *The San Jose Mercury News* stated that Webb’s efforts with the story “fell short of my standards.”⁴² In Webb’s defense, the

litany of evidence to support his claims—in the form of testimonies from alleged CIA officials, law enforcement, and drug dealers—effectively counter the criticisms he received.

According to Webb and his supporters, during the Reagan administration of the early 1980's, a group of rebels sought to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. These Nicaraguan rebel groups were called Contras. President Reagan, an ideological supporter of the Contras' cause, wanted to offer financial assistance to these groups. Reagan viewed the contras as "allies in the global fight against communist subversion."⁴³ However, Congress did not agree with Reagan's plea to support this movement, and consequently passed multiple bills to halt funds intended for the Contras. Despite this opposition, with the "silent" approval of President Reagan, Colonel Oliver North "was found to have sold weapons to the Iranian government, supposedly an enemy of the White House, in order to raise money for the contras."⁴⁴ Additionally, Reagan, North, and the CIA "also approved and supported the Contras' trafficking of cocaine into the United States."⁴⁵ Specifically, Nicaraguan and other Central American drug dealers in the United States were allowed to send boat and plane shipments of guns and money to the contras. In return, the contras would send shipments of cocaine back to the United States.

Film maker Kevin Booth's 2008 documentary *American Drug War: The Last White Hope* seems to corroborate Webb's serious allegations. *American Drug War*, consists of several interviews with individuals including former DEA agents, LAPD narcotics officers, gang members and former crack dealers. This documentary tells a story which is nearly identical to the declarations made by Gary Webb in *Dark Alliance*- ultimately alleging that the Reagan and Bush administrations knowingly allowed cocaine to be imported in the United States.⁴⁶ As discussed in this film and introduced by Webb, a Venezuelan man, Danilo Blandon, was displaced from his

home country of Nicaragua, and came to the United States to raise money “to aid the contras in ridding his home from the invading Sandinistas.” Eventually, Bandon became involved with cocaine distribution as his method of contributing to the contras’ cause. As Bandon himself stated, “what-ever we were running in L.A., the profit was going to the contra revolution.”⁴⁷ This activity was apparently allowed by the CIA under the approval of President Ronald Reagan.

Booth, the film’s creator and narrator, argues that the storied connection between the United States government and cocaine is in relation to the infamous Iran-Contra affair of the mid-1980s. “The Iran Contra affair was one of the biggest scandals in United States history. Members of the Reagan administration, headed by Oliver North, engaged in the sale of arms to Iran. The proceeds from these illegal deals were being used to fund the contras, a right wing gorilla group who Reagan referred to as his freedom fighters. The contras were fighting the Soviet backed Sandinistas for the domination of Nicaragua.”⁴⁸ Reagan’s attraction to this fight was politically based. The fight between the contras and the Sandinistas was viewed as a fight against communism which was a major issue to Americans in the 1980s. Former DEA agent Celerino Castillo III, candidly recalls his involvement with these activities. “The [Iran-Contra] mandate was to investigate the sale of missiles to Iran...George Bush senior came to Guatemala on January 13, 1986 and he approached me and asked me what I did, what my job description was, and I told him I was a DEA agent working international narcotics investigations, and I told him look, ‘we have gathered intelligence that the contras are involved in drug trafficking down in El Salvador.’ And then he just smiled, shook my hand, and walked away from me. It was then and there that I knew my government knew these atrocities were occurring.” He goes onto say, “I remember down in Central America we were refueling planes full of cocaine coming into the U.S. and it was a CIA operation being run by the White House.”⁴⁹

In another scathing indictment of the United States' government, CIA, and DEA, regarding their connection to cocaine trafficking, former DEA agent Michael Levine's *The Big White Lie* (1993) blatantly accuses these government factions of flooding America's streets with cocaine. As cited by Levine, United States Senator John Kerry, while speaking during the 1988 Iran Contra Senate Hearings, stated that "our system of justice had been perverted; that [our covert agencies] had converted themselves into channels for the flow of drugs into the United States."⁵⁰ His detailed accounts further fuel an atrocious and disturbing theory-that the United States government is responsible for the crack epidemic that has severely wounded the African American community possibly beyond repair. Levine clearly states "for decades, the CIA, the Pentagon, and secret organizations like Oliver North's Enterprise have been supporting and protecting the world's biggest drug dealers."⁵¹

There is a preponderance of evidence alleging that the illegal, self-serving, and unpatriotic activities of President Reagan and his administration, if in fact true, forcefully and directly spearheaded the crack epidemic in the United States' inner cities.⁵² More specifically, the large quantities of cocaine used to fund an illegal war in Nicaragua ultimately surfaced on the streets of predominately African American ghettos. The President of the United States of America, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and a Colonel in our beloved Armed Forces, are all accused of conspiring to allow tons of an illegal, potentially deadly narcotic to flood African American neighborhoods across the country. In fact, "Reagan's determination to help the Contras became one of the main themes of U.S. foreign policy throughout his presidency."⁵³ As appropriately stated by United States Congresswoman Juanita McDonald, "The mere idea that our government could have, in any way, been involved in the distribution of this horrendous drug though-out our community is repulsive."⁵⁴

Webb discusses how the influx of crack cocaine in the African American community specifically impacted African American males. Of particular importance was one African American male by the name of “Freeway” Ricky Ross. Ross was a South Central L.A. resident who became the biggest crack cocaine dealer in the area by working with associates of the United States government. While Ross is identified as the biggest “tool” used by the government to flood the Black community with crack, other African American male crack dealers would participate as well. The severity and extremely negative impact of “Freeway” Ricky Ross’ crack dealing was not only the result of his personal activities, but also his influence on other young impressionable, socially deprived Black males in his community. As a result of the “guns for cocaine” operation happening between the United States and Nicaragua, an illiterate, poor, African American from California became a multi-millionaire, urban legend and drug dealing pioneer during the 1980s-“Freeway” Ricky Ross.

Ricky Donnell Ross, better known as “Freeway” Ricky Ross, became the final character of a large cast responsible for introducing crack cocaine to the “ghetto.” Ross, by his own admission, was “illiterate...uneducated, uninformed, unemployed” and therefore presumably ill-equipped to understand the cultural genocide he was preparing to contribute to. Additionally, his status as one of the marginalized African American urban poor made him “ripe for the picking” as an over paid puppet for the U.S. officials. This relationship would make history and create an opportunity for contemporary scholars to retrospectively analyze political corruption and the “horrific social consequences of crack cocaine.”⁵⁵

According to his personal website, as a youth, Ross was not a criminal and had dreams of becoming a tennis player.

As a youth, Donnell Ross moved to South Central Los Angeles with his mother with the intent of playing tennis which he pursued a scholarship while attending high school. Unfortunately, his coach would later find out he was illiterate and removed him from the school. Ross then attended Los Angeles Trade Technical College and again pursued tennis, reaching the 3rd spot on the team. Shortly after, at the early age of 19, Ross said a teacher, who taught at a job center, turned him on to cocaine. Because he looked up to him, Ross started selling cocaine for him. The money was good so he ended up starting his own business. His operation grew and he soon became one of the biggest cocaine dealers in South Central.⁵⁶

“Freeway” Ricky Ross, by some twist of fate, was introduced to Danilo Blandon, the displaced Venezuelan contra supporter and cocaine dealer with CIA connections, and became the distributor of tons of cocaine throughout the Black community. According to a former secret service operative from San Jose, California, once the shipments of cocaine returned from Nicaragua, “they gave all the coke to Norwin Meneses and Danilo Blandon, who was a CIA asset. He in turn fronted all that stuff to Ricky Ross. Ross became the Wal-Mart of crack, distributing to the Bloods and the Crips and everybody else all over the country. They fucked up all of California with the crack epidemic.”⁵⁷ Ross’ exploits, which allowed him to make millions of dollars and gain local and national notoriety, promoted similar activity among other young African Americans during that time and for generations to come.⁵⁸ In fact, “Police say he was among the first to take expensive cocaine powder and cook it into low cost highly addictive crack.”⁵⁹ By his own admission, Ross states that “People would come and buy the powder but they didn’t have the cooking utensils, they didn’t have the stuff to cook the powder, so the idea

came to me to have what I called ready rock so they could start cooking immediately...I was the guy who taught the most people how to rock it up.”⁶⁰

During an interview, Ross reveals that he started selling drugs to get him-self “in a better position.” He states that “I started to see the opportunities that the drug business offered as far as making money and I took advantage of it. I had about an 8 year run. It took a lot of dedication, determination, sacrifice, planning, a lot went into it, connection, putting my money back into it.”⁶¹ Ross is a prototypical example of how crack cocaine can be extremely alluring for those facing financial hardships, and how its presence can influence and infiltrate the minds, decisions, and ultimately life courses of young African American “ghetto youth.” Sadly, the example Ross set continues to be followed by thousands of African American youth of similar circumstance, and their families. As suggested by Ross, “everyone was in the game one way or another, grandmothers, grandfathers and the gangs got involved too, they started selling it.”⁶² This is a major reason why crack cocaine has had such a disastrous impact on the Black community for decades.

More evidence of Ross’ enormous and enduring influence is the presence and popularity of a rap artist who assumed Ross’ name and likeness. Multi-platinum recording artists, William Roberts, better known as Rick Ross, is a former corrections officer who raps about selling crack, powder cocaine, and other illegal activity. While much larger in physical size, Ross the rapper wears a signature beard and goatee identical to that of “Freeway” Ricky Ross which has become the emcee’s trademark. In fact, rapper Ross has a diamond encrusted likeness of himself in the form of a pendant displaying the now famous beard. In his first commercially successful song, “Hustlin,” found on his debut album *Port of Miami*, a reference to the infamous Miami shipping

ports where tons of cocaine are said to have been shipped in the 1980s, rapper Ross remarks “I’m into distribution, I’m like Atlantic, I got them motherfuckers flying across the Atlantic. I know Pablo, Noriega, the real Noriega he owe me a hundred favors. I ain’t petty nigga we buy the whole thang, see most of my niggas really still deal cocaine.” These lyrics are in direct reference to buying “Kilos” of cocaine and claiming to be an international player in the cocaine business—similar to the actual “Freeway” Ricky Ross. Rapper Ross goes on to rap that “we deal hard, whip it real hard, whip it whip it real hard.” Hard is a slang term for crack cocaine, and “whipping” is a reference to the process of stirring the cocaine, water, and baking soda in a pot to produce the crack rocks.⁶³

Interestingly, as a result of this song’s popularity, which is ultimately a testament to “Freeway” Ross’ influence, 9 year old recording artist- and daughter of iconic film star Will Smith and actress Jada Pinkett-Smith- Willow Smith, makes an indirect reference to this crack making process. In her wildly successful 2010 release, “Whip My Hair,” Smith sings “I whip it real hard, I whip it real hard, real hard, I whip it real hard.” While clearly innocently referring to the songs content of “whipping her hair,” this is a direct sampling of rapper Ross’ performance which is discussing crack cocaine. It is in subliminal manners such as this that crack has become sewn into the fabric of Black America’s sub-conscious, or at the very least, perceived as an issue not requiring much concern.⁶⁴

“Freeway” Ricky Ross does not authorize the use of his name, story and likeness by the rap artist Rick Ross. In fact, Ross has openly criticized the rapper for these actions in several interviews. When asked about the rapper Rick Ross, “Freeway” Ross responded “He’s never sold drugs, he’s never been involved with any type of crime, he was a college boy...he was a

prison guard...he has created a fraud and he's perpetrating a lie."⁶⁵ Another rap artist has also borrowed part of Ross' moniker for his stage name- Philadelphia based rapper "Freeway." Freeway is a reference to using the highway or freeway for interstate cocaine distribution. In his song "Crack Rap 2," Freeway recites "I get the drugs through...I'm getting street money" on the chorus he chants "I solemnly swear to bake the cake, and after that take the cake from state to state...and after that then I make the cake to crack, and after that I take it straight to the block, then I flood em with the rocks I know them smokers can't wait."⁶⁶ Unlike rapper Rick Ross, "Freeway" Ricky Ross does not mind the Philadelphia rapper's borrowing of his "Freeway" nick- name as he considers him a friend-due to their interactions while incarcerated.⁶⁷ Regardless, this is another tribute to the pervasiveness of "Freeway" Ricky Ross' influence on young Black men, hip hop and popular culture.

Ross claims that he was not initially aware of his connection and partnership with the CIA and the contra revolution in Nicaragua. In fact, it was not until he was personally given a copy of Gary Webb's previously mentioned *Dark Alliance* (1998) by the author himself that he became privy to his role in a government operation. Ross once stated, "I read *Dark Alliance*, I got a copy personally from Gary Webb personally himself and to read the book-it was fascinating for me you know, to find out that I was connected with the CIA and all these high powered people up in the government."⁶⁸ As stated by Castillo, "Ricky Ross was just lucky, he just happened to get a source that was connected to the CIA."⁶⁹

To be clear, it is not alleged that the government and CIA were directly selling crack to Ross-Webb accuses them of selling Ross cocaine which he turned into crack for sale. As noted by former LAPD narcotics officer Mark Ruppert, "for a long time in South Central, the

buzzword was that the CIA was selling crack. I said, 'no the CIA wasn't selling crack, the CIA was importing cocaine-Ricky Ross got it, turned into crack and he sold it.'⁷⁰ Ross' crack sales and cocaine distribution to other dealers reached much further than just California. Ross' crack operation spread all over the United States. He targeted "ghettos" in several major cities including Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, New Orleans and St. Louis. At his height, he claims to have made \$2-\$3 million a week on average and as much as \$2 million in a day selling crack and cocaine. This fruitful enterprise was allegedly sponsored by the leaders of the United States of America.⁷¹ In an interview with *Russia Today*, a global news channel broadcasting from Russia and Washington, Ross plainly describes the government's involvement with cocaine trafficking to the United States. Considering his proven direct involvement with this activity, his informal testimony is credible.

"The government needed this money to fight this war in Nicaragua against the Sandinistas. Russia had gave the Sandinistas \$100 million dollars to fight with. Congress had cut off all the money from the contras, so now the Sandinistas had an advantage. Reagan and Bush had made the Sandinistas their pet peive, they felt that if Russia took over Nicaragua they would be too close to America, they'd be in our backyard. I believe that they felt it was more valuable to sacrifice a particular sector of America and a race of people in America in order to save the whole country, so they let these guys open up pipelines. Danilo Blandon, Norwin Meneses, and the rest of the crew that worked with the Nicaraguan connection. I knew about ten or fifteen different Nicaraguans that was all inside of this contra organization that was selling drugs. So by them allowing these guys or basically turning a blind eye cuz I don't think the government necessarily gave them the drugs or what not, but in a sense they sanctioned it because they turned a blind eye.

They knew these guys were selling drugs and they did absolutely nothing about it. I also believe that had they not let these guys sell drugs, it's possible that I may not have ever been a drug dealer.”⁷²

In an unprecedented event on November 17, 1996, and in a direct response to the public's outrage regarding Webb's accusations- which were supported by Ross and a host of others- Central Intelligence Agency director John Deutch addressed these accusations during a town hall meeting in Los Angeles, California. Deutch admits that the United States, via the CIA, assisted the contras. He stated “we all know that the U.S. government and the CIA supported the contras in their efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government in the middle 80s.” While he admitted the CIA's involvement with the rebellion he vehemently denied that the CIA assisted with “introducing crack cocaine into California.”⁷³ Many of the attendants, consisting of many local residents among others, were given the opportunity to ask specific questions regarding this matter-thus, allowing an opportunity for local residents to passionately voice their frustrations and anger.

The first question posed to Dr. Deutch was by an African American woman. She passionately asked “Sir, I would like to know how this incident differs from what happened at my school, Tuskegee University, where for twenty years the government denied inflicting syphilis among African American men until they died and then they agreed that yes they had something to do with it so for twenty years we were told the same thing and these were able bodied men who had families and the government injected syphilis in them as a test to see what happened and they denied this for twenty years, so I want to know how this differs...so I want to know from you how what you are saying now differs when the government said that for twenty

years until the men were dead, because we are alive now.” This question, regarding the horrific “Tuskegee Experiment” during the mid-twentieth century, aroused an enthusiastic response from the crowd. The Tuskegee Experiment involved the United States Public Health Service’s false treatment of hundreds of African American males plagued with syphilis to better understand the disease. The Public Health Service (PHS) selected African American males in the late stages of the disease and pretended to treat them with a placebo medicine. This event contributed to many African American’s distrust of the government and medical field which still continues today.⁷⁴ Syphilis is a disease which, if left untreated, can destroy the body and eventually cause death; therefore, considering the disastrous effects crack has had on the Black community, drawing a parallel between this factual deception by the United States and this alleged wrong doing regarding crack cocaine is warranted.⁷⁵

The duration of this town hall meeting illuminates the seriousness of crack cocaine’s impact on the Black community as well as its feelings of frustration, anger, and mistrust towards United States government officials. Overwhelmingly, the attendees of this gathering, who were the residents of the community Webb, Ross and others accused the CIA of “flooding” with cocaine, exposed their belief in the United States government’s misconduct. Among the litany of questions and comments passionately and enthusiastically hurled at Dr. Deutch, there were four of particular interest and value. The first comment was stated by Ross’ co-defendant in his cocaine trafficking case-Chico Brown. Mr. Brown asked why Nicaraguan co-conspirators Danilo Blandon and Norwin Meneses were sentenced to short prison sentences in comparison to what him-self and Ross were facing-20 years and life respectively. He also accused the CIA of not only freeing Blandon, but also paying him \$166,000-Deutch deflected the answer of this question to the DEA.⁷⁶

Another comment of significance was delivered by a man who identified himself as a former LAPD narcotics officer. To the emphatic applause of the crowd he stated, “I will tell you director Deutch as a former Los Angeles police narcotics detective that the agency has dealt drugs through-out this country for a long time.” This direct contemptuous accusation strikes the heart of this issue. It is revelations such as these which give credence to Webb’s allegations, and the popular theories of governmental misconduct prevalent in Black communities. These feelings are obviously expressed by the crowd, as they cheer in support of such a statement. What is also telling, is the virtually non-existent reactions of shock or surprise by audience members. Such serious and alarming information should undoubtedly cause astonishment among the people—unless of course they consider it old news.⁷⁷

Thirdly, an audience member, James Otis, who claimed to be making a documentary about CIA secret operations, stated that he interviewed former CIA agents who were assigned “to murder the head of Cuba, Fidel Castro,” overthrow the government of Guatemala in 1954, spy on dark skinned and foreign students at Iowa State University, and poison the food supply in Cuba. He asked, “if we know all of this stuff that the agency has done historically, then why certainly should we believe you today when you say ‘certainly this could never happen in Los Angeles’ when this has happened all over the world?” The CIA director, Deutch’s, failure to rebuttal those alleged happenings is intriguing. This question captures the spirit of many in Black America concerning government officials beyond, yet including, the CIA. Widespread mistrust of law enforcement by African Americans is based in eternal racial conflict between the two groups. Racial profiling, unfair sentencing in court, and police brutality are among the reasons why this volatile relationship exists. As previously mentioned, many African Americans do not trust United States medical practitioners, because of the Tuskegee experiment among other

issues. Long disenfranchised and underrepresented, many African Americans also illustrate feelings of mistrust and disenchantment with the United States political system as well. Therefore, Mr. Otis' questioning of the CIA relative to their past indiscretions is indeed insightful and thought provoking. Further, it is worth noting that upon viewing Mr. Otis's film *Secrets of the CIA* (1998), his town hall meeting claims appear to be true.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Upon examining the arrival of crack cocaine into the African American community during the mid-1980s, several realities are exposed. It is clear that the completion of deindustrialization during the 1970s severely wounded residents of the inner city-predominately African Americans. Consequently, middle class flight, and the removal of employment opportunities in these neighborhoods resulted in the accelerated decay of these environments. By the 1980s, these devastated areas of America appeared hopeless.

Coincidentally, the strife occurring across urban America corresponded with an opportunity for politically motivated action by President Ronald Reagan and his administration. Unfortunately, for many inner city occupants, the war between the Sandinistas and contras was interpreted by the Reagan Administration as a war against communism, and thus prompted them into action. The apparent "turning of the head" while cocaine was imported into the United States in order to fund the contra's cause, placed a possibly insurmountable burden on ghetto America-crack cocaine.

As is customary, where there is struggle and suffering, someone is benefiting and prospering as a result. In this case, the United States government, contra supporters, and crack

dealer “Freeway” Ricky Ross were the primary beneficiaries from the hell delivered to the ghetto. African Americans appeared to have been the “sacrificial lambs” concerning this situation as stated by Ross, “our government will sacrifice its people to accomplish a goal, and this is not the first time that they’ve done that, we’ve known numerous times in our history that they have done that, especially the black man.”⁷⁹ At least in the beginning, Ross’ was a Black man who was benefiting tremendously via the sacrifice of the African American inner city community.

At the height of his crack dealing empire, Ross claims that “my property was probably worth 8-10 million dollars.”⁸⁰ He also claims that he “went from buying what we used to call an 8 track which was 3 *grams* to buying 100 keys at a time.”⁸¹ According to researchers Fryer, Heaton, Levitt, and Murphy, “powder cocaine was roughly \$100 to \$200 per gram.”⁸² Therefore, Ross claims to have initially been purchasing \$300-\$600 worth of cocaine-making him a small time dealer by all accounts. Another crack cocaine researcher, Maurice Rinfret, states that “at the beginning of the 1980s, the national wholesale price for a kilogram of cocaine hydrochloride ranged from \$47,000 to \$70,000. By the end of the 1980s, the national wholesale price dropped to between \$10,000 and \$38,000.”⁸³ At these rates, Ross’ claim to buy “100 keys at a time” would have possibly required a price tag ranging from \$1-\$7 million dollars. Ross also once stated, regarding his total accumulation of wealth from dealing crack, that “well at the height of my career, I was making at least a million dollars every day.” He continues by saying that “the prosecutor, he added it all up, it’s in the court records, he said I was worth like 600 million dollars.”⁸⁴ This is an astronomical amount of money for any individual, but even more astonishing when his method of acquiring this wealth is considered.

Ross' large income and success is evidence of the high demand for crack cocaine in predominately poor African American neighborhoods all over the United States. The motivation, opportunity, and strategic plan to sale crack, however, are not enough to create a widespread epidemic in any community. There has to also be a market for this drug in order to be successful. Obviously, poor Black people proved to be a market susceptible to becoming victimized by crack and all the associated troubles it carried along with it.

Any reasonable and fair analysis of the evidence connecting the CIA and government officials to the crack epidemic must admit that there is cause for alarm. Considering the personal testimonies of several CIA agents, police officers, drug dealers, and community residents, it is a fair assumption to surmise that dishonest and deceptive activity was afoot. Further, the less than spectacular history African Americans share with the United States government, gives these types of allegations more traction. Also, one must consider the eventual enactment of unfair laws which disproportionately impacted African American in regards to crack cocaine as additional proof supporting these claims.⁸⁵

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CHAPTER THREE

THE BLACK FAMILY'S INSIDIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH CRACK COCAINE, 1984-

2009

*"[Crack] destroyed our community, all the black men are in prison, most of us, the women are still strung out on the drugs, kids without fathers, without mothers...a lot of it is my fault, I played the game."*¹- "Freeway" Ricky Ross

Introduction

Since the early 1980s, crack cocaine's presence within the African American community has been causing serious problems. African Americans' relationship with this drug has been harmful in many ways. The pharmacological reaction to crack cocaine causes its users to suffer from the dangerous and dramatic effects on the human body and mind. Crack users may experience comas, convulsions, liver damage, and respiratory problems as well as many other serious ailments.² Further, the larger African American community has been negatively impacted by user behavior, the culture surrounding use and distribution, and the significant changes in law as a result of crack cocaine's prevalence in the United States. The Black family has been disproportionately impacted by crack cocaine's presence. African American women, the mothers, grandmothers, and often the caretakers of the Black family, are far too often unable to properly execute their role in the family due to crack addiction. These crack addicted women are more likely to engage in prostitution, neglect their children, and suffer from serious health issues-including early death.

Scholars Grace Xueqin Ma and George Henderson discuss some of the various reasons African Americans use crack cocaine in *Ethnicity and Substance Abuse: Prevention and*

Intervention (2002), paying particular attention to women. Ma and Henderson suggest that there are several reasons that African American women use crack cocaine. For one, they state “childhood adversity, including inadequate parenting” as a possible reason for cocaine use. “The initiation to drug use is more likely to occur when adversarial demands of life exceed a person’s adaptational capacity.” Henderson and Ma refer to an interesting study from 1993 on African American women who used crack cocaine. This study found that “a significant number of women who used crack cocaine have a history of sexual abuse and depressive symptoms. Those who were victims of incest or rape had greater drug use and were younger than women without such sexual trauma.”³ Ma and Henderson also suggest that “African American women, similar to African American men, may use drugs in large part in response to the stresses they face in their adult lives including conditions such as minority status and reduced economic, social and political expectations.”⁴

The significance of thoroughly examining the reality of African American female crack addiction and the issues surrounding it cannot be exaggerated. Most African American children are raised solely by their mothers; this makes the Black mother, in most instances, the head of the Black household. This position, while forced upon African American women for a variety of societal reasons responsible for Black males household absences, has historical roots that are centuries old. Many historians have described the Black woman as the matriarch or leader of the Black family beginning during enslavement. This was largely considered to be in response to the intensified oppression placed on Black men by white slave owners and society. This labeling is extremely problematic and historically inaccurate, yet contributes to Black male and female interaction today. As noted by Angela Davis, “the matriarchal black woman has been repeatedly invoked as one of the fatal by-products of slavery. When the Moynihan Report consecrated this

myth with Washington's stamp of approval, its spurious content and propagandistic mission should have become apparent. Yet even outside the established ideological apparatus, and also among black people, unfortunate references to the matriarchate can still be encountered."⁵ Historical assessments of the enslavement era which suggest an African American female matriarchal culture are overlooking key factors which render this analysis impossible. A matriarchy, by definition, is connected to power and control. Under no circumstances were slaves, male or female, granted power or control by any means; this would be contradictory to the institution of slavery.⁶ Further, the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse suffered by African American female slaves destroys any argument of their implied advanced status among the enslaved. This historical analysis of black female matriarchy is divisive and harmful to black male and female relations.

During the crack era and beyond, the suggested placement of African American females at the head of most urban Black households is a matter of fact-not misrepresentation. Statistically, in comparison to African American males, African American women are more likely to raise their children alone, less likely to become incarcerated, have higher rates of employment, college enrollment, and graduation.⁷ This is also partly due to many factors which contribute to Black father absenteeism. Additionally, as discussed by author Elaine Bell, the issues "Black men confront in a racist labor market make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for them to be good husbands and fathers. Black men are forced into low paying jobs or onto unemployment lines, or unemployment forces them into a life of crime, drugs, homicide, or suicide. As William J. Wilson and others note, these Black men have little opportunity to fulfill men's primary family obligations. These family obligations are related to what Jessie Bernard calls the "good provider" responsibility. Bernard asserts, "The good provider is a family man. He

sets a good table, provides a decent home, pays the mortgage, buys the shoes, and keeps his children warmly clothed."⁸ In response to an inability to fulfill these “manly” roles, many Black men apparently decide to not participate in the traditionally family unit.

Therefore, understanding the African American woman’s plight in order to improve their situations is imperative for the progress and improvement of the Black family and larger community. Analyzing their relationship with crack cocaine in particular and its disastrous consequences is of extreme importance. The harmful tentacles of African American’s relationship with crack cocaine stretch far and wide throughout various segments of the Black community. Tellingly, immediately before crack cocaine made its arrival in urban communities throughout the country in 1984, in 1982, 47 percent of African American children under eighteen were living in single mother households, but by 2002 that number rose to 66 percent.⁹ This is evidence of crack’s potential impact on the Black family structure.

Crack’s destruction to the Black family is also executed by way of damaging children’s relationships, perceptions, and identification with their addicted parents. An individual suffering from an addiction to crack, whether a male, female, mother or father, is rarely viewed as a respectable person in their families or community. This perception is not lost on the children of these addicts, and the resulting feelings of embarrassment, resentment, disrespect, and disgust have grave consequences. A young man or woman’s self image and view of the world are initially crafted by their identification with their parents. A parent is a child’s first role model, hero, and teacher. As noted by scholars Kristin J. Anderson and Donna Cavallaro, “one of the most important features of childhood and adolescence is the development of an identity. As children shape their behavior and values, they may look to heroes and role models for guidance. They may identify the role models they wish to emulate based on possession of certain skills or

attributes. While the child may not want to be exactly like the person, he or she may see possibilities in that person... Parents and other family members are important role models for children, particularly early on.”¹⁰

These influential roles are disrupted and severely tarnished by addiction to crack and its accompanying behaviors. The fragile and extremely important relationship between parent and child can be irreversibly severed, and cause a child to have low self-esteem, acquire a dysfunctional value set, and engage in misguided behaviors. Additionally, the common occurrences of neglect, which often accompany crack addiction, can exacerbate these feelings and have dramatic results. An individual’s respect for themselves and humanity in general can be negatively impacted by having a crack addicted parent. It is fair to presume that a young man’s view of and respect level for women as a whole can be adversely influenced as a result of seeing his mother “strung out” on crack cocaine. The consistent disrespect experienced by crack addicts, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is witness and internalized by their children. To assume that this has absolutely no effect on these children is unreasonable. It is proven that inadequate parenting can make children “vulnerable to maladaptive behaviors in their adulthood.”¹¹

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine how crack cocaine abuse and distribution have impacted the Black family. Specifically, this chapter discusses African American female addiction in relation to prostitution and their inability to serve as the primary care taker of their children—largely transferring this responsibility to their children’s grandparents. Additionally, the participation of African American men in the crack cocaine trade, as it pertains to incarceration rates and an accompanying violent and dangerous lifestyle is discussed. The intention of this

chapter is to expose the connection between crack cocaine's presence in the 1980s and 1990s and its varying destructive influences on the Black family.

Fathers, Sons and the Legal System

The latent functions of crack cocaine's steady incarceration of young Black males are illustrated in the skewed view of masculinity held by many African American youth. Combined, the often deprived and dangerous environments young Black men reside, the disproportionate imprisonment of Black males, and the resulting normativity of incarceration have morphed traditionally frowned upon criminal activity and the stigma of "doing a bid" into a badge of honor. As described by scholar Michael P. Jeffries, "urban hyperghettos can be dangerous places, with massive structural impediments to economic sustainability and mobility, and men and women who live in these neighborhoods may be both executors and victims of terrible crimes. The illegal drug economy and prevalence of weaponry (especially firearms) creates a hypermasculine culture that Elijah Anderson calls the 'code of the street,' or 'set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence.' Anderson argues that young people from impoverished urban areas are alienated from the norms and rewards of legitimate society and engaged in a constant quest for respect. Ghetto residents cannot ensure their public safety without respect, and because respect is hard won and easily lost, many of the measures taken to secure it may seem obscene, irrationally violent, or petty to outside observers."¹²

Additionally, the inevitable violence attached to crack dealing also contributes to the expectation of hyper-toughness, aggression and machismo for young Black males. Unfortunately, finding a legal means to acquire financial success, being and caring for one

woman, and being dedicated to raising a child are not the pillars of manhood in many communities infested with crack cocaine. Instead, “earning your stripes” by “putting in work” in the street or surviving the manhood ritual of incarceration are what garner an individual respect in many of these environments. These harmful, backwards and misguided philosophies can all be attached to crack cocaine’s impact on the African American community.

In addition to the aforementioned issues directly related to crack cocaine and the Black family structure, African American men, many of them fathers, brothers and sons, underwent the added consequence of being incarcerated at alarming rates for distributing crack cocaine during the crack era. In 1993, African American males accounted for 88 percent of crack convictions compared to only 4 percent for Whites.¹³ This activity of “hustling” not only increased their risk for consistent and extended incarceration, but also exposed these individuals to a dangerous lifestyle.

During the crack era, hustling not only became an option for financial gain for inner city African Americans males-it often became the best option. This was because of the stifling societal constraints placed on African American males which paralleled the societal expectations of success and leadership for men-creating seemingly insurmountable hurdles to achieving manhood. As eloquently explained by scholars Richard Majors and Janet Billson:

Historically, racism and discrimination have inflicted a variety of harsh injustices on African Americans in the United States, especially on males. Being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated-rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites have historically dominated. Black men learned long ago that the classic American virtues of thrift, perseverance, and hard work did not give them the

same tangible rewards that accrued to whites. Yet African-American men have defined manhood in terms familiar to white men: breadwinner, provider, procreator, protector. Unlike white men, however, blacks have not had consistent access to the same means to fulfill their dreams of masculinity and success. Many have become frustrated, angry, embittered, alienated, and impatient. Some have learned to mistrust the words and actions of the dominant culture.¹⁴

These barriers and obstacles hindered African American male's ability to achieve society's idea of manhood and to secure their position as "man of the house"- but hustling re-opened that possibility. This activity is not limited to African American men alone, young Black females also began to increasingly join street gangs and become incarcerated after crack cocaine made its appearance in America's inner cities. African American females experienced a 600 hundred percent increase in incarceration from 1980-1995, especially after the beginning of the crack epidemic.¹⁵ As a direct result of the crack era, "one in every 18 black women born today can expect to go to jail in her lifetime: this is six times the rate for white women."¹⁶ Female gang bangers, hustlers, and overall criminals, directly and indirectly connected to crack cocaine, are indeed a presence in numerous "hoods" across the country. As noted by scholar Carl Taylor "there is no doubt that women are very involved in gang activities."¹⁷ However, their population and resulting behavioral impact in the Black community pales in comparison to that of young African American male "hustlers."

Hustling, is simply a slang term for distributing drugs-specifically crack cocaine. This activity was already in practice with drugs like heroin, "but heroin has been the 'other' drug since crack arrived." Taylor noted in 1989 that after crack's arrival, a "serious consequence of this endemic utilization has been the inclusion of more youngsters in the business of drug

distribution at the street level”-hustling.¹⁸ Hustling is often attached to violent crimes, including murder, due to fights over territory to sell crack and robberies. Often, hustlers sell crack while maintaining membership to street gangs which also increases the likelihood of criminal activity. Crack hustlers who participated in gang activity, were actually often employees similar to those in legitimate businesses. There is often a hierarchy of positions and pay within crack dealing gangs. As mentioned by scholar, Steven Levitt, whose research partner participated in ethnographic research for ten years with a Chicago street gang, “if I had to draw a parallel between the gang and any other organization it would be that the gang is just like McDonalds...it’s the way its organized, the hierarchy of the gang.”¹⁹ He goes on to say that teenage foot soldiers would make around \$3.50 per hour. However, individuals in these crack dealing gangs were able to “move up the corporate ladder” and make more money, sometimes over \$100,000 per year. As Levitt noted, “that was the best job you could hope to get if you were growing up in one of these neighborhoods as a young Black male...one of the sad parts of this is that indeed among the many other ramifications of crack cocaine is that the most talented individuals in these communities this is what they were striving for they weren’t trying to make it in legitimate ways because there were no legitimate channels out this was the best way out and it actually was the best choice probably to try to make it out this way.”²⁰ In any form, the frequency which the preponderance of Black males are hustling is causing dire consequences in the Black family and community.

In 1986, the controversial 100-to-1 provision of the “Anti-Drug Enforcement: Narcotics Penalties and Enforcement Act of 1986” law was mandated in response to the presence of crack cocaine in urban neighborhoods. This law punished crack possession much more severely than powder cocaine possession. As identified by scholars Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley “under a

numerical formula that attaches values to particular crimes, the sentencing guidelines treat crack as 100 times worse than powdered cocaine.”²¹ Clause (ii) in Section 401 of the Controlled Substances Act of 1986 states that “In the case of a violation of subsection (a) of this section involving- (ii) 5 kilograms [5000 grams] or more of a mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of (I) coca leaves, except coca leaves and extracts of coca leaves from which cocaine, ecgonine, and derivatives of ecgonine or their salts have been removed; (II) cocaine, its salts, optical and geometric isomers, and salts of isomers; (III) ecgonine, its derivatives, their salts, isomers, and salts of isomers; or (IV) any compound, mixture, or preparation which contains any quantity of any of the substance referred to in subclauses (I) through (III); (iii) 50 grams or more of a mixture or substance described in clause (ii) which contains cocaine base...such person shall be sentenced to a term of imprisonment which *may not be less than 10 years* or more than life...”²² Under the guises of this law, conviction for the sale of 500 grams of powder cocaine resulted in the same 5-year mandatory minimum prison sentence as only 5 grams of crack cocaine.²³

This ridiculous disparity is steeped in racist and classist ideology, and the motivations of its proponents are stunningly similar to those of anti-cocaine activists at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, African Americans are stereotyped as violent and dangerous individuals. As described by Jeffries, “according to the stereotype, the ghetto-poor black male is a heartless criminal, fulfilling his own destructive prophecy as he ruthlessly navigates a desolate concrete jungle. He is not merely *a* problem but *the* problem, responsible for alienating and threatening greater American society while wreaking havoc on families and reinforcing social disorganization within his community.”²⁴ In the early 1900s, government officials as well as law enforcement professionals feared cocaine because of its alleged “crazing” effect on “negroes.”

There was a belief that cocaine made the already sexually addicted, violent, Black male “crazed” and uncontrollable. The remnants of this philosophy of thought still exist in our criminal justice system, and in the attitudes of much of White American concerning African Americans and crack cocaine.

As stated by *Newsweek* editor Ellis Cose in 2009, when the 100-1 ratio law was passed, “there was a notion that crack was a freakish demon drug-that it was many times more addictive, a trigger for violence, and infinitely more dangerous than powder in virtually every way.”²⁵ Perhaps it’s merely coincidence that this “demon drug” just so happened to be directly associated with African Americans-or perhaps not. In fact, according to the United States Sentencing Commission, in 1994, over 90 percent of people prosecuted for dealing crack were African American. Between 1995 and 2006, more than 80 percent of federal crack prosecutions involved African Americans. In 2006, 82 percent of individuals convicted for federal crack offenses were African American.²⁶ These statistics coupled with the negative popular perceptions of those involved with crack cocaine explain why the harshness of sentencing for those convicted of crack offenses has been acceptable for decades. “There is considerable evidence that many Whites see Blacks as characteristically violent and therefore deserving of punitive treatment from an equitable system.”²⁷ This philosophy was expressed by Office of National Drug Control Policy Director William Bennett, in support of tough on law policy in the 1980s, stated “Let’s build the prisons. This is where these people belong when they violate the law. These people deserve nothing than doing hard long time.”²⁸

Politicians used White America’s deeply embedded fear of crack and its association to African Americans to their advantage via “the war on drugs.” This propagandized war is what prompted the Anti-Drug Enforcement Act of 1986 and prompted George Bush to proclaim, in

1988, that “we’ve got to wage an all out aggressive war against narcotics there’s no doubt about that.” Further, during a public service announcement in 1989, President Bush stated that “this is the first time since taking the oath of office that I felt an issue was so important, so threatening that I felt it warranted talking directly with you the American people. Our most serious problem today is cocaine, and in particular crack.”²⁹

During this speech to the public, Bush held a bag of crack cocaine that allegedly was “seized...by drug enforcement agents in a park just across the street from the White House.” It was later revealed that White House officials lured an eighteen year old African American male from across town to Lafayette Park to sell them the crack. The purpose of this set up was obviously to make American’s believe that crack was everywhere and a dangerous threat to not only ghetto inhabitants, but White America as well. As stated by NBC news correspondent Michael Isikoff, “it came to symbolize how the threat of drugs in general and crack in particular was being portrayed in almost a near hysterical fashion ‘oh my god its all around us it’s everywhere’ it was clearly something that the country was concerned about but it was being inflated for political purposes.”³⁰

The “drug scare” propagandized the image of Black gangbangers and “crack fiends” dangerously running wild throughout the country. This provided politicians an opportunity to prove to American citizens that “I am the candidate that can make you feel safe again” by being tough on these demonized crack dealers and addicts. This trend was identified by an anonymous news caster cited in “Planet Rock,” a documentary which chronicled the rise of the crack era in the 1980s, who reported in 1986 “with election day approaching and polls showing that drug abuse is the public’s number one concern, today’s voting became a contest to determine who

could be toughest on drug traffickers.” The politicization of crack and drugs is efficiently described by scholars Harry G. Levine and Craig Reinerman.

In addition to racism, bureaucratic self-interest, economics, and mongering by the media, drug scares always have deeper political facets as well. The increased power and legitimacy of political and cultural conservatism in the Reagan era have contributed significantly to the making of the current drug scare. The right wing has long been attracted to the issue of illicit drug use because it focuses political attention on individual deviance and immorality and away from structural social ills like economic inequality, injustice, and lack of meaningful roles for young people. A crusade against drug use allows conservative politicians to be law-and-order minded; it also permits them to give the appearance of caring about social ills without committing them to do or spend very much to help people. In the last ten years, New Rightists and other cultural conservatives have championed a life-style politics that is antihomosexual, antiabortion, antisex out of wedlock, antidrugs, and even anti-rock and roll. Politicians opposed to the agendas of the right have often felt obliged to give lip service to some conservative moral issues in order to retain their own political legitimacy.

Participation in the antidrug crusade of 1986 gave Democrats a way to take a strong stand on something without opposing a then very popular president. Being against illegal drugs has always been a safe issue for politicians because there are no large, powerful corporate opponents with wealthy and influential lobbies, as there are for tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, firearms, automobiles, and other dangerous products. In fact, for some Democrats, allocating more money for a

war on drugs than even Reagan asked for seemed ideal; it deprived conservatives of one of their issues, and gave liberals a way of appearing more middle-of-the-road. Spending money on the drug war even gave politicians a way of saying they were doing something about minority and inner-city problems after most of them had pushed for or acquiesced in six years of crippling cuts in social programs for the poor.³¹

The disproportionate rate that African Americans possessed and continue to possess crack cocaine is startling. At year end, 1996, approximately 86 percent of all crack cocaine cases involved African Americans. In 2010, Blacks still comprised 79 percent of crack cocaine cases; most of these were black men. Black Americans arrested for dealing crack cocaine are also more likely to be sentenced and sentenced longer than White Americans. “Human Rights Watch’s analysis of prison admission data for 2003 revealed that relative to population, blacks are 10.1 times more likely than whites to be sent to prison for drug offenses.” Among African American children, 1.2 million, or about 11 percent, had a parent incarcerated by 2008. In 1999, Black children were nearly 9 times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children. In 2007, more than 4 in 10 incarcerated fathers were black, about 3 in 10 were white, and about 2 in 10 were Hispanic. An estimated 1,559,200 children had a father in prison at midyear 2007; nearly half (46%) were children of black fathers. Overwhelmingly, these drug convictions are related specifically to crack cocaine. These statistics are staggering and likely contribute to the reality that Black single mothers comprise nearly a third of all single mother led households in the United States- numbering well over three million. This statistic is a double edged sword of negativity for African Americans.³² The disproportionate number of Black women addicted to

crack, likely promotes increased instances of neglectful behavior and other negative stimuli in a child's environment.³³

The alarming rate that African Americans have been incarcerated under unfair and racist crack sentencing guidelines undoubtedly has impacted the Black family. The number of African American crack offenders with children is unknown, however, the incarceration statistics noted above describe an obvious issue pertaining to the Black family. With each conviction, a father, son, brother, uncle, husband and on some occasions, mother, daughter or sister, is being taken away from their family structure. This “time away” was often significant (5+ years) due to mandatory sentences for crack offenses. Granted, the 100-to-1 sentencing policy was repealed by President Barack Obama in 2010. “The Fair Sentencing Act (Act), Pub. L. No. 111-220, signed by the President on August 3, 2010, reduced the statutory penalties for crack cocaine trafficking and eliminated the mandatory minimum sentence for simple possession of crack cocaine. Specifically, the Act reduced the statutory penalties for offenses involving manufacturing or trafficking in crack cocaine by raising the quantity required to trigger a statutory mandatory minimum term of imprisonment — from 5 *grams* to 28 *grams* for five-year mandatory minimums and from 50 to 280 *grams* for ten-year mandatory minimums. The Act also contained directives to the Commission to review and amend the federal sentencing guidelines to account for certain aggravating and mitigating circumstances in drug trafficking cases to better account for offender conduct.”³⁴ This repeal is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. However, the twenty-four year period that this law was active, witnessed multitudes of African Americans face unfair extended amounts of time in prison, and countless numbers of family members and friends negatively impacted. Further, while crack use, distribution, and the resulting violence have been steadily in decline since the early 1990s “federal crack cases *increased* during this period, and

the gap between sentences for crack and powder *grew*...Likewise, while the majority of people who report using crack at least once a year are white, over 80 percent of those sentenced under federal crack laws have been Black.”³⁵

African American Women, Crack, and Prostitution

African American women’s crack cocaine use during the 1980s crack crisis is very similar to that of the Progressive Era; their usage is still largely connected to prostitution. However, unlike the turn of the twentieth century, Black women’s drug use has many more consequences detrimental to not only their person, but their families and the community overall. In addition to prostitution, issues related to Black women’s crack cocaine use such as incarceration, disease, and childhood trauma and neglect are very present.

The myriad of problems associated with African American women and crack cocaine appears to be severely under acknowledged in society overall and academe specifically. Media and government attention, as well as scholarship exclusively devoted to African American women and crack cocaine clearly remains unpopular. Few scholars have focused on African American women’s crack cocaine habits. James Inciardi, Dorothy Lockwood, and Anne Pottieger’s *Women and Crack-Cocaine*, Terry Williams’ *Crackhouse: Notes from the End of the Line* (1992), and Tanya Telfair Sharpe’s *Behind the Eight Ball: Sex For Crack Cocaine Exchange and Poor Black Women* (2005) represent a few shining examples.³⁶ The consequences of African Americans’ involvement with crack are extremely influential to the condition of the overall Black community, and on a more micro level, the Black family.

The scarce amount of focus dedicated to African American female cocaine use throughout the early twentieth century is unfortunate. This trend continues when discussing

African American women and crack cocaine use specifically in the post 1980s era. Sadly, this reality appears to be more evidence of Black women's lowly, secondary status in the United States. The scope of this issue deserves serious attention and understanding, as its consequences have contributed to the crumbling of Black inner city communities, and African American culture overall.

Earlier references about African American female prostitutes and cocaine never stated that cocaine addiction caused prostitution. At that time, cocaine was seen simply as something that prostitutes and other members of the "underworld" used for recreational purposes. Unlike pre-crack era prostitutes, crack addicted prostitutes do indeed prostitute themselves for the drug. These women participate in prostitution as a means to attain crack cocaine and support their addiction.³⁷

Works such as JM Edward's; CT Halpern's and WM Wechsberg's "Correlates of exchanging sex for drugs or money among women who use crack cocaine" (2006) and KS Riehm's, WM Wechsberg's, W. Zule's, WK Lam's and B. Levines's "Gender differences in the impact of social support on crack use among African Americans," (2008) are two articles, among few others, in opposition to this unfortunate history. Both of these works focus on African American female crack cocaine use specifically and offer insight to what kind of issues this situation creates. In their study of African American female crack cocaine users, Edwards, Halperns, and Wechsberg found that, "heavier crack use, homelessness, and unemployment are all associated with trading sex." This study's results are consistent with the long, yet sporadic, history of research on African American women and cocaine. The reoccurring theme in this

research has been the connection between African American women's cocaine use and prostitution; this is for good reason.³⁸

Prostitution resides at the core of the serious issues surrounding African American women and crack cocaine addiction. In depressed neighborhoods, with few options for upward mobility, African American "women found crack, and engaged in sex work as a means for getting it."³⁹ Society generally deems prostitution as an activity or profession whose participants consist of only morally deficient lower level human beings, and they "are stigmatized by society if their work as prostitutes becomes known."⁴⁰ This contempt is true for "sex workers" overall. It would be a great challenge to convince the masses of American citizens that exotic dancers or "strippers," adult film stars or "porn stars," or even promiscuous single women rank among society's moral superiors. As noted by researcher Danielle Egan, exotic dancing or stripping has been "historically conceptualized as a deviant, pathological, and immoral behavior."⁴¹

Although prostitution and sex work is popularly viewed as negative, stigmatized, immoral behavior, millions of Americans participate in related activities. According to scholar Jessica Spector, "the sex industry-a loose term for a variety of commerce in sex-is an enormous economic force in the United States and worldwide. According to one report, the American pornography industry grosses more per year than the American music and mainstream movie industries combined. According to another report, Americans spend more money per year on strip clubs than on theater, opera, ballet, jazz, and classical music concerts combined...estimates of the amount of money spent per day on prostitution in the United States range upward of \$40 million."⁴² Prostitution includes "stripping, massage parlors and brothels, saunas, prostitution rings, international and domestic trafficking, mail order bride services, street prostitution, escort

services, phone sex, live sex shows, peep shows, and pornography.”⁴³ The wide range of activities under the umbrella of prostitution help explain the suggested millions of dollars spent per day on these services.

Within this world of sex work a hierarchy exists. The elite sex workers are high paid, and usually temporary participants in this world. They see few clients and eventually “get out.” The middle tier sex workers include women who participate in sex work, “because they need the money,” or have some other pressing issue which coerces them into choosing this line of work. At the bottom of the sex work hierarchy “are the poorest people in prostitution. They have enormously restricted life choices.” It is at this level most African American crack addicted women reside. Further, the already challenging statuses of African American and female, in a Eurocentric patriarchal country such as the United States, only increase the depth of the proverbial gutter for which these women dwell.⁴⁴

In *Sexed Work*, scholar Lisa Maher provided further evidence of African American female crack addict’s status within the world of prostitution. After several interviews with Black female crack addict prostitutes, she concluded that Black men specifically “indicated a fundamental lack of respect towards Black women who used drugs.” As one of her respondents, a crack prostitute, stated “I don’t date Blacks. No...because a Black man, they consider a Black woman if she smoke crack, ‘here gimme a blow job, let me fuck you for five,’ and I’m not with that five dollar shit. You gonna pay me fifteen dollars or more.”⁴⁵ The fact that this woman was insulted by a five dollar proposition for sex and viewed a fifteen dollar offer as more acceptable is a surreal representation of the defeated and lowly status of crack prostitutes. Another woman, discussing the differences between being a prostitute versus a “crack head” prostitute stated that

“the difference is that when you are prostituting, it’s like a profession. The men know that you are a prostitute and not a crackhead; they handle you different....when they know that you are doing it when you are addicted to dope, you just might wind up getting anything done to you.”⁴⁶

Crack addicts involved in prostitution are not homogeneous. There are different forms of prostitution that these women participate in. These varieties include: street prostitution, direct sex for crack transactions, sex for money for crack, and sex for crack within crack houses. Each activity, and its participants, exhibits their own unique set of characteristics and norms. “In crack houses, prostitution takes on a very different character than soliciting on the streets. In the crack house a barter system exists in which sex and crack are the currencies. Moreover, in the descriptions that follow, it becomes readily clear that there are a number of very real differences between prostitutes who use crack and crack users who exchange sex for drugs.” Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger go on to argue that “the addiction to and need for crack cocaine was the motivation for women to become prostitutes. For almost all of the women encountered, particularly those trading sex for crack in crack houses, the drug controlled their lives in that everything they did revolved around seeking and smoking crack.”⁴⁷

A crack house is a residence-house, apartment or “shack”- which individuals frequent to smoke crack cocaine. “The typical crack house has a stark, unattended look. There are no flashing lights; no throbbing disco music emanates from these surroundings. The only sounds are the sucking noise of the pipe, the burp of the butane torch, the whoosh of smoke being exhaled and the constant after-chatter once the smoke has been emptied from the overused lungs. Yet for those who are here, these rooms provide an arena of sensations-smells, sights, sounds, touch-and often times hallucinatory experiences.”⁴⁸

The culture of crack houses, as disturbing as it may be, is very relevant to and prevalent within the African American community. Sadly, many children are conceived, have lived in or are currently living in crack houses. These crack houses are horrible environments for anyone, but especially children because of the crack use, violence, and sex for crack prostitution that takes place inside of them. In crack houses, “prostitution takes on a very different character than soliciting on the streets.”⁴⁹

In *Crackhouse* (1993) ethnographer Terry Williams tells the stories of several African American individuals, both male and female, who dwell in a New York City crackhouse. Through his interviews with African American women, he too learned about the culture of prostitution surrounding crack cocaine addiction. Interestingly, through his interviews he exposed two different types of sex for crack prostitution. One form consisted of women going out and having sex in order to bring crack back to the “crack family” to smoke. The other, more common occurrence, of sex for crack, involved women prostituting themselves for their own personal use of crack cocaine. One female addict stated “I never go out and have sex with anybody and bring stuff back for the group...if I have sex to get drugs, those drugs are for me and me only.” His grizzly, blunt and deeply saddening depictions of crackhouse life for African American women expose harsh truths and realities that must be addressed.⁵⁰

The control crack cocaine has over its female users and their behaviors is amazing. The desire to acquire crack consistently drives women in crack houses to sell their bodies for the drug. One crack addict interviewed by Williams, Shayna, stated that “their only means of getting it is either to have money or to use their bodies. If they don’t work for a living or have a sugar daddy, they use their bodies.” The idea that sex for crack holds the dual purpose of pleasure and

as well as a means of commerce is nullified by the Shayna as well. She stated that “most women are nonsexual basers. They just want to get high. They are using sex to get to the drug-you know, that’s the only way to get the drug.” Therefore, the crack addiction appears to be the sole motivation for them to prostitute themselves. This illustrates crack’s control over these women’s actions and lives. As Shayna explains, “so it is really a force thing. The sexual thing is a forceful thing because the men say, ‘if you don’t give me sex, I won’t give you the drug.’”⁵¹ In these situations, being in possession and having control of the crack allows the Black men in crack houses a sense of control over the women. Shayna goes on to explain, “a woman may be with a guy that doesn’t run her on, but because he has the drug, she’ll go with him and do what he says. She’s not really aroused by him; she’s just with him because of the drug. But him, he’s sexually aroused regardless, and he wants to fuck, he wants that sex, he wants his dick sucked.”⁵² The sense of control and power given to these men in crack houses is in direct opposition to the perceived lack of agency they experience in society. Due to a slew of oppressive societal factors, the Black male is commonly stripped of this feeling of dominance-thus, adding to this activities appeal. This is an added dynamic to the realities of the crack house and prostitution associated with them.

In addition to Maher and Williams, other scholars such as James A. Inciardi, Dorothy Lockwood, and Anne Pottieger *Women and Crack-Cocaine*, Mitchell S. Ratner, *Crack Pipe as Pimp*, and Tanya Telfair Sharpe, *Behind the Eight Ball*, also utilize interviews to describe the realities of crack house prostitution involving African American female crack addicts. Similar to Williams, and Maher’s accounts, sex for crack transactions run rampant in crack houses. Crack houses are indeed unique and telling spaces which offer glimpses into the world of female crack addicts. As described by Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger, “the crack house environment

affects every aspect of the business of providing sexual services-the setting, the solicitation, the negotiation, the payment, the actual exchange of either money or drugs for sex, as well as the violence and cheating endemic to both the street and crack house environments.”⁵³

Dr. Tanya Telfair Sharpe’s book titled *Behind the Eight Ball: Sex for Crack Cocaine Exchange and Poor Black Women* (2005) is a detailed study about African American women prostituting themselves for crack-cocaine. Similar to Williams, Inciardi, Lockwood and Pottieger’s work, as well as Edward’s, Halpern’s and Wechsber’s research, Sharpe’s study provides information about sex for crack within the crack house, while separating this activity from general street prostitution. Describing the commonalities of prostitution in crack houses, Sharpe says that “it is not unusual for crack-using females to engage in unprotected sex with anonymous partners in the genre of crack houses that have emerged. These are houses, or more commonly, apartments in public housing where people can either purchase the drug, use the drug, engage in sex, or a combination of all three for various monetary charges.”⁵⁴ Sharpe states that “the cycle of crack addiction fills the void in the lives of many disenfranchised women. Therefore, poor black women are disproportionately at risk for engaging in sex-for-crack exchanges to support their drug habit.”⁵⁵

With the epidemic of HIV/AIDS plaguing the African American community, the idea of sex for crack prostitution is particular unsettling. One woman, cited by Sharpe, when describing her time as a prostitute for crack cocaine, stated that “when I was whoring professionally, I practiced safe sex. My pimp gave us condoms. And a man couldn’t do anything to me if he didn’t use a condom, no matter how much money he had. My pimp told me, even if the man had a hundred dollars, he had to use a condom. When I was doing it for crack that’s when I didn’t

practice it [safe sex].” The HIV/AIDS risks associated with crack house prostitution is effectively described by Ratner. During his interviews, the women described several high risk sexual encounters they had experienced while in crack houses.⁵⁶

Crack cocaine has been considered an aphrodisiac for its ability to increase sexual desire in both men and women. For men specifically, crack has been said to “delay the sexual climax, and that after prolonged stimulation, an explosive orgasm occurs.” However, a widely reported side effect of crack cocaine use is sexual dysfunction. Coupled with the constant sex for crack transactions and activities within crack houses, this is a serious issue. According to Ratner, “the potential for transmission of HIV from women to men during vaginal intercourse in crack houses is related to one aspect of the cocaine/sexuality connection.” As a result of crack use, men have reported difficulty reaching climax. In fact, some interview respondents reported “that they can climax only through extremely vigorous masturbation.” In several cases, female crack house prostitutes reported incidents where men tried so hard to climax, by masturbation and/or prolonged intercourse that they started to bleed. One woman explicitly reported her possible exposure by stating, “he was so hot and hard that I figured it’d be over quick. But he don’t come. Fuck, fuck, fuck, and he still don’t come. Then he starts jerkin’ himself off fast, doin’ it ‘til ya can see his cock bleedin on his hand. His dick has blood on it an’ so does his hand. And then he rams his bloody dick back in me and fuck, fuck, fuck...he never did come.” A male crack house “john” reported that on one occasion he “was porking a crack house prostitute while she was on the rag...she was bleeding, and I was bleeding, first from a bad blow job and then from too much sex....after a while, the blood, hers, got too much, so I turned her over and put it in her chute [anus].”⁵⁷

As of 2009, The Center for Disease Control reported that “African Americans are the racial/ethnic group most affected by HIV. In 2009, African Americans comprised 14% of the US population, but accounted for 44% of all new HIV infections.” According to the United States National Library of Medicine, HIV transmission rates are high for crack cocaine users compared to the general population, and this is associated with their high risk sexual behavior. Additionally, “crack–cocaine use facilitates HIV disease progression by reducing adherence in those on (HAART) [highly active antiretroviral treatment] and by accelerating disease progression independently of HAART.” Further, “non-injection drug use, including cocaine, crack–cocaine, and heroin sniffing, is also known to contribute to the spread of HIV through risky sexual behaviors including multiple sex partners, inconsistent condom use, and exchanging sex for drugs or money.”⁵⁸ This is a grim portrait of the status of African Americans regarding HIV/AIDS in direct relation to behavior influenced by crack cocaine—namely sex for crack prostitution.

The previously noted testimonies from crack addict prostitutes illustrate the harshness of and health risks related to sex for crack activity. Prostitution may be considered by many to be an undesirable and frowned upon profession. Some may consider becoming a prostitute hitting “rock bottom” as far as life style choices are concerned, but what becomes apparent by analyzing Williams, Maher’s, Ratner’s, Sharpe’s, and others work along with interviews from the women themselves, is that sex for crack prostitution is an even “lower” level of activity. Sex for crack prostitutes find themselves in a world where, on a consistent basis, “they are subjected to humiliation and ridicule” by drug dealers.⁵⁹

These women are the mothers of young Black boys and girls. In some cases, these are grandmothers or even daughters themselves. These drug dealers who “humiliated” and look down upon these crack addicts are the children of other Black women. These “dope boys” are the future husbands and/or fathers of another generation Black people. There is undoubtedly a possibility that the widespread exposure to crack addiction, experienced by Black males, can have a severely negative impact on their attitudes towards Black women. As a result, this exposure may be directly influencing their treatment of Black women, their continued practice of selling crack to Black women, and their lack of concern for the plight and condition of Black women. Furthermore, these attitudes influenced by the harsh realities of “crack addict culture” could go as far as contributing to the epidemic rise in Black father absenteeism. For the sake of argument, is it far-fetched to surmise that consistent negative exposure to members of a certain group can cause stereotyping even among its own fellow members? The answer to this question is no. Self-stereotyping is real and has a serious impact on an individual’s perception of reality and his or her resulting behaviors. As suggested by scholars, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, and Reicher, “self-stereotyping is a consequence of self-categorization, where “self-categorization leads to a stereotypical self-perception and depersonalization, and adherence to and expression of in group normative behavior.” According to researcher Iva Iantcheva Katzarska-Miller, “Not only do we hold stereotypes about others, but simultaneously others hold stereotypes about us, based on our group memberships. Furthermore, we know and often endorse the stereotypes that are characteristic of our groups.”⁶⁰ The wounding effects of crack cocaine are not only felt in the high incarceration rates, murder rates, and overdose statistics, but in the psychology of African Americans who have been exposed to crack addicts and the culture of life which is attached to it.

This culture consists of the values, practices, and environments of individuals who are addicted to and distribute crack cocaine.

Scholars have exposed some of the harsh realities experienced by African American female crack cocaine addicts especially by those who exchange sex for crack. These works give the women involved in the drug and sex industry a voice, and also allows others a glimpse into their world. References to African American women cocaine users in the past did not include information from interviews with the women, mainly assumptions and generalizations largely based on stereotypes and racism. Therefore, the existence of first-hand accounts from the women themselves is a sign of informational progression which must be utilized by contemporary scholars and activists.

Crack Addiction and Motherhood

Balancing the roles of motherhood while addicted to crack is nearly impossible. The tension between the crack-user lifestyle and the responsibilities of mothering is often irreconcilable. After the arrival of crack cocaine, female addicts often would “devise methods to separate their children from drug-use- sessions, for example, by temporarily placing the children in someone else’s care. Eventually, as the crack compulsion became stronger, these strategies were abandoned and the women lost custody of their children through family intervention or state-ordered foster care.” Crack use and motherhood can increase pressure on the extended family-specifically grandmothers.⁶¹ From 1984, the beginning of the crack era, until 1994, incarcerations for Black women increased 202 percent. “Two thirds of these women have children under the age of 18 years, and approximately 53 percent of these children live with their grandmothers.”⁶²

Grandmothers of “crack babies” are particularly prone to assume the role of care taker when their daughters are addicted to crack cocaine. This unexpected role of primary care taker can be an overwhelming task for grandmothers often advanced in age and “retired” from their initial career of motherhood. These women have lives of their own and the responsibility of raising a child, often from toddler’s age, can severely alter their lifestyles; this may result in feelings of isolation from other family members, loss of time for recreational activities, and separation from their peer group. Grandmother guardians also must endure an increased financial load which may require additional employment, or even a return to the workforce for those who have retired. Immediately following the crack boom of the 1980s, the “1990 census made it clear, African American women heads-of-household increasingly include mid-life and older women who are raising their grandchildren and great grandchildren, often in impoverished circumstances.”⁶³

There is evidence to imply that the increased prevalence of African American children being raised by their grandmothers is directly related to consequences of the crack epidemic. According to an interview with an admitted crack head in *J is for Junkie*, one crack addicted mother stated that because of her addiction to crack “when my daughter was a child I couldn’t see about her in school, my grandma had to do it.”⁶⁴ As suggested in a 1987 *New York Times* article, “In the two years since crack first struck New York City's poorest neighborhoods, the powerful form of cocaine has taken an unprecedented toll on women, children and families, according to newly gathered statistics and interviews with drug treatment experts. The rise of crack has been particularly devastating to children because, as crack has replaced heroin as the favorite hard drug among the young of the inner city, a far higher proportion of women have become addicts. So many poor families are headed by single mothers that the sudden increase in

women becoming crack addicts has caused disproportionate damage to families, experts say, and produced a rise last year in reports of child abuse, neglect and death linked to drug use by parents. The problem is reflected, too, in the growing number of "boarder babies" - infants, neglected or abandoned by their parents, who languish in the city's hospitals, awaiting foster homes."⁶⁵

According to researcher Miverva Urrutia, "substance abuse has been repeatedly cited as the leading cause for the unprecedented rise in grandmother headed households. The crack-cocaine epidemic has devastated the African American family and its community. Many children have been murdered, orphaned, abandoned, neglected, abused, emotionally and developmentally traumatized, or left homeless by this epidemic. Grandmothers as caregivers suffer enduring hardships and are often stressed emotionally in fulfilling their obligations."⁶⁶ Additionally, the physical exhaustion as a result of having to watch, chase, carry, bath, and dress a child is a serious burden for older individuals. "Grandparent caregivers themselves are typically middle aged or older...they may have chronic health conditions that are exacerbated by frequent lifting and carrying, emotional stress, and the myriad of demands associated with the caregiver role."⁶⁷

With regard to children of crack addicted mothers, the burden of a grandparent becoming the guardian, provider, nurturer, and protector is intensified when the unique characteristics of these children is considered. Children born to crack addict mothers or "crack babies" often suffer from a multitude of physical, emotional and psychological issues. These problems include, short attention spans, mood swings, hyperactivity, poor motor skills, and excessive crying, among other issues.⁶⁸ In discussing the rampant crack cocaine use among African Americans, Hutchinson stated that "by the mid 1990's more than 4 million crack babies will reach school

age. They will have speech defects, hyperactivity, and a propensity to violence. They will require billions of dollars in special medical and educational services. Since most of them are black and poor, they will be stigmatized by a fearful society.”⁶⁹

The source of these characteristics has been a topic of debate among researchers and medical practitioners since the late 1980s. The foundation of these issues creates an argument of “nature vs. nurture.” One school of thought believes that the pharmacological effects of crack on an unborn fetus produce the aforementioned conditions in children. Some believe that the “prenatal exposure to this drug often results in intrauterine growth deficiencies due to oxygen deprivation, and in elevated rates of distress during the birth process”, and this consequently results in several health issues after birth.⁷⁰

Sons, Daughters and Gang Activity

The crack era saw a dramatic increase in young African American male’s involvement with the distribution of the drug. Accompanying crack distribution are the ills of street gang activity-gun violence and increasing incarceration rates. “Hustling,” like other activities associated with crack cocaine, cannot be analyzed within a vacuum. The activities and culture which are associated with crack dealing are extremely consequential to the Black family and community.⁷¹

While street gangs existed before the advent of crack cocaine in the 1980s, these “organizations” grew exponentially in size and influence during the crack era. This is directly connected to the need for territorial protection in order to sell crack in various neighborhoods. Author Michael D. Lyman, *Gangland: Drug Trafficking by Organized Criminals (1989)* discusses the prevalence of crack selling by gangs such as the Black Guerilla Family, Bloods,

Crips, Black Stone's and others. He states that crack "has evolved into the most sought after illicit drug commodity on the street, with widespread involvement by organized gangs of criminals." Each of these gangs is predominately populated by Black males.⁷² Researchers Malcolm W. Klein, Cheryl L. Maxson and Lea C. Cunningham add to the discussion about the relationship between crack cocaine and street gangs. In a chapter titled, "Crack" Street Gangs, and Violence" in *Gangs and Gang Behavior* (1997) Klein, Maxson and Cunningham state that Black gangs' drug involvement initially was that of use and addiction as opposed to control and distribution. The authors cite the police and press reports as the sources which began to connect predominately Black street gangs such as the 'Bloods' and the 'Crips' as the main distributors of crack cocaine throughout several cities. These reported connections coincide with the overall crack boom of the mid 1980s throughout the country.⁷³

These same sentiments are shared researcher, Lewis Yablonsky *Gangsters* (1997). He describes African American male gang bangers involvement with crack cocaine by stating "crack is a commodity for both Black and Chicano gangs; crack is a heavily addicting drug that has dominated hoods and barrios throughout the United States since about 1985. Gangsters are involved in the distribution and sale of these drugs at all levels. Some OGs and Gs have direct contact at the very top of the drug business with manufacturers and distributors on an international level. Gs and WBs, at the lower rungs of the drug business ladder, deliver and sell drugs on the street."⁷⁴ Often times, OGs (original gangsters) have children selling crack for them that are yet to reach their teens. This is extremely disturbing and a testament to the breakdown of the family and culture in many inner city Black ghettos⁷⁵

Scholar Jeffrey Fagan, in his discussion about street gang activity and cocaine in an article titled “Gangs, Drugs, and Neighborhood Change” (1996), mentions that “among gangs, involvement in the drug trade varies by locale and ethnicity. Chicano gangs in L.A. do not sell cocaine but sell small quantities of other drugs. The crack and cocaine trades in that city are dominated by African American youth both gang members and non-gang youth”.⁷⁶ This is an interesting occurrence. Fagan also states that Chinese gangs specifically “have remained outside the cocaine and crack trades.” These statements, although small in number, again connect African American gang members specifically to crack cocaine distribution.⁷⁷

The consistency that African Americans have been involved in the drug trade is more understandable when examined within the context of economics. “The legitimate employment void is quietly being filled by the underground drug economy.” Sadly, across the country, beginning in the mid-1980s, there “has been the inclusion of more youngsters in the business of drug distribution at the street level.”⁷⁸

Another alarming reality of crack cocaine related to gang activity, is the fact that on occasion, some of these “gangsters” become users of the drug as well as distributors. Yablonski says that “some of the purveyors of the commodity get hooked on their product. This usually leads to the abuser being ostracized from the gang.”⁷⁹ Participation in crack distribution is dangerous and harmful itself by any measure, however the additional crack abuse by these same hustlers make this relationship potentially catastrophic.

Conclusion

African American women addicted to crack-cocaine are commonly associated with prostitution and other dangerous behaviors. Many of these women are mothers, and their children suffer from this behavior often in the form of neglect. Occasionally, these crack abusing women may become impregnated while prostituting themselves for the drug. Ultimately, this may lead to children being born to a crack addicted mother and an absent unknown father. Also, “crack house prostitution” or sex in exchange for crack-cocaine, increases ones chance of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. As suggested by Sonja Singleton from the University of Miami’s Health Crisis Network, “It turns out that the women get infected by having sex in exchange for the high-grade crack cocaine. Every crack house has an extra room for sex. There are only two things that go on in crack houses - drugs and sex.”

Tonya Sharpe, James Inciardi, and Anne Pottieger among others, discussed African Americans activities in prostitution related to cocaine addiction. While these books and their focus are appreciated, more research on other segments of African American women’s and men’s cocaine and/or crack habits is necessary. A total picture of the drug’s effect on the Black community is not possible when attention is only paid to street and crack house prostitutes.

The consequences of children being born to “crack head” mothers is detrimental to society in either case-whether nature or nurture is causing the problem. If a child was not raised by his or her parent, how will he or she know how to be a parent their own children? While many grandparents’ willingness to fill the void left by a child’s parents is nothing less than heroic, their achievement, due to the myriad of previously mentioned factors, can be less than stellar. The strains of being the primary caretaker may often influence a grandparents’ interaction with their

grandchild. Frustration and fatigue can understandably result in lapses of supervision, outbursts of anger, and quite simply an inability to efficiently care for a young, energetic and often troubled child.

When considering the effectiveness of grandparents raising a child, life expectancy must also be considered. A child placed under the chief supervision of an often elderly grandparent, faces the likelihood of losing his or her guardian to death. In these cases, the child often finds him or herself in an unstable situation which can have serious consequences of its own. Ultimately, these children are susceptible to becoming wards of the state, or placed in the care of another family member simply by “default.” These default placements within the extended family unit have great potential to be unpleasant for the child. This often unwanted, unexpected, and forced burden of providing for a niece, nephew, may not encourage one’s best parental efforts. In these instances once again, the child suffers immensely. In many circumstances, extended family guardianship for children born to crack addicted parents harvests exemplary results. However, these instances of success do not change the fact that crack’s control over many mothers and fathers allow potentially disastrous situations for their children and extended family network.

The unfair crack sentencing law that was allowed to exist for 24 years inflicted immeasurable harm on the Black community. Regarding this law, crack cocaine further illustrated its strangle hold on the African American community and family via Black males catastrophically high incarceration rates for “hustling” crack cocaine. It is fair to assume that on some occasions, a family consists of an incarcerated father due to crack distribution, a crack addicted prostitute mother, and a child in a gang who both sells and uses crack. This picture is

frightening, but sadly authentic just the same. As a result of this far too prevalent reality, gangs are not viewed as detriments or thorns in the side of Black families-they become families within themselves. Many children who grow up in these depressed communities with drug addicted parents yearn for a family and often fall victim to the mirage of love, unity and togetherness portrayed by gangs. Ironically, it may not be gangs that are causing disruption within families; dysfunctional families may in fact be creating and sustaining gangs and gang activity.

When considered collectively, crack cocaine's relationship with the African American family is nothing short of disastrous. Virtually every facet of the Black family has been severely wounded by crack cocaine's presence. Parenting, prostitution, incarceration, physical deterioration, disease, self-identity, gang affiliation, birth trauma and the feelings of hopelessness attached to crack addiction are all associated with the Black family's insidious relationship with crack cocaine. However, crack cocaine is not the only guilty party regarding this issue. The long history of oppression, marginality, and isolation attached to African Americans created an environment physically, judicially, psychologically, and societally ripe for this epidemic to wreak havoc.

I argue that it is the job of Black Studies practitioners to identify and act upon this problem. This action must start first by researching and understanding the issue of African American female crack addiction and the behaviors connected to it. In accordance with this call to action, it is important to pay particular attention to Black women's involvement with cocaine related to prostitution. It is the job of black studies scholar activists to examine these conditions in a continued effort to assist with the healing process of the Black family, and perhaps better prepare the African American community for any future cataclysmic epidemics.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FROM DOPE MC TO DOPEMAN MC: THE GENESIS OF HIP HOP AND THE FUSION OF CRACK AND RAP

“These rappers talk about the money, they talk about the fame, but they don’t talk about the pain that comes with selling ‘cain, crack I hate you, cocaine I hate you”¹-This’l

“Went from being a broke man/ to being the dope man/ to being the President/ look now its hope man, this that inspiration for the Moe’s and the Folk’s man, shorty come and see his mama straight overdosin/ and this is the soundtrack/ this the type of music that you make when you where I’m at/ CRACK MUSIC nigga, that real black music nigga...God how could you let this happen?”² –Kanye West

“Somehow the rap game remind me of the crack game”³-Nas

Introduction

At its inception, hip hop was a positive, socially conscious, party culture. The youth who founded this culture, naturally merged each of these characteristics into what would become a global phenomenon. In fact, a phenomenon may not be the appropriate term to describe hip hop; that word implies the occurrence or presence of a remarkable wonder with a temporary existence-hip hop is here to stay. The continued evolution of hip hop’s music, fashion, politics, population and overall attitude make the culture more similar to a living organism than a trend or fleeting sensation. This being has encountered many struggles, obstacles, and disappointments during its life, but continues to persevere. It feeds on the energy of those who identify with its

spirit. It breathes life into those who yearn for its guidance, message and influence, and their artistic expression is the blood in its veins.

Crack cocaine's presence has overwhelmed hip hop via rap lyrics, imagery and culture over the last two decades. According to rapgenius.com, an exhaustive database which archives rap lyrics, songs, albums, and artist information, "crack" was referenced in 8,746 songs. By comparison, other "hard" drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine or "meth" were only mentioned 563 and 456 times respectively.⁴ As will be discussed later in this chapter, many rap artists, particularly the most popular and commercially successful, consistently mention crack and activity associated with the drug throughout the lyrics. As noted by scholar Paul Alfred Barton, "trashy rap became the main form of music fed to these inner city and 'outercity' (suburban) youth as the previous forms of conscious rap, soul, rhythm and blues, disco and other forms of music were removed from airplay on many radio stations. This introduction of 'trashy rap' lyrics came at a time when the crack epidemic was causing genocidal destruction in the innercity communities of the United States."⁵

This reality is extremely consequential to Black America because of hip hop's immeasurable influence on African American youth. Additionally, the fact that hip hop culture originated as a positive creation by the urban poor with the potential to promote widespread progress, makes crack's negative takeover even more disheartening. This discussion of crack's impact on Black America would be remiss if did not include a detailed and thorough examination of hip hop's relationship to the drug. To complete this examination, and fully appreciate the impact crack cocaine has had on this "movement", hip hop as a culture, influence, and potential revolutionary force must be understood from its inception.

What is Hip Hop?

Hip hop culture has made a dramatic impact on society at a global level. In fact, hip hop's impact on the world has defined a period in time-ultimately named the hip hop generation. Defining the hip hop generation is a difficult task. The hip hop generation, as defined by Bikari Kitwana, consists of individuals born between 1965-1984.⁶ Molefi Keke Asante suggests that we are now (as of 2008) in the "post-hip-hop generation." The post-hip-hop generation "describes a period in time-*right now*-of great transition for a new generation in search of a deeper, more encompassing understanding of themselves in a context outside of the corporate hip hop monopoly. While hip hop may be a part of this new understanding, it will neither dominate nor dictate it, just as one can observe the civil rights generation's ethos within the hip-hop generation, yet the two remain autonomously connected. Post-hip-hop is an assertion of agency that encapsulates this generation's broad range of abilities, ideals, and ideas, as well as incorporates recent social advances and movements that hip hop has either failed or refused to prioritize."⁷ Asante's assertion of "post" hip hop is problematic because hip hop is a culture that is constantly evolving. To suggest that we are in a "post" phase implies that hip hop culture is of the past, or as New York MC Nas boldly proclaimed in 2008-dead.⁸

A more accurate definition of the hip hop generation is offered by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar in *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (2007). Ogbar utilizes Kitwana's definition of the hip hop generation beginning in 1965, but notes that he would "extend the end date forward, considering that those born after 1984 are probably even more attuned to hip-hop as a group, as they have not known of an era without platinum hip hop records and the art's mainstream success."⁹ Therefore, a more appropriate working definition of the hip hop generation consists of individuals born after 1965 until the present. Persons born in 1965 and

after “came of age” during either hip hop’s formative years (the late 1970s and early 1980s), the era of its growing popularity (the mid-1980s to early 1990s), or during the period of its commercialization of the mid to late-1990s and beyond. The end of the hip hop generation is difficult to identify and may not even exist, so declaring an end date or a “post” hip hop period is inaccurate and presumptuous.

Possibly more difficult than identifying the hip hop generation is the task of defining hip hop culture. Opinions regarding where hip hop began, and who or what should or should not be considered hip hop vary. Author Jared Green defines hip hop as, “a constellation of urban-oriented intellectual and artistic fields, including dance, art, television, film, fashion, and , of course, music, that has reached every corner of the globe...rap music its most visible (and audible) artistic form.”¹⁰ In *Black Noise* (1994) hip hop scholar Tricia Rose states that hip hop is a culture which “attempts to negotiate new economic and technological conditions as well as new patterns of race, class, and gender oppression in urban America by appropriating subway facades, public streets, language, style, and sampling technology.”¹¹ Rose goes onto identify rap music, hip hop’s most recognizable form, as a music which “brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society,” and “prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America.”¹² Hip Hop scholar Imani Perry posits that:

Hip hop is an iteration of black language, black music, black style, and black youth culture. Hip hop music, or rap, the subject of this book [*Prophets of the Hood*, 2004], is an art often culturally rich and economically impoverished, and, sometimes recently, artistically impoverished but backed by huge corporate dollars. At its best, it is compelling art and culture. It is at once the most lucrative and culturally oppositional

musical force in the United States, and it demands a literary and musical criticism, a criticism in the tradition of Henry Louis Gates's *Signifying Monkey*, which uses the vernacular as a theoretical foundation of its analysis.¹³

According to hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, "Hip hop means the whole culture of the movement, when you talk about rap, rap is part of the hip hop culture. The emceeing, the djaying is part of the hip hop culture. The dressing the languages are all part of the hip hop culture. The break dancing the b-boys, b-girls, how you act, walk, look, talk are all part of hip hop culture, and the music is colorless. Hip Hop music is made from Black, brown, yellow, red, white. Whatever music that gives you the grunt, that funk, that groove or that beat. It's all part of hip hop."¹⁴ Another pioneering hip hop legend, KRS 1 defines hip hop in song. He raps "hip means to know/ it's a form of intelligence/ to be hip is to be up-date and relevant/ hop is a form of movement/ you can't just observe a hop, you got to hop up and do it/ hip and hop is more than music/ hip is the knowledge – hop is the movement/ hip and hop is intelligent movement/ or relevant movement, we selling the music/ so write this down on your black books and journals/ hip-hop culture is eternal/ run and tell all your friends/ an ancient civilization has been born again."¹⁵

A more contemporary hip hop artist, Chicago emcee Common, poetically defines hip hop as "a spirit, it's a soul to it it's the voice of so many people that's been through struggle the inner city its love in it, its strength, expression, its pain, it's definitely joy in it, it's a lot, its truth...it's a movement that we been able to do and use and be a part of that has helped change the world and effect the world like no other, it's the connection of mankind, it's the driving force behind bringing together Black people, White people, Latino people, Asian people, Native Americans and all mankind, it's that force, it's that unity, it's that voice, it's infinity, it's eternal, it's

everlasting art, it's truth, and it's me and you.”¹⁶ Each of the previously mentioned artists' definitions and descriptions of hip hop expressed a high level of passion and sincerity. This passion is a tribute to the power and influence this culture has had on these individuals and society overall. Arguably, hip hop culture- specifically its rap music- has had more of an impact on the African American community than any other art form. All of these definitions articulate facets of a culture that does not have boundaries or limitations. Hip hop culture is a never ending evolution of ideas, expressions, beliefs, perceptions and knowledge. It is all encompassing and therefore infinite. Those who are identified as “being hip hop” are distinguishable not only by their birth year, but by their style, perceptions of society and spirit. One knows hip hop when he or she sees it, and feels its soul when it is present.

Hip hop was created and practiced in the same poor, crime ridden, predominately African American neighborhoods that crack-cocaine would eventually become extremely popular. In “the New York that spawned hip hop...in the 70's...it was, at times, a frightful experience to walk the streets, ride the subways, or contemplate the future. A sense of despair and decay emanated from a poorly run City Hall, strike and corruption wracked municipal services and the city was pervaded by the sense that it (and perhaps all big Northeastern cities) was essentially unlivable.”¹⁷ As stated by author, film maker and critic of hip hop culture Nelson George, “hip hop grew in the damaged, insecure city of my youth [New York], and neither poverty nor indifference nor racism could stop it. In fact, to some degree, all these things helped it grow.”¹⁸ Another commenter interviewed for the BBC documentary “Once Upon a Time in New York: The Birth of Hip Hop, Disco and Punk,” stated that in the mid-1970s, “New York was wilder than any wild west town and probably deadlier.” However, “amidst the ruins and squalor a golden era of music was born”-hip hop.¹⁹

DJ Kool Herc, unanimously regarded as the founder of hip hop, was simply a young man from Jamaica who resided in the Bronx, NY and wanted to party. In response to the increase of robberies and violence at local disco clubs, and the unpopular music being played on the radio, Kool Herc decided to host parties of his own. In an apartment on 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, which later became a historical landmark in New York City, DJ Kool Herc gave birth to hip hop. While at the party he promoted, Kool Herc remembers, “I had heard a lot of gripe on the floor. ‘Why is this guy not playin’ this music? Why’s he...you know, F-in up?’ And I was agreeing with them. So I took that attitude behind the turntables giving the people on the floor what they were supposed to be hearing. You know? So it was like ‘whoa! there’s somebody that knows what they doin!’ So I was the guy who kind of resurrected the music again, on the west side, a place called 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, 1973.”²⁰

Kool Herc’s style as a DJ became popular in the neighborhood, so his parties also grew in popularity. Ultimately, Kool Herc began to throw large parties at various venues around the city and even outside at local parks. He would set up large speakers around a dance floor and play his music loudly, including breaks and pauses for the dancers and “breakers” to react to. As remembered by another pioneering DJ, Grandmaster Flash, “he’d have these huge speakers setup, and he’d be playing this particular type of music that they weren’t playing on the radio.”²¹ This “particular music” consisted of songs “like, ‘Give It Up or Turn It Loose,’ by James Brown...or Rock Steady by Aretha Franklin.”²²

Interestingly, arguably two of the largest predominately Black social movements in United States history were formally established by foreign born Jamaicans- Marcus Garvey and the UNIA movement of the 1920s and Kool DJ Herc also known as “The Father of Hip Hop.” Each of these movements began with Black nationalistic and socially conscious spirits. Marcus

Garvey blatantly endorsed a separatist agenda, and sought to establish a Black nation of his own, designating himself as the leader. While Hip Hop, by its very nature, expressed its own rebellious brashness in the songs and artist it endorsed and its unique forms of expression. While discussing the nature of the first hip hop parties, rap pioneer “and most celebrated old school female MC” Sha Rock stated “they go for the bass. Just to hear the bass was like everything, and that’s what made me rebel: to hear the bass.”²³ The deep, loud, aggressive nature of the bass and music of hip hop-as Common identifies as “rebel Cadillac music-” was in itself rebellious and “anti” to the oppressive society its participants were forced to endure. Further, the embrace and approval of James Brown who performed “I’m Black and I’m Proud” and Aretha Franklin who’s “Respect” was laden with sexual references controversial for a women during this period are more evidence of the musical defiance illustrated at hip hops’ foundation. Additionally, each of the “five elements of hip hop” is a socially defiant behavior in its own right: graffiti or tagging, DJ’ing, breaking, knowledge (many argue that beat boxing is an element instead of knowledge), and MC’ing.²⁴

One element of hip hop is Graffiti. Graffiti or “tagging,” is the act of painting or drawing (usually with spray paint) symbolic pictures, words or phrases on various mediums throughout a neighborhood or city. Graffiti artists commonly perform this act on buildings, bridges, trains, and even sidewalks. This art form began as part of gang culture. Gang members would claim a “set” or neighborhood by writing their names or crew names in certain areas. Graffiti could also be viewed as an act of disrespect if one “tags” on someone else’s territory and writes something disrespectful. On occasion, tagging and/or graffiti can lead to violence and even murders. This behavior is considered vandalism by the law and destructive by mainstream society; however, it provides another defiant outlet of expression for “hip hoppers.”²⁵

Another element of hip hop is breaking or break dancing which is an almost gymnastic style of dance that originated in the streets. Breaking or “b-boying,” also known as “popping and locking” consists of a dancer contorting his or her body in unusual ways to the music. The performer will often spin on their back, head or arms in wide sweeping movements. This style of dance is sometimes viewed as aggressive and “violent” because of the movements involved. Similar to “tagging,” this element of hip hop also has connections to gang culture. Break dancing was often an alternative (and perhaps more often a pre-cursor) to violence between rival gangs or crews. These rivals would participate in “break battles” as teams for respect and bragging rights on the street. In spite of its bold appearance and often “shady” participants, breaking was also progressive and positive by providing an artistic creative outlet of expression instead of violence.²⁶

Thirdly, DJ’ing, dee-jaying, or disc jockeying, is the act of controlling the music at various gatherings, and often would “scratch” on the records and manipulate songs in various ways. The DJ is responsible for “keeping the party going” and determining the mood and flow of an event. Once coupled with an MC, the DJ provides the back drop for the rhyming and story-telling of the person on the microphone. A DJ is required to have a hip hop party and for dancers to break dance. As discussed earlier, DJ Kool Herc created the foundation for modern hip hop by DJing parties. The often revolutionary music played by DJ’s and the loud, pulsating style for which they presented music, can clearly be considered rebellious behavior.²⁷

Fourthly, knowledge as an element of hip hop is yet another example of its revolutionary and socially conscious nature. In this regard, knowledge is defined as knowledge of oneself and “being hip” to what is going on in one’s community and society overall. As a result of the socio-economic climate of the environment by which hip hop was born, this knowledge also inherently

including activism and outreach for progress. Specifically, hip hop pioneer Afrika Baambata stated that when hip hop was started “it was a lot of unity and a lot of social awareness going on, at a time when people of color was coming into their own, knowin that they were Black people, hearing records like James Brown’s “Say it Loud-I’m Black and I’m Proud,” giving us awareness. Hearing people like Sly and the Family Stone telling you to “Stand!” “You Can Make It If You Try,” “Everyday People”...just being a young person and seeing all this happening around me put a lot of consciousness in my mind to get up and do something; it played a strong role in trying to say, ‘we’ve got to stop this violence with the street gangs.’”²⁸ These motivations prompted Baambata to start a hip hop group called “The Zulu Nation” further identifying himself with his African heritage beyond his moniker.

Lastly, the MC (Master of Ceremonies) also known as the “Microphone Controller,” was originally the person who spoke on the microphone at various gatherings and parties, but evolved into an individual who rhymes over music and performs songs. With the popularization of hip hop beginning in 1979 and exploding in the mid-1980s, the MC became by all accounts the pentacle of hip hop culture. An MC’s rhyme ability, voice, delivery, and personality became the uncontested focal point for hip hop audiences. Accordingly, the stories, opinions, and identities of these “microphone controller’s” began to define a culture.²⁹

The MC (Emcee): Before Crack

Officially, the first recorded rap on a record was in 1979. King Tim III recorded a verse on a song by the Fat Back Band. His rhymes were largely about himself being “well known like Burger King” and “6 foot one/full of fun/ and sexy as I want to be.” King Tim’s rhymes were mainly braggadocios and lighthearted. This style of rhyme was a precursor to the boasting,

bragging, and self-promoting lyrical content of rappers to come in the very near and distant future. In 1979, the first commercially successful rap record of all time “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang was another example of jovial self-indulgent lyrical content. As one third of the Sugar Hill Gang trio Master Gee rhymed “I said a M-A-S-T-E-R a G with a double E/ I said I go by the unforgettable name of the man they call the Master Gee/ well my name is known all over the world by all the foxy ladies and the pretty girls/ I’m going down in history as the baddest brother there ever could be.”³⁰ Contrarily, what was missing from these songs- in comparison to many raps of the future- were references to drugs, crime, struggle, or gang activity. As stated by George in his description of hip hop’s earliest years “the early pioneers of hip hop and their audience came from housing projects, tenements, and rough areas-and didn’t let any of that stifle their desire for pleasure. The will to joy proved as powerful as any of the socio-economic forces aligned against them.”³¹ As chanted by the Zulu Nation in 1980, “we want to party, dance, and boogie all damn night.”³² This is similar to most rap songs in the pre-crack era with a few exceptions.

In the years following the first recorded rap song (1979) up until 1984, hip hop’s popular pioneering artists such as the Sugar Hill Gang, Kurtis Blow, Afrika Bambaataa, Zulu Nation, Threacherous Three, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, and the Cold Crush Brothers consistently and nearly exclusively, rhymed about their self-proclaimed greatness on the microphone and making “everyone in the party clap their hands.” However, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five with their hit “The Message” and Grandmaster Melle Mel in his 1983 hit “White Lines (Don’t Do It),” rhymed about much more serious subject matter.³³

“The Message” illustrated a change in the content of rap music from party rhymes to more grim social commentary. Rhymes like, “it’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder

how I keep from going under” refers to the hostile “jungle” like environment of the inner city which they grew up. More directly, the opening verse begins by delivering a detailed description of the environment from which they came- “broken glass everywhere/ people pissing on the stairs you know they just don’t care/ I can’t take the smell/ can’t take the noise/ got no money to move out I guess I got no choice/ rats in the front room roaches in the back junkies in the alley with the baseball bat/ I tried to get away but I couldn’t get far cause the man with the tow truck repossessed my car/ don’t push me cause I’m close to the edge/ I’m tryin not to lose my head.”³⁴

This verse not only expresses the unsightly setting of their neighborhood, but also illustrates their frustration with the conditions they are living in. “Don’t push me cause I’m close to the edge” is a direct expression of one being at his “wits end” and their present unhappiness. These sentiments are undoubtedly familiar to the other multitudes of African American inner city residents who endure similar living conditions and emotions. While this song does not directly mention crack cocaine, it does clearly portray an environment that is highly susceptible to crack cocaine’s- and its interconnected complexity of issues’- arrival in the immediate future.

“White Lines,” by Grandmaster Melle Mel, was about freebase cocaine. Freebase cocaine was the predecessor to crack cocaine. This form of cocaine consists of removing all (or as many as possible) of the impurities in the cocaine. Similar to crack, freebase cocaine is smoked, however, the higher level of purity makes this brand of cocaine much more expensive than crack. “Cooking” crack, involves the addition of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) to the cocaine in order to stretch the cocaine base into more product. When smoked, the crackling sound, which crack derives its name, is actually the sound of the impurities (baking soda) being burned away. This process of adding sodium bicarbonate to the cocaine allows the product to be sold at much cheaper prices than powder cocaine or freebase, thus contributing to its meteoric rise in

popularity in low income neighborhoods. Further, the simplicity of its production also contributed to its explosion onto the inner city streets of the United States.³⁵

Grandmaster Melle Mel's depiction of freebase cocaine chronicled the popularity of this form of "coke" [free base] and documented the end of the pre-crack era. Melle Mel rhymed, "(Ooooh...White Lines) Vision dreams of passion (Blowin through my mind) And all the while I think of you (Pipe cries) A very strange reaction (For us to unwind) The more I see the more I do (Something like a phenomenon) Baby (Tellin your body to come along, but white lines...blow away) (Blow! Rock it! Blow!) Ticket to ride white line highway/ Tell all your friends, they can go my way/ Pay your toll, sell your soul/ Pound for pound costs more than gold/ The longer you stay the more you pay/ My white lines go a long way/ Either up your nose or through your vein/ With nothin to gain except killin your brain/ (Freeze! Rock!) 4X (Blow!) (High...) Higher, baby (High...) Get higher, baby! (High...) Get higher, baby! And don't ever come down! (Freebase!)"³⁶

Similar to any other drug, freebase cocaine was used by all segments of the United States population; however, Melle Mel's references to freebase cocaine were inspired by his surroundings-described so poignantly by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five as discussed previously.

Melle Mel also discusses the unfairness of the legal system with regards to cocaine that would only be magnified in the coming years. He states that "a street kid gets arrested/ gonna do some time/ he got out three years from now just to commit more crime/ a business man is caught, with 24 kilos/ he's out on bail and out of jail and that's the way it goes."³⁷ Presumably, the "business man" Melle Mel mentions is a White man, and the "street kid" is an African American. This discrepancy in the treatment of "street kids" and "Whites" in relation to cocaine and the legal system overall not only continue to this present day, but increased dramatically with the

arrival of crack cocaine. These rhymes are interesting because they are evidence that the harmful destructive “crack laws” of the late 1980s have a foundation in the pre-crack era.

In addition to rapper lyrics about cocaine powder and freebase during the early 1980s, cocaine found itself engraved into the fabric of hip hop culture via rapper names and aliases as well. Hip hop pioneer Kurtis Blow used the term “Blow” as a direct reference to cocaine. Also, the term “ski” was a common part of early 1980s emcee’s monikers; ski was a reference to snow as in “skiing,” which was a reference to cocaine powder. As stated by Questlove, a member of the hip hop group The Roots “ski as in snow as in blow.” Several artists including, Joe *Ski* Love, T *Ski* Valley, E-A *Ski*, *Ski* Beats, Kool Rock *Ski*, Mob *Ski*, all included ski in their MC names. These rap names are more concrete examples of cocaine’s undeniable connection to hip hop culture from its inception; twenty years later, this cocaine rap name connection still exists. Rappers such as: Tony *Yayo* (*yayo* is slang for cocaine), Jeezy *The Snowman*, Joey *Crack*, Juelz Santana also known as *Human Crack in the Flesh*, and The *Coke Boys* are a few examples of this continuing trend among many others.³⁸

Introducing Crack Rap: The mid-late 1980s

The pioneering hip hop artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s clearly described a setting which was ripe for crack cocaine’s infestation a decade later. The environment these artists identify was symbolic of many African American neighborhoods throughout the United States. Regardless of region, much of the African American community found themselves in environments that proved to be highly susceptible to crack cocaine’s plague. Hip hop culture, rap music specifically, has been dramatically influenced by crack cocaine use and distribution.³⁹

Rap music, hip hop's most popular art form, is often performed by individuals who are familiar with crack cocaine on an intimate level either through a past history of distribution themselves, a close association to users and distributors via residential proximity or personal relationships. This relationship between many rappers and cocaine is illustrated continuously through lyrics and video imagery. As a result, listeners all over the world are influenced by the messages delivered by these artists related to the drug. Many argue that rappers glorify cocaine distribution and as a result they are contributing to the youth's continued involvement with crack cocaine. This opinion is central to the purpose of this dissertation, and will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.⁴⁰

Overwhelmingly, rap artists make references to distributing cocaine more so than any other drug-except marijuana. However, given marijuana's minimal negative impact on the user and society, by comparison to "harder" narcotics like crack cocaine, as well as its debatable legalization, rapper's references to marijuana may be higher in number while much more miniscule in impact and seriousness. In fact, references to dealing cocaine are the most mentioned criminal activity by rap artist, with the possible exception of using marijuana whose criminality is often called into question by the public and government officials alike. Occasionally, both drugs are mentioned together as both have become part of hip hop culture-although in different ways; an example of this occurrence is from Reed Dollaz, a Philadelphia MC who raps in a song title "Crack Cocaine," "I'm 17 on the block, on the stoop/ *crack* in my dickies/ twisting up jars of that *sticky*/ trying to escape the slums and the city."⁴¹ In this regard "sticky" is a nickname for marijuana. These types of references are commonplace in rap lyrics. What is also common, is the references to crack dealing or hustling as a means of "escape." This idealogy will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The history or experience of dealing crack cocaine has become celebrated by rap artists and fans. Reflections on past crack cocaine hustling comprises a majority of many rap artists overall content in their songs and albums. An apparent addiction to the money and the drug dealer lifestyle has captured the imagination and souls of many rap artists and fans. One must not underestimate the effects of this current trend of cocaine dealing popularization on the youth of the Black community. Also worthy of acknowledgement, is the periodic youth addiction to crack cocaine in addition to dealing the drug. Contemporary rappers such as “DMX, the late Ol’ Dirty Bastard and Field Mob’s Smoke have all been involved in high-profile arrests in which they were discovered in possession of crack cocaine that was allegedly for personal use. Philly’s Beanie Sigel, who has undergone counseling at a drug treatment facility, and Staten Island’s Raekwon have rhymed in the past about doing hard drugs. But, overwhelmingly, hip-hop’s tales have centered on the sale of narcotics, not the use.”⁴² Increasingly, after the turn of the twenty first century, this “hustler” adoration became normative and its resulting impact on young Black girls and boys perhaps more pervasive. This is evidenced by rapper T.I.’s recollection of hearing an early “crack rap” song “Pocket Full of Stones” by rap group the Underground Kings (UGK) and its impact on his behavior, he recalls “I been hustling since ’92 when I heard UGK, hollering pocket full of stones I was on my way.”⁴³ The stones of course were actually “crack rocks” and this song served as an ode to hustling.⁴⁴

The foundation of “crack rap” or rap lyrics influenced by the drug can be traced to 1985. MC Schooly D’s song “PSK (What does it mean?) made references to the new crack dealer lifestyle. As stated by rapper Ice T “in 1985, Schooly D came out with PSK (What does it mean) a track reflecting the hustler lifestyle.”⁴⁵ Journalist Barry Michael Cooper reflects that PSK “was the first record that talked about drugs as a means to get over and get out.”⁴⁶ What Mr. Cooper

meant, was the now customary philosophy of selling drugs to “get out of the ghetto” was introduced to hip hop by Schooly D at that time. This philosophy was poignantly expressed later in 2002 by Jay-Z in “Somehow Someway.” The chorus to this song repeats “somehow someway I gotta make it up out the hood someday,” and he rhymes, “whether we dribble out this motherfucker, rap metaphors and riddle out this motherfucker, clean second floors hospital out this motherfucker, somehow we gotta get up out this motherfucker, someday the cops will kill a motherfucker, I don’t always wanna be this drug dealing motherfucker damn.”⁴⁷

PSK begins with the lyrics “PSK, we’re making that green,” and from that moment the era of “get money rap” and “crack rap” was born.⁴⁸ In a display of this new money making, drug dealing rap content, Schooly D goes on to rap “pull up to the curb and park my Mercedes...my name is Schooly D, all about making that cash money...mama mama I tell you no lies, cause all I want to do is to get you high.”⁴⁹ The obvious references to making money, driving a Mercedes, and getting one “high” are blatant examples of the changing direction of rap music. Previous to this song, it would appear fictional for a rapper to mention purchasing a Mercedes Benz. Emcees and their audiences were from environments and circumstances that made this type of expensive purchase nothing less than a fantasy. However, with the introduction of crack cocaine, the increasing numbers of hustlers, and hip hop’s inherent nature of reflecting the street, these types of rhymes were now present and indeed reality rap. This form of rap content illustrated the changes occurring in the inner city community.

During the mid-1980s, other rap artists made songs exposing the presence of crack, and the activities surrounding its presence, in the urban community. In 1985, Toddy Tee’s “Batter Ram” detailed the police’s use of battering rams to force entry into alleged crack houses. According to then LAPD chief of police Darryl Gates “if you don’t want this battering ram

coming through your house, don't do dope.”⁵⁰ A batter ram looks very similar to a United States army tank with a long thick steel bar sticking out the front in order to knock down the walls of a house. The appearance of this vehicle is menacing and certainly unusual for any environment outside of war combat. Toddy Tee's "Batter Ram" did more than just describe the "boom" of the batter ram smashing through an individual's home. Toddy Tee also voiced the consensus of displeasure this practice created throughout the inner city community. He raps "Mayor of the city, what you trying to do/ they say they voted you in, in '82 but on the next term, without no doubt/ they say they gon vote your jack ass out/ because you must have been crazy or half way wack/ to legalize something that works like that/ and the chief of police say he just might, flatten out every house he sees on sight/ because he say the rock man is taking him for a fool/ and for some damn reason it just aint cool/ that when he drive down the street I tell you the truth/ he gets no respect they call his force F-TROOP/ he can't stand it he can't take no more/ and now he gon have you all falling to the floor/ and Mr. rock man you better stop one day/ hang it up homeboy your house will pay/ batter ram." Toddy Tee also acknowledges how widespread this practice has become as a result of crack's nationwide presence by chanting (in reference to the batter ram) "in New York, *its coming*/ in Detroit, *its coming*/ in L.A., *its coming*." ⁵¹ This song became one of the most popular songs of this time. This is proof of the commonality of experiences endured by urban youth across the entire country. The scope of this epidemic, from its foundation, was broad and extremely consequential. ⁵²

It is well documented that the mid 1980s witnessed widespread crack dealing and abuse throughout African American communities. However, similar to the unfair and racist "crack laws," the use of batter rams in predominately African American communities was a misguided, unproductive, overreaction to this issue which further fueled the already volatile relationship

African Americans shared with law enforcement. In an interview about the batter ram, university Professor Todd Boyd stated “Darryl Gates introduced a tank to roll through American neighborhoods destroying peoples’ houses in this pursuit of individuals involved in the crack trade,” he goes onto say “crack cocaine was used as an excuse to justify this militarization of the police force.”⁵³

Law enforcement’s use of the batter ram to fight crack’s presence in the “ghettos” of the United States is another example of how activity surrounding crack cocaine influences African American culture overall. To appropriately understand the depth of the batter ram and its impact, it is mandatory to contextualize this activity. Following emancipation and continuing onward until the mid-twentieth century, the police were commonly viewed by African Americans as synonymous with racism, oppression, and specifically the Ku Klux Klan. On occasion, African Americans were beaten, harassed, and even lynched at the hands of White mobs which included police officers. This understandably created ill feelings towards the police by African Americans, and these feelings were maintained for decades by continued mistreatment by law enforcement.

The early stages of the crack era and hip hop of the mid-1980s immediately followed the civil rights and Black power movements of the 60s and 70s. During those movements, police brutality, which was nothing new in African American neighborhoods, became more public than ever before. News programs televised camera footage of police brutality towards Black people via water hoses, night stick beatings, and dog attacks- among other tactics. Additionally, the rivalry of the Black Panther party and law enforcement, along with the police killing of Fred Hampton in 1969, provided more evidence of the “us versus them” mentality held throughout the Black community regarding police officers. This combative relationship was discussed during a 1968 Senate hearing about the Black Panther Party. After discussing the alleged use of automatic

weapons by Black Panther Party members on police officers in Oakland, one of the Senators present stated “This is a war against the police they are being murdered by military terrorists. We want to deal with this national threat. The person, the group, the urban gorilla, the organizations which are mounting this nationwide war on law officers must be discovered and punished before the fabric of this nation is seriously damaged or destroyed.”⁵⁴ The introduction of the batter ram and the surreal sight of this “tank” trekking through residential neighborhoods certainly aggravated the oppositional stance of Black people towards the police.

The adversarial attitude of many African Americans toward the police still exists today. In hip hop culture in particular, dislike for the police is customary and expected. In the 1980s, songs such as Flavor Flav’s “911 is a Joke (1988),” NWA’s “Fuck Da Police (1989),” and Ice-T’s 1992 single “Cop Killer” were not only accepted by hip hoppers but heralded as well. While this attitude and cultural norm was certainly not established during the crack era, it was certainly perpetuated and advanced during this time period.

The rap music that mentioned crack cocaine during the late 1980s simply reflected the realities of the drug in the community and its resulting impact—as opposed to glorifying its presence. There is no better example of this “crack reality rap” than NWA an acronym for Niggas Wit Attitudes. NWA has been called hip hop’s version of the Beatles.⁵⁵ The group consisted of members Dr. Dre, Easy E, MC Ren, and Ice Cube. This “west coast” rap group’s influence on hip hop and society as enormous. Their name alone evokes controversy and represents rebellion—while gaining everyone’s attention. Hip Hop mogul Russell Simmons posits that “their songs are political in nature in many ways, and social in nature, and you understood the plight of the people that were suffering in the ghetto down the block they got bolstered around them and they got these honest poets to tell this honest truth.”⁵⁶ Perhaps no single rap

song captures the harsh realities of crack cocaine's presence in urban America than NWA's 1989 hit "Dopeman." This song is a raw, direct, descriptive illustration of an environment influenced by crack cocaine. The vulgar, detailed, and unapologetic content of "Dopeman" is not celebratory, prescriptive, corrective or judgmental regarding the behavior of the Dopeman and those around him-it is simply "keeping it real." As a result of "Dopeman's" potency and relevance regarding this subject, a segment of the song is presented below. However, it is important to examine this song in its entirety, which is posted in the appendix.

[Ice Cube]

It was once said by a man who couldn't quit
Dope man please can I have another *hit*
The *Dope man* said cluck I don't give a *shit*
If your girl kneels down and sucks my dick
It all happened and the guy tried to choke her
Nigga didn't care she aint nothing but a *smoker*
That's the way it goes that's the name of the game
Young brother getting over by *slanging 'caine*
Gold around his neck 14 k heaven
Bitches clockin on his dick 24-7
Plus he's making money keep the *base* heads waiting
Rollin 6-4 wit the fresh ass daytons
Living in Compton, California CA
His Uzi up yo ass if he don't get paid
Nigga begging for credit he's knocking out teeth
Clocking much dollars on the 1st and 15th
Big wad of money nothing less than a twenty
Yo you want a five-oh the *Dope man* got plenty

To be a *Dope man* boy you must qualify
Don't get high off your own supply
From a key to a G it's all about money
10 piece for a ten, *base* pipe comes free
If people out there are not hip to the fact
If you see someone getting money for *crack* he's
The...

[Chorus]

Dope man Dope man
Hey man give me a *hit*
Dope man Dope man
Hey yo fuck that *shit*
Dope man Dope man
We just can't quit
Dope man Dope man
Well suck this bitch

[Ice Cube]

You need a nigga with money so you get a *Dope man*
Juice that fool 4 as much as you can
She likes his car and he gets wit her
Got a black eye 'cause the *Dope man* hit her
Let that slide and you pay it no mind
Find that he's slapping you all the time
But that's ok cause he's so rich
And you ain't nothing but the *Dope man's* bitch
Do what he say and you keep yo mouth shut
Popping that trash might get you fucked up

You'll sit and cry if the *Dope man* strikes you
He don't give a fuck he gots two just like you
There's a another girl in the *Dopeman's* life
Not quite a bitch but far from a wife
She's called strawberry and everybody know
Strawberry strawberry is the neighborhood hoe
Do anything for a *hit* or 2
Give the bitch a *rock* and she will fuck your whole damn crew
It might be yo wife and it might make you sick
Come home and see her mouth on the *Dopeman's* dick
Strawberry just look around you'll see her
But don't fuck around she'll give you gonorrhea
If people out there ain't hip to the fact
Strawberry is a girl *selling* pussy for *crack*

[Ice Cube]

If you smoke '*caine* you a stupid motherfucker
Known around the hood as the schoolyard *clucker*
Doin' that *crack* with all the money ya got
On ya hands and knees, searching for a piece of *rock*
Jonzing for a *hit*, now ya lookin' for more
Doug stole a Alpine outta Eazy's 6-4
Ya need ya ass whooped 'cuz it's outta this Earth
Can't get a 10-piece, need a dollar fifty's worth
Knucklehead nigga, you turned into a crook
But swear up and down, boy, that you ain't hooked
You beat ya friend up and you whooped his ass long
'Cuz he *hit* the pipe till the *rock* was all gone

You robbin' and stealin', bugging and illin'
While the *Dopeman's* dealing
What is killin' your pain? Cocaine? This *shit's* insane
Yo, E, she's a berry, lets run a train!
Man, I wouldn't touch that bitch!
Me neither, hoe go home and wash out ya beaver
And nigga's are out there, messing up people's health
Yo, what the fuck you gotta say for yourself?"⁵⁷

What must be understood is that crack cocaine's overwhelming impact on the community is not only measurable quantitatively; in fact, the true measure of crack cocaine's influence on the African American community must be examined qualitatively through the analysis of the words, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of those directly impacted by its presence in their environment. As group member Dr. Dre bluntly stated, "we're not promoting gang violence at all, we're just telling it like it is, we're like reporters."⁵⁸ Hip hop MCs (in this case NWA) during the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s not only reported the "goings on" in the urban community in relation to crack cocaine via their lyrics, they also offered glimpses into their psychological functionality as a result of this presence-which can be viewed as representative of the masses in their communities. Proof of this representative symbolism is the popularity of these songs, the iconic status of the artists, and the emulation of their behavior by legions of fans and supporters. NWA's 1988 release *Straight Outta Compton*, which included the track "Dopeman" sold over 1 million copies in its first year-despite the banning of its title song video and public outrage.⁵⁹

The violent nature of the "Dopeman," as described consistently throughout this classic hip hop song, is telling of the expectations of those who sale crack and the aggressive behavior

witnessed by those in their periphery. Overall, this song is laden with telling portrayals of drug dealers, crack addicts, and the seemingly normative violence surrounding each of these figures. As stated by Joseph Baker, author of *The History of Rap and Hip Hop* in reference to NWA's songs detailing violence and vulgarity, "other rappers had done it and done it well before NWA, but NWA really put the Hollywood stamp on it, they made it super sensational."⁶⁰

The mentioning of "Strawberry," described as the "neighborhood hoe" who sells sex for crack, is a direct reference to the century old connection of African American women, cocaine, and prostitution. As discussed in the previous chapter, sex for crack prostitution was and remains, a highly consequential practice, and NWA clearly suggest that its occurrence is commonplace—"Strawberry just look around and you'll see her." Strawberry also symbolized a role of subordination for women in the ghetto. When Ice Cube raps "do what he say and keep yo mouth shut popping that trash might get you fucked up you'll sit and cry if the dope man strikes you he don't give a fuck he gots two just like you" his suggestion of her insignificance makes the dope man appear "all powerful." While NWA may have been attempting to only highlight the activity already in existence in their surroundings, they incidentally were also providing an instruction manual for drug dealer behavior. Additionally, when he states "You need a nigga with money so you get a dope man/ juice that fool 4 as much as you can/ she likes his car and he gets wit her/ got a black eye 'cause the dope man hit her/ let that slide and you pay it no mind/ find that he's slapping you all the time/ but that's OK cause he's so rich/ and you ain't nothing but the dope man's bitch" he is influencing many, often fatherless and example less, African American women to seek and dope man and accept his potentially degrading, abusive behavior. Obviously, all of these implications are harmful to individuals and more importantly the millions of hip hop fans who listen to these messages.

This song also exposes the disdain for crack users in the urban community, when he raps “if you smoke crack you a stupid motherfucker, known around the hood as the schoolyard clucker” and “...he don’t give a fuck she aint nothing but a smoker.” While it can be argued that these venomous lyrics can be viewed as cautionary to potential crack users, the high number of present “cluckers” who are fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters, makes these expressions substantial. These suggestions further the contempt and resentment of young African Americans towards crack abusers and increasingly strain the fragile relationships of family members.

The 1990s “Dopeman” MC

The 1990s produced the top selling and arguably most iconic hip hop figures of all time. Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Master P, and Eminem. With the exception of Eminem, who coincidentally (or not) is the only White emcee on this esteemed list, each of these artists have effectively described crack cocaine’s influence on their lives. In fact, with the exception of Eminem, each of these artists has claimed to have distributed crack cocaine at some point in their lives. Tupac Shakur once exclaimed “I’m up before the sunrise first to hit the block little bad motherfucker with a pocket full of rocks.” In addition to this claim of past hustling, Tupac also passionately once stated that he “blamed [his] mother for turning [his] brother into a *crack* baby,” and in an ode to his mother that “even as a *crack* fiend mama, you always was a Black queen mama.” The Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie) released a song titled “The 10 *Crack* Commandments” which instructed individuals on how to effectively sale *crack*- he bellowed “I’ve been in this game for years, it made me an animal, there’s rules to this shit, I wrote me a manual,” and added that “niggas can’t tell me nothing about this *crack*” in reference to his expertise in dealing with the drug. Jay Z, who is perhaps the most closely associated with crack

dealing of all the rappers mentioned, once said “*crack* in my palm, watching the long arm of the law, so you know I seen it all before, I seen hoop dreams deflate like a true *fiends* weight.”⁶¹

Ironically, the unanimous selection for the rapper with the least amount of lyrical ability and career longevity was responsible for selling the most albums during the 1990s-Master P. Master P is the founder of No Limit Records- a Louisiana based hip hop label. Under his guidance, Master P and his artists sold over 75 million records during the 1990s. In an interview during a tribute to his accomplishments he recalled “we was able to accomplish something that nobody ever did to be able to sell 75 million records independent.”⁶² Clearly, the reality of his enormous record sales is proof of his popularity, and the widespread consumption of his music by hip hop fans; therefore, it is fair to isolate the content of his music, during this time period, as it is of extreme importance to an examination of rap lyrics’ impact on its listeners-particularly African Americans. Consequently, one of Master P’s most famous songs, and the title track of his most commercially successful album “Ghetto D (Dope),” is deserving of exclusive focus and critique.⁶³

In addition to Master P’s commercial success in the 1990s, “Ghetto D” is worthy of detailed scrutiny regarding this subject matter for three supplementary reasons. First, Ghetto D the album had a picture of a crack addict on its original cover which was ultimately shelved for this very reason. Secondly, in the beginning of the song, before any rapping occurs, a voice says “thank you dope fiends for your support.” Thirdly, the chorus to “Ghetto D” includes a voice repeatedly chanting “m-m-m-m-ake *crack* like this” cueing the listener to the songs purpose-teaching one how to “cook” crack cocaine.

As the title song for the album, “Ghetto D” is a glaring display of “crack rap” or “Dopeman rap” in the vein of NWA’s classic 1989 song. However, unlike the more objective and journalistic commentary regarding crack dealing illustrated in the previous decade by NWA, Tupac, Notorious B.I.G and a slew of other artists, or the anti-crack rap of Public Enemy, “Ghetto D” rebirthed the hustler glorification hinted upon by Schooly D in 1985 with “PSK (What does it Mean),” and magnified its content.

The first verse, recited by Master P’s brother C-Murder, who is currently serving a life sentence in prison for murder, is performed as follows:

[Chorus]

Ma-ma-ma-make *Crack* like this (repeated 4 times) Ghetto *Dope!*

[C-Murder]

Let me give a shot out to the *D Boys* (drug dealers)

Neighborhood *Dope man*

I mean real niggas

That’ll make a dolla out a fifteen cents

Ain’t got a dime, but I rides and pay the rent

Professional *Crack* slanger I serve *fiends*

I once went to jail for having *rocks* up in my jeans

But nowadays I be too smart for the Task

C Murder been known to keep the *rocks* up in the skillet man

Waitin on a *kilo* they eight I’m straight you dig

What you need ten

Ain’t no fuckin order too big

And makin *Crack* like this is the song

You won’t be getting yo money if yo shit ain’t cooked long

Over cook yo *dope* it might come out brown

Them *fiends* gonna run yo ass clean outta town

But fuck that I'm bout to put my soldiers in the game

And tell ya how to make *Crack* from *cocaine*.

1. Look for the nigga wit the whitest snow

2. No buying from no nigga that you don't know

Make yo way to the kitchen where the stove be

You get the baking soda I got the *D*

Get the triple beam and measure out yo *dope*

Mix one gram of soda every seven *grams* of *coke*

An shake it up until it bubble up an get harder

Then sit the tube in some ready made cold water

Twist the bitch like a knot while it's still hot

And watch that shit while it can rise to the fuckin top

Now ya *cocaine powder* is *Crack*.

Nigga I hopes you strapped cause you might get jacked.

Ghett Ghett Ghett Ghetto *Dope*

Ma Ma Ma Ma Make *Crack* like this Ghett Ghetto *Dope* (Repeat 4 times)⁶⁴

In a discussion pertaining to the influence of crack cocaine on rap music as a vehicle to impact the lives of African Americans in urban America, one would have difficulty locating a more telling talking point than the fact that one of the most heralded songs of the 1990s was a detailed, step by step instructional audio lesson on how to make crack. Perhaps just as intriguing a point of discussion, is the opening line of the verse praising or “shouting out” drug dealers and labeling them “real niggas” or individuals worthy of respect and honor. This happening is clear, indisputable proof of the shift from emcee’s merely exposing the presence of crack and its

accompanying activity, to the unapologetic exaltation and encouragement of drug dealing participation.

Conclusion

In the beginning, hip hop was an avenue for young energetic African American youth from the inner city to express themselves. Largely a party culture, hip hop at its foundation was a joyful celebratory experience. DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Melle Melle, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa and the other pioneers would eventually add social commentary to the experience of hip hop music-rap. The purpose of these commentaries was to expose the often harsh realities of inner city, urban life, and simply to express themselves. Eventually, with the arrival of crack cocaine in an environment totally unprepared for its financial possibilities, legal ramifications, and pharmacological effects, rap music and hip hop culture which mirrors the streets, changed forever.

There is no doubt that drug dealers heavily influenced rappers in the mid-1980s through the late 1990s. This fact is consequential to the African American community as a whole in major ways. As discussed, young African American inner city youth identify with these artist and the messages in this music has a direct impact on their behavior. This reality is exacerbated by the other factors such as father absenteeism, social marginalization, crack addicted mothers, and other variables which remove suitable role models from an impressionable youth's life. As a result, often times, as Common once rhymed "hip hop is fathering."

These drug dealing songs were often the music young African American's partied and danced to. Subconsciously, young people were associating feelings of happiness, joy and celebration with musical illustrations and identifications of their plight. This irony has proven

resilient, and this seemingly backwards behavior not only continues today, but has magnified itself to unprecedented levels.

As a self-identified “hip hop head”—an individual who immerses him or herself in the music, history, and culture of hip hop— it is easy to defend and justify all of rap music’s faults. However, even as a defender, advocate, consumer, and personification of hip hop culture, it is impossible to endorse the indisputable glorification of “crack rap”—specifically after the turn of new millennium. The irresponsible, ignorant, selfish, genocidal content, attitude, and lifestyle of many contemporary rappers and their music is inexcusable and repulsive. Revealingly, while holding this moral opposition to certain rappers’ musical content and image, I too find myself reciting, purchasing, and celebrating this problematic form of hip hop. This contradiction of behavior is a testament to the power and influence rap music and hip hop culture has on hip hop generationers such as my-self. How did this absurdity become allowable? Well, the accumulation of African American’s relatively infinite oppression, marginality, and social, educational and professional isolation along with the infestation of crack cocaine in these hot beds of despair, combined with the effects of record levels of incarceration contributing to widespread family disruption—and don’t forget slavery—culminated into a galaxy of irresponsibility, backwardness, low expectations, low self- esteem and self-destructive behavior.

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CHAPTER FIVE

“THE HONORABLE” NINO BROWN: PROBLEMATIZING THE LEGACY OF *NEW JACK CITY* AND THE RISE OF THE DOPE BOY

“Where I’m from selling drugs is an honest profession”¹-Jadakiss

Introduction

The laundry list of issues plaguing the African American community societally, economically, psychologically, educationally and behaviorally, prohibit some of the luxury of lackadaisicalness in even the most recreational of venues-including music, sport and motion pictures. Contrary to the famous 1993 rant of “I am not a role model” by NBA legend Charles Barkley, professional athletes are indeed role models for American youth-similar to celebrities in other genres. In 1998, only 26 percent of African American children under the age of 18 lived with both parents. Of the 74 percent who lived in single parent households, 70 percent lived with his or her mother.² Given the disproportionate rates of fatherlessness in Black households around the nation, visible male figures of status have an inherit responsibility to acknowledge the impact of their public actions on impressionable youths. Additionally, as a community, African Americans must use caution when propelling certain individuals, whether celebrities, fictional film characters, or infamous crime figures, into the position of icon or person of note. These individuals can easily and unwittingly begin to serve as the role models so many young African American youth are yearning for.³

Crack cocaine has submerged itself in the culture of African Americans in various ways. In addition to the pharmacological impact on the human body, crack has influenced law and perhaps more importantly culture. In addition to crack’s obvious impression on rap music during

hip hop's formative years, the drug has infiltrated the world of urban film. Via this motion picture penetration, crack cocaine found an effective and visual recreational medium to further spread its destructive propensities. Using this platform, the culture surrounding crack cocaine use and distribution or "hustling" graduated from individual inner city neighborhoods to becoming visible by countless millions from the comfort of their couches or local movie theatre seats. As a result of this enormous platform, crack used the same charisma it utilized to seduce "the streets" to partner with the already seductive powers of movie star celebrity status to create "crack icons."

An icon, as defined by authors David Scott and Keyan G. Tomaselli, "encodes the person or object so identified as personifying the exemplar of a particular generation, a stylistic epoch, and a feeling about a particular set of social experiences. Although the icon or cult object so identified is something with which we can all identify, it is at the same time a construction, a product deriving from the media, entertainment, or public relations industries. Although its origin is in the real, the operations to which it is submitted in the iconization process transform it into a simulacrum."⁴ A more operational Black studies definition of an icon is similar to that of Scott and Tomaselli, but must make accommodations for the uniqueness of the African American experience and hip hop culture. In this circumstance, an icon is the personification of the generation and culture of its admirer. An icon is an individual or object that has influence over one's actions, attitude, perceptions, and formulation of racial, sexual, and overall self-identity. While indeed a social construct iconized by the media and entertainment, an icon, through the public's manifestation of his or her influence, embodies the space of an actual being. The collectivity of African American plight, the popularization of crack cocaine, and the motion picture industry, created the "crack icon." These crack icons would prove to serve as not only

the role models that many Black fathers failed to become, and Mr. Barkley so vehemently refused, but they would become almost deified figures to much of Black America—none more omnipotent than fictional film character Nino Brown. During the late 1990s and into the 2000s, many hip hop artists would strive to achieve Nino Brown or “dope boy” status. This reality is harmful and a testament to the power of crack cocaine’s influence and the power of the film industry to help create “crack icons.”

This chapter is an examination of the crack icon, particularly Nino Brown, and the continued perpetuation of his philosophies through hip hop culture. This continuance has proven itself detrimental to hip hop culture and another valuable avenue for crack to intrude upon urban Black America. The preservation of the spirit of Nino Brown is clearly found in the contemporary “dope boy” label so many hip hop figures and fans aim to adopt. To be clear, in order for one to inhabit the spirit of Nino Brown, as a dope boy, does not require a direct acknowledgement of the legendary prototype. These newer age spawns, in many cases, may not even be aware of the forefather of their attitude, crack dealer aspirations, and cultural deformity.

Further, the film *New Jack City*, for which Nino Brown is the main character, is also the focus of analysis and critique as it too has achieved iconic status among films within hip hop culture. Like its predecessor and obvious inspiration, *Scarface*, whose lead character Tony Montana has achieved arguably more of an iconic status among hip hoppers than Nino Brown—except he was Cuban and sold only powder cocaine—*New Jack City*, inspired future generations to aspire to a life of drug dealing. I argue that the harmful “dope boy” persona of far too many contemporary hip hop generationers and rap artists, who often times were crack dealers themselves, is a product of *New Jack City* and Nino Brown’s incredible influence on Black urban America. As stated in a featured article in *Complex* magazine celebrating the 20 year anniversary

of the release of *New Jack City*, “*New Jack [City]* remains one of the most influential hip-hop films ever. Directed by Mario Van Peebles, starring Wesley Snipes (as drug kingpin Nino Brown), Ice-T (as Officer Scotty Appleton), and Chris Rock (as a crack head named Pookie), the film has gotten much love from the hip-hop community over the years. Whether it was admiration for Nino Brown's don status, sorrow for Pookie's addictive tendencies, or just being in awe of The Carter (Nino's crack dealing headquarters), rappers have basically referenced every single famous scene from the film.”⁵

The Influence of Television and Film

Similar to other influential elements common in individual's lives, i.e. parenting, peer groups, schooling, personal exploration and church among other stimuli, various forms of media impact the way individuals view and participate in the world. As noted by psychologists Lisa Butler, Cheryl Koopman and Philip Zimbardo, “the mass media, particularly television, increases the public's awareness and knowledge about everything.” They go on to say that “information can be conveyed even in dramatic programming not specifically designed to educate.”⁶ Similar to music, television and film are easily digested by the public; therefore, it is easy to convey messages to audiences with relative ease and convenience. Perhaps there is no better indicator of the belief in media's psychological and social influence on individuals, than the hundreds of millions of dollars politicians spend on television advertisements during their campaigns. If it were not for the sincere belief in the ability of messages and imagery in television commercials to influence individual's perspectives, this money would be better spent elsewhere.⁷ As stated by researcher Ted Brader, “Observers have long recognized that politicians appeal to the emotions of citizens, and these appeals are a hallmark of the television advertising that dominates

contemporary elections.”⁸ This media effect is certainly not lost on African American movie goers.

The influence of television, specifically film, on young African Americans of the hip hop generation is arguably more potent than any other form of media-including rap music-a fact argued by several rap artists themselves. In defense of rap music’s often violent, sexually oriented, and crime riddled content, rap artist Cam’Ron and hip hop mogul Damon Dash argued that by comparison, movies have more of an impact on the psyches and behaviors of audiences. Harlem emcee Cam’ Ron stated that as a hip hop artist he “has an influence...but so do movies...a lot of influence I think goes to movies, a lot of people look at the movies and then they react.” In the same interview, on the nightly “news” program *The O’Reilly Factor*, Dash added, while arguing the impact of films, that “if there’s an unsupervised child, how is he to know whether it’s real or not, how is he to determine what’s real or not real? Who is to supervise him?” He goes onto argue that movies’ impact is more significant because “there is a visual.”⁹ These sentiments are shared by another hip hop artist, rapper Jay-Z, who once stated that “*Scarface* the movie did more than Scarface the rapper to me, so that ain’t to blame for all the shit that happened to me.”¹⁰

The impact of film, or at least its potential impact, on Black America was eloquently articulated by author James Snead in *White Screens Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*. Here he states that “Even in the infancy of motion pictures, it was obvious that film, as a new way of perceiving reality, opened up entirely new perceptual possibilities, giving the eye an augmented sense of visual mastery over its surroundings, preserving events in motion for a seemingly unlimited number of future replays, performing a wide variety of functions: educational; propagandistic; recreational; aesthetic.”¹¹ Each of these proposed functions, if

absorbed, are cogent to the psyche of audience members. If audience members are in fact learning -*education*, being exposed to dishonest and biased information- *propaganda*, willingly and excitedly viewing movies- *recreation*, and processing the imagery and portrayals on display- *aesthetic*, than the content of films is certainly influencing viewers' cognition, and thus a necessary cause for detailed investigation.

Historical Context

Since the creation of motion pictures in 1888, African Americans have unsurprisingly witnessed their film depictions perpetuate negative stereotypes.¹² As noted by Dr. Henry Sampson “the very first images [of Blacks] were little more than unrehearsed performances by untrained Blacks who were usually photographed in grotesque situations. Around the turn of the century, when motion pictures first began to tell a story, early Black films such as “Wooring and Wedding of a Coon,” “The Watermelon Contest,” and “A Nigger in the Woodpile” did little to enhance the emerging Black image on film.”¹³ Film historian Larry Richards adds that, during the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans were “doomed to stereotypical images.” These images included the African American as a lazy, cowardly, stupid, submissive and irresponsible.¹⁴ African American women were trapped in the roles of “mammy,”-the obedient care giver and helper to White families. Given its historical proximity to slavery, the particular stereotypical nature of early 20th century films paralleled much of White society's pre and post emancipation views of Blacks. In many cases during this era, film imitated a racist, propagandized, false, yet celebrated and comfortable perception of reality for White America. As effectively stated by scholar Donald Bogle, early Black film roles:

All were character types used for the same effect: to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority. Fun was poked at the American Negro by presenting him as either a nitwit or a childlike lackey. None of the types was meant to do great harm, although at various time individual ones did. All were merely filmic reproductions of black stereotypes that had existed since the days of slavery and were already popularized in American life and arts. The movies, which catered to public tastes, borrowed profusely from all the other popular art forms. Whenever dealing with Black characters, they simply adapted the old familiar stereotypes, often further distorting them.¹⁵

Bogle, in his classic book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks* (1995), goes onto separate the consistent stereotypical images of early twentieth century Black film characters into the five types: *Tom* the socially acceptable Good Negro, *The Coon* an amusement object and black buffoon, *The Tragic Mulatto* who is “almost White” and somewhat likeable as a result, but unfortunately was cursed with some Black blood, *The Mammy* the female Tom or coon, and lastly *The Brutal Black Buck* “always big, baadddd niggers, oversexed and savage, violent.”¹⁶ It is this role, the Buck, which most closely resembles actor Wesley Snipes 1991 character Nino Brown. In fact, Bogle himself notes that Snipes’ character embodied attributes of the buck as he stated that “Nino in *New Jack City* is callous, ruthless, brutal, highly sexual.”¹⁷ Interestingly, *New Jack City*’s director, actor and director Mario Van Peebles, briefly spoke about the depiction of Nino Brown related to the buck identification. During an interview about the film Van Peebles states that in the history of Black film “if a brother was in an action picture, he usually played the police commissioner and he was past his sexual prime, he had a big gut...the reason they would do this is they would put the brother in a position of authority, but he wasn’t a threat because he was past his sexual prime, he doesn’t have his shirt unbuttoned, he’s not shooting his gun or

saving the girl.”¹⁸ Obviously, Peebles intended to counter this trend as Nino Brown is often shown with his shirt open and depicted as someone in his sexual prime.

From the beginning of the twentieth century onward until the mid-1900s, African Americans rebelled against these negative, insulting depictions in film. Various forms of media including newspapers and Black film studio motion pictures attempted to reverse these notions of African American ineptitude. In 1916, a disgruntled African American movie goer wrote the following letter which was published in the *Chicago Defender*. This letter is a symbol of the sentiments shared by African Americans during this time regarding the deplorable depictions they were forced to endure.

“I consider it my duty as a member of the respectable class of theater patrons, to protest against a certain class of pictures which have been and are being shown at the theaters in this district. I refer to pictures being exploited by the Ebony Film Company, according to the advertisements, and which make all exaggerated display of the disgraceful actions of the lowest element of the race. It was with abject humiliation that myself and many of my friends sat through the scenes of degradation shown on the screen, and if they were meant for comedy, the meaning certainly miscarried. When the beastly actions of the degraded of our people are flaunted before our eyes in places of amusement it is high time to protest in the name of common decency. The pictures referred to are “Maddin Jone,” “Money Talks in Darktown” and “Two Knights of Vaudeville.” You have probably seen them, so further comment from me is hardly necessary. I only desire that you give this letter whatever consideration you think it is entitled to under the circumstances.

Yours truly,

Mrs. J.H.”¹⁹

The noted “humiliation” experienced at the hands of common Black depictions in film inspired the creation of more representative and flattering portrayals of African Americans by Black film makers. An example of this trend was in 1916 with “Realization of a Negro’s Ambition,” which featured a plot surrounding middle class Black people. “It was the first feature picture produced in the United States which featured Blacks in dramatic non stereotypical roles.”²⁰ From 1910-1950 many films starring and directed by African Americans were released. These films were largely parodies to larger budgeted White films, but still afforded African Americans some agency in motion picture portrayals.²¹ The aim of films during this time was to present more fair and realistic depictions of African Americans. In review of a “race film” in 1925, *The Son of Satan*, and in praise of one of the key film makers contributing to this more favorable trend in movie making during this era, Oscar Micheaux, journalist D. Ireland Thomas commented “some may not like the production because it shows up some of our race in their true colors. They might also protest against the language used. I would not endorse this particular part of the film myself, but I must admit that it is true to nature, yes, I guess too true. We have got to hand it to Oscar Micheaux when it comes to giving us the real stuff.”²²

Producing films which accurately portrayed the realities, both good and bad, of African American life during the early to mid-twentieth century was a triumphant act, and obviously worthy of recognition. This idea of triumph regarding African Americans and film will become a reoccurring theme throughout the duration of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. The impassioned reactions of African Americans, in response to the demeaning and shameful treatment they received in motion pictures, highlight the value of these film portrayals. The plots, visuals and characters of films are not merely digestible treats for the purpose of entertainment;

they are powerful, relevant, and meaningful statements and commentaries on the current climate of society. These statements mean something to people; they are absorbed into the minds of viewers and impact one's self-image, and perception of reality. In the coming decades, Blaxploitation films would take the responsibility of making statements through film to unprecedented heights.

During the 1970's, "Blaxploitation" films became the dominate genre for African Americans on the big screen. The term Blaxploitation is defined as "a commercial-minded film of the seventies for black audiences. The design of such films drew heavily on the popularity of black actors in screen stories that were often highly sensational: tough crime plots with superhero figures, for example *Shaft*, were common ingredients."²³ Author David Walker described Blaxploitation films in this way "Big bad soul brothers and super sexy sisters, their afros picked to spherical perfection and their guns blazing, lit up the silver screen in a dynamic cinematic explosion that forever changed Hollywood."²⁴

The era of Blaxploitation films lasted from approximately 1969-1976.²⁵ The "big bad soul brother," with the perfectly picked out afro, and gun blazing antics as described above, typified the cinematic renderings of these films. Additionally, Blaxploitation films were doused in the black empowerment spirit of the time. This period was defined by continued oppression and struggle combined with a wide spread promotion of self-awareness, pride, and activism. Blaxploitation films provided an escape from the seriousness and pervasive challenges of Black life and created "a fantasy world on the big screen where black men and women were the heroes. These films proved to be more than a cinematic catharsis; they also created a new mythology."²⁶ Indeed, all commentators did not share this praise of Blaxploitation films. In 1974, Dr. Alvin Poussaint, an African American Harvard University Professor, offered this scathing critique of

Blaxploitation films “these films, with few exceptions, damage the well-being of all Afro-Americans...negative Black stereotypes are more subtle and neatly camouflaged than they were in the films of yesteryear, but the same insidious message is there: blacks are violent, criminal, sexy savages who imitate the white man’s ways as best they can from their disadvantaged sanctuary in the ghetto.” Dr. Poussaint “rejected the argument that such films are psychologically beneficial to the black viewer.”²⁷ This dichotomy of opinion regarding Blaxploitation films is a theme that will continue for decades to come in reference to other predominately African American motion pictures. Specifically, urban films, which become popular during the crack era, come to be the new topic of varying opinion within the Black community.

The over century long journey of Black film can be described as a voyage from enduring degradation and humiliation to defining oneself and promoting triumph over oppressive forces. Blatantly insulting depictions of “Negroes” during the early twentieth century were replaced with portrayals of “larger than life black heroes who saved the day, often by standing up to the dominant oppressor (a.k.a. whitey).”²⁸ The ideas of triumph, mythology, heroism, and racial stereotyping in film remain present in more contemporary African American motion pictures. The furtherance of these themes is expressed in new age “hood,” “street,” or urban films beginning during the crack era with cult classic *New Jack City*.

Naturalization, Justification, and Triumph

Within the film *New Jack City*, there are three central themes of focus which will guide this analysis-naturalization, justification and triumph. The first theme, as described by Vincent F. Rocchio in *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood’s Construction of Afro-American Culture*, is *naturalization*. Naturalization, in regards to film, “can be a very effective rhetorical tool. Appeals

to nature or the natural state of things can function rhetorically as a means of persuading people not to act; to maintain something (like privilege) by accepting it as inherent, rather than to act upon it. Naturalization is therefore a popular mode of rhetoric for maintaining the status quo of inequity and its modes of categorized oppression-race, class, and gender.”²⁹ Therefore, an African American portrayed in film to be impoverished and living in the ghetto is in his naturalized state. This remains consistent with the racist “naturalized” depictions of African Americans in early twentieth century films such as *The Birth of a Nation*, which portrayed Black men as crazed, violent and objects of fear or as depicted in other films of this era, as “bug eyed,” submissive, intellectually and culturally inferior. At that time, African Americans depicted in such a way were simply “being who they are.” These representations were largely based on racist biological beliefs of African Americans’ inferiority. Today, films such as *New Jack City* and more contemporary urban films’ illustrations of naturalization are “not so much associated with the biology of race as it is with the form and structure of social reality, with “the way things are.”³⁰

Justification refers to the allowance and resulting normativity of certain activity regardless of its level of immorality, danger, or legality, based on one’s alleged naturalized state of being. An African American’s attempt to rape and kill White women, submissively obey his “master,” or participate in illegal activity, such as selling crack, robbery, stealing or prostitution is *justified*, because of his or her biological deficiencies and inferiority or societal circumstances. Therefore, it is understandable and normal for an African American to sell crack because of the environment he or she resides in. Legendary MC and new jack from Brooklyn, NY Biggie Smalls spoke to this point as well as the naturalization of Black plight and justification of criminal activity as a means of escape in song. He raps, “If I wasn’t in the rap game, I’d proolly

have a key (kilo) knee deep in the crack game, because the streets is a short stop, either you slinging crack rock or you got a wicked jump shot, shit it's hard being young from the slums eatin 5 cent gums not knowing where your next meal's comin from.”³¹

The often harmful nature of destructive justified behaviors in film is ignored because they maintain the comfortable skewed vision of African Americans popular among the masses. The underlining message of Black's depictions in film has not changed throughout its over century long existence-only the context of its presentation has evolved. In film, the natural state of the African American remains violent and deviant from the rest of society, and in response, any and all destructive, self-damaging behavior is totally justifiable. Coupled with the theme of naturalization, these realities in film are devastating to the formation of African Americans' perspective on life and their own community.

Thirdly, the idea of *triumph* is a consistent theme throughout the history of African Americans in film which remains present today. The notion of triumph is related to film as an artistic expression of the African Americans' yearning for success and victory over the oppressive factors of society. These triumphs, in relation to the history of African Americans in film, include: the ability to represent oneself realistically, the creation and development of Black film heroes who defeat “the man,” or “whitey,” and the portrayal of ghetto dwellers overcoming poverty to become financially successful and prosperous despite their disadvantaged placement in society. The latter triumph is most directly related to *New Jack City* and the multitude of urban films that follow.

The problem with this version of triumph is its partnership with naturalization and justification. The triumphant Nino Brown is heralded as a folk hero and a template for how to

overcome poverty and despair despite his tactics for achieving such illustrious achievements. This reality is exemplified by rap artists Busta Rhymes' in his mentioning of a real life Nino Brownesque personality Rayful Edmunds. Rayful Edmunds was a notorious crack dealer who was once referred to as "the Babe Ruth of crack dealers" by the Deputy Attorney General of the United States Department of Justice- Eric H. Holder Jr.³² In justification of drug dealing activity, Busta Rhymes raps "look in my baby's eyes, while they smile at me playful, fuck you think I'm gonna do, when the hunger gets painful, every day I hit the street and I chase it like Rayful."³³ Busta Rhymes uses the feeling of hunger and his responsibility to provide for his daughter as a justification to "chase it like Rayful" or sell crack to help his situation. As poignantly stated by Journalist Barry Michael Cooper in description of the crack dealer ethos of triumph, "I am this new crack generation, I make money, Reagan tried to circumvent who I was it didn't work, now I may have killed some of my own to get here, but I'm here, no apologies no excuses."³⁴ As a result of the expected, accepted, and *naturalized* environment Nino Brown (and his real life counterparts) is placed in, murdering, crack selling, and illegal behavior is *justifiable*, worthy of imitation, and viewed as *triumphant*.

Nino Brown and the Birth of the "New Jack"

What is a new jack city? New jack city is a place where residents either "live for the money" by selling drugs- or as Queen Latifah raps are "trying to win the hustler of the year award"- or live as a victim of drug addiction. It is a place where money is the new religion and "all hail the almighty dollar." After the birth of the crack era, the new jack city became its younger sibling. These city dwellers become victims of crack cocaine's addictive qualities-both to the user and the distributor. In a new jack city, the hustler is addicted to the money and the hustle itself while the addict or fiend is surely addicted to the high (and inevitable low) of using

crack. As Jay-Z stated on “Can I Live” a track of his debut album *Reasonable Doubt* which is largely a tribute to the hustler lifestyle, “we become addicted sorta like the fiends we accustomed to serving.”³⁵ Hip hop personality Ed Lover effectively describes the appropriateness of *New Jack City* being filmed in New York City, and its realistic depiction of how crack made New York a new jack city. “When that crack came, New York changed, it was like to the point where everybody could make money doing it, so the landscape of New York playing the backdrop for *New Jack City* was just real because New York just became a different city. New York hasn’t even ever fully recovered from the crack epidemic of the mid-[19]80s.”³⁶

Fittingly, a new jack city is populated with “new jacks.” A “new jack” is an individual who is the product of the new jack city, and its hustler culture. As described by researcher John Hagadorn, new jacks “regarded the dope game as a career.”³⁷ He or she is a symbol of hip hop culture’s rebellious brashness and carries an attitude which is considered “street.” The new jack has a swagger which is a reflection of their environment laden with hustlers, gangsters, pimps, prostitutes, robbers and “fiends.” The new jack, occasionally, may not be a hustler, but he or she is familiar with the hustle. This individual is distinguishable from others not accustomed to the cultural mores of the new jack city. Interestingly, via the spread of hip hop, the attitude, swagger, and physical appearance of the new jack has become the default aura of young Black America—including those from outside a new jack city. Scholar John H. McWhorter, while describing an observance of new jacks in a public setting, stated the individuals were listening to “hard-edged rap, preaching bone-deep dislike of authority—providing them with a continuing soundtrack to their antisocial behavior. So completely was rap ingrained in their consciousness that every so often, one or another of them would break into cocky, expletive-laden rap lyrics, accompanied by the angular, bellicose gestures typical of rap performance. A couple of his buddies would then

join him. Rap was a running decoration in their conversation.”³⁸ This new jack is the immediate predecessor to the “dope boy” who will be discussed later in more detail. This reality is a tribute to not only hip hop’s influence and cultural potency, but also a testament to the continuing dregs of the crack era.

The 1991 film *New Jack City*, is a cinematic portrayal of this new type of city spawned by the crack era. It is set in New York City beginning in 1986. Appropriately, this is near the beginning of the crack era. As noted by New Yorker, and hip hop artist RZA, “to my memory crack might of hit around 1984.”³⁹ The main characters of this film consist of a crack addict-*Pooky*, a new jack police officer-Scotty Appleton, and Nino Brown along with his “CMB” (Cash Money Brothers) drug dealing crew-featuring G-Money, Nino’s closest friend or “brother.” The setting and characters in this film are reflections of the real life urban ghettos identifiable in every major city in the United States. This is why *New Jack City* and Nino Brown resonated with so many viewers of similar circumstances.

Nino Brown is a new jack; he is the personification of all of the new jack’s worst characteristics and potentialities. He is a hardened criminal whose only concern is making money. Nino Brown is a narcissistic, womanizing, murderous socio-path. However, he is also a flashy, ambitious, successful, charismatic individual with undeniable swagger and leadership ability. He is a superstar in his community, and appears to have overcome the seemingly inevitable sentence of poverty delivered to most ghetto inhabitants. The combination of these characteristics, superbly encompassed by actor Wesley Snipes, display an individual who is a product of centuries of oppression, despair, marginality, isolation, and the arrival of crack cocaine-but apparently *triumphed* over it all.

Mario Van Peebles and Film Criticisms

As previously mentioned, Mario Van Peebles was the director of *New Jack City*. Intriguingly, Mario is the son of Blaxploitation film era director Melvin Van Peebles. Mario Van Peebles is an African American actor, an Ivy League graduate, Columbia University, who on several occasions has professed that he makes films in an attempt to make social statements. Van Peebles directed the 1995 film *Panther* which detailed the creation and activities of the historic activists group the Black Panther Party of self-defense. He has stated that “I like to make films with an artistic agenda or social agenda or a political agenda or just to provoke thought.” *New Jack City* is a film that is certainly laden with social implications and encourages a great deal of critical thought. However, as an African American director who appears to be socially and historically conscious, it is somewhat surprising to witness his apparent nonchalant attitude pertaining to the negative impact of *New Jack City* on Black America.⁴⁰

Van Peebles has stated that “when you watch *New Jack City* good or bad you won’t forget it and you’ll see that the director took a point of view.” What he never seems to make clear is what point of view he is attempting to display. Van Peebles stated that when he cast Wesley Snipes to play the lead role in *New Jack City*, he told him “you gonna be Black Pacino baby do it up.” He then went onto to use this casting as an example of Black empowerment in film because of his leading role. He compared Snipes’ leading role to actor Laurence Fishburne’s role in *Higher Learning*, and Denzel Washington’s role as Malcolm X in the bio pic, and Will Smith’s role as Muhammad Ali in that biography film. These comparisons illustrate Van Peebles’ under acknowledgement of Nino Brown’s negative influence on Black youth. To compare the Snipes’ film role as a murderous crack kingpin to that of a university professor-Fishburn, an iconic civil rights leader-Denzel Washington, and a legendary athlete and social

figure-Smith is virtually incomprehensible. Van Peebles appears to be a director who understands his place in the Black film tradition, and an individual who seeks to be socially responsible and active in his films. Therefore, Van Peebles' surprising unawareness of the detriment *New Jack City* has caused may simply be the result of a misguided attempt to make a statement that was not widely digested by the masses. After analyzing his statements regarding film history, and *New Jack City*, it is clear that Van Peebles took pride in casting a dark skinned African American male in a leading major film role. This is indeed an accomplishment given Hollywood's blatantly racist history and continuing unfair racial practices. However, Van Peebles' focus on this "revolutionary" achievement has seemingly blinded him of the more consequential result of this film. Countless misguided Black youth have identified with the glorious character of Nino Brown and blatantly and in spirit, his murderous, crack selling, deviant behavior continues to manifest itself in hip hop and larger Black youth culture.⁴¹

Reviews of *New Jack City* are expectedly mixed. One film critic stated that "we all know *NEW JACK CITY* is making the right statement on drugs, racism, the system," while another accurately noted that "it became a prototype for the bling-heavy gangsta melodramas of the 90s."⁴² In any circumstance, the fact that *New Jack City* made a serious impact on society is clear as noted by renowned film critic Jeff Shannon,

Some pundits called it a flawed, exploitative action film that glamorized drug dealing and the luxury of a lucrative criminal lifestyle, spawning a trend of films that attracted youth gangs and provoked violence in theaters. Others hailed it as a breakthrough movie that depicted drug dealers as ruthless, corrupt, and evil, leading dead-end lives that no rational youth would want to emulate. However you interpret it, *New Jack City* is still one of the first and best films of the 1990s to crack open the underworld of cocaine and peer inside

with its eyes wide open... New Jack City deserves mention in any serious discussion about African American filmmakers and influential films.⁴³

As will be discussed later in the chapter, among the hip hop audience, *New Jack City* was considered an instant classic and Nino Brown was viewed as an immediate icon.

New Jack City

“Hopelessness is at an all-time high.” Among several other anonymous news anchor voices describing the ills of inner city America during the opening credits of *New Jack City* (1991), the preceding quote summarized the message of this film’s opening montage of nightly news quotables- which frankly intends to convey that the inner city is in shambles. From the beginning, the film attempts to lay the foundation of justification for the activities that are to follow throughout *New Jack City*. The shoot-outs, murder, and “hustling” prevalent in this film are the result of the *naturalized* “hopelessness” experienced in the inner city. As Jay-Z, himself a new jack, once stated “we hustle out of a sense of hopelessness, sort of a desperation.”⁴⁴ This is the backdrop for the now legendary scenes that follow which, in sum, form one the most influential, graphic, and honest depictions of Black ghetto America’s relationship to crack cocaine ever filmed.⁴⁵

Within five minutes of the movie’s opening credits, Nino Brown is committing his first murder; during this murder scene, his appearance is obviously intended to portray success, or *triumph* and wealth-a gold chain, gold rings, and a silk outfit. Further, Nino is also displaying *triumph* by murdering a professionally dressed White male-a clear indication of his power and a direct paying of homage to the Blaxploitation film era’s victory over “whitey.” Interestingly, *New Jack City’s* director, Mario Van Peebles, is the son of 1971 Blaxploitation film *Sweet*

Sweetbacks Baadasssss Song director Melvin Van Peebles. This family lineage is family lineage is paralleled by the theme of triumph's film lineage continued in *New Jack City*.⁴⁶ While executing this murder of "whitey" Nino states "the brothers don't wait to get paid, money talks, bullshit runs a marathon." This "money talk, bullshit walk" mantra has become engrained in rap ethos. Nino's drug dealer motivated money first creed has evolved into several other rap axioms such as "if it don't make dollars, it don't make sense" "if you ain't talkin money I don't understand your language," "money talks well I'm the ventriloquist" "fuck you pay me" and "money talks and I speak it fluent" among a litany of others.⁴⁷ This is indisputable evidence of *New Jack City's* influence on rap music and hip hop culture.

The following scene consists of three individuals, apparently "crack heads" and/or alcoholics frolicking about in a deteriorated and unsightly area, holding alcoholic beverages, with children running around in the background. This is where the visual *naturalization* process begins and already poses a serious issue to film viewers. This scene is clearly intended to portray the "ghetto," however there is no explanation for why these individuals are in this environment. These African American individuals both adult and children, are simply present in the ghetto as if this is their natural state of being. The purposeful placement of children in this environment is intended to illustrate the normalcy, comfort, and familiarity crack addicts have with their neighbors. Illustrations such as these further perpetuate the acceptance of such realities and desensitize viewers to this unfortunate circumstance.⁴⁸

In a later scene, "G-Money," Nino Brown's right hand man and fellow crack dealer, is shown at a park on a basketball court draped in gold jewelry. This is the film's second attempt to magnify the success and attractiveness of drug dealers. The camera pans to the side of the court and intentionally shows two young children cheering in admiration as "G-Money" successfully

shoots a long distance shot to win a wager. The gaze of approval and idolization in the children's eyes coupled with the congratulatory salutes from others on the basketball court sends a direct signal to viewers that this person is of high status in the neighborhood—a *triumphant* figure. From this point, G-Money is called to a noticeably fashionable vehicle which holds Nino Brown and one of his partners, again all draped in gold. During this car ride, G-Money introduces Nino to crack cocaine as a new reliable drug to make them a lot of money. G-Money excitedly and animatedly states “they goin crazy over this man, and the bitches, oh lord the bitches, they do anything for this man, I had my Jimmy waxed (referring to oral sex) every day last week.” At this point, barely ten minutes into the film, the viewer has been informed that drug dealers are nicely dressed, powerful, admired in their neighborhoods, and have control over women all because of their dealings with narcotics. This is in addition to seeing the alternative to this status, which is naturally either that of a drunkard or crack head.⁴⁹ The drug dealers are clearly the *triumphant* beings.⁵⁰

In furtherance of Nino's superstar like status, he is later shown walking into a club, he apparently owns, to the obvious adoration of the many club goers and a “shout-out” from iconic rap group Public Enemy member Flavor Flav who was emceeding the party. As always, Nino is draped in gold, specifically, he is wearing a “dookie gold chain.” The “dookie” gold chain was of particular importance in the inner city and hip hop culture. As noted by New York rapper Reakwon, “I woulda did anything for one of them back then coming up, it definitely made us all feel that it was a form of being successful, but still being from the projects.” Rapper Ice-T also commented that the “dookie” gold chain was “a new status symbol” of the street during that time. From a female perspective, 1980s MC Pepper of the group Salt N Pepper flirtatiously remembered, “if you had a big chain I'm like who's that, he got a big chain he got a big dookie

rope we used to say, we used to call it the big dookie rope...and once Salt and I were able to purchase ours we knew we was on our way”⁵¹

Nino’s “dookie” rope gold chain further certified his status as “the man” to all movie viewers-thanks to his dealings with crack cocaine. Future “dope boys” will replace the “dookie” gold chain with diamond studded chains, earrings, bracelets, and watches. The silk garments and occasional formal suit and tie Nino fashionably adorned with gold jewelry were replaced with expensive athletic shoes, designer clothing and interestingly simple White T shirts by “dope boys” or contemporary “new jacks.” As rapped by 1990s emcee Master P, “got em hooked on this cocaine, you used to seeing CEO’s in suits and ties, but we young niggas in tennis shoes and diamonds, executive street millionaires.”⁵² Regardless of the emblem, the triumphant crack dealer aura so masterfully exuded to millions by Nino Brown, continues to evolve, and be emulated by African American youth.

In another scene, Nino, during a meeting with his underlings in which he introduced his plan to distribute crack cocaine, describes the climate of the times for poor Black America. In *justification* of people’s desire to get high, and thus his intention to supply them with the tools, he states “you gotta rob to get rich in the Reagan era, they runnin a strange program ya’ll, I mean more poor and disenfranchised folks than this country ever seen...times like these people wanna get high, real high and real fast...and this (crack) is goin to do it, and make us rich.”⁵³ He then goes onto detail a plan to take over “The Carter” which is an apartment complex in the ghetto. “The Carter” would become the headquarters for Nino’s crack dealing operation, and a mythological metaphorical reference for hip hop artists in the future-which is discussed later in the chapter. As he envisioned, “one place to make the product, one place to collect our money, we will own this fucking city.” In response to this sinister plan, one of his underlings

approvingly blurts out “you’s a genius man” cementing his prestige as a leader and visionary. This status was further elaborated upon in a later scene, after Nino belittled his supposed Columbian “bosses,” when this same underling is shown drawing a picture of what appears to be Nino in a traditional superhero garb busting through a brick wall; here, Nino has ascended beyond street superstar and leader to immortal super hero status. The former scene ends with a close up camera shot of Nino, with a haunting look on his face while holding a vile of crack, softly saying to himself “damn...crack.” This dramatized moment of acknowledgement reinforces the fact that all of the previously administered messages regarding Nino’s success are connected to drug dealing. It also forewarns the viewer that the increased amount of success, murder, and overall ruthlessness to come will specifically be linked to dealing crack cocaine.⁵⁴

By the middle of this cinematic display of crack dealer glorification, Nino Brown and his “CMB” posse have forcefully, by way of multiple shootings and murders, taken control of “The Carter.” The Carter is displayed as a fortress and “Nino has it hooked up like Mission Impossible” according to “crack head Pooky.” He goes onto say that “walking through the courtyard is like walking through a nightmare, it’s like a nation full of Zombies.” The Carter is further described as a mythological place where one needs codes to enter, includes a “drug store” inside, has naked women on the employ, and holds a section for the addicts to use crack.” This description leads to a police officer calling Nino a “sick genius.” From here, Nino is seen celebrating his success, drinking champagne and feeling good about life. He appears to be a ghetto success story and it is easy to appreciate the lifestyle he leads courtesy of crack cocaine- despite his violent acts.⁵⁵

Another example of the acceptance, approval, and unapologetic adoration of Nino’s hustler behavior involves the girlfriend of G-Money. While dressed in lingerie, she attempts to

seduce Nino by stating “a man like you Nino needs to leave a legacy, a son, a mark to let the world know that he was here.” This acceptance of murderous hustler behavior has unfortunately become common place among hip hop generationers. Similar sentiments are exemplified by, superstar hip hop era representatives and hip hop generationers themselves, singer Ciara and rapper Nick Minaj. Ciara, in her song “So What” sings about her indifference to her love interest’s criminal, hustler lifestyle. She sings “they say he do a little this, he do a little that, he always in trouble, and I heard he aint nothing but a pimp he got a lot of chicks he always in the club, and they say he think he slick he got a lot of chips he selling them drugs and I heard he’s been locked up by somebody else he aint nothing but a thug, so what, so what, so what, so what.” Nicki Minaj in her song “Super Bass” describes her ideal type of man and states “he cold, he dope, he might sell coke...that’s the kinda dude I was lookin for.”⁵⁶ Each of these examples is blatant, unapologetic endorsements of the drug dealer lifestyle. In fact, each of these artists appears to hold a drug dealer or “thug” in higher regards than those who choose not to participate in this type of lifestyle-harmful indeed.

An additional example of Nino’s success, in relation to female relations, is the casting of a light skinned woman, or what many hip hoppers call a “redbone,” with “good hair” as Nino’s girlfriend. Historically light skinned African American women have been considered the standard of beauty within the Black community; this is a continuing trend. As noted by author Omowale Akintunde in “Light Skinned with Good Hair,” “light skin and straight hair are considered in and of themselves attractive attributes...a few minutes of video watching on BET (Black Entertainment Television) will clearly demonstrate what I mean. Here, one may view hour after hour of self-hatred conditioning. Light complexioned African American women with long (often synthetic) hair writhe suggestively in scant attire. These light-skinned, long hair

“beauties” are often depicted as objects of desire for African American men.”⁵⁷ Therefore, having a “redbone” girlfriend with long hair is definitely a display of success-especially for a dark skinned man like Nino Brown. As noted by Akintunde, dark skinned men have long been depicted as “the black buck....brainless, animal-like, studs...” and there “darker complexions” have been considered unattractive.” Akintunde uses *The Bill Cosby Show* as another example of this point. While not a crack dealer, Bill Cosby or “Cliff Huxtable” is a successful dark skinned medical doctor “married to a light skinned woman with long, straight hair. All of his daughters have these same attributes.”⁵⁸

Further, it is worth noting that Nino’s light skinned “good haired” girlfriend is also not from a “new jack city” background. During an argument, Nino screams “I was your ticket out of a life of boredom, when your rich doctor daddy was making his house calls or at Harlem General [hospital].” This clear suggestion of her upper class socioeconomic background has significant implications. The viewer is being told that Nino’s desirability is not confined only to fellow ghetto dwelling new jacks, but also to light skinned, straight haired, wealthy women as well. The scope of Nino’s attractiveness is apparently immeasurable. Nino’s girlfriend is illustrating a level of acceptance of his crack dealing lifestyle simply by serving the role of his significant other. In fact, she is more than accepting of his crack dealing ways as evidenced by Nino stating “yea you helped me build the brothers” in reference to his “Cash Money Brothers” (CMB) crack dealing posse. In illustration of her strong feelings and attachment to Nino, despite his career as a crack dealer, she exclaims while crying “I love you and now you are beginning to take me for granted...” This is detrimental imagery and depictions of this sort become normal in more contemporary urban films, as well as rap lyrics and hip hop videos. The light skinned, long

haired woman is a sign of *triumph* for Black men. In this case, and many others to follow, the method of “achieving” this prize is by selling crack cocaine.⁵⁹

Nino Brown’s representation as neighborhood hero and acceptable figure is further illustrated later in the film. In consecutive scenes, Nino is shown in “The Carter” handing out money to a group of naturally excited children, while a local minister is seated next to him. In the following scene, it is made clear that Nino funded the wedding of this minister’s daughter in a lavish ceremony which featured recording artist Keith Sweat performing one of his hit records.⁶⁰

Ultimately, Nino Brown, the CMB, and The Carter, all meet tragic conclusions. Members of the CMB fall victim to violent deaths, The Carter is destroyed by fire, and Nino Brown is killed in a dramatic fashion by the one community member consistently shown not to accept Nino’s crack dealing activities. However, before his death, Nino manages to deliver a couple more noteworthy and significant statements. In an attempt to *justify* his accused wrong doings during a court trial, Nino states “I’m not guilty; you’re the one who is guilty. The law makers, the politicians, the Columbian drug lords, all you who lobby against drugs being legal, it’s like you did with alcohol during the prohibition. You are the one that’s guilty, I mean let’s kick the ballistics here, ain’t no oozies made in Harlem, not one of us in here owns a poppy field, this thing is bigger than Nino Brown this is big business, this is the American way.” In a further attempt to justify his behavior, Nino goes on to belittlingly say to the prosecuting attorney, Ms. Hawkins, “I was forced into this way of life, hey look I been dealing drugs since I was 12 years old, see I didn’t have the chances that you had Ms. Hawkins, I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth Ms. Hawkins.”⁶¹ This attempt at justification for crack dealing encompasses the spirit of this film and the continuing sentiments of crack dealers and hip hop artists to come.

In the end, Nino Brown was able to escape major prosecution despite his disturbing list of reprehensible acts. Before his death outside the courtroom, Nino continues to exude the arrogance and *triumphant* aura he displayed throughout this film. In fact, if it were not for the incidental intervening of a character of minimal importance throughout the film, Nino would have been victorious. He would have overcome a life of poverty and a mediocre existence, as well as the legal system's attempt to destroy him. Although he was ultimately killed, it is these triumphs and victories which leave a lasting impression on the viewer of *New Jack City*.⁶²

The audiences of *New Jack City*, specifically African American youth, were effectively shown that dealing crack will afford them enviable almost hero like status and recognition within their environment, financial reward, power, and the light skinned straight haired woman one is supposed to only dream about. He is openly admired by many, including women and children, and at least, accepted by most others-including religious leaders. The young African American female, from the new jack city or suburbs, was told that a crack dealer is an attractive and desirable potential mate because of his material acquisitions, power, and the respect he demands in his community. He may sell crack and kill people, but "so what." These are dangerous realities.⁶³

After New Jack City

Similar to conditions for African Americans in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s also presented significant economic, educational, and environmental challenges for African Americans-among other issues. During this decade, African Americans experienced higher disproportionate rates of poverty, suicide, murder, educational underachievement, incarceration, unemployment, and infant mortality.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the same is true after the turn of the new

millennium. As noted by Marian Wright Edelman in 2006, “Black children are disproportionately denied a fair chance and are disproportionately poor. An unlevel playing field from birth contributes to many poor black children getting pulled in to a cradle-to-prison-to-death pipeline that we must dismantle if the clock of racial and social progress is to turn backwards.”⁶⁵ As cited in *The Covenant With Black America* (2006), a useful source which synthesizes many of the African American communities’ ailments, “one of every three black males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime.” Additionally, in at least 15 states, black men were sent to prison on drug charges at rates ranging from 20-57 times those of white men.” African Americans also constitute 74 percent of all drug related prison sentences while consisting of only 13 percent of monthly drug users. These statistics contribute to the fact that African Americans, while occupying only 12 percent of the United States population, make up 44 percent of the state and federal prison population.⁶⁶

The urban ghetto, which was already decaying in response to middle class flight and deindustrialization during the 1970s and early 1980s, was now beleaguered from the devastation of the crack era from 1984 through the mid-1990s. It is impossible to identify a year of conclusion for the crack era, because while its popularity began to significantly decline in the early 1990s, many individuals are still addicted to the drug. In response to the obvious devastation created by crack cocaine within families and communities, the negative stigma attached to crack addiction caused African American youth to avoid using the drug.⁶⁷

In the later part of the 1990s and into the new millennium, crack’s presence was still being felt in major ways. Although new addiction rates were steadily decreasing, a significant number of ghetto inhabitants were still abusing crack. The rapid rate of incarceration witnessed during the crack era was also still impacting the community. Additionally, the many ills plaguing

inner city America for decades did not disappear. As clearly described by sociologists Dunlap, Golub and Johnson, “poverty and long-term joblessness have been associated with a constellation of other negative consequences: overcrowded housing, poor physical and mental health, despair, post-traumatic stress disorder, family dissolution, teen pregnancy, school dropout, interpersonal violence, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse, among others. These factors help perpetuate disadvantage across generations.”⁶⁸ As a result of this continuance of despair within the Black inner city, the “new jack” of the late 1980s and early 1990s evolved into the new age “dope boy” of the turn of the twentieth century.

The New “New Jack”: The Dope Boy

There is no better method of understanding or defining the “dope boy” than to allow him to identify and explain himself. Fortunately, several rap artists have repeatedly defined the characteristics, activities, and motivations of dope boys in song. Below are two clear examples of these efforts.

Philthy Rich- “Dope Boy” (2009)

[Chorus]

I'm a *Dope boy*

I hustle hard on the block

24/7, Give a fuck about the cops

I'm a *Dope boy*

I move work all day

Posted on the Block, man I gotta get paid

I'm a *Dope boy* in the *Coke* white pushin *Coke* white

I go hard, yeah the *fiends* gotta get it right

I'm a *Dope boy*, so addicted to the hood

Got the block on lock, be addicted to this good

[Verse]

I go hard in my *d-boy* stance
Feinds hit me on my chirp tryin to get them *grams*
It's on me nigga, the neighborhood *dope boy*
Task out you got to watch out for them decoys
I hold it down on the block makin big noise
I cut *rocks* off them *bricks*, call'em almond joy's
I got mo white than M Jackson, I'm finna cop more *bricks*, latest transaction
I'm in the hood like a leaky transmission and niggas get killed if my *grams* come up
missin
I don't play when it come to the prox, put my whip game on it and take it to the block
Call me Boston George I got that *blow*
Makin outta town trips cause them *bricks* gotta go
10 *bricks* in the rental like fuck it
A hundred thousand at the house, I'm still in the bucket⁶⁹

Gorilla Zoe- "Dope Boy" (2008)

You know what you need baby (I think she need a *dope boy*) ya feel me
You need a nigga that get that money (she wants a *dope boy*)

[Verse]

Twenties on the floor fifties in the chair
Hundreds in the safe
Kush is everywhere
Wake up in the morning like "what I'm gonna wear?"
We could hit the mall, but that ain't really fair
Pull up to the mall in a black Murcia logo
Rollers in the trunk
But in the hood's a semi auto
Clip full of hollows valet parked the car

They don't want no problem
They know who I are
Fresh from head to toe
Pull a bitch and I'm gone... take her to the room then I drop her back at home
He ain't selling records I am ballin everyday
Bitch I got work all I do is move the yay
Season close they don't drop the next year
Young nigga old money *dope boys* over here

[Chorus]

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boy*
It's all good all the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy a dope boy*
We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boy the dope boy*
It's all good the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy a dope boy*⁷⁰

The chorus' or "hooks" of these songs, and the cited songs which follow, are in bold print for a purpose. As mentioned in this dissertation's introduction, and chapter 4, these songs are cited for the purpose of impact, and they are listed in their entirety in the appendix. If an informed discussion about the impact and value of rap lyrics as a reflection of a culture's perspective is to take place, then one must consume the material in its intended format- just like the masses. The hooks are in bold print for emphasis, because they carry a particular importance to the song. As noted by hip hop journalist Oa'Toya James, "the hook catches you, gets your attention... let's face it, without the hook, most rap songs wouldn't stand a chance!"⁷¹ The verses of a song make a point, deliver a message, and have a purpose, but "the hook just drives it home!"⁷² It is these hooks or chorus' that remains in the minds of listeners long after the song is completed. People recite these hooks over and over again throughout the day and inadvertently catch themselves repeating "catchy" song chorus.' It is for this reason that the hooks of songs

such as these, referring to the glorification of being a dope boy, or hustler who sells crack cocaine are of immeasurable consequence to the psyche of their audiences.

Similar to the “new jack,” the “dope boy” as described in the songs above is dedicated to making money-by any means. In fact, the dope boy is the evolution of the new jack in the post crack era. He is not only the product of centuries of oppression, inequality, and the genocidal impact of crack cocaine; he is also a child of hip hop’s post commercialization period. The commercialization of hip hop began with the popularization of music videos in the mid-1980s. As noted by author Bikari Kitwana, “Music video, primarily through BET and MTV, were critical cogs in the wheel that moved hip-hop from the margins to the center of American youth culture.”⁷³ Rap videos, which added a visual aspect to the already descriptive lyrics of these artists, became extremely popular to avid and casual hip hop fans alike. Additionally, via television stations such as BET, MTV, MTV 2, VHI, and MTV Jams, these music videos became available twenty-four hours a day. This commercialization period witnessed young African Americans connecting with the *triumphant* qualities of Nino Brown-as well as his crack dealing tactics, philosophies, and machismo-to ultimately concoct a new subculture within hip hop culture-dope boy hustler culture. Further, in addition to rap artists growing functionality as role models to young Black youth, hip hop artists and culture is occupying an educational role as well. As noted by author Greg Dimitriadis, “school culture today has been overtaken by media culture broadly defined to include television, music, film, video games and the internet. All of these have provided models for self-fashioning that are more disparate and now more compelling than the ones offered in traditional schools and through traditional curricula.”⁷⁴

It is also worth noting that hip hop audiences, particularly those individuals from similar often humble backgrounds as the artists, largely perceive the lyrics and persona of these

individuals to be real. While music of all genres serves a purpose of entertainment, hip hop's inherent intimacy with the Black inner city requires a level of genuineness at a level not expected in other genres of music-save gospel. As stated by hip hop researcher Michael P. Jeffries, hip hop is "a culture with a 'religion and ideology of authenticity.'"⁷⁵ This expected authenticity strengthens the potency of the messages delivered by hip hop artists, thus increasing the level of influence these "dope boy" anthems have on listeners.

The dope boy hustler culture was embraced by African American youth and surprisingly White suburbanites as well-along with virtually every other race of people due to hip hop's global appeal. This widespread embrace of hip hop was also courtesy of the commercialization of hip hop culture, and around the clock consumption of rap music imagery. Due to the increasing popularity of hip hop culture and rap music, the internet, the improving quality and view ability of rap videos which allowed the coupling of imagery to match the often "hard core" hustler oriented lyrical content, African American youth began to identify with the visual aspect of rap music along with the words of the artists. As suggested by Kitwana, "Part of the reason the culture is so influential among today's youth is that most young people who identify with hip-hop, unlike rock and roll and other genres, identify with more than music."⁷⁶ This identification with rap artists coincided with their changing image. The light hearted, celebratory, socially aware and positive rap content which defined hip hop during its formative years was replaced with a more sinister, materialistic, vulgar form of poetry created during the crack era. These new age artists of the late 1990s and 2000s personified the "new jack" spirit, magnified it through video and film, and created the updated more materialistic, homicidal and ambitious version of itself-the "dope boy." Essentially, the dope boy is Nino Brown with theme music.

The essence of Nino Brown is clearly present in the ethos of the dope boy and represented by rap artists throughout the hip hop industry. This influence is also often times expressed by rap artists by their stage names, lyrics, and album titles. A slew of rap artists have either included the name *New Jack City* or Nino Brown in their album title's or have taken the name Nino Brown for themselves. Currently, there are two rap artists, "Young Nino" and "Nino Brown" who have obviously borrowed the infamous name for themselves. Among several others, rap artist NR named one of his mixtape albums *Pittsburg's Nino Brown*, and another rapper Carl Banks titled his mixtape album *This is Bigger Than Nino*. Rap artist "Elz" has an album titled *New Jack City: Elz is Nino Brown* which features multiple songs using quotes from the movie as their titles. Each of these albums was released at least eighteen years after the debut of *New Jack City*-2009, 2010, and 2012 respectively. This is clear evidence of *New Jack City's* and specifically Nino Brown's longevity in the psyches of young Black America, and a testament to the power of their legacies.⁷⁷

Multi-platinum selling rap artist and confessed ex crack dealer "Nelly" illustrated his awareness of Nino Brown by performing a chant reminiscent of a slogan popularized by Nino Brown's drug dealing posse-the CMB. In *New Jack City*, the CMB, in an expression of group solidarity, would harmoniously chant "CMB we all we got!" Nelly and his group, "The St. Lunatics," collectively made up the record label Derry Ent.; in an attempt to emulate Brown and his crack dealing "family's" morale building statement, Nelly and his cohorts would periodically chant "Derry Ent. we all we got!" during songs.⁷⁸ They also named a mixtape album "Derry Ent: We All We Got!"⁷⁹

Even more blatant and consequential expressions of the connection to the legacy of Nino Brown and *New Jack City* are exhibited by rapper Lil Wayne. Lil Wayne is arguably the most

popular and influential rapper of the last decade, therefore, his consistent dope boy and direct *New Jack City* references are extremely influential to youth. The infamous Carter crack factory popularized by Nino Brown in the film, is the title of four of Lil Wayne's albums-Carters 1, 2, III, and IV. The Carter III set a record by selling over 1 million copies in its first week of release in 2008. The Carter IV went on to nearly repeat these enormous sales numbers, by selling nearly 1 million albums as well in 2011.⁸⁰ His popularity among rap fans and African American youth is astonishing. Further, Lil Wayne and his record label associates also call themselves the CMB, changing the acronym meaning to "Cash Money Billionaires," instead of the "Cash Money Brothers" from the film. Lil Wayne's infatuation with *New Jack City* and the Nino Brown character has prompted him to also borrow the namesake as one of his many aliases. In reference to himself as "Nino Brown," Lil Wayne released a documentary titled *The Nino Brown Story* about himself in 2009. He has also released mixtape albums, featuring himself, titled *The Nino Brown Mixtape* and *The Return of Nino Brown*.⁸¹

The problematic nature of the enduring spirit of Nino Brown is illustrated far beyond the mirroring of his name and scripted film lines. It is the manifestation of his essence presence in the dope boy persona of so many young rap artists who are undoubtedly role models for legions of impressionable African American youth that is most harmful. As is clear in the cited "dope boy" song lyrics above, the repetitive reiteration of "I'm a dope boy" is a clear indication of their desire to get that point across; it is a statement of pride. Like many others, Lil Wayne also has a "dope boy" anthem confirming his affiliation with this popular culture. Wayne too describes the attitude and lifestyle of the dope boy, and the similarities to the definitions of artists Gorilla Zoe and Philthy Rich are intriguing. Also worthy of note, is the guest feature of Lil Wayne's mentor

and label boss “Birdman” whose name refers to the slang term for a kilogram of cocaine—a “bird.” The presence of crack and cocaine in rap music is seemingly endless.

Lil Wayne featuring Birdman- “I’m a DBoy” (2005)

[Chorus]

I’m a *d-boy*

Bitch I’m a *d-boy*

Ho I’m a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rox for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

[Birdman Verse]

See we *cookin’ up* a thousand *grams*

I’m in the kitchen over the stove with pots and pans

Triple color with the platinum jam

50 *birds* homeboy in the back of a van

A hundred grand in rubberbands

We got them *birds* in the coffee cans

We got the whips wit the extra clips

Got bitches outta state niggaz flippin them *bricks*

Been in the caddy been in the alley

Nigga been on the block

Right in front of Mrs. Gladys

Nigga know bout *hustlin’*

Know bout stuntin

Did the curb *servin* shynd every summer (Biatch)

Been on front, been in the back

Nigga roll wit ducttape and ride wit the mac

We see these haters like fuck them niggas
We made men millionaire *hustlin* our nature⁸²

It is apparent in each of the listed dope boy anthems that a feverish ambition for money, women, and material possessions is pervasive. Additionally, each of these artists illustrates the willingness, capability, and arguable eagerness, to “touch you cowards” with “a clip full of hollows.” Combined, the dope boy appears to be an individual who is willing to risk his freedom, life, and the chance of taking another’s life, in the pursuit of financial gain and all that it brings- via selling crack and cocaine. Lil Wayne in particular, emphasizes “power” in his dope boy anthem. Often deemed powerless as a result of racial and economic stratification, young Black inner city youth understandably seek power in addition to and as a function of financial gain.

Although these artists make their points clear, perhaps what is absent from these lyrics speaks volumes more than those performed. These songs bluntly inform the listener about the characteristics and attitude of a dope boy; they are consistent in their nature. Therefore, the vacancy of any mention of religion, legal employment, marriage, education or any other typical acceptable value in American culture is telling. These artists and their music, which is duplicated by multitudes of other rap artists both “mainstream” and “underground,” are not only vessels of influence for African American inner city youth culture-they are a part of it themselves. It must not be overlooked that the negative consequences and information imparted on these dope boy audiences, while of extreme importance and significance, is only half of the issue this reality presents. Hip hop music and film, since their inceptions, has served as reflections of the constituents they represent. Simply demonizing the performers of dope boy music is discrediting and under-acknowledging their shared roles as oppressed citizens.

Rap artists, and professed dope boy T.I. poignantly describes the motivational factors behind a young African American ghetto dweller's decision to sell crack cocaine in his 2003 song "Doing My Job." This song is an excellent example of a "new jack" choosing the "dope game as a career" as previously stated by Hagadorn.

(A sampled singing voice repeats: "*I'm just doing my job*")

Ay I'm working here, know what I'm saying

Try to put yourself in my shoes for a second

It's not personal I'm just sayin though

[Verse]

Ay look

From when the moon came out 'till the sun came up

I was supplyin the *J's* with what they *flame up*

Our mamas passing, by trying to explain us

Pissing in the bushes like they never house trained us

But, try to understand that's how we came up

You get to know us, you'll love us but you can't change us (naw)

Really we rather be rich and famous

But in the mean time we're forced to *slang* dust

'Dro or *crack cocaine*, Penicillin to Rogaine

Ecstasy, Viagra, whatever'll get the dough mayne

Im tired of people mis-representing my domain

Oh you think we out here killing for nothing, *hustling*

for no gain (picture that)

[Hook]

Hey man *I'm just doing my job*

Hey lady, don't mind me *I'm just doing my job*

I don't wanna make your life more harder, *I'm just doing my job*

You live here, I work here *I'm doing my job*

[Verse]

I don't know if you don't know, don't care or can't see
Every time something up in the hood, it ain't me
And I ain't always up to no good and know the creep
So you ain't always gotta pass through the hood without speaking (how you doing)
We ain't out here threatening your lives, raping your children
We just out here staying alive, making a million (you know)
Working hard, trying to survive chasing a million
You hear us talking loud, just think of this is chameleons
Adapting to the situations, but accusations of stealing
To burglarizing your houses..hey man you just hurting my feelings (maaan).
We got lives, we wanna live nice too
We got moms, dads, wives, kids just like you
But our options are few it's hell in high school
When you're helping with the rent lights and the gas bill too
So before you go judging us loving us won't hurt
Yeah under 25, staying alive is hard work
And for you to see what I'm saying, open eyes will help
If you could think about somebody besides yourself
Why you pointing fingers at me, analyze yourself
Quit all that chastising and try to provide some help
Instead of calling the law, you busting my balls
With all due respect, we don't even be fucking with y'all (maan)
And we can't help it cause it is like this
We don't like it no more than you that we live like this
Always stuck in the grind summertime to wintertime
Cutting school to sell fifty dimes by dinner time
See everything we know we learned from the streets
Since thirteen I've been hustling and earning my keep
Hey man *I'm just doing my job*

You live here I work here⁸³

T.I.'s introspective and honest lyrics are loaded with valuable information regarding this issue. What is clear is that crack cocaine provided a source of income for individuals with seemingly no other options-even if they didn't want to sell the drug. As T.I. stated "we don't like it no more than you that we live like this." The nonchalant manner in which he spoke of his drug dealing activity speaks to the normativity of this "business" in this environment. The tone of the song encourages the listener to believe that he may be talking to an older generation of residence in his neighborhood. This would be consistent with the apparent acceptance of crack dealing among younger individuals.

Other popular rap artists such as Cam'ron who once boasted "it wasn't rap it was crack that got the racks on the Range," Lil Flip who cleverly rapped "my music is like *crack* cause I *rock* the shows," and Nicki Minaj who once stated "I'm the queen of the crew, I could cook crack or cook a mean beef stew," among a slew of others, effortlessly and consistently mention crack cocaine in various capacities. The crack era clearly had an extreme impact on the life expectations of youth, the norms of behavior in the ghetto, and rap music as a representation of the thoughts, philosophies and conditions of African American inner city youth.

Conclusion

There is no question that film impacts the minds of audiences. Particularly, within the African American community, film has served the purpose of entertainment as well as that of platform for commentaries on society and the condition of the race. For over 100 years, African Americans in film have been making these statements. Even when the depictions of African Americans are false and at times insulting, they still speak to the racial climate of society and to how Blacks are viewed in the United States. Fortunately, since virtually the beginning of African

Americans presence on the big screen, they have been able to resist the often disheartening portrayals they have been exposed to in film. From the foundation of Black film companies in the early 1900s to the creation and explosion of Blaxploitation films in the 1970s, this rebelliousness has been in action.

Scholars must not under estimate the value of film in impacting culture. As suggested by Henry T. Sampson “there can be no question that motion pictures have had more impact on the public mind than any other entertainment medium during the last ninety years.”⁸⁴ Therefore, the analysis of film and its resulting influence on a community of people who have been made especially susceptible to harm by generations of oppression is important.

The theories of *naturalization*, *justification*, and *triumph* are appropriate guiding principles for this analysis. The apparent natural position of African Americans as sexually corrupted, violent, in a state of poverty and residing in the ghetto is harmful. The resulting justification of deviant behavior because of this belief steeped in centuries of racism and stereotype has proven itself destructive as well. Finally, the skewed perception of triumph, by any and all means, even in the form of becoming crack dealing outlaw, is pervasive and continually encouraged in film and rap music.

Beginning with *New Jack City* and *Nino Brown*, the African American community has been bombarded with films, both mainstream and “low budget” which glorify the crack dealer lifestyle. Films such as *Paid in Full*, *Clockers*, *Sugar Hill*, *Kings of Paper Chasing*, and *State Property*, among a slew of others, have served this purpose. *New Jack City* was a pioneering crack era film and its legacy is still being felt. Cinema professor Dr. Todd Boyd believes that “it is a hip hop classic because in my mind it’s really the first film to deal with that street culture.” Rapper Black Child states that “it was recapping what was going on in the streets.” Ed Lover

remembers “people in the hood and in hip hop love *New Jack City* because the way it was cast the way it was written the way it was shot was 100 percent true to what we all knew happened with the crack epidemic in the 1980s.”⁸⁵

In *New Jack City*, Nino Brown is depicted as one of many African American males in his apparently *naturalized* state of being- the ghetto, who *justifiably* sold crack as a vehicle to *triumph* over inherent status in America. The hip hop community certainly considers him an iconic figure. As remembered by radio personality Big Boy, “Wesley Snipes was just Nino Brown...when you see that movie you don’t see Wesley Snipes...you see a guy who was the king of an empire.” Black Child adoringly stated that “he definitely was a gangster, he did what he had to do to make sure he was eating and that’s what it’s about. Really when you in the streets and niggas is in that life like that you gotta do whatever you gotta do to eat, you might be selling crack but you might have to lay something down.” Boyd adds “Nino Brown was about money that was the bottom line in terms of what he was trying to get accomplished was putting money in his pocket at any cost it didn’t make any difference, it was getting money and this is very much ethos in hip hop...Nino Brown represented that in film.”⁸⁶ It is this ethos, and these characteristics which spawned the new age dope boy figure in the hip hop community and rap music specifically.

Beyond emulating the spirit and blueprint of *New Jack City* and Nino Brown by promoting the benefits of crack cocaine dealing, urban films also assisted with the creation and acceptance of the dope boy which is rampant within the immeasurably influential hip hop culture. This persona which encapsulates an individual who sells crack, disrespects women, carries and uses guns, is undoubtedly influencing urban youth and contributing to steadily increasing incarceration rates, alarmingly high murder rates, and the overall decay urban Black

America. Simultaneously, the dope boy is a representation of the hurt, struggle, and sense of hopelessness experienced by urban Black youth including the artists themselves. It is quite the quagmire for these oppressed individuals that the form of expression intended to be an outlet may in fact be a major contributor to the continuance of their plight.

Perhaps the final statement presented immediately preceding the concluding film credits of *New Jack City* say it best, “Although this is a fictional story, there are Nino Browns in every city of America. If we don’t confront the problem realistically- without empty slogans and promises- then drugs will continue to destroy our country.” Ultimately, this movie deflects attention from the real causes of this problem-the system that allows cocaine to cross United States borders, failures of parents to keep their children out of trouble, and the societal factors which make crack so convenient and desirable to inner city African Americans- not America’s Nino Browns.

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CONCLUSION

The story of African Americans and cocaine is long and complex. Cocaine has existed in varying forms for centuries, but African Americans' reported use did not begin until around the turn of the twentieth century. The early literature illustrates reports of African Americans as "crazed" and uncontrollable while using cocaine which reflected the nation's popular feelings about Black people during this time. African Americans were commonly considered violent and sexually insatiable, especially pertaining to White women, and cocaine was believed to have exacerbated these negative qualities. African American female cocaine use was apparently reserved for prostitutes. In general, the use of cocaine during the early 1900s was reportedly connected to lower class individuals, epitomized by African Americans. This reality is important to understand as this theme remains eerily similar to African Americans' use of crack cocaine nearly a century later.¹

During the middle of the twentieth century, due to a variety of factors including high cost, relative scarcity of availability, its illegality post the Harrison Act of 1914, and the rising popularity of heroin, African Americans similar to the majority of America decreased their use of cocaine. However, it is far-fetched to posit that African American cocaine use simply stopped during the mid-1900s. The scholarly attention as well as periodical references to Black cocaine use did however practically come to a screeching halt. This time period must be researched more thoroughly concerning this issue if a complete analysis of this history is to be performed.²

The 1970s, marked by widespread unemployment and residential reorganization due to middle class flight from the inner cities and deindustrialization, set the stage for the arrival of crack cocaine in the following decade. Similar to the progressive era reports of cocaine use by

African Americans of lower class status. This ever increasing section of the Black community, in dire straits, was ripe for a new “thing” to offer an escape from depression and economic opportunity. Crack cocaine would play the role of panacea to perfection.³

The reported “brief intense euphoria” offered by crack cocaine was a new, cheap, and easy escape from the ills of everyday life for many poor African Americans. This was the purpose of powder cocaine nearly a century earlier, and heroin during the mid-1900s. Crack miraculously satisfied several needs for potential abusers. The process to make the drug, which only requires baking soda, cocaine, and water, allowed virtually anyone the ability to create crack. This assisted potential distributors, and encouraged many poor ghetto residents to involve themselves with hustling. Additionally, crack cocaine is extremely easy to use requiring only a pipe and a lighter. Obviously, this promotes repeated use and eventual addiction. Further, the “cooking” or breaking down process required to make crack dramatically reduced the price of the high in comparison to cocaine. This factor clearly contributed to poor people’s consistent use of crack cocaine. Lastly, the overwhelming availability of crack cocaine, in combination with the other convenient factors, easily helps to explain crack cocaine’s explosion in Black urban America.

The vastness of crack in predominately Black neighborhoods is perhaps the most significant cause for this drug’s catastrophic impact on the community. The series of occurrences, which ultimately resulted in the crack explosion, are as complex and potentially sinister as they are marvelous. The coincidental interconnectedness of government misconduct and the economic state of inner city Black America combined with the timing of international rebellions and political opportunism all culminating into a crack epidemic is nothing short of amazing. How a sequence of apparently isolated realities could somehow unite to create a

culturally stifling, genocidal, history altering era is absolutely astounding. However, these seemingly coincidental moments in time were clearly manipulated and strategically utilized to conceive the crack epidemic.

The Anti-Drug Enforcement and Penalties Act of 1986 was a clear representation of America's enduring disdain for African Americans. The recommendation and twenty four year employment of a 100-1 crack to cocaine sentencing ratio is evidence of this contempt. As discussed, African Americans were mostly connected to crack cocaine use and distribution. Cocaine, the more expensive and "high class" drug, was associated with the upper class and elite. Therefore, this law, as part of the "war on drugs" was subliminally a war on African Americans. The consistent 80-90 percent crack conviction rate for African Americans during the crack era is proof of this assault. Similar to the actions utilized by law enforcement during the progressive era, politicians and law enforcement during the 1980s used America's fear of Black violence and "crazed" behavior to popularize this unfair and harsh provision to crack cocaine law. The incarceration of large volumes of "scary" African Americans, made White America feel safe.⁴

The creation and execution of this law is even more disturbing when crack cocaine's route to the ghettos of America is considered. As a result of President Reagan's desire to assist Venezuelan rebels (Contras) in their war against Russian take over, evidence supports the accusations that cocaine was allowed to flow freely from South America to the United States. An African American ghetto resident, "Freeway" Ricky Ross, became the end destination of this cocaine pipeline. Consequently, in addition to Ross having access to endless amounts of cocaine via his direct connection to a CIA affiliated contra supporter, Ross also popularized "ready rocking" the cocaine for ease of use and distribution. This of course was the process of turning

cocaine into crack. This activity spread throughout urban communities across the United States and thus the crack epidemic was born.

The hypocrisy of “the war on drugs” while allowing the very drugs you claim to fight into the country is preposterous. The interconnected factors of America’s fear and indifference to African Americans, political opportunism, extreme environmental depression, and crack’s panacea like qualities created a period in time that is still impacting an entire community today. The ripples of these occurrences and realities have severely wounded the Black family in several ways. African American women’s prevalent participation in prostitution in order to acquire crack is one significant example in this case. Besides personal deterioration, child neglect and high risk sexual behavior are often the results of Black women’s crack addiction and participation in sex for crack prostitution. The increased number of extended family members as primary caregivers of African American children is evidence of this fact. Further, the endemic HIV/AIDS rates within the African American community offer more proof of this sad reality.⁵

The steady incarceration of African Americans-particularly males- connected to crack distribution is another devastating strike to the Black family delivered by this drug. These men are often fathers, and as a result of their often lengthy incarcerations, their children will be fatherless. Perhaps just as important, the large numbers of incarcerated African American males may contribute to the change in views of masculinity in the Black community. The apparent “hardening” of Black culture and an expectation of toughness in order to gain much desired respect appear to be remnants of prison culture. This culture is also perpetuated by the glorification of the hustler, street, or dopeboy lifestyle adopted by so many inner city African American youth. The reach of crack cocaine as it pertains to influence on Black America seems to be limitless. In addition to crack infiltrating law and impacting the Black family via its

contribution to incarceration, child neglect, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS, crack also conquered one of Black America's proudest creations and its dominant form of cultural expression-hip hop.

The music of hip hop culture, rap music, is the voice of the inner city and has been since its inception. The prevalence of crack in the inner city began to present itself in the lyrics of rap artists in the mid-1980s. These lyrical displays were initially descriptions and acknowledgements of crack cocaine's incredible presence in their environments, but over time, to the detriment of Black youth, this content began to change.

Crack also began to appear on the big screen and portrayals of its presence and resulting activity became common place in "urban" films. The popularity of *New Jack City* and Nino Brown, created this trend. In the decades following its 1991 release, the image and attitude of Nino Brown, the money hungry, ruthless, charismatic, crack kingpin, captured the minds of hip hop culture. Over time, this image became more common and eventually accepted as normal to those who affiliated themselves with hip hop culture or inner city Black America. This cultural climate allowed the rise of the dope boy in contemporary rap music, and his influence is widespread.⁶

The dopeboy makes crack dealing seem cool and attractive to young African Americans via hip hop artists' lyrics, video content, and overall persona. This image is perpetuated in "hood films" as well. This is a dangerous reality. Involvement with crack cocaine has proven itself detrimental to the progress of African Americans since its arrival, and the glorification of distributing this drug is incomprehensible. However sad, the fact remains that hip hop's, and music in general, most popular artists portray this dope boy image. These artists are icons to young, poor, impressionable, and often fatherless Black urban youth. This must be stopped.

As a Black studies practitioner, I propose an appeal to Black artists who perpetuate these harmful messages. African American record executives who encourage this type of lyrical and visual content must also be addressed. Parents who allow their children to view and listen to this music, without any critical explanation, are also at fault. Society at large is guilty for the acceptance of this type of disastrous behavior. No individual should be allowed to publicly glorify and promote the destruction of millions of people-and artists are not exempt. The level of insanity illustrated by African Americans, who likely have family members addicted or incarcerated in relation to crack cocaine, promoting and celebrating a contributor to their demise is immeasurable. I liken this occurrence to an assault victim applauding and cheering for their assailant.

We must ask ourselves, “Why is this phenomenon of crack celebration that is seemingly so unexplainable in existence?” Well, centuries of oppression, isolation and separation from upward mobility, the decay of the family unit, and the remarkable influence of the media on society have all combined to create this unfortunate reality. Therefore, any real attempt to discontinue this harmful spectacle must first address the larger societal factors which endorse an individual’s involvement with crack. The idolization and emulation of dope boys by young Black boys, and their apparent attractiveness to young Black girls, inform us of the significance of role models for our children. The prevalence of young Black children’s admiration of destructive behavior, informs us that there is obviously a void of positive role models in their lives. This must be changed. No longer can rap artists and urban films raise our children and be their reference point for self-identification.

This dissertation has attempted to synthesize much of crack’s assault on the Black community. The purpose of this project is to highlight the issue of crack cocaine in the Black

community and offer intelligent and educated suggestions to treat this illness and prevent further infection. As a result of this in-depth examination of the issue, I believe there are two major factors which will promote progress from this stifling epidemic.

In 2010, while in Toronto, Canada interning at a drug rehabilitation center, one of the counselors made two simple statements that struck me as profound. As we discussed the process of recovering from various addictions, he informed me that an addict never “recovers” from the disease of addiction, but instead remains in active recovery. Therefore, recovering from a harmful addiction requires consistent maintenance and attention. The moment an addict relaxes or “slips up” they will once again become victimized by the symptoms of their addiction. Secondly, he told me that in order for an addict to remain in active recovery, “he or she must find something in their life to *replace* the drug.” If an individual fails to replace their previous addiction, that void will remain and ultimately will be refilled by their problem drug of choice.

The African American community has been infected by the crack cocaine disease. The addictive qualities of the drug control the lives of its abusers. Additionally, the *high* crack dealers or dope boys experience by temporarily enjoying the feeling of overcoming economic distress is also an addictive disease. The irrational mind state of many in the hip hop community and Black America in general, which allows, accepts, and promotes the glorification of crack dealing, imprisonment, lack of responsibility, neglect of education, violence, and ignorance is the result of this disease. To begin active recovery from these addictions, African Americans must be provided with healthy, positive, productive alternatives to experience joy. There must be a multi-faceted assault on the psychological, educational, and economic aspects of African Americans’ lives. As outlined in the important *Covenant with Black America* (2005), the issues facing African Americans are vast. Works such as the *Covenant* are a step in the right direction as they

help plainly identify the problems we face. It is imperative that this assault on Black plight includes widespread changes in the education Black youth receive.

African Americans must be educated using relevant stimuli in environments that are conducive to learning. They must also be taught about their histories in order to build self-esteem and a sense of self value. The Eurocentric nature of formal education, which most African American students are exposed to, creates feelings of disenchantment, boredom, inferiority, and uselessness among Black students. These negative emotional and psychological responses to formal education, in its current state, heighten these youth's susceptibility to becoming victimized by antagonists such as crack and other detriments. To remedy this issue, there must be a massive scale amendment to formal education, and a switch to Afro-centric curriculum in urban communities. Generally, formal education throughout the United States does not offer culturally stimulating curriculum for African American students. An afro-centric curriculum will promote students' pride in their race and heritage, and perhaps most importantly, themselves. The need for pride in self and community is not just empty emotional pleasure, this awareness and appreciation has the potential to positively impact one's behavior, decision making and outlook on the world. In regards to crack cocaine use and distribution, these changes in thinking and action are desperately needed.

Not only is the current climate of formal education deficient in cultural, historical, and psychological elements, it is also lacking any "real world" significance. Today, a student whom seeks to graduate high school may look forward to acquiring a diploma absent of virtually any job or economic skills. Educational institutions in urban communities must place an emphasis on job training and credential building. Young African American students in high risk neighborhoods must be trained in practical arenas such as auto repair, plumbing, basic

construction, lawn care, and computer functioning among other skills. These students must also get connected to internships with employers in various fields.

In combination with a change to afro-centric curriculum, and an emphasis on job skills training in high schools, Black students must also be exposed to higher learning opportunities. While the number of Black students enrolling in college and universities are at an all-time high, the numbers could still be better. Further, many African American students, particularly males, enter college but do not graduate; this is due in part to failures of parents and high school educators to prepare Black students for the rigors, economics, and lifestyle of higher learning. There must be workshops dedicated to financial aid, potential majors and minors, money management, study habits, and career options while students are in high school. Those of us who have been to college must visit urban schools and mentor students. We must make them aware of the “ins and outs” and “goings on” of college life so they are better prepared for the often dramatic changes. By combining each of these strategies through education, we (meaning Black academics, educators, professionals, community residents, parents, and adults overall) can detour many of the potential crack addicts and dealers from participating in destructive activity. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, these actions will help shield Black youth from the onslaught of negative stimulation they receive from commercial hip hop culture via music, video, literature and film.

To overcome a monster as potent as crack and its resulting negative influences on Black America, changes in educational institutions are not enough. Hopefully, the changes in Black student education will result in positive future behavior within the Black community once these youth become adults. At present, there is a lack of Black togetherness and unity. As poignantly identified by William Julius Wilson decades ago, the upwardly mobile of us in the Black

community have a propensity for isolating ourselves from the masses of African Americans. There must be unity for Black uplift. The economic growth in Black communities requires African Americans of means to stay in the community, and create businesses. They must also serve as economic, professional, and cultural role models. Black businesses equate to Black employment opportunities which are desperately needed in inner city Black communities. “When more jobs are available, there is less incentive to turn to crime” or destructive behaviors such as drug use.⁷ We must restore the value of relevant education in our youth, and provide examples of success via education which rival the illustrations of instant gratification they witness from hustlers in their neighborhoods. Employment options must be available for African Americans, or individuals will continue to seek financial reward in harmful ways. Those addicted to crack cocaine often begin using the drug in response to extreme financial stress and hopelessness. Addressing these societal issues will assist in lessening these feelings. Counseling for those suffering from depression, trauma, and other mental illnesses must be provided and encouraged in our community. As discussed, many crack users, specifically women, have a history of sexual assault in their past. Coupled with the other stresses presented by society, crack became a self-medication for many. Proper counseling options for these individuals must be made available to replace drug abuse. Additionally, job and career opportunities, as discussed previously, must also be hopeful and positive replacements for the crutch of crack addiction. Frankly, these are difficult tasks that will take time to complete, however, it must be done and the clock has already been ticking.

History has shown us that grassroots organizations can be effective contributors to major change in the Black community. Grassroots movements are actions by community members prompted by a collective social and/or political belief. These organizations often aim to establish

positive change within a small area, but have the potential to lead by example and spread throughout the nation. For example, in Detroit, Michigan, a city plagued with drugs and crime, a group of men have decided to stand up against the negative elements in their neighborhood. These men, who call themselves “The Detroit 300,” have united to declare war on criminals in their neighborhood. They hold neighborhood watches, walk throughs, and have a book forthcoming *How to Secure and Take Back Your Neighborhood*.⁸ Unfortunately, grassroots “vigilante” organizations such as this have seen “mixed results” and their “effects on crime have not been demonstrated.”⁹ However, in combination with educational, community, and psychological revolution, grassroots organizations such as this, among many others, can surely promote significant positive change.

Further, family stability is another viable treatment for Black America’s crack addiction. A stable family unit will provide young boys a template for manhood, young girls an example of woman hood, and strengthen her expectations of a potential mate. Misguided or unguided youth are susceptible to fall victim to virtually anything. This is clearly evidenced by the content of this dissertation. Regardless of the factors surrounding African Americans’ consistent involvement with cocaine, guidance and direction away from this participation will do wonders. Even in a situation where an individual is starving, he will not eat something that he or she is sure is poison; it is not even an option. However, if the individual is not properly informed of its poisonous nature, and this person becomes famished unexposed to any other food options, he or she is susceptible to partake and suffer the consequences. This analogy is relevant to African Americans’ involvement with crack cocaine. Regardless of the circumstances which promote a relationship with crack, factors such as proper guidance and role models will allow an individual to properly identify crack cocaine as toxic and avoidable in any circumstance.

As a young African American male who came of age at the height of the crack era in a crack infested section of town, I know this to be true. I was fortunate to have a present father, mother and older brother, who shielded me from involvement with the ever present crack rock. We were a low income family, in the “hood,” surrounded by individuals who reaped economic gain from hustling crack. I listened to and continue to listen to “crack rap,” watched urban films, and viewed “dopeboy videos,” but I had an alternative model to emulate and was properly informed of crack cocaine’s poisonous attributes. While the racist structure of America must be changed to allow more fairness in the law, housing, employment, education, and healthcare, it is not *immediately* necessary to begin solving this still pressing issue of crack cocaine. A strong family unit can be the proverbial eye in the storm of oppression, marginalization, poverty, and struggle.

Historically, African American movements for change and uplift have started with the masses of people and forced political and legal change. While this strategy has proven effective in past decades, it is clear that the final destination of community action must not be government cooperation. We must take it upon ourselves as the academic and religious leaders, educators, professionals, parents, and elders to create and sustain change within Black communities. We must hold each other responsible and get the wheels of revolution turning. There must be widespread and large scale fundraising and grant writing in order to establish academic institutions with afro-centric curriculum. This funding is also vital to the creation and sustainment of workshops and community centers in urban communities.

For those of us sentenced to endure these life conditions, we must have support and information to avoid the alluring charisma of crack cocaine. Analysis of information which connects African Americans to crack cocaine is valuable in order to heal the wounds this drug

has inflicted. This idea is eloquently stated by Congresswoman Juanita McDonald, “information is power, without it we are powerless, with it and its effective application our potential is unlimited.”¹⁰ It is not only the job of Black studies practitioners to utilize this information for Black uplift it is imperative that the masses become informed and active as well. African Americans’ relationship with crack cocaine is a dark and uncomfortable truth, but in no situation is truth an inhibitor of progress and this issue is not an exception.

Notes

- 1 Joseph F. Spillane, *Cocaine: From Medical Marvel to Modern Menace in the United States, 1884-1920* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 9; Edward Williams, "Negro Cocaine Fiends, New Southern Menace", Feb. 8, 1914.
- 2 James B. Bakalar and Lester Grinspoon, *Cocaine*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc.1971), 17.
- 3 Robin D. G. Kelley, "Into the Fire: 1970 to the Present," *To Make Our World Anew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 543-544.
- 4 Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, Public Law 99-570, (H.R. 5484), October 27, 1986; Source Book of Federal Drug Sentencing Statistics," United States Sentencing Commission. http://www.ussc.gov/Data_and_Statistics/Annual_Reports_and_Sourcebooks/1996/sourcebk.htm
- 5 "HIV among African Americans," Center for Disease Control, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/aa/>.
- 6 *New Jack City*, Directed by Mario Van Peebles, (1991; Warner Home Video, 1998), DVD.
- 7 Robert J. Chaskin, *Youth Gangs and Community Intervention: Research, Practice, and Evidence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 85.
- 8 <http://www.thedetroit300.org/>. accessed May 30, 2012.
- 9 Chaskin, *Youth Gangs and Community Intervention: Research, Practice, and Evidence*, 84.
- 10 Juanita McDonald-"CIA Drug Trafficking Town Hall Meeting," 1996.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

N.W.A. (NIGGAS WIT ATTITUDES)- DOPEMAN (1989)

[Ice Cube]

It was once said by a man who couldn't quit

Dope man please can I have another *hit*

The *Dope man* said cluck I don't give a *shit*

If your girl kneels down and sucks my dick

It all happened and the guy tried to choke her

Nigga didn't care she aint nothing but a *smoker*

That's the way it goes that's the name of the game

Young brother getting over by *slanging 'caine*

Gold around his neck 14 k heaven

Bitches clockin on his dick 24-7

Plus he's making money keep the *base* heads waiting

Rollin 6-4 wit the fresh ass daytons

Living in Compton, California CA

His Uzi up yo ass if he don't get paid

Nigga begging for credit he's knocking out teeth

Clocking much dollars on the 1st and 15th

Big wad of money nothing less than a twenty

Yo you want a five-oh the *Dope man* got plenty

To be a *Dope man* boy you must qualify

Don't get high off your own supply

From a key to a G it's all about money

10 piece for a ten, *base* pipe comes free

If people out there are not hip to the fact

If you see someone getting money for *crack* he's

The...

[Chorus]

Dope man Dope man

Hey man give me a *hit*

Dope man Dope man

Hey yo fuck that *shit*

Dope man Dope man

We just can't quit

Dope man Dope man

We'll suck this bitch

[Ice Cube]

Wait a minute who the fuck are you talking to do you know who I am?

I can't believe this this bitch is trying to gank me

I'll slap you up side yo head wit 9 inches of limp dick

[Ice Cube]

You need a nigga with money so you get a *Dope man*

Juice that fool 4 as much as you can

She likes his car and he gets wit her

Got a black eye 'cause the *Dope man hit* her

Let that slide and you pay it no mind

Find that he's slapping you all the time

But that's ok cause he's so rich

And you ain't nothing but the *Dope man's* bitch

Do what he say and you keep yo mouth shut

Popping that trash might get you fucked up

You'll sit and cry if the *Dope man* strikes you

He don't give a fuck he gots two just like you

There's a another girl in the *Dopeman's* life

Not quite a bitch but far from a wife
She's called strawberry and everybody know
Strawberry strawberry is the neighborhood hoe
Do anything for a *hit* or 2
Give the bitch a *rock* and she will fuck your whole damn crew
It might be yo wife and it might make you sick
Come home and see her mouth on the *Dopeman's* dick
Strawberry just look around you'll see her
But don't fuck around she'll give you gonorrhea
If people out there ain't hip to the fact
Strawberry is a girl *selling* pussy for *crack*
To the....

[Chorus]

Dope man Dope man

Hey man give me a *hit*

Dope man Dope man

Hey yo man fuck that *shit*

Dope man Dope man

In yo face

Hey yo DRE kick in the bass

[Ice Cube]

If you smoke '*caine* you a stupid motherfucker
Known around the hood as the schoolyard *clucker*
Doin' that *crack* with all the money ya got
On ya hands and knees, searching for a piece of *rock*
Jonzing for a *hit*, now ya lookin' for more
Doug stole a Alpine outta Eazy's 6-4

Ya need ya ass whooped 'cuz it's outta this Earth
Can't get a 10-piece, need a dollar fifty's worth
Knucklehead nigga, you turned into a crook
But swear up and down, boy, that you ain't hooked
You beat ya friend up and you whooped his ass long
'Cuz he *hit* the pipe till the *rock* was all gone
You robbin' and stealin', bugging and illin'
While the *Dopeman's* dealing
What is killin' your pain? Cocaine? This *shit's* insane
Yo, E, she's a berry, lets run a train!
Man, I wouldn't touch that bitch!
Me neither, hoe go home and wash out ya beaver
And nigga's are out there, messing up people's health
Yo, what the fuck you gotta say for yourself?
[Easy E]
Well, I'm the *Dopeman*, yeah, boy wear corduroy
Money up to here but unemployed
You keep smoking that *rock*
And my pocket's getting bigger
Yo, got that 5-0, double-up nigga!
Yeah, high rollin', big money, I'm foldin'
Bitch on my tip, for the dick, I'm holdin'
Strong strawberry, jockin' me so early
Hoe, ya wanna *hit*? Ya gotta get your knees dirty
Well that's my life, that's how it's cut
"Hey *Dopeman!*" Bitch shut the fuck up!
Gotta make a run, it's a big money deal

Gankers got the fake but you can get the real
From the....

[Chorus]

Dopeman! Dopeman!

Yeah, that's me!

Dopeman! Dopeman!

Yo, can I get a G?

Dopeman! Dopeman!

Clock as much as he can

Fuck this *shit*, who am I?

The *Dopeman!*

Yo, Mr. *Dopeman*, you think your slick

Ya sold *crack* to my sister and now she's sick

But if she happens to die because of your *drug*

I'm puttin' in your culo, a .38 slug!

Hey Mr. *Dope man* you think

Your slick you sold *crack* to my sister and now she's sick but if she

Happens to die because

Of your *drug* I'm putting in your culo a 38 slug

APPENDIX B

Philthy Rich- "Dope Boy" (2009)

[Chorus]

I'm a *Dope boy*

I hustle hard on the block

24/7, Give a fuck about the cops

I'm a *Dope boy*

I move work all day

Posted on the Block, man I gotta get paid

I'm a *Dope boy* in the Coke white pushin coke white

I go hard, yeah the fiends gotta get it right

I'm a *Dope boy*, so addicted to the hood

Got the block on lock, be addicted to this good

[Verse 1]

Hey, call me *dope boy* fresh

Coke white like the coke white tee on your chest

I'm on them narcs like a strap on the vest

I'll strap on the vest and hit the block with the best

Yes, The *dope boy* pushin cream through the hood

In my late night outfit jeans and the hood

Yeah, I'm so hood and that's where you can find me

Late night, postin up, yeah niggas just grindin

I'm stayin low, keep my name ain't for the cops

Passed out Tuesday, Thursdays got to close shop

I'm on the block like the cross walk in between
Niggas got to cross through me before they move they cream
We won't play stretch a nigga like elastic
An Weezy told you niggas how we shoot if it's plastic
Don't try to play cause them 4's will blast em
Battery Acid for the bricks if we got to trash em

[Chorus]

I'm a *Dope boy*

I hustle hard on the block

24/7, Give a fuck about the cops

I'm a *Dope boy*

I move work all day

Posted on the Block, man I gotta get paid

I'm a *Dope boy* in the Coke white pushin coke white

I go hard, yeah the feigns gotta get it right

I'm a *Dope boy*, so addicted to the hood

Got the block on lock, be addicted to this good

[Verse 2]

I go hard in my d-boy stance

Feigns hit me on my chirp tryin to get them *grams*

It's on me nigga, the neighborhood *dope boy*

Task out you got to watch out for them decoys

I hold it down on the block makin big noise

I cut rocks off them bricks, call'em almond joy's
I got mo white than M Jackson, I'm finna cop more bricks, latest transaction
I'm in the hood like a leaky transmission and niggas get killed if my *grams* come up missin
I don't play when it come to the prox, put my whip game on it and take it to the block
Call me Boston George I got that blow
Makin outta town trips cause them bricks gotta go
10 bricks in the rental like fuck it
A hundred thousand at the house, I'm still in the bucket

[Chorus]

I'm a *Dope boy*

I hustle hard on the block

24/7, Give a fuck about the cops

I'm a *Dope boy*

I move work all day

Posted on the Block, man I gotta get paid

I'm a *Dope boy* in the Coke white pushin coke white

I go hard, yeah the fiends gotta get it right

I'm a *Dope boy*, so addicted to the hood

Got the block on lock, be addicted to this good

[Verse 3]

The *dope boy* got the paper in his pocket
And a key to the hood so I'm about to lock it
I spit dimes out my mouth for a profit

I spit rhymes out my mouth on some block shit
I'm hot bitch, I've been out here all day
Ain't no shade, we don't hustle in no hall ways
My stomach rumble but my bundle got to move
Got to run inside a house and take a number 2
Now check it, watch how we rock up to the top
Look that's good cream, ain't stickin to the pot
A good nigga so I'm stickin to the block
I'm goin in with nothin but I'm leaving with the block
Yes, this be the *Dope boy* Anthem
No I'm not a 5-0, but please put ya hands up
And pledge allegiance to the hood
To keep good cream, good purp good joogs

[Chorus]

I'm a *Dope boy*

I hustle hard on the block

24/7, Give a fuck about the cops

I'm a *Dope boy*

I move work all day

Posted on the Block, man I gotta get paid

I'm a *Dope boy* in the Coke white pushin coke white

I go hard, yeah the feigns gotta get it right

I'm a *Dope boy*, so addicted to the hood

Got the block on lock, be addicted to this good

Gorilla Zoe- “Dope Boy” (2008)

You know what you need baby (I think she need a *dope boy*) ya feel me

You need a nigga that get that money (she wants a *dope boy*)

[Verse 1]

Twenties on the floor fifties in the chair

Hundreds in the safe

Kush is everywhere

Wake up in the morning like "what I'm gonna wear?"

We could hit the mall, but that ain't really fair

Pull up to the mall in a black Murcia logo

Rollers in the trunk

But in the hood's a semi auto

Clip full of hollows valet parked the car

They don't want no problem

They know who I are

Fresh from head to toe

Pull a bitch and I'm gone... take her to the room then I drop her back at home

He ain't selling records I am ballin everyday

Bitch I got work all I do is move the yay

[Chorus]

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boy*

It's all good all the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy a dope boy*

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boy the dope boy*

It's all good the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy a dope boy*

[Verse 2]

Bricks of the press call me Osama, presidential kush call me Obama

Pull up to the trap trunk beating like thunder

Man I'm gettin money better watch ya baby mama

Hey Mrs. Hilary, can't be kin to me but I keep that white bitch on another

Level G

Hey Billy Clinton what ya tryin to sell me that's the same shit that my Mexicans mail me

1500 bills god damn that's a felony

Karats in my ears all the bitches wanna share me

John deer, take care of the grass

My dear let me take care of that ass

G Zoe G4 that's a lear Lamborghini threw it in the 6 gears

Season close they don't drop the next year, young nigga old money *dope boys* over here

[Chorus]

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boys the dope boys*

It's all good all the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy a dope boy*

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boys the dope boys*

It's all good the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy* a *dope boy*

[Verse 3]

Rap shine, I want one like Snoop say

So you can catch me up in Onyx every Tuesday

Styrofoam cup ya think I'm drinking pink kool aid karats round my neck

Looking like a bunch of lemonade

Dope boy I been running from the media, stacks in my pocket thick like encyclopedias

Old money I get it I beat a block, then throw it at them girls that like to lick the lollipop

[Chorus]

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boys* the *dope boys*

It's all good all the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy* a *dope boy*

We be in the hood all the bitches in the hood love the *dope boys* the *dope boys*

It's all good the bitches wanna do is fuck a *dope boy* a *dope boy*

Lil Wayne featuring Birdman- "I'm a DBoy" (2005)

[Lil Wayne]

Yeah

Ok I'm strapped

Get 'Em

Black Hat, Black Shades, Black Diamonds Oh Behave

No he can't with the fuckin seats back

Got the paint job tho

And the fuckin seats cracked

[Chorus]

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rox for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rox for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm Gone

[Lil Wayne]

Thinkin' of a masta plan

I get money but I'm thinkin of a fasta plan

I'm tryin' to cash it in

I got 5 in the garbage can and the Wrap Saran

I need cash advance

See I know three sold

The other two a jam
I'ma sit on one and whip the other one much as I can
Hot ass fuckin Sudan
Windows rolled down no sound
Them bricks got the speakers drowned
I ain't listenin for shit but sirens
I ain't tryin to get to my ships sunk fuck you pirates
I'll touch you cowards
It ain't nuthin to a boss
The niggas in the hood tryna floss and ya head gotta cost nigga
Take a loss nigga
SS five five all black with the top chopped off dat
Catch me in the spots where the shots pop off at
I ain't tryin to prove nuttin I'm jus tryin to move some

[Chorus]

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rov for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rox for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm Gone

[Birdman]

See we cookin' up a thousand *grams*

I'm in the kitchen over the stove with pots and pans

Triple color with the platinum jam

50 birds homeboy in the back of a van

A hundred grand in rubberbands

We got them birds in the coffee cans

We got the whips wit the extra clips

Got bitches outta state niggaz flippin them bricks

Been in the caddy been in the alley

Nigga been on the block

Right in front of mrs gladdies (?)

Nigga know bout hustlin'

Know bout stuntin

Did the curb servin shyned every summer (Biatch)

Been on front, been in the back

Nigga roll wit ducktape and ride wit the mac

We see these haters like fuck them niggas

We made men millionaire hustlin our nature

[Chorus]

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rof for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm a *d-boy*

Bitch I'm a *d-boy*

Ho I'm a *dopeboy*

I got the scope in the rof for them jackboys

I got money in my pocket

I got money on my block

I got the money and the power

I'm Gone

[Lil Wayne]

8 AM open my eyes

Yeah kick my bitch tell her open the blinds

And I'm, over the stove at 9
Yeah I'm cookin breakfast for the block then I let her cook mine
Yeah quick line in the bathroom before we bounce
Not me I mean her she go a day a ounce (damn)
Y'all pray for her
While I'm at the bus station in the Bentley sittin' low as I wait for ya
I'm gettin' dough I'm a paper---boy I will take ya
For the right paper--boy I will take her
Shake her--tape her--waist up
Send her to the money she be back before I wake up
Get cha cake up
Y'all niggas lame ducks
Ya prolly get ya game up when I'm givin the game up
My name Wayne what
Hot boy flame up
You niggas tryin to change up and I'm gettin my change up

T.I.- Doing My Job (2003)

(A sampled singing voice repeats: "*I'm just doing my job*")

Ay I'm working here, know what I'm saying

Try to put yourself in my shoes for a second

It's not personal I'm just sayin though

[Verse 1]

Ay look

From when the moon came out 'till the sun came up

I was supplyin the J with what they flame up

Our mamas passing, by trying to explain us

Pissing in the bushes like they never house trained us

But, try to understand that's how we came up

You get to know us, you'll love us but you can't change us (naw)

Really we rather be rich and famous

But in the mean time we're forced to slang dust

'Dro or crack cocaine, Penicillin to Rogaine

Ecstasy, Viagra, whatever'll get the dough mayne

Im tired of people mis-representing my domain

Oh you think we out here killing for nothing, hustling

for no gain (picture that)

[Hook]

Hey man *I'm just doing my job*

Hey lady, don't mind me *I'm just doing my job*

I don't wanna make your life more harder, *I'm just doing my job*

You live here, I work here *I'm doing my job*

[Verse 2]

I don't know if you don't know, don't care or can't see

Every time something up in the hood, it ain't me

And I ain't always up to no good and know the creep
So you ain't always gotta pass through the hood without speaking (how you doing)
We ain't out here threatening your lives, raping your children
We just out here staying alive, making a million (you know)
Working hard, trying to survive chasing a million
You hear us talking loud, just think of this is chameleon
Adapting to the situations, but accusations of stealing
To burglarizing your houses..hey man you just hurting my feelings (maaan).
We got lives, we wanna live nice too
We got moms, dads, wives, kids just like you
But our options are few it's hell in high school
When you're helping with the rent lights and the gas bill too
So before you go judging us loving us won't hurt
Yeah under 25, staying alive is hard work

[Hook]

[Verse 3]

And for you to see what I'm saying, open eyes will help
If you could think about somebody besides yourself
Why you pointing fingers at me, analyze yourself
Quit all that chastising and try to provide some help
Instead of calling the law, you busting my balls
With all due respect, we don't even be fucking with y'all (maan)
And we can't help it cause it is like this

We don't like it no more than you that we live like this

Always stuck in the grind summertime to wintertime

Cutting school to sell fifty dimes by dinner time

See everything we know we learned from the streets

Since thirteen I've been hustling and earning my keep

[Hook]

Hey man *I'm just doing my job*

You live here I work here

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