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Lil Trump: A Paradox in American Rap Music
Diplomová práce

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Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.
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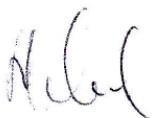
Zásady pro vypracování:

The thesis deals with a paradox of American rap culture. The roots of the hypothesized paradox are the socially committed content of rap songs and the humanistic values that rap music stems from, which seem to be in conflict with the frequent appreciation for arrogant gangster characters. The thesis will analyze the case of Donald Trump. Before he began pursuing a political career, he was used in a number of rap songs as a symbol of success and wealth among other things. The perspective is quite the opposite at present, with Donald Trump being widely ridiculed, criticized and even hated. It seems that when real power comes about, values become more important than blatant success. A range of different rap songs will be analyzed in order to describe the extreme shift of perspective on the controversial president of the United States of America. The thesis will also consider some exceptions which make the entire phenomenon even more interesting.

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Děkuji Mgr. Davidu Livingstone, Ph.D. za trpělivost, odborné vedení práce a velmi přínosné konzultace.

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INTRODUCTION

“For outsiders, rap’s easy to move to, hard to dissect.”¹

- David Foster Wallace

When the rap superstar Kanye West (*1977) made an appearance at the Trump Tower after Donald Trump became the 45th president of the United States, the rap world stopped turning. The idea that a notoriously rebellious rapper would do something unexpected comes naturally, however in this case, there was very little understanding awaiting West in his community. Before the 2016 United States presidential election campaigning, Trump had served as one of the most noticeable and almost exclusively positive symbols which was widely used in rap songs by some of the most important rappers of all time. Things took a rapid turn once he announced his presidential candidacy for the Republican Party. Basically overnight, the symbol of wealth, success and the personification of the American Dream became arguably the most significant villain in rap music. This thesis argues that this instant paradigm shift revealed conflicting principles—sets of values prevailing in rap music, yet fundamentally paradoxical. The extreme individualism and the limitless appreciation of the self is inconsistent with community thinking and the fight for equal living conditions and opportunities. In this particular case, the inconsistent set of values of these urban poets can even directly influence how history is written, as will be justified later on.

The first part of the thesis demonstrates the importance of rap music and explains why opinions of rappers have an enormous impact on other people’s behavior and beliefs. Moreover, its omnipresence in American culture, business and, most importantly, politics, is illustrated.

The following part of the thesis, arguably the most important one, marks the similarities between Donald Trump and the majority of significant rappers. The topics that are dealt with in this segment stretch from the pursuit of fame or money through similarities in rhetoric to sexism. Reasoning for these similarities is provided and exceptions are mentioned.

¹ David Foster Wallace and Mark Costello, *Signifying Rappers* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 24.

The third part of the thesis illustrates the abrupt perspective switch, the instant change from worshipping up to a point of suggesting assassination of Trump.

The penultimate part deals with the POTUS as a symbol of disgust. It analyses the post-election reflection of Donald Trump as well as his own reactions to it. It also deals with important exceptions to the rule.

The last part utilizes all of the gained evidence to present and defend the postulated paradox. Furthermore, it sketches the potential real-life impact of promoting inconsistent sets of values through this extraordinarily potent medium.

Before exploring the relationship between Donald Trump and rap, it is important to clarify basic vocabulary and context. Two terms, which will be used many times in this thesis and can be slightly confusing, are “rap” and “hip hop.” The archivist at the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College Chicago, Andrew Leach, defines hip hop as follows: “The most commonly held view, however, is that hip-hop is a cultural movement.”² This movement is usually considered to consist of other elements apart from music such as graffiti art,³ break dancing etc. He further explains: “Rap music has become by far the most celebrated expression of hip-hop culture.”⁴ Alternatively, one can look for definitions by rappers themselves. A prominent rap star KRS-One (*1965) defined these terms in his song “Hip Hop Vs. Rap” (2003):

Rap is something you do
Hip Hop is something you live⁵

Presidents of the United States are public figures and rap lyrics often reflect celebrities, which is why we can find references to all presidents in office from the beginning of hip-hop, which is usually dated to early 1970s.⁶ The role of rap as a tool of political commentary and critical voice towards those in power is evident. There are two presidents, however, whose significance for rap music seems to be overwhelming and

² Andrew Leach, “‘One Day It’ll All Make Sense:’ Hip-Hop and Rap Resources for Music Librarians,” *Notes* 65 (2008), 10.

³ Many people, who are significant for the culture, disagree with the common association of graffiti art with hip hop, see Paul Edwards, *The Concise Guide to Hip-Hop Music: A Fresh Look at the Art of Hip-Hop, from Old-School Beats to Freestyle Rap* (New York City: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 13.

⁴ Leach, “One Day It’ll All Make Sense,” 10.

⁵ KRS-One, “Hip Hop Vs. Rap,” *D.I.G.I.T.A.L.* (Los Angeles: Cleopatra Records, 2003), album.

⁶ See Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History* (London: Cassell, 2017), 7.

systemic. Barack Obama, who has been dubbed “the first hip-hop president,”⁷ openly embraced hip-hop, invited many rappers to perform at the White House and often referenced them in his speech.⁸ Moreover, he releases a very popular list of his favorite rap songs every year.⁹ Many rappers returned the favor and praised him in their lyrics.¹⁰ One of the most remarkable instances is the hit song “My President” (2008) from Young Jeezy’s (*1977) gold-selling album *The Recession*.¹¹ The lyrics, written right before Obama was elected the first African American president,¹² reflect the optimism accompanying the 2008 United States presidential election:

Tell him I'm doin' fine, Obama for mankind
We ready for d*mn change so y'all let the man shine
Stuntin' on Martin Luther, feelin' just like a king
Guess this is what he meant when he said that he had a dream¹³

Incidentally, Jeezy later wrote a song called “Trump” (2011), celebrating his wealth, which will be referenced later. The relationship between Donald Trump and rap is somewhat more complicated. The fact that rappers used to extensively reference Trump as a positive symbol in their lyrics has been noticed for example by the *Business Insider* or *The Washington Post*.^{14,15} The rapid growth of extremely negative references during his candidacy was surveyed and illustrated by a visual journalist Allison McCann, who wrote: “Trump’s shifting hip-hop narrative makes this clear: No pop art more swiftly

⁷ See Travis L. Gosa, “Not Another Remix: How Obama Became the First Hip-Hop President,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22 (2010), 389-415.

⁸ See Jonathan Landrum Jr., “Obama Praised for Bridging Gap between hip-hop, politics,” *Associated Press*, January 19, 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/be12f77915d84503b580d224ec18400a> (accessed November 20, 2020).

⁹ See Jamie Ehrlich, “Barack Obama Shares His Favorite Songs of 2019,” *CNN*, December 30, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/30/politics/barack-obama-favorite-music-2019-trnd/index.htmlhttps://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/30/politics/barack-obama-favorite-music-2019-trnd/index.html> (accessed November 24, 2020).

¹⁰ For a thorough analysis of Barack Obama and rap, see edited by Travis L. Gosa and Erik Nielson, *The Hip Hop & Obama Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹¹ See Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 242.

¹² See Genius, “Jeezy ‘My President’ Official Lyrics & Meaning | Verified Classic,” YouTube video, 5:59, January 10, 2017, <https://youtu.be/BaC3N9p4kUE> (accessed November 20, 2020).

¹³ Young Jeezy featuring Nas, “My President,” *The Recession* (Atlanta & New York City: CTE & Def Jam, 2008), album.

¹⁴ See Business Insider, “Donald Trump in Rap Songs,” YouTube video, 1:06, November 2, 2016, <https://youtu.be/QdZNMZY6EQw> (accessed August 19, 2020).

¹⁵ See Chris Richards, “Trump’s Rap Sheet,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2019/11/06/trumps-rap-sheet/?arc404=true> (accessed August 19, 2020).

reflects the sentiments of progressive culture than rap music.”¹⁶ Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at Cornell University Travis L. Gosa explored the relevance of rap music on politics based on behavior and political marketing strategies of various American politicians. He wrote: “Throughout the 2016 presidential election, both Democratic and Republican candidates used rap music, hip hop slang, celebrities, and dances in their efforts to craft desirable political identities and to court youth and minority voters.”¹⁷ Later in this thesis, it will be explained why hip hop plays a rather substantial role in voters’ preferences. As Gosa pointed out, the most obvious indicator of its importance can be seen through analysis of political marketing of various high-ranking politicians: “The campaigns of Ben Carson, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, and Hillary Clinton reveal the significance of popular music in national politics, and specifically, hip hop’s continued political influence in the post-Obama era.”¹⁸

Rap is an omnipresent phenomenon in the United States and since there is close to zero initial investment required to publish a rap song nowadays, there are countless rappers. Therefore, only significant rappers can be taken into account. Understandably, this leads to inevitable subjectivity. The acclaimed American writer and scholar David Foster Wallace tried to find a way to distinguish “serious rap” in a book *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present* (1990), which he co-authored with his longtime friend and roommate Mark Costello: “‘Serious’ rap—a unique U.S. inner-city fusion of funk, technified reggae, teen-to-teen ‘hardcore’ rock, and the early ‘70s’ ‘poetry of the black experience’ of Nikki Giovanni, the Last Poets, etc.”¹⁹ However, for the purposes of this thesis, not only so-called “conscious” or “political” rap will be dealt with. The success of rap records is what matters, since only successful songs and albums can have noticeable effects outside the music industry itself. Therefore, all the rappers quoted in the thesis are considered important or successful in terms of strength of their impact, which will always be supported with evidence.

The aim of the thesis is to illustrate the importance of rap music in relation to politics; analyze similarities between the values shared by Donald Trump and hip hop as

¹⁶ Allison McCann, “Hip-Hop Is Turning on Donald Trump,” *FiveThirtyEight*, July 14, 2016, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/clinton-trump-hip-hop-lyrics/> (accessed November 20, 2020).

¹⁷ Travis L. Gosa, “Hip Hop, Authenticity, and Styleshifting in the 2016 Presidential Election,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 29 (2017), 7.

¹⁸ Gosa, “Hip Hop, Authenticity, and Styleshifting in the 2016 Presidential Election,” 7.

¹⁹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 23.

well as the abrupt paradigm shift in formation of Trump as a rap symbol. Afterward, using all the information gathered on the way, a crucial paradox in values will be inferred.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POETRY OF TODAY

“Poetry is not an expression of the party line. It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does.”²⁰

- Allen Ginsberg

Before exploring Donald Trump as a symbol in rap, a truly fundamental question needs to be answered: Why should anyone care what rappers think? In his acclaimed monograph *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005), American historian and journalist Jeff Chang described the history of hip hop from its beginning, which he views in Bronx and Jamaica in the 1970s, up until the end of the century. He set out to do so because he believes that “hip-hop has been a generation-defining movement [... which] forever transformed politics and culture.”²¹

While it would be rarely disputed that rap is influential, I would argue that its significance is often underestimated, as the title of this chapter suggests. In the first volume of *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, its editors note that: “For nearly four decades now, Hip Hop culture, something that was expected to only last a few years as a ‘fad,’ has developed into a trans-global phenomenon in almost every industrialized nation in the Western world.”²² Because rap music is a worldwide complex phenomenon, “more and more disciplines are beginning to take up Hip Hop for academic reflection.”²³

Rap is poetry. Admittedly, there are formal differences between contemporary poetry and rap, e.g., the tendency of poets to write in free verse in sharp contrast with the way an absolute majority of rappers rhyme extensively, even though the meter rarely remains the same throughout an entire rap song.²⁴ Nevertheless, Shakespeare’s sonnets can be rapped over a rap beat and any rap lyrics can be written down and published in a

²⁰ Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography* (New York City: Harper Perennial, 1990), 520.

²¹ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Ebury Press, 2015), Rear Cover Text.

²² Monica Miller et al., “The Hip in Hip Hop: Toward a Discipline of Hip Hop Studies,” *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 1 (2014): 6.

²³ Miler et al., “The Hip in Hip Hop,” 9.

²⁴ See David Caplan, *Rhyme's Challenge: Hip Hop, Poetry, and Contemporary Rhyming Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

book. However, definition disputes are out of the scope of this thesis.²⁵ Wallace also believed in the importance of the poetry of rap music:

Our opinion, then, from a distance: not only is a serious rap serious poetry, but, in terms of the size of its audience, its potency in the Great U.S. Market, its power to spur and to authorize the artistic endeavor of a discouraged and malschooled young urban culture we've been encouraged sadly to write off, it's quite possibly the most important stuff happening in American poetry today.²⁶

It should be noted that Wallace and Costello's book deals with rap music of the 1980s, and rap has been growing stronger ever since, against all odds. Although Wallace and Costello sometimes arguably write condescending, unfortunate or at least questionable claims about rap in *Signifying Rappers*, they are often spot on and time has proved them right.

Rap is now at its peak. In 2018, rap surpassed rock as the most popular genre in the USA for the first time.²⁷ Although so-called Instapoets²⁸ have substantially boosted sales of books of poetry,²⁹ its audience is considerably smaller than the rap audience, despite the fact that these poets can also reach their readership directly through social media. To illustrate the shocking virality of rap, one can look at an example of 6ix9ine's (*1996) official music video for his song "Gooba" (2020), which gained approximately 43 million views on YouTube on the first day after being released.³⁰ After less than three months, the video exceeded 500 million views.³¹

²⁵ For an insightful analysis of this topic, see Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York City: Basic Civitas Books, 2009).

²⁶ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 114.

²⁷ Roisin O'Connor, "Rap Overtakes Rock as Most Popular Genre in the US," *The Independent*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/rap-music-rock-most-popular-genre-us-nielsen-music-report-2017-kendrick-lamar-ed-sheeran-drake-top-a8141086.html> (accessed August 1, 2020).

²⁸ People who gain audience by posting their poetry on Instagram.

²⁹ The NPD Group, "Instapoets Rekindling U.S. Poetry Book Sales, The NPD Group Says," *The NPD Group Press Releases*, April 5, 2018, <https://www.npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2018/instapoets-rekindling-u-s--poetry-book-sales--the-npd-group-says/> (accessed August 1, 2020).

³⁰ Katie Scott, "6ix9ine, out of Prison for over a Month, Breaks YouTube Record, Addresses Being Called a 'Rat,'" *Global News*, May 11, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6928974/6ix9ine-gooba-youtube-record-instagram-live/> (accessed August 1, 2020).

³¹ Tekashi 6ix9ine, "Gooba," YouTube video, 2:28, May 8, 2020, https://youtu.be/pPw_izFr5PA (accessed August 2, 2020).

What matters for the present purposes, however, is the influence of rap outside of the music industry. I shall begin with film. Rappers often become successful actors later in their careers (e.g., Ice Cube, Will Smith, Ludacris...). The biographical movie about the band N.W.A. (short for N*ggaz Wit Attitudes) entitled *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) became the highest-grossing movie from an African-American director ever made.³² The hit rap musical *Hamilton* (2015) about the American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton broke many records, won countless prizes and is considered one of the biggest musicals of all time.^{33,34}

The original songs for the superhero film *Black Panther* (2018) rapped by Kendrick Lamar (*1987) and composed by Ludwig Göransson (*1984) won Best Original Score awards at the Academy Awards and the Grammy Awards.^{35,36} Furthermore, the song “King’s Dead” (2018) from the same film won a Grammy for Best Rap Performance.³⁷ Critics have always been supportive of Lamar’s career, which resulted in him being the first rapper ever to win the Pulitzer Prize in 2018,³⁸ on top of winning countless music prizes.

Rap has an incredible cultural influence all over America, even when it comes to how people move. The origins of a movement called “dab,” which is “a dance move that involves lowering your head and lifting both arms, one straight out to the side and one with the elbow bent,”³⁹ is dated to Atlantan rap culture, specifically the crew Migos, who will be a part of the analysis further in the thesis. In 2017, everyone “dabbed,” including

³² Mia Galuppo, “‘Straight Outta Compton’ Becomes Highest-Grossing Movie from African-American Director,” *Billboard*, March 11, 2015, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6752823/straight-outta-compton-box-office-worldwide> (accessed August 2, 2020).

³³ Jennifer Van Evra, “Hamilton: 15 Fascinating Facts about the Biggest Musical of All Time,” *CBC Radio*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/blog/hamilton-15-fascinating-facts-about-the-biggest-musical-of-all-time-1.5341556> (accessed August 2, 2020).

³⁴ Incidentally, Donald Trump demanded an apology from the cast of *Hamilton*, when the actor Brandon V. Dixon, according to Trump, *harassed* his vice president Mike Pence by addressing him directly in the audience, expressing concerns about the new administration as well as hope that the show had inspired him. See Eliot Nelson, “Mike Pence’s ‘Hamilton’ Recollection Conflicts with Donald Trump’s Take,” *The Huffington Post*, November 21, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/mike-pence-donald-trump-hamilton_n_5831bbf8e4b058ce7aab9dd7 (accessed August 2, 2020).

³⁵ Katie Atkinson, “Grammys 2019 Winners: The Complete List,” *Billboard*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grammys/8496912/grammys-2019-winners-list> (accessed August 13, 2020).

³⁶ Steve Dove, “Oscar Winners 2019: See the Full List,” *Oscar*, February 25, 2019, <https://oscar.go.com/news/winners/oscar-winners-2019-live-updates-to-come> (accessed August 13, 2020).

³⁷ Atkinson, “Grammys 2019 Winners: The Complete List.”

³⁸ Joe Coscarelli, “Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer in ‘Big Moment for Hip-Hop,’” *The New York Times*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-pulitzer-prize-damn.html> (accessed April 13, 2020).

³⁹ *Cambridge Dictionary*, s. v. “Dab,” accessed August 2, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dab>.

many sportsmen and young celebrities, but also Betty White, Tom Hanks or Bill Gates.⁴⁰ Even Donald Trump's opponent in the 2016 United States presidential election, Hillary Clinton, learned to "dab" during her campaign.⁴¹ Given the topic of the thesis, it is relevant to point out that the comment section of this video is full of agitated comments suspecting Clinton of merely trying to fish for young African American voters. Gosa wrote: "Unfortunately, Clinton's use of hip hop was questioned, ridiculed as awkward and embarrassing, and, above all, seen as incompatible with her true identity."⁴²

Other areas significantly influenced by hip hop are fashion and language. These are often even considered parts of the culture itself, as pointed out by Leach: "Fashion and language are also included in hip hop's elements."⁴³ I will begin with language. Rappers are very creative with their pronunciation and grammar, but most notably with their lexicon. They often coin their own trademark words which later become widely used. Other times, they make words trendy just by using them. Let us briefly inquire into two interesting examples of words that made their way into the Oxford English Dictionary. The word "bling," which OED defines as "expensive, ostentatious clothing and jewellery,"⁴⁴ was coined by Lil Wayne.⁴⁵ Another example would be the word "stan," which describes an overly attached obsessive fan, such as the one from Eminem's hit song "Stan" (2000).⁴⁶ These words are widely used even outside the prototypical hip-hop circles. An expert on language and identity from the City University of New York, Cecelia Cutler, wrote: "When White teenage boys sprinkle their speech with hip-hop slang they are often projecting a 'tough, streetwise' persona."⁴⁷ Basically, these guys are "wankstas."⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Gavin Haynes, "How the Dab Made it from Atlanta Hip-Hop to the US Congress How the Dab Made it from Atlanta Hip-Hop to the US Congress," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/shortcuts/2017/jan/04/how-the-dab-made-it-from-atlanta-hip-hip-to-the-us-congress> (accessed August 2, 2020).

⁴¹ CBSN, "Hillary Clinton Learns to 'Dab,'" YouTube Video, 0:48, January 11, 2016, https://youtu.be/WkNL_cfVyWU (accessed August 2, 2020).

⁴² Gosa, "Hip Hop, Authenticity, and Styleshifting in the 2016 Presidential Election," 9.

⁴³ Leach, "'One Day It'll All Make Sense:' Hip-Hop and Rap Resources for Music Librarians," 10.

⁴⁴ OED, s. v. "Bling," accessed August 3, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/bling>.

⁴⁵ Renee Tawa, "'Bling-bling' in the Oxford dictionary? That's Phat," July 9, 2003, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jul-09-et-tawa9-story.html> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁴⁶ Jessie Fry, "Eminem-Inspired 'Stan' Added to the Oxford English Dictionary," *OED Blog*, July 12, 2018, <https://public.oed.com/blog/eminem-inspired-stan-added-to-the-oxford-english-dictionary/> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁴⁷ Cecelia Cutler, "Hip-Hop Language in Sociolinguistics and Beyond," *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1 (2007): 14.

⁴⁸ A word created by 50 Cent by blending of "wannabe" and "gangsta." It represents people who look and act like gangsters without actually being ones.

All of this is happening at an incredible pace. Note what Costello wrote in 1990: “Some in-word, like ‘fly,’ meaning ‘fine-looking,’ have been in coin since the beginning, now venerable as Old English because they turn up on Grandmaster Flash cuts from ’82.”⁴⁹

Rappers are certainly one of the most noticeable influencers and businesses are aware of that. It has been argued that rappers are fashion’s greatest influencers.⁵⁰ There are numerous collaborations and almost every successful rapper has contracts with various fashion brands. This is rather understandable given that as of today, e.g., Nicki Minaj has more than 120 million followers on Instagram,⁵¹ Drake has more than 70 million followers and the list could go on.⁵² It is relatively simple to extensively promote products in music videos as well. To understand the impact, one can take a closer look for example at the Kanye West’s Yeezy collaboration with Adidas, which is itself a “billion-dollar empire.”⁵³ Rappers’ approval make a difference on consumer behavior. A shocking instance outside the fashion world is Dr. Dre’s headphone producing company Beats Electronics,⁵⁴ whose products are branded as “Beats by Dre” and endorsed by numerous rappers, which was bought by Apple for three billion dollars, making it the largest deal in Apple’s history.⁵⁵ Big brands clearly understand how influential the approval of rappers can be.

It has been shown that rap influences how millions of people move, look, speak and spend their money. The question is if rap also has the power to influence how people vote. The former Detroit mayor, Kwame M. Kilpatrick, was named “America’s hip-hop mayor” due to the fact that during his campaign, he skillfully used the influence of rap in Detroit, the city of Eminem, Big Sean or Danny Brown. In an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, journalist Geoff Boucher wrote:

⁴⁹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 59.

⁵⁰ Siobhan Rooney, “Why Hip-Hop Artists Are Fashion’s Biggest Influencers,” *entSight*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.entsight.com/blog/why-hip-hop-artists-are-fashions-biggest-influencers> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁵¹ “@nickiminaj,” *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/nickiminaj/> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁵² “@champagnepapi,” *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/champagnepapi/> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁵³ Zack O'Malley Greenburg, “Kanye’s Second Coming: Inside the Billion-Dollar Yeezy Empire,” *Forbes*, August 31, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2019/07/09/kanyes-second-coming-inside-the-billion-dollar-yeezy-empire/> (accessed August 3, 2020).

⁵⁴ Founded together with his colleague, another producer Jimmy Iovine (*1953). For an insightful analysis of the brand history, see Directed by Allen Hughes, *The Defiant Ones* (Netflix, 2017), TV Mini-Series.

⁵⁵ Heidi Moore, “Apple Buys Dr Dre’s Beats for \$3bn as Company Returns to Music Industry,” *The Guardian*, May 28, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/may/28/apple-buys-beats-dr-dre-music-streaming> (accessed August 3, 2020).

Rap music is already one of the most potent forces in American youth culture, and its imprint has changed the rhythms in film, advertising, fashion and television. Some observers look here and wonder if this youthful mayor -- the one who had a rap campaign song and loves to quote the gritty street parables of Tupac Shakur [also known as 2Pac (1971-1996)] -- represents the arrival of hip-hop in a major elected office. Could the administration of Kwame M. Kilpatrick become a template for using the music-based culture to marshal young votes?⁵⁶

The question at the end of the quote is rather difficult to answer, however, the ex-mayor's appeal to the young electorate can be "evidenced by a 40% increase in turnout among voters ages 18 to 40 from the previous mayoral race."⁵⁷ It is somewhat unfortunate that the first "hip-hop mayor" resigned after being convicted and was eventually sentenced to 28 years for corruption.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this does not undermine rap as a powerful tool in political marketing.

It has been demonstrated that rap has a tremendous influence which should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to politics. When rappers create an undoubtedly positive symbol of a personality, it might have a considerable impact on electorate behavior. One should not forget, that our voting decisions and affiliations towards certain candidates or political parties are substantially driven by cognitive processes influenced by emotions and impressions that have been primed into our psyche through often inconspicuous stimuli.⁵⁹ The clinical psychologist Roger Paxton noted:

This process of evaluation and consequent resentment makes understandable the apparent paradox that many of the constituencies that voted most strongly for Brexit in Britain and Trump in America stood to lose most from their victories.

⁵⁶ Geoff Boucher, "A Politician Who Runs on Hip-Hop," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 2003, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-may-11-na-kwame11-story.html> (accessed August 10, 2020).

⁵⁷ Boucher, "A Politician Who Runs on Hip-Hop."

⁵⁸ Steven Yaccino, "Kwame M. Kilpatrick, Former Detroit Mayor, Sentenced to 28 Years in Corruption Case," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/us/former-detroit-mayor-kwame-kilpatrick-sentencing.html> (accessed August 10, 2020).

⁵⁹ See Ramona De Luca and Delane Botelho, "Olfactory Priming on Consumer Categorization, Recall, and Choice," *Psychology & Marketing* 37 (2020), 1101-1117.

Voting in these cases appears economically irrational. Surprisingly perhaps, voting is frequently guided by emotion rather than reason.⁶⁰

One could argue that Mac Miller's (1992–2018) cheerful hit song “Donald Trump” (2011) has made a more significant impact on the 2016 United States presidential election than many of Trumps’ celebrated and well-explored publicity stunts. I will now inquire into how Donald Trump has been largely promoted as a positive symbol in rap for years.

“I take over the world when I'm on my Donald Trump sh*t

Look at all this money!

Ain't that some sh*t?”⁶¹

- Mac Miller

⁶⁰ Roger Paxton, “Democracy in danger: How Can Psychology Help?” *Psychologist* 30 (2017): 24.

⁶¹ Mac Miller, “Donald Trump,” *Best Day Ever* (Pittsburgh: Rostrum Records, 2011), album.

WHO IS THE BLACK TRUMP?

“Hey, Method Man! This is Donald Trump and I’m in Palm Beach and we're all waiting for your album. Let's get going, man! Everybody's waiting for this album.”⁶²
- Donald Trump

Method Man (*1971), a very successful American multi-platinum rapper, producer and actor, member of one of the most influential bands in hip-hop history,⁶³ Wu-Tang Clan, decided to devote a whole track of his second studio album *Tical 2000: Judgement Day* (1998) to Trump’s cameo endorsement. Why would he want to do so? When he was asked in an interview in 2017 what had drawn him towards Trump, he answered: “He doesn’t give a f*ck. Pretty much. And that is a credo in hip-hop, not to give a f*ck.”⁶⁴ Thus, Trump’s apathy can be seen as the first common denominator of himself and the hip-hop culture. Surprisingly, there are many more, as will be analyzed later in this chapter.

In an article where pop music critic Chris Richards briefly summarized Trump’s appearance in rap music, he also raised an interesting point that demonstrates the diversity of roles that Trump personifies in hip-hop:

Imagine if you’d only ever heard of Donald Trump in rap songs. You’d know him as a personification of wealth, an avatar of luxury, a role model, a villain, a hustler, a brand name, a punchline, a dark cloud, a bad haircut, a boss, a bigot, a king of his own reality, and fundamentally, a syllable that rhymes with “slump,” “pump” and “chump.”⁶⁵

Clearly, rappers seem to have liked being associated with Donald Trump. Knowing him personally, or even being on friendly terms with him, seemed like a

⁶² Method Man, “Donald Trump (Skit),” *Tical 2000: Judgement Day* (New York City: Def Jam, 1998), album.

⁶³ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 105.

⁶⁴ Late Night with Seth Meyers, “Method Man Tells the Story Behind Donald Trump's Feature on His Album,” YouTube video, 4:38, October 6, 2017, <https://youtu.be/xNn6Xd2FF04> (accessed August 13, 2020).

⁶⁵ Richards, “Trump’s Rap Sheet.”

worthwhile objective. See for example how multiple Grammy winner Ludacris (*1977) bragged about having meetings with Trump.⁶⁶

I buy cars with straight cash, have meetings with Donald Trump
Y'all meet with Honda, no payments for 12 months⁶⁷

Kendrick Lamar, in contrast, expressed wanting to play golf with the businessman:

Give me fame and fortune, me and Trump on golf courses
With that being said, give me Tiger sports endorsements⁶⁸

Another rapper who talked about being in touch with Trump is the bit bizarre Riff Raff (*1982):

Hot like five saunas, my shoelaces is iguana
Trump towers with Donald
I can't drive a Honda⁶⁹

Note how both Ludacris and Riff Raff use Honda in adjacent lines to the ones that contain Trump. The choice of the car manufacturer here is likely to be motivated by the slant rhyme Donald / Honda. Admittedly, one should keep in mind that Donald Trump's name is fairly rhymable when considering the motivations of rappers to mention him in their lyrics.

Being acquainted with the icon is one thing, being a version of Trump himself is even better. The West Coast hip-hop legend Snoop Dogg (*1971) rapped:

Twenty-seven cars and a twelve-bedroom house

⁶⁶ Recording Academy, "Artist: Ludacris," *GRAMMY Awards*, <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/artists/ludacris/4060> (accessed August 14, 2020).

⁶⁷ Ludacris, "Hip Hop Quotables," *Chicken-n-Beer* (Atlanta: Disturbing tha Peace & Def Jam South, 2003), album.

⁶⁸ Kendrick Lamar, "Is It Love?" *Kendrick Lamar* (Carson: Top Dawg, 2009), EP.

⁶⁹ Riff Raff, "Maybe You Love Me," *Neon Icon* (Los Angeles: Mad Decent, 2014), album.

Now they call me Snoopy Trump⁷⁰

Raekwon (*1970), another member of the aforementioned legendary collective Wu-Tang Clan, even indicated that he was the black Trump:

Poisonous sting, which thumps up and act chumps
Rae's a heavy generator, but yo, guess who's the black Trump?⁷¹

In a song called “Pocket Full of Stones” (2011) by the Grammy-winning duo UGK,⁷² Bun B (*1973) claimed that his peers called him “Black Trump,” too:

Suck a d*ck and lick an *ss just to get a bump
F*ck Black Caesar, n*ggas call me Black Trump⁷³

The list could go on, but the differences in the usage would be minor. The fact that Trump resembles a prototypical rapper in many of his—often outrageous—claims has also been noted by the Comedy Central satirical television program *The Daily Show*. Comedian Roy Wood Jr., who has served as a correspondent for Comedy Central, picked up a “Black Trump” persona and rapped a song “They Love Me” under this alias, featuring his fellow comedian Jordan Klepper. The lyrics consist of slightly modified Trump quotations and even though this idea might sound slightly far-fetched, it simply works. The inconsistency of Trump’s quotes resembles a paradox which can also be frequently found in rap. Many rappers do not mind occasionally expressing feminist beliefs despite having a great number of clearly sexist lyrics and objectifying music videos, as will be shown later. The lyrics of “They Love Me” create very astute juxtapositions of Trump’s actual utterances to ridicule him but also to point out a disturbing point about rap:

Mexico is not our friend

⁷⁰ The Notorious B.I.G. et al., “Living the Life,” *Duets: The Final Chapter* (New York City: Bad Boy Records & Atlantic Records, 2005), album.

⁷¹ Raekwon, “Incarcerated Scarfaces,” *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* (New York City: Loud Records & RCA Records, 1995), album.

⁷² Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 237.

⁷³ UGK, “Pocket Full of Stones,” *Too Hard to Swallow* (New York City: 2011), album.

Build the wall
I love the Mexicans
Nobody has more respect for women
Heidi Klum sadly, no longer a 10 (Truth!)⁷⁴

There are other rap songs in which rappers impersonate Trump, mostly parodically, since rap parodies are generally common YouTube content. The most notable piece of such satire is a rap battle from the well-known YouTube series *Epic Rap Battles of History* between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, which has almost 85 million views at this point.^{75,76} To be precise, although it is a rap battle between Trump and Clinton, the clear winner is Abraham Lincoln,⁷⁷ who suddenly flies into the scene on an oversized eagle.⁷⁸ This type of content would rarely be considered as a serious rap, however, which is why it will not be further analyzed.

I will now explore some of the common features or patterns that might make Trump admirable for rappers. When Costello analyzed the underlying tendencies in rap music, he came to a very fitting conclusion: “Rap celebrates power.”⁷⁹ The question is where the hip-hop culture sees it. One way or another, a person has to be famous to become a pop culture symbol systematically referenced to in rap lyrics. An analysis of this trait of Donald Trump follows.

⁷⁴ The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, “They Love Me’ Music Video - Black Trump (ft. Jordan Klepper): The Daily Show,” YouTube video, 2:31, April 28, 2016, <https://youtu.be/JSBGDC0rKWU> (accessed August 14, 2020).

⁷⁵ ERB, “Donald Trump vs Hillary Clinton. Epic Rap Battles of History,” YouTube video, 4:34, October 27, 2016, <https://youtu.be/Kbryz0mxuMY> (accessed August 15, 2020).

⁷⁶ Cf. ERB, “Donald Trump vs Joe Biden. Epic Rap Battles of History,” YouTube video, 3:48, October 24, 2020, <https://youtu.be/FkGK7bitav0> (accessed November 9, 2020).

⁷⁷ Lincoln also appeared in ERB’s rap battle between Barrack Obama and Mitt Romney. See ERB, “Barack Obama vs Mitt Romney. Epic Rap Battles of History,” YouTube video, 3:29, October 15, 2012, https://youtu.be/dX_1B0w7Hzc (accessed November 24, 2020).

⁷⁸ Interestingly, it was not the first time Trump appeared on ERB. He had already appeared in a rap battle between himself and Ebenezer Scrooge, where they stood for archetypal miserly moguls, before the battle turned into a rap version of Charles Dickens’ (1812-1870) *A Christmas Carol* (1843), when Scrooge was first visited by J.P. Morgan as the spirit of Christmas Past, then by Kanye West as the spirit of Christmas Present (cf. later chapters about West) and eventually by Grim Reaper as the spirit of Christmas Yet To Come. See ERB, “Donald Trump vs Ebenezer Scrooge. Epic Rap Battles of History Donald Trump vs Ebenezer Scrooge. Epic Rap Battles of History,” YouTube video, 3:25, December 19, 2013, <https://youtu.be/cP6VqB4kIpQ> (accessed November 24, 2020).

⁷⁹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 60.

FAMOUS LIKE TRUMP

“I'm back with the funk, chump
You want funk? How many lumps?
I got spunk
I'm well-known like Donald Trump
I'm not...”⁸⁰
- Redman

The East Coast legend Redman (*1970) used Trump as a symbol of fame on his gold-selling debut *Whut? Thee Album* (1992).⁸¹ There is no doubt that Donald Trump has been a symbol of fame for quite some time in the United States. In Trump's profile article in *The New Yorker*, one can find what he said to the interviewer about this topic himself: “You want to know what a total recognition is? I'll tell you how you know you've got it. When the Nigerians on the street corners who don't speak a word of English, who have no clue, who're selling watches for some guy in New Jersey – when you walk by and those guys say, ‘Trump! Trump!’ That's a total recognition.”⁸² Since rap is full of pop culture references, it is not so surprising to encounter this particular celebrity in many lyrics when rappers talk about fame. The interesting question is why they rap about fame so much. Why is being famous such a desirable status for rappers? One possible answer can be found in an elaborate biography of Trump by Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher named *Trump Revealed: The Definitive Biography of the 45th President* (2016): “Donald Trump built his reputation selling real estate, but the thing he had always wanted to sell was Donald Trump. His career as a reality television star would finally make Trump into a house-hold brand.”⁸³

Fame is monetizable, especially in a celebrity culture such as the one of the United States.⁸⁴ The entire myth of rich and successful celebrities has had a complex and vital role in American society. It has even been called the ideology of celebrity; Elizabeth Barry from the University of Warwick wrote:

⁸⁰ Redman, “Da Funk,” *Whut? Thee Album* (New York City: Rush Associated Labels & Chaos, 1992), album.

⁸¹ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 91.

⁸² Mark Singer, “Trump Solo,” *The New Yorker*, May 12, 1997, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/05/19/trump-solo> (accessed August 15, 2020).

⁸³ Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher, *Trump Revealed: The Definitive Biography of the 45th President* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 221.

⁸⁴ See Frank Furedi, “Celebrity Culture,” *Society* 47 (2010): 493–497.

In the myth which underpins the ideology of celebrity, the celebrity figure returns now and then to ‘our’ world from the supernatural one which they inhabit – a world of yachts, fast cars, Cartier diamonds, in which they dine out constantly but never gain an ounce, in which flashbulbs illuminate their every step – to report something of its essence to us.⁸⁵

The way Donald Trump makes profit of his fame is fairly similar to the way rappers monetize theirs with merchandise, endorsement-based collaborations with large companies, publishing books etc.:

In almost all cases, Trump’s only involvement in the overseas projects was to license the Trump brand to local partners for fees that reached millions of dollars, and sometimes to manage the hotels when they opened. The Trump name proved in some instances to be a hugely successful draw.⁸⁶

Fame in America can be tightly related to power and wealth, when processed conveniently.

Fame is a fairly common topic of rap songs. In braggadocio rap, it is one of the few very typical traits rappers boast about. In a book about rapping compiled from interviews with famous rappers called *How to Rap: The Art & Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (2009), the insightful author Paul Edwards noted: “Bragging and boasting, known as braggadocio content, have always been an important part of hip hop lyrics and are an art form in themselves.”⁸⁷ It is important to understand that many of these bragging lyrics cannot be taken very seriously—braggadocio is a discipline in rap lyricism that has a sport undertone in it. Almost every rapper does this occasionally, which makes it difficult to write such lyrics in a witty, entertaining, but most importantly original way, even though bragging about e.g., being famous has been done by countless rappers.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Barry, “Celebrity, Cultural Production and Public Life,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11 (2008): 254.

⁸⁶ Kranish and Fisher, *Trump Revealed*, 241.

⁸⁷ Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art & Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 25.

Furthermore, many prominent rappers have also pointed out the negative sides of fame. Eminem (*1972), the best-selling rapper of all time,⁸⁸ filled the chorus of his song “Almost Famous” (2010) with warnings about fame:

You dream of trading places, I have been changing faces
You cannot fill these shoes, there is too much to lose
Wake up behind these trenches, you run around defenseless
There is too much to lose, you cannot fill these shoes
I just wanna be famous, but...
Be careful what you wish for⁸⁹

The implicit point of personality loss which goes hand in hand with becoming famous is even more obvious in the song “Famous” (2018) by Lil Wayne (*1982), who is often considered one of the best rappers of all time.⁹⁰ This entire song with a surprisingly nostalgic atmosphere takes a rather disturbing take on fame:

Livin' in the spotlight, twist the light bulb when it's blinking
I'm never alone
I got my demons and my angels
Can't talk to myself, 'cause mama said don't talk to strangers⁹¹

Wayne also managed to describe the motivations of many African Americans to become successful rappers, seeing their heroes in the spotlight when made a transparent allusion to “You’re Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You)” (1997) by another rap superstar, Notorious B.I.G. (1972-1997):

And I'm sittin' here reading what was written 'bout what I do, what I didn't
I ruined relationships before my image, but

⁸⁸ Brad Callas, “The Ten Greatest Rappers of All-Time (From a Purely Commercial Perspective),” *Medium*, August 25, 2018, <https://medium.com/@bradcallas/the-ten-greatest-rappers-of-all-time-6a49efa4ac69> (accessed August 16, 2020).

⁸⁹ Eminem, “Almost Famous,” *Recovery* (Santa Monica & New York City: Aftermath Entertainment & Interscope Records & Shady Records, 2010), album.

⁹⁰ Billboard Staff, “The 10 Best Rappers of All Time,” *Billboard*, December 11, 2015, <https://www.billboard.com/photos/6723017/the-10-best-rappers-of-all-time> (accessed August 16, 2020).

⁹¹ Lil Wayne, “Famous,” *The Carter V* (New Orleans & New York City: Young Money Entertainment & Republic Records, 2018), album.

All I ever wanted was everybody's attention
'Cause most people are nobody 'til somebody kill 'em⁹²

In rap music lyrics, too many people do not die of natural causes, they are killed. Getting famous can seem like obtaining a bulletproof vest.⁹³ And bragging about it is an essential part of the game.

⁹² Lil Wayne, "Famous."

⁹³ This vest is not necessarily effective enough, since there are, sadly, more than few examples of murdered hip hop artists. A 2015 study even concluded that murder was the cause of 51.5% of American hip hop musician deaths. See Stephen Harris, "Music to Die for: How Genre Affects Popular Musicians' Life Expectancy," *The Conversation*, March 22, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/music-to-die-for-how-genre-affects-popular-musicians-life-expectancy-36660> (accessed November 24, 2020).

BRAGGADOCIO

“I am a God
Hurry up with my d*mn massage
Hurry up with my d*mn ménage
Get the Porsche out the d*mn garage
I am a God”⁹⁴
- Kanye West

A very important part of rap lyricism has been encountered—braggadocio rap. Looking for self-referential boastful rap lyrics would be beside the point. All one would need to do would be to close their eyes and throw a dart into a wall covered by printed random successful rap songs’ lyrics, and the chances of hitting a boasting line would be fairly high. Kanye West, for example, has compared himself to Pablo Picasso, Steve Jobs or God. Is he really comparable to these characters? Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) certainly did not think so, as he made clear in a (diss-)poem called “Kanye West is Not Picasso” (2015).⁹⁵ One way or another, Kanye obviously believes it, or more precisely wants people to believe that he does. Similarly, Trump’s speech is also full of boasting, up to the point of calling himself a “very stable genius.”⁹⁶ Instead of looking for isolated instances of such stylistic devices, it is more interesting to quote this without prior explanation:

As far as temperament
And we all know that
As far as temperament
I think I have a great temperament

⁹⁴ Kanye West, “I Am a God,” *Yeezus* (New York City: Roc-A-Fella Records & Def Jam, 2013), album.

⁹⁵ Allyson Chiu, “‘Kanye West is Not Picasso,’ Wrote Leonard Cohen in a ‘Diss Poem from beyond the Grave,’” *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/10/12/kanye-west-is-not-picasso-wrote-leonard-cohen-in-a-diss-poem-from-beyond-the-grave/> (accessed October 13, 2020).

⁹⁶ David Nakamura and Karen Tumulty, “Trump Boasts that He’s a ‘Very Stable Genius’ amid Questions over His Mental Fitness,” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-boasts-that-hes-like-really-smart-and-a-very-stable-genius-amid-questions-over-his-mental-fitness/2018/01/06/f166c8e8-f314-11e7-b3bf-ab90a706e175_story.html?utm_term=.b8ed6dc53eb4&itid=lk_inline_manual_6 (accessed October 13, 2020).

I built a phenomenal business
With incredible, iconic assets
One of the really truly great real-estate businesses

And I may be an entertainer
Because I've had tremendous success
With number-one bestsellers all over the place
With *The Apprentice*
And everything else I've done

But I will tell you this
What I am far and away greater
Than an entertainer
Is a businessman⁹⁷

No changes have been made in this quote by Donald Trump besides typesetting in verse-looking paragraphs. Rappers also often brag about being entertainers and businessmen at the same time. The business part is frequently even more important to their personalities than the fact that they are, primarily, artists. Then again, the relationship between art and business is quite tight in the USA. Before anyone refuses this connection by saying that (unlike Trump) many rappers also claim that they love music in the first place, note Trump's own words from his book *Think Like a Champion: An Informal Education In Business and Life* (2009): "Getting rich isn't always simple. I have and will always continue to emphasize the importance of loving what you do first. [...] So the first step in preparing to becoming rich is to find something that you absolutely love doing."⁹⁸

Bragging lyrics are often complementary with looking down on somebody, showing superiority over specific rivals and using punch lines. Edwards defines a punch line as follows: "A punch line is a particularly strong phrase in the lyrics that 'punches,' or hits, the listener. It can be something funny, an interesting metaphor or simile, clever

⁹⁷ Ryan Teague Beckwith, "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate," *Time.com*, September 18, 2015, <https://time.com/4037239/second-republican-debate-transcript-cnn/> (accessed August 16, 2020).

⁹⁸ Donald J. Trump and Meredith McIver, *Think Like a Champion: An Informal Education in Business and Life* (New York City: Vanguard Press, 2009), 177.

wordplay, or anything that makes an impact.”⁹⁹ Trump often manages to brag, look down on others, ridicule them and end the same utterance with a punchline:

I’m the most successful person ever to run for the presidency, by far. Nobody’s ever been more successful than me. I’m the most successful person ever to run. Ross Perot isn’t successful like me. Romney — I have a Gucci store that’s worth more than Romney.¹⁰⁰

The Gucci reference makes it seem as if Trump was actually imitating rappers in this particular quote. What Wallace wrote about rap lyrics could also be applicable to Trump’s speech at least with the same precision: “The lyrics, nearly always self-referential, tend to be variations on about half a dozen basic themes.”¹⁰¹ Just as he aims to stir up crowds and make them love him, while being provocational at times, Donald Trump is a very special type of an MC.¹⁰²

Let us take a look at another common denominator of Trump and rap—a certain type of enticing negligence.

⁹⁹ Edwards, *How to Rap*, 58.

¹⁰⁰ Josh Hafner, “Trump: I Won’t Do Straw Poll if Everyone Backs out,” *Des Moines Register*, June 2, 2015, <https://eu.desmoinesregister.com/story/newselections/presidential/caucus/2015/06/01/donald-trump-straw-poll-mitt-romney-gucci-store/28313569> (accessed August 16, 2020).

¹⁰¹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 26.

¹⁰² An MC, which is an abbreviation for “the master of ceremonies,” who is usually a host for events, introducing performers and presenting the program in order. In hip hop, the acronym has become a near-synonym of the word “rapper.”

CARELESS LIKE TRUMP

“I don't give a f*ck, I don't give a f*ck
I don't, I don't, I don't give a f*ck
B*tch, I don't give a f*ck about you
Or anything that you do.”¹⁰³
- Big Sean

Method Man’s reasoning of the appeal of Trump to rappers has been already discussed. He showed that it was Trump’s carelessness what drew rappers towards him. This does not mean indifference in the sense of not being interested in what is happening around one. Quite the opposite, rappers tend to get emotional when it can strengthen their message and most of the time, they are absorbed in topics of their interest, much as the 45th president of the United States.

Costello claimed that rap is “equating strength with style, and style with the ‘I’ in ‘Individuality.’”¹⁰⁴ Not caring is closely related to a certain type of selfishness presented as a virtue. It is about coming on strong, about not mincing one’s words and saying whatever the person believes to be true or appropriate to state at a given moment. In the world often perceived as a world of correct unopinionated rhetoric without real content or edge, sincerity is valued as a rare resource.

In this “straight-forward” language, there might be a higher chance of actually making a relevant point, which often goes hand in hand with a higher chance of being unprecise or plain false, hurting someone, breaking cultural standards or even taboos. When the pioneer “gangsta rap” superstar group N.W.A. wrote a controversial track “F*ck Tha Police” (1988), even FBI took action. Sociologist Mathieu Deflem wrote:

The most extensive police actions against popular music during the era took place in response to records released by N.W.A. and Body Count. Offended by the song ‘F*** tha Police’ by rap group N.W.A., FBI agent Milt Ahlerich sent a letter to the N.W.A. record distributor claiming that the band’s album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) “encourages violence against and disrespect for the law-

¹⁰³ Big Sean featuring E-40, “I Don’t Fuck with You,” *Dark Sky Paradise* (New York City: GOOD & Def Jam, 2015), album.

¹⁰⁴ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 60.

enforcement officer.” A network of police messages distributed by fax machines tracked N.W.A. during their 1989 tour, urging law enforcement to stop the band’s live concerts.¹⁰⁵

They intelligently turned the situation around and made a free-speech, anti-political-correctness case out of it. Not only does this provide a certain “martyr” narrative, when establishment tries to silence someone (or allegedly ignores them),¹⁰⁶ it can create a feeling of the mainstream media trying to hide the truth. Similarly, Trump often gets support for openly stating whatever he believes to be true, which might be even more important than actually being right.¹⁰⁷

After all, at least he has clear opinions. This anti-elitism can create a feeling that believing in even obvious lies makes one a proper supporter or fan. Political scientist S. M. Amadae noted:

This could explain populism and the Trump administration’s appeal to its supporters by brandishing post-truth rhetoric that “vilifies elites, [and] combined with glorification of the people... [, expresses] a pretty strong anti-intellectualism and skepticism about expertise.” (Steven K. Bannon, quoted by Marc Fisher in the *Washington Post*, ‘The Political Lexicon of a Billionaire Populist,’ March 9, Fisher, 2017).¹⁰⁸ Expressive demonstration of support for Trump, then takes the form of acceding to even blatantly obvious untruths.¹⁰⁹

More often than not, it helps when these opinions are controversial or extreme to a certain extent, or at least said in a way that defies certain expectations. Wallace wrote:

Very often the fresh new usurpers bands are several orders of magnitude harsher, harder, meaner than their precursors, their terminology and themes right over the edge into what even in ’89 couldn’t get airplay: N.W.A’s real name, “N[*]ggaz

¹⁰⁵ Mathieu Deflem, “Popular Culture and Social Control: The Moral Panic on Music Labeling,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45 (2020), 15.

¹⁰⁶ Steven Shepard, “How Could the Polling Be So Wrong?” *Politico*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/how-could-polling-be-so-wrong-2016-231092> (accessed August 17, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ S.M. Amadae, “Game Theory, Cheap Talk and Post-Truth Politics: David Lewis vs. John Searle on Reasons for Truth-Telling,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 48 (2018), 306-329.

¹⁰⁸ Amadae, “Game Theory, Cheap Talk and Post-Truth Politics,” 307.

¹⁰⁹ Amadae, “Game Theory, Cheap Talk and Post-Truth Politics,” 308.

with Attitude,” is one that no white DJ or requester can even mention without a cringe at how it’ll sound; while their monster underground hit “F[*]ck tha Police,” like Schoolly D’s “Mr. Big D[*]ck,” seems almost designed to ensure radio/cable rejection and thus, at least for a while, a kind of intense racial locality...¹¹⁰

Apart from the “realness” being appreciated by Americans, this approach brings other benefits. What might seem like closing media for oneself often actually leads to a greater coverage launched by controversy. Costello noted: “Editorial writers will be appalled, giving the new snuff rappers the kind of jackpot of free publicity N.W.A enjoyed in the spring of ’89.”¹¹¹ Arguably, the majority of Trump media coverage during his presidential run was concerned with his controversial, strong claims which triggered journalists so much that they could not help themselves but write about their disillusionment over and over. This just gave Trump a very desirable anti-establishment brand as well as an anti-elitist one, which would be very hard to build otherwise, considering the fact that Trump is a billionaire. As the unprecedented success of rap music as well as the result of the 2016 POTUS elections imply, Americans are drawn towards characters that blatantly express their strong beliefs while creating an overall character that is, above all, strong and bold.

This inevitably leads to problematic oversimplifications of complex issues and frequent blabbering that sounds opinionated but lacks any real content. Then again, it should never lack believable emotion to work. Aiming at emotion rather than reason when “selling” an idea seems like the more effective way. This phenomenon was already witnessed in late 1950s by a prominent English mind. Twenty-six years after the publishing of one of the most iconic dystopian novels of all time, *Brave New World* (1932), the brilliant English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) looked back at the society’s development towards dystopia in a witty and truly timeless book *Brave New World Revisited* (1958): “But today, in the world’s most powerful democracy, the politicians and their propagandists prefer to make nonsense of democratic procedures by appealing almost exclusively to the ignorance and irrationality of electors.”¹¹²

Stating whatever is on one’s mind without caring about other people’s feelings and truthfulness of given utterances might seem like a terrible thing to do. Nevertheless,

¹¹⁰ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 79, 80.

¹¹¹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 81.

¹¹² Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), 72-73.

Donald Trump himself pointed out the benefits of always speaking his mind right off the bat in a chapter of *Think Like A Champion* conveniently named “Keep It Short, Fast, and Direct:” “Someone who analyzed my negotiating technique said I had an advantage over most people because I had the ability to get to the point faster than anybody else. While they were still formulating their sentences, I’d already written the book.”¹¹³ A funny explanation of this phenomenon in rap is given by an award-winning television series about contemporary hip hop culture called *Atlanta*.¹¹⁴ The protagonist of the show, rapper Paper Boi clarifies his motivations as a lyricist in an interview: “Nah, nah, nah, there’s no extra layer. I don’t think about what I’m rappin’ half the time. Look, I’m just tryin’ to get paid, you feel me?”¹¹⁵ When the multi-talented artist Donald Glover (*1983),¹¹⁶ who wrote and directed the TV show, while starring there, accepted the trophy for *Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Comedy Series*, he ironically thanked the President: “I want to thank Trump for making black people number one on the most-oppressed list. He’s probably the reason I’m up here.”¹¹⁷

Trump’s appeal is thus clearly connected to his rhetoric. The multi-platinum-selling rapper and one of the most well-known rappers of all time, 50 Cent (*1975), has been compared to Trump many times.¹¹⁸ When asked how he felt about this, he responded: “I think he’s amazing... And the outrageous things he says—maybe that’s what they say we have in common. It’s like personality flaws a little bit.”¹¹⁹ Later, 50 Cent said that Trump has the attitude of a rapper. When asked why he thought so, he explained: “He do. He never takes responsibility for what he says.”¹²⁰ The best-selling American author Robert Greene (*1959) wrote about 50 Cent in a biography called *The 50th Law* (2009): “His lack of fear is displayed in his attitude and his actions. [...] He feels supreme confidence in himself. Living in a world where most people are generally

¹¹³ Trump, *Think Like A Champion*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Todd Van Luling, “Donald Glover Is First Black Director to Win an Emmy in Comedy,” *The Huffington Post*, September 17, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-glover-emmy_n_59b1fb7e4b0edff971d1b1d (accessed October 11, 2020).

¹¹⁵ Written and directed by Donald Glover, “B.A.N.,” *Atlanta*, S01E07 (originally aired on FX, October 11, 2016), TV series.

¹¹⁶ Also known as rapper “Childish Gambino.”

¹¹⁷ Danielle Turchiano, “Donald Glover Jokingly Thanks Trump after Winning Lead Actor in a Comedy Emmy,” *Variety*, September 17, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/donald-glover-emmys-lead-actor-trump-1202557335/> (accessed October 11, 2020).

¹¹⁸ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 199.

¹¹⁹ The Meredith Vieira Show, “What Does 50 Cent Think of Donald Trump?” YouTube video, 1:06, September 10, 2015, <https://youtu.be/hEx0zMm9oOw> (accessed October 11, 2020).

¹²⁰ Team Coco, “Curtis ‘50 Cent’ Jackson: Trump Has the Attitude of a Rapper - CONAN on TBS,” YouTube video, 2:20, January 17, 2018, <https://youtu.be/0qF6TiZ9CIg> (accessed October 11, 2020).

timid and conservative, he always has the advantage of being willing to do more, to take risks, and to be unconventional.”¹²¹ The similarity between himself as the prototype of a “gangster-rapper” and Donald Trump is striking. 50 Cent, who became a very successful entrepreneur even though he grew up in extremely difficult conditions and was shot nine times in 2000,¹²² now uses slightly harsher language when talking about Trump, but still acknowledges the similarities. Not doing so would be hypocritical, and “realness” is clearly an important virtue of rappers.

The reason for this fascination with Trump’s prepossessing ignorance might be that this “carelessness” is significantly connected to the notion of authenticity.¹²³ Gosa noted that: “Historically, hip hop culture has been obsessed with authenticity as knowledge, a sense of realness flowing from personal experience and truth.”¹²⁴ The truth here is a clearly subjective category often justified by verifiable life experience rather than convincing argumentation, persuasion skills or presentation of facts. The life experience is what gives one authority to make prophet-like statements perceived as truisms. One cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, if someone gets hurt in the process, be it.

In summary, not caring much about other people’s feelings and truthfulness of one’s claims in an enticing careless manner is surely one of the most striking and important common denominators of rap music and Donald Trump. We have seen that the content of the two explored phenomena is in many ways similar, however, the form is just as important. Oversimplification is a matter of content, which needs a simple form to be expressed.

“This mother*cker hit North Korea with rap battle threats.”¹²⁵

- Dave Chappelle

¹²¹ 50 Cent and Robert Greene, *The 50th Law* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 7.

¹²² Kameron Virk, “50 Cent’s story: From Shootings to Million-Dollar Deals,” *BBC*, October 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-45836061> (accessed October 11, 2020).

¹²³ See David Sköld and Rehn Alf, “Makin’ it, by Keeping it Real: Street Talk, Rap Music, and the Forgotten Entrepreneurship from ‘the Hood,’” *Group & Organization Management* 32 (2007), 50-78.

¹²⁴ Gosa, “Hip Hop, Authenticity, and Styleshifting in the 2016 Presidential Election,” 8.

¹²⁵ Directed by Stan Lathan, *Dave Chappelle: Equanimity* (Netflix, 2017), movie.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

“[T]he candidate must be glamorous. He must also be an entertainer who never bores his audience. Inured to television and radio, that audience is accustomed to being distracted and does not like to be asked to concentrate or make a prolonged intellectual effort.

All speeches by the entertainer candidate must therefore be short and snappy.”¹²⁶

- Aldous Huxley

Contemplating quotes like this one, it is hard to believe that Huxley wrote his essay in 1958. From his age of TV and radio, people have been inured to more and more distracting media and devices. Researchers have proved that the internet significantly reduced our attention abilities, bringing “the multi-faceted stream of incoming information encouraging us to engage in attentional-switching and ‘multi-tasking,’ rather than sustained focus.”¹²⁷ To stay focused, people often need to consume simple and clear information, while the quality of the content does not really play a major role:

However, the ability of the Internet to capture and hold attention is not solely due to the quality of media content available online. Rather, it is also driven by the underlying design and presentation of the online world. One such example is the self-evolving “attraction mechanism;” whereby aspects of the Internet that fail to gain attention are quickly drowned out in the sea of incoming information, while the successful aspects of the adverts, articles, apps or anything that does manage to capture our attention (even superficially) are logged (through clicks and scrolls), noticed (through online shares), and subsequently proliferated and expanded upon.¹²⁸

It seems that this AI-based evaluation of information to be presented to users is a fertile ground for simplicity. The underlying mechanisms and economic motivations for such design are sufficiently exposed in a documentary movie *The Social Dilemma*

¹²⁶ Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 74.

¹²⁷ Joseph Firth et al., “The ‘Online Brain:’ How the Internet May Be Changing Our Cognition,” *World Psychiatry* 18 (2019), 126.

¹²⁸ Firth et al., “The ‘Online Brain,’” 120.

(2020).¹²⁹ What is even scarier, though, are the long-term neurocognitive changes to our behavior and potential physical impact on brains of internet users, which might be significantly more substantial than previously expected.¹³⁰

One way or another, when looking for the reason of enormous success of rap music and Trump's rhetoric, we should keep in mind how powerful internet is today.¹³¹ Costello understood, that one of the powers of hip-hop is that while it is difficult to make an R&B album, "anybody with a larynx can rap."¹³² It is very questionable if truly anybody can rap, not to mention to rap well, but internet evidently brought opportunities and platforms for aspiring rappers who could not afford live bands and studios and would not get through the former gate-keepers in form of big production and distribution companies. Similarly, the vanishing division between journalist and bloggers and growing reach of internet-based media have arguably allowed Trump to get more coverage. Lawyer Ronald D. Coleman noted that: "The First Amendment was not drafted for the benefit of an elite few; it was meant to protect the rights of all Americans to express themselves in a robust, cantankerous exchange of opinions."¹³³ This would be rarely disputed, but the social media algorithms seem to decrease the cantankerous exchange of opinions in favor of dosage of articles we are likely to agree with no matter how reliable their source might be. The internet theoretically allows anybody to reach an audience. That should be great, should it not?

Clearly, in the (online) world overflowing with information, text and opinions, simplicity has an enticing edge. Donald Trump wrote: "We don't have the time for loquacious colleagues, and the longwinded diatribes we often have to suffer through will greatly diminish their chances of winning."¹³⁴ Linguistic analyses of Trump's speech seem to indicate that his speech is truly connected to intuitive thinking and confidence.¹³⁵ Researchers from The University of Texas at Austin concluded: "Taken together, the

¹²⁹ Directed by Jeff Orlowski, *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix, 2020), movie.

¹³⁰ Firth et al., "The 'Online Brain,'" 119-129.

¹³¹ See FleishmanHillard, "2012 Digital Influence Index Shows Internet as Leading Influence in Consumer Purchasing Choices," *FleishmanHillard Press Releases*, January 31, 2012, <https://fleishmanhillard.com/2012/01/news-and-opinions/2012-digital-influence-index-shows-internet-as-leading-influence-in-consumer-purchasing-choices/> (accessed October 13, 2020).

¹³² Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 8.

¹³³ Ronald D. Coleman, "Bloggers, Journalists, Reporting, and Privilege," *Computer & Internet Lawyer* 31 (2014), 12.

¹³⁴ Trump, *Think Like A Champion*, 63.

¹³⁵ Kayla N Jordan et al., "Examining Long-Term Trends in Politics and Culture through Language of Political Leaders and Cultural Institutions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116 (2019), 3476-3481.

trends suggest that voters may increasingly be drawn to leaders who can make difficult, complex problems easier to understand with intuitive, confident answers.”¹³⁶ For example, writer Tiffany Markman highlighted Trump’s directness, exaggeration and repetition, when she said that “when Trump wants to make a point, he makes it multiple times.”¹³⁷

We can see similar strategies in rap lyricism, particularly in almost every hook, which is “[t]hat part of a song, sometimes the title or key lyric line, that keeps recurring.”¹³⁸ It is often the chorus, but not necessarily. Basically, it is the part that catches the listener’s attention and ends up being the most memorable one. An expert in media studies Gary Burns noted: “The word ‘hook’ connotes being caught or trapped, as when a fish is hooked, and also addiction, as when one is hooked on a drug.”¹³⁹ Hooks are widely and successfully used in rap music for various reasons.

The clearest motivation is the fact that if they are simple enough, people can easily remember them, chant them with the rapper at a concert or sing them in a club. An exceptionally successful example of such a hook would be one of the most remarkable hooks of all time, from 50 Cent’s platinum single “In da Club” (2003), which “would, within two months, become the most listened to song in radio history:”¹⁴⁰

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub'
Look, mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come give me a hug if you into gettin' rubbed¹⁴¹

This hook is quite simple to remember and since it is repeated many times over the song, the listener is truly familiar with its sound as well as lyrics right after they listened to “In da Club” for the first time. Apart from getting under one’s skin, successful

¹³⁶ The University of Texas at Austin, “Trump’s Simple, Confident Language Has Strong Historical Roots,” *UT News*, February 11, 2019, <https://news.utexas.edu/2019/02/11/trumps-simple-confident-language-has-strong-historical-roots/> (accessed October 14, 2020).

¹³⁷ Tiffany Markman, “An analysis of President Donald Trump’s Use of language,” *Medium*, February 9, 2020, <https://medium.com/@tiffanymarkman/an-analysis-of-president-donald-trumps-use-of-language-74a76c3d062b> (accessed October 14, 2020).

¹³⁸ Donn Delson and Walter E Hurst, *Delson's Dictionary of Radio & Record Industry Terms* (Thousand Oaks: Bradson Press, 1980), 58.

¹³⁹ Gary Burns, “A Typology of 'Hooks' in Popular Records,” *Popular Music* 6 (1987), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 199.

¹⁴¹ 50 Cent, “In da Club,” *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (New York City & Santa Monica: Shady & G-Unit & Aftermath & Interscope, 2003), album.

repetitive hooks have mantric and empowering effects. Kendrick Lamar’s Grammy-winning single “Alright” (2015) “became an anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement.”¹⁴² This song has political potential mostly due to a remarkably catchy hook written by a hook-genius Pharrell Williams (*1973):

N*gga, we gon' be alright
N*gga, we gon' be alright
We gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright¹⁴³

Associate Professor of Music Studies at Temple University, Noriko Manabe, noted: “The mesmerizing rhythmic repetition, combined with the hopeful tone, makes this hook an effective protest chant.”¹⁴⁴ This is most likely why “We Shall Overcome” of the 21st century has become so successful as to be named “the most important rap record of the decade.”¹⁴⁵ The roots of simple and repetitive lines written in AAVE (African American Vernacular English) can be traced for example to the authors of the Harlem Renaissance such as Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), whose poems like “A Negro Love Song” (1913) contain stanzas that might quite easily become rap hooks:

Seen my lady home las' night,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Hel' huh han' an' sque'z it tight,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Hyeahd huh sigh a little sigh,
Seen a light gleam f'om huh eye,
An' a smile go flittin' by—
Jump back, honey, jump back.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 305.

¹⁴³ Kendrick Lamar, “Alright,” *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Carson & Santa Monica: TDE & Aftermath & Interscope, 2015), album.

¹⁴⁴ Noriko Manabe, “We Gon’ Be Alright? The Ambiguities of Kendrick Lamar’s Protest Anthem,” *Music Theory Online* 25 (2019), 13.

¹⁴⁵ Ural Garrett, “Kendrick Lamar Created the Most Important Rap Record of the Decade So Far through ‘Alright,’” *HipHopDX*, October 16, 2015, <https://hiphopdx.com/editorials/id.3070/title.kendrick-lamar-created-the-most-important-rap-record-of-the-decade-so-far-through-alright> (accessed October 14, 2020).

¹⁴⁶ Paul Dunbar, *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 49.

Irrespective of the motivation, rap predominantly uses relatively simple, repetitive language, just like Donald Trump in his speech. In terms of language, there are thus similarities in the form as well as in the content, which is likely to be an important factor drawing rappers—people making their living by language use—closer to Trump.

Before analyzing more pressing and self-evident shared topics like sexism and money, I will briefly consider one more rhetoric similarity; the tendency to paint the situation black.

DYSTOPIAN LIKE TRUMP

“Sadly, the American Dream is dead.”¹⁴⁷

- Donald Trump

Contrary to the overall hopeful message of Lamar’s “Alright,” the whole lyrics are clearly driven by pain and struggle. Even though it is one of the more positive songs of his album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), it has a very dark build-up leading to the optimistic belief repeated throughout the hook:

Wouldn't you know
We been hurt, been down before
N*gga, when our pride was low
Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go?"
N*gga, and we hate po-po
Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'
N*gga, I'm at the preacher's door
My knees gettin' weak, and my gun might blow
But we gon' be alright¹⁴⁸

Still, “Alright” appears to be one of the more hopeful rap songs in general. Wallace wrote: “[A] kind of dystopian present from which no imaginative future can even emerge. Long-honored musical ‘messages’ of hope, faith, reconciliation, of the importance of basic compassion, peace, spirituality, political (dare one say economic?) equality have, here as elsewhere in post-Reagan culture, been not just rejected but relegated to the status of an oh-come-on cliché, instant ridicule.”¹⁴⁹ Nihilism in rap has been studied as a separate topic.¹⁵⁰ Given the fact that American hip hop for a big part narrates the experience of African Americans, it is no surprise. In his article called “Numb the Pain with the Money’: How Hip-Hop Turned Nihilistic,” essayist Tirhakah Love noticed the wider contextual and historical interconnectedness:

¹⁴⁷ Susan Page, “This Time, Donald Trump Says He’s Running,” *USA Today*, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2015/06/16/donald-trump-announcement-president/28782433/> (accessed October 15, 2020).

¹⁴⁸ Lamar, “Alright.”

¹⁴⁹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ See Charis E. Kubrin, “I See Death around the Corner,” *Sociological Perspectives* 48 (2005), 433-459.

Whether it's the blues musicians of the past responding to the broken promises of America's post-emancipation period; the bitter questioning of Marvin Gaye and Syl Johnson; the flipping off of the LAPD by Ice Cube; or Queen Latifah attempting to quell tensions bred over years of misogyny from men in the industry, black music is an endless loop of observing, feeling and talking back.¹⁵¹

The tendency of many rappers to write dark lyrics is possibly due to the descriptive character of this music genre. The artistic license allows rappers to exaggerate, since hyperbolic reflection of reality might illuminate hidden issues more amply with more direct light pointed at them. In an early 90's interview for CNBC, the controversial rap star Ice Cube (*1969), who will be an important part of the analysis later on, explained: "Taking rap music literally for everything that's said is like taking TV literally. You have TV programs, and you have the news. With rap music, you have the same thing."¹⁵² The lack of clear distinction between fiction and reporting is what often confuses people, who are not so familiar with rap, but understanding and feeling the thin line is an important part of rap interpretation. Not being able to directly access the reality rap music is predominantly coming from, one might unconsciously misinterpret or absolutely miss important points of rap lyrics. Further in the same interview, Ice Cube appropriately reacted to the condescending interviewer: "Excuse me, you see the anger, but you don't understand the anger. That's the problem. [...] We lost four hundred years of teaching, of schooling, of any kind of knowledge of our culture. And we're right now in the process of getting that back through rap music."¹⁵³

Similarly, Donald Trump often expresses negative outlook on different topics throughout his speeches. When addressing African American communities during his presidential campaign tour in 2016, he said: "Look how much African American communities have suffered under democratic control. To those I say the following: What do you have to lose by trying something new like Trump? What do you have to lose? [...] You're living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58% of your youth

¹⁵¹ Tirhakah Love, "Numb the Pain with the Money': How Hip-Hop Turned Nihilistic," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/oct/19/post-malone-rockstar-numb-the-pain-with-the-money-how-hip-hop-turned-nihilistic> (accessed October 15, 2020).

¹⁵² X+, "Ice Cube Interviewed on CNBC During the Early 90's," YouTube video, 15:01, April 26, 2016, <https://youtu.be/hRYJTKUabhc> (accessed October 15, 2020).

¹⁵³ X+, "Ice Cube Interviewed on CNBC During the Early 90's."

is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose?”¹⁵⁴ The first sentence of this quote unveils one of the motivations for such rhetoric. It allows the speaker to assume the desirable anti-establishment persona. At the same time, it indicates, that the speaker is someone people can look up to when seeking solutions, even though the person might not mention them explicitly. It also adds to the “real and confident” brand, because it seems bold and straightforward to talk about the darkness of a situation without artificial overestimation.

There are other similarities in rhetorical form and content that might be explored in separate studies. The phenomena that will be analyzed in two following chapters are the most intuitive dots to connect between Trump and rap. I will now explore shared features concerning a phenomenon that both hip-hop culture and the 45th President of the United States have been widely criticized for—sexism.

¹⁵⁴ Tom LoBianco and Ashley Killough, “Trump Pitches Black Voters: 'What the Hell Do You Have to Lose?’” *CNN*, August 20, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/19/politics/donald-trump-african-american-voters/index.html> (accessed August 16, 2020).

TREATING WOMEN LIKE TRUMP

“That type of p*ssy, it's gon' make you want to wife her

We do a whole lotta numbers, yeah

Grab on that p*ssy like Donald”¹⁵⁵

- Future

Such a reference to Trump’s controversial remark by one of the more important Atlanta rappers,¹⁵⁶ Future (*1983), in 2017, when Trump has already become the villain in hip-hop culture, is maybe even more controversial in a given context than the original comment of the businessman at the time.

Blatant sexism, or more precisely objectification of women, is an issue that both Trump and hip-hop culture have been criticized for. Even though Trump’s list of offensive comments about females is rather long,¹⁵⁷ the most famous one is the recording of Trump’s blabbering before leaving a bus and talking to a female reporter, which Future referenced in the aforementioned passage:

Bush: “It better not be the publicist. No, it’s, it’s her; it’s —”

Trump: “Yeah, that’s her. With the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know, I’m automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.”

Bush: “Whatever you want.”

Trump: “Grab ’em by the p*ssy. You can do anything.”¹⁵⁸

It quickly becomes clear, that this issue is connected to one of the previously studied phenomena, particularly the braggadocio. Being perceived as someone who is

¹⁵⁵ Future, “High Demand,” *FUTURE* (Atlanta: A1 & Freebandz & Epic, 2017), album.

¹⁵⁶ Sam Moore, “13 Artists That Made Atlanta Rap What It Is Today,” *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4f3LV62CVJDL4GRBnfX27DC/13-artists-that-made-atlanta-rap-what-it-is-today> (accessed August 17, 2020).

¹⁵⁷ The Associated Press, “Trump Has Long History of Offensive Comments about Women,” *The Associated Press*, October 9, 2016, <https://apnews.com/article/92e1f5d5e8c0440c8805448043056a3b> (accessed October 16, 2020).

¹⁵⁸ Mark Makela, “Transcript: Donald Trump’s Taped Comments about Women,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html> (accessed August 17, 2020).

good with women and gets a lot of (hetero)sexual experience seems like a worthwhile goal for Trump as well as majority of rappers. Some comments of the POTUS are clearly merely about bragging, not really about expressing beliefs about women. Take for example a quote from his book *How to Get Rich* (2004): “All the women on *The Apprentice* flirted with me—consciously or unconsciously. That’s to be expected. A sexual dynamic is always present between people, unless you are asexual.”¹⁵⁹

Contemporary rap is for a big part defined by its derogatory portrayal of women, which does not have to be illustrated, given the fact it is also one of the most common reason for its criticism. However, it is not only a state of affairs of the recent years, this can be found even in hit songs from late 80s. In a song from N.W.A’s album *Straight Outta Compton*, Ice Cube claims: “Life ain't nothin' but b*tches and money.”¹⁶⁰ Three years later, Ice Cube proved that it was a steady belief, when he wrote a similar line for a song in his second studio album, *Death Certificate* (1991): “Cause life ain't nothin’ but money and f*ck a b*tch.”¹⁶¹

During the past years, similar lyrics became an industry standard. Lyrics that seem more objectifying than truly misogynistic are often accompanied by music videos, which can be described as soft porn rather than anything else, such as Tyga’s (*1989) music video for “Taste” (2018), which has exceeded one billion views on YouTube.^{162,163}

It is beside the point to show more examples, since rap music has been attacked for sexism mostly using anecdotal evidence out of context. However, as studies show, there is a clear pattern and really successful songs prevailingly fit into lots of preconceptions about hip hop. Sociologist Kayla Gray wrote: “It is not uncommon in rap to find lyrics that degrade women into merely objects or tools to be used for sex and to find lyrics that provide justification for engaging in acts that are violent or sexual against women.”¹⁶⁴ It has been shown that rap is a powerful music genre. Some studies even indicate that “exposure to rap music videos can have a negative impact on health in

¹⁵⁹ Donald J. Trump and Meredith McIver, *How to Get Rich* (New York: Random House, 2004), 222.

¹⁶⁰ N.W.A, “Gangsta Gangsta,” *Straight Outta Compton* (Los Angeles: Ruthless & Priority, 1988), album.

¹⁶¹ Ice Cube, “Steady Mobbin,” *Death Certificate* (Los Angeles: Lench Mob & Priority, 1991), album.

¹⁶² Tyga, “Tyga - Taste (Official Video) ft. Offset,” YouTube video, 3:52, May 16, 2018, <https://youtu.be/LjxulQ1bEWg> (accessed August 16, 2020).

¹⁶³ See Marla L. Shelton, “Can't Touch This! Representations of the African American Female Body in Urban Rap Videos,” *Popular Music and Society* 21 (1997), 107-116.

¹⁶⁴ Kayla Gray, “Evidence of Rape Culture in Modern Music,” *CLA Journal* 7 (2019), 40.

African American adolescent girls.”¹⁶⁵ Clearly, this issue should not be overlooked or underestimated.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is more important to find out why rappers as well as Trump tend to use degrading language toward women, apart from the aforementioned braggadocio. Sociologist Ronald Weitzer and criminologist Charis E. Kubrin noted: “Some analysts describe rap music as part of a larger reaction against the feminist movement, seeking to perpetuate women’s inequality and reempower men.”¹⁶⁶ In general, it seems to be connected with masculinity and self-acceptance, used as an argument for higher self-worth. Last but not least, “sensationalism sells.”¹⁶⁷

Another part of being a successful man in the eyes of many rappers and Donald Trump is clearly being good with women and being verbal about it.

UNTIL YOU DO RIGHT BY ME

“Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble.”¹⁶⁸

- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982)

“And nothing good gon' come to ya til you do right by me
Brother you wait and see (Who you callin' a b*tch?)”¹⁶⁹

- Queen Latifah, “U.N.I.T.Y.” (1993)

It would be unfair to only mention rap and sexism without taking into account the other side of the coin. The teacher of African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago noted in his analysis of Alice Walker’s (*1944) iconic masterpiece, *The Color Purple*: “Walker makes clear the relationship between the emptying of the literary space and the fulfilment of female identity through her novel’s epistolary structure, which subverts the predominantly male code of the Western literary tradition.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, even though rap is often seen as a (black) masculine genre, it

¹⁶⁵ Shani H. Peterson et al., “Images of Sexual Stereotypes in Rap Videos and the Health of African American Female Adolescents,” *Journal of Women’s Health* 16 (2007), 1163.

¹⁶⁶ Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin, “Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings,” *Men and Masculinities* 12 (2009), 25.

¹⁶⁷ TEDx Talks, “Misogyny in Hip Hop | Ellen Chamberlain | TEDxWayneStateU,” YouTube video, 14:06, June 19, 2019, <https://youtu.be/8tRWkHybjOo> (accessed October 16, 2020).

¹⁶⁸ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York City: Harcourt, 1982), 176.

¹⁶⁹ Queen Latifah, “U.N.I.T.Y.” *Black Reign* (Los Angeles: Motown, 1993), album.

¹⁷⁰ James C. Hall, “Towards a Map of Mis(Sed) Reading: The Presence of Absence in the Color Purple,” *African American Review* 26 (1992), 89.

would be a big mistake to overlook important female rappers, such as Queen Latifah (*1970), whose “anti-misogyny anthem ‘U.N.I.T.Y.’ hit the top ten on the R&B chart and won the Grammy for best rap solo performance.”¹⁷¹ To illustrate her importance in hip hop culture to a greater extent, it is worth noting that she was the first hip-hop artist to be given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.¹⁷² Alongside iconic female rappers like MC Lyte (*1970) or Roxanne Shante (*1969), Latifah resolutely belongs to the canon of important MCs in the development of hip hop culture as a strong female character, who stood up in a male-dominated culture and made her voice heard with lyrical and musical skills matching or exceeding her male rivals and colleagues. Another example of a successful old-school female rapper is The Notorious B.I.G.’s protégé Lil’ Kim (*1974), who also happens to have developed a friendly relationship with Donald Trump.¹⁷³ However, the 90s became more difficult for women in rap than the 80s. Chang wrote: “Hip hop had blown out of its niche into the mainstream. It suddenly seemed difficult to remember a time when youths of color had not been represented in the media, whether as consumers or producers. But just as hip-hop was now crucial content for the consolidated media, media consolidation also affected hip-hop’s content. Women in hip-hop lost the most. [...] A decade later, successful female artists like Missy Elliott and Lauryn Hill were the exceptions rather than the rule.”¹⁷⁴ Author Ellen Chamberlain suitably described the situation by stating: “Women kind of morphed into being props.”¹⁷⁵ Today, the situation is once again arguably slightly turning around, since we can witness enormous success of female rappers like Nicki Minaj (*1982), Cardi B (*1992) or Megan Thee Stallion (*1995), even though they are still undoubtedly an exception more than anything.¹⁷⁶

Even though the prevailing portrayal of women in rap is relatively unfortunate and many rappers behave in an arguably sexist way in real life as well,¹⁷⁷ it would be a mistake

¹⁷¹ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 105.

¹⁷² Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 224.

¹⁷³ See UPROXX Video, “Talib Kweli and Lil Kim Talk Her Bars, Biggie, Diddy, Censorship, & Marmalade | People’s Party,” YouTube video, 1:12:19, November 18, 2019, <https://youtu.be/hwLPGLbjNmg> (accessed November 24, 2020).

¹⁷⁴ Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 445.

¹⁷⁵ TEDx Talks, “Misogyny in Hip Hop.”

¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, it could be argued that these artists to a great extent follow the tradition of Lil’ Kim rather than the tradition of Queen Latifah, since their sexuality is heavily highlighted in their art and, in extreme cases, they seem like props even in their own music videos. There are many up-and-coming female rappers closer to the conscious rap tradition, such as Rapsody (*1983), Chika (*1997) and many more.

¹⁷⁷ See Janelle Griffith, “T.I. Said He Goes to Gynecologist with 18-Year-Old Daughter to ‘Check Her Hymen,’” *NBC News*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/t-i-said-he-goes-gynecologist-18-year-old-daughter-n1077841> (accessed October 16, 2020).

to assume the whole genre is defined by this. Weitzer and Kubrin conclude: “A majority of songs in our sample do not degrade women, and there are rappers who actively challenge rap’s misogynistic messages and endorse a more egalitarian form of masculinity.”¹⁷⁸ Gender and sexuality in rap is truly ambiguous and confusing, as analyzed by behavioral scientist Denise Herd in “Conflicting Paradigms on Gender and Sexuality in Rap Music: A Systematic Review.”¹⁷⁹

Even Tupac Shakur, “one of the figureheads of the gangsta rap movement,”¹⁸⁰ who was convicted of sexual abuse himself,¹⁸¹ has voiced feminist beliefs in his songs, which will be inspected to illustrate the inner fight. His first album, for example, contains a hit single “Brenda’s Got a Baby,”¹⁸² (1991) which describes struggles of females in the ghetto. His third studio album contains a song called “Dear Mama,”¹⁸³ (1995) where he demonstrates respect to black mothers without stereotypical characterization, specifically to his mother Afeni Shakur, a political activist and a Black Panther.¹⁸⁴ The most significant pro-female lyrics can be found in his womanist song “Keep Ya Head Up” (1993):

And when he tells you you ain't nothin', don't believe him
And if he can't learn to love you, you should leave him
'Cause, sister, you don't need him

[...]

And since we all came from a woman
Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman
I wonder why we take from our women

¹⁷⁸ Weitzer and Kubrin, “Misogyny in Rap Music,” 25.

¹⁷⁹ See Denise Herd, “Conflicting Paradigms on Gender and Sexuality in Rap Music: A Systematic Review,” *Sexuality & Culture* 19 (2015), 577-589.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Gumbel, “Tupac: The Life. The Legend. The Legacy,” *The Independent*, September 13, 2006, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/tupac-the-life-the-legend-the-legacy-415744.html> (accessed October 16, 2020).

¹⁸¹ George James, “Rapper Faces Prison Term for Sex Abuse,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/08/nyregion/rapper-faces-prison-term-for-sex-abuse.html> (accessed October 16, 2020).

¹⁸² 2Pac, “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” *2Pacalypse Now* (Santa Monica: Interscope, 1991), album.

¹⁸³ 2Pac, “Dear Mama,” *Me Against the World* (Santa Monica: Interscope, 1995), album.

¹⁸⁴ Mia Hall, “Afeni Shakur Davis: The Activist, Organizer, Leader Remembered,” *NBC News*, May 4, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/afeni-shakur-davis-activist-organizer-leader-remembered-n567296> (accessed October 16, 2020).

Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?

I think it's time to kill for our women

Time to heal our women, be real to our women

[...]

So, will the real men get up?

I know you're fed up, ladies, but keep ya head up¹⁸⁵

Bragging about one's (heterosexual) sex life and potentially really acting in a sexist or even abusive way seems to be another connection between a number of rappers and Donald Trump.¹⁸⁶ This trait of Trump is also one of the reasons why rappers have looked up to the POTUS. The next chapter deals with what seems like the most important common goal and value—riches.

“No Donald, I'll trump that b*tch”¹⁸⁷

- Young Thug

¹⁸⁵ 2Pac, “Keep Ya Head Up,” *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z...* (Santa Monica: Interscope, 1993), album.

¹⁸⁶ See Eliza Relman, “The 26 Women Who Have Accused Trump of Sexual Misconduct,” *Business Insider*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/women-accused-trump-sexual-misconduct-list-2017-12?r=US&IR=T> (accessed October 16, 2020).

¹⁸⁷ Young Thug, “Purpose” (New York City: The Orchard Enterprises), single.

RICH LIKE TRUMP

“Richest n*gga in my hood; call me Donald Trump
The type of n*gga to count my money while I smoke a blunt”¹⁸⁸
- Young Jeezy, “Trump”

It appears that if one really wants to understand the most important reason why rappers tend to mention and look up to Trump, all he or she needs to do is follow the money. With all his public appearances, books and self-branding as a whole, Donald Trump has managed to become a symbol of wealth. White House Reporter Stephen Collinson noted, quoting Trump: “‘I am smarter than they are, I am richer than they are’ Trump said at a rally in 2018, showing how he uses money as a barometer of his own success and as a badge of honor to wield against an establishment that has never really accepted him.”¹⁸⁹ Since rap is famously preoccupied with money, it is no wonder, that riches had made Trump a hero for many rappers. Already in 1989, rapper Buff Love (*1967) from American hip hop trio The Fat Boys rapped: “Boy, I got money like Donald Trump!”¹⁹⁰

Trump is often mentioned in rap songs as a symbol of “high” business, as in 50 Cent’s song “50/Banks” (2002): “We can talk Trump talk, real estate, stocks, and bonds.”¹⁹¹ Similarly, Offset (*1991) from Atlanta’s trendsetting trio Migos indicated that his wealth made him overcome racial limitations: “I got the white man money, call me Donald Trump.”¹⁹² Most often, the POTUS appears as a plain symbol of wealth, similarly to Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and others: “Bill Gates, Donald Trump, let me in now.”¹⁹³ This only demonstrates the strength of Trump as a symbol—when speaking about wealth, many rappers mention the second richest person in America, Bill Gates, alongside the 339th one.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Young Jeezy, “Trump,” *The Real Is Back 2* (Atlanta: Corporate Thugz, 2011), album.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Collinson, “Trump’s Wealth in the Spotlight with New Disclosure Forms,” *CNN*, May 16, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/16/politics/donald-trump-disclosure-business-trump-organization/index.html> (accessed October 22, 2020).

¹⁹⁰ Fat Boys, “LIE-Z,” *On and On* (London: Polydor Records, 1989), album.

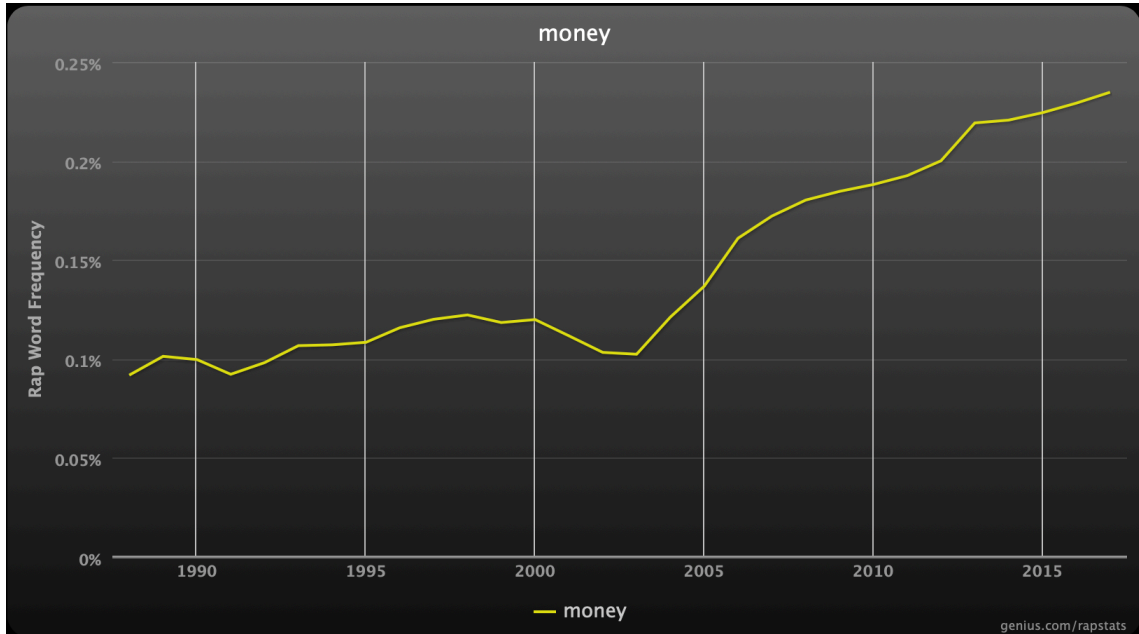
¹⁹¹ 50 Cent, “50/Banks,” *50 Cent is the Future* (New York City: Street Dance, 2002), album.

¹⁹² Migos, “Since Day 1,” *Streets on Lock* (Atlanta: Rich Forever Music & Quality Control Music, 2013), album.

¹⁹³ Nelly, “Country Grammar (Hot Sh*t)” *Country Grammar* (New York City: Universal & Fo’ Reel, 2000), album.

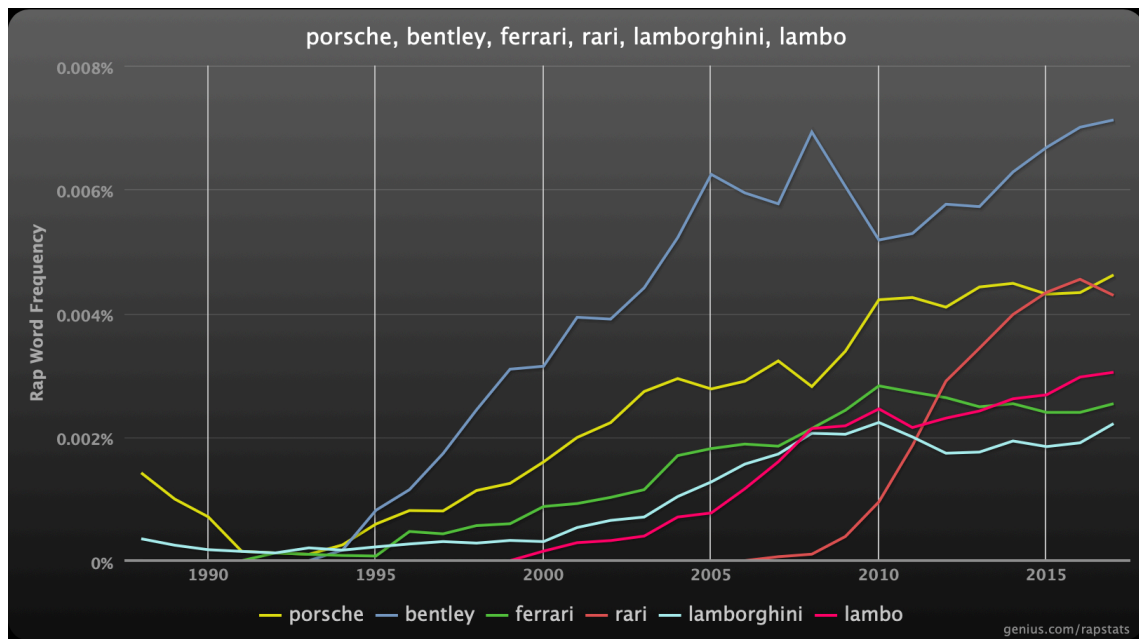
¹⁹⁴ Edited by Kerry A. Dolan, Chase Peterson-Withorn and Jennifer Wang, “The Definitive Ranking of The Wealthiest Americans in 2020,” *Forbes*, July 24, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/forbes-400/> (accessed October 22, 2020).

The following graphs generated using web application Rap Stats developed by lyrics server *Genius.com* exemplify an interesting development in rappers' usage of words connected to wealth.



Graph 1: Usage of “money” in rap lyrics

It is obvious that even though money has always been a topic in rap songs, its proportional frequency has more than doubled since 2003. Arguably, rap has become more oriented on money in the last years. In many cases, we can see similar results when putting in various items and brands connected to luxurious lifestyle, as depicted in “Graph 2.”



Graph 2: Usage of “Porsche,” “Bentley,” “Ferrari,” “Rari,” “Lamborghini” and “Lambo” in rap lyrics

Rap’s (contemporary) obsession with money is the most important piece of the puzzle connecting Donald Trump with rap music. Furthermore, rappers often like to show off their entrepreneurship as a virtue. Adam Coombs from Indiana University inquired into Jay-Z’s (*1969) last album, in comparison with Trump: “As a record of personal financial achievement, the album offers a general model for individual aspiration that highlights and disregards the systemic racial and economic structures JAY-Z overcomes and actively participates in as a hip-hop and financial mogul. In this way, JAY-Z’s use of personal narrative, and interest in real estate, aligns with Donald J. Trump’s own narrative of individual achievement.”¹⁹⁵

As most topics, valuing money is most vivid in braggadocio lyrics about one’s wealth and music videos, where rappers very often blatantly show off their valuables. On the other hand, when 50 Cent, who is also well known as an entrepreneur, was offered half a million USD to be present at Trump’s inauguration, he refused, because “all money’s not good money.”¹⁹⁶

However, in rap, it is often a part of a wider agenda. 2Pac, even though often seen with “bling,” always promoted certain pro-social agendas. In his already quoted song

¹⁹⁵ Adam Coombs, “‘There’s a Disconnect:’ The Entrepreneurial Ethics of JAY-Z and Donald Trump,” *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 11 (2019), 348.

¹⁹⁶ The Late Show with James Corden, “Trump Offered Curtis ‘50 Cent’ Jackson Half a Million Dollars,” YouTube video, 1:30, February 20, 2019, <https://youtu.be/0fL6jsuAf88> (accessed October 15, 2020).

“Keep Ya Head Up,” he also criticized the establishment for dislocation of resources: “They got money for wars but can’t feed the poor.”¹⁹⁷ I would argue that his thinking about money is a blueprint for other rappers, who often talk similarly about this paradoxical situation, in which rappers find themselves calling for social policies and support for the neighborhoods, even though they are often driving Lamborghinis next to people without enough money to put their children through the school system. 2Pac’s prototypical hip hop ideology is very much clear from an interview where he even talked about Trump in 1992:

This world is such a [...] “gimme, gimme, gimme! Everybody back off!” You know, everybody’s taught that from school. Everywhere, big business. You want to be successful? You want to be like Trump? Gimme, gimme, gimme! Push, push, push, push! Step, step, step! Crush, crush, crush! [...] There’s no way that these people should own planes and there are people who don’t have houses, apartments, shacks, drawers, pants. [...] If they earned it, I think that’s good, I think they deserve, but even if you earned it, you still owe.¹⁹⁸

FROM RAGS TO RICHES

“All my life I had to fight.”¹⁹⁹

- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982)

“Alls my life I has to fight, n*gga!”²⁰⁰

- Kendrick Lamar, “Alright” (2015)

What was described in the previous chapter, of course, does not mean that all rappers worship and idolize money. There is a lot of conscious and political rap that promotes very different values. What can from the outside seem like an obsession is a

¹⁹⁷ 2Pac, “Keep Ya Head Up.”

¹⁹⁸ MTV News, “Tupac Talks Donald Trump & Greed in America in 1992 Interview | MTV News,” YouTube video, 4:55, April 19, 2016, <https://youtu.be/GL-ZoNhUFmc> (accessed November 6, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York City: Washington Square Press, 1998), 46.

²⁰⁰ Lamar, “Alright.”

very logical outcome of the conditions many of these rappers struggled with. A famous hit by Wu-Tang Clan called “C.R.E.A.M.”^{201,202} (1993) starts with Raekwon’s verse:

I grew up on the crime side, the New York Times side
Stayin' alive was no jive.²⁰³

His colleague, Inspectah Deck (*1970), opens the second verse by showing us that even for adults, not much has changed thereabouts, while explaining why he got into this situation:

It's been twenty-two long hard years, I'm still strugglin'
Survival got me buggin', but I'm alive on arrival
I peep at the shape of the streets
And stay awake to the ways of the world 'cause sh*t is deep
A man with a dream with plans to make cream
Which failed; I went to jail at the age of fifteen²⁰⁴

It would be a great mistake to interpret rap themes as praise of these in default. Rappers tend to describe their realities and surroundings in the most graphic way, no matter how ugly it can get. When the lack of wealth inevitably forces people to focus so much of their efforts and thoughts on money, it must be reflected in the rap culture.

Money is a form of possible escape of this situation. Even though Kendrick Lamar acknowledges the danger of chasing after money in his song “Money Trees,” (2012) he also points out that having money provides one with a very comfortable place:

And I been hustlin' all day
This-a-way, that-a-way
Through canals and alleyways, just to say
Money trees is the perfect place for shade

²⁰¹ Acronym for “Cash Rules Everything Around Me.”

²⁰² Cf. Joey Bada\$\$ (*1995) referenced the famous acronym in his song “Paper Trail\$” (2015), where he rapped: “Cash ruined everything around me.” See Joey Bada\$\$, “Paper Trail\$,” *B4.Da.\$\$* (New York City & London: Pro Era & Cinematic & Relentless & RED, 2015), album.

²⁰³ Wu-Tang Clan, “C.R.E.A.M.” *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* (New York City: Loud, 1993), album.

²⁰⁴ Wu-Tang Clan, “C.R.E.A.M.”

And that's just how I feel^{205,206}

Some rappers even clearly warn about the threats that too much lust for money brings along. In one of his biggest hits, “Love's Gonna Get'cha (Material Love)” (1990), KRS-One of Boogie Down Productions uses his storytelling skills to express a clear point about money. In the spoken-word intro, the rapper dedicates this song to “all the people out there that fall in love with a material item.”²⁰⁷ The song starts with a description of a situation that is used very often as a starting point—a mother has to work, take care of her children, while deaths of young people in their surroundings seem perfectly ordinary. Suddenly, the lyrical subject and his brother are offered drug dealing jobs and very quickly get used to fast and simple money. The brothers become very successful in their drug dealing business when the protagonist’s brother suddenly gets shot but survives. When their crew seeks revenge, a shootout takes place. After some time, the protagonist manages to shoot the character, who was responsible for his brother’s assault. Besides, this person was the one who got the brothers into dealing in the first place, and a long-time friend. This moment is when it all goes downhill leading to the tragic conclusion of the last verse:

I threw the gun down and began to shout
"Come on I got him, it's time to break out!"
But as we ran there were the boys in blue
Pointin' their guns at my four-man crew
They shot down one, they shot down two
Now tell me what the f*ck am I supposed to do?²⁰⁸

KRS-One, who is an anti-violence activist,²⁰⁹ clearly criticizes acts of vengeance and violence in general. Nevertheless, the whole point of the song is to point out the risks

²⁰⁵ Kendrick Lamar, “Money Trees,” *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City* (Carson & Santa Monica: TDE & Aftermath & Interscope, 2012), album.

²⁰⁶ Cf., later in the album, in a song called “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst,” (2012) Lamar makes it clear that getting rich does not solve the problem at all. He seems to point to religion as a possible provider of real answers.

²⁰⁷ Boogie Down Productions, “Love's Gonna Get'cha (Material Love),” *Edutainment* (New York City: Jive & RCA Records, 1990), album.

²⁰⁸ Boogie Down Productions, “Love's Gonna Get'cha (Material Love).”

²⁰⁹ See edited by Nelson George, *Stop the Violence: Overcoming Self-Destruction* (New York City: Pantheon Books), 1190.

of materialism. *This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History* states that this album, *Edutainment* (1990), “featured BDP leader KRS-One, at what many called his lyrical finest, tackling such issues as materialism, racism, police corruption, violence, black unity, and even the benefits of vegetarianism.”²¹⁰ The whole album could serve as a prime example of a rap album which clearly criticizes phenomena which might be commonly (and often mistakenly) associated with all rap culture.

The focus on success and its most quantifiable aspect—wealth—can be most often seen in what Wallace calls “postbreakthrough raps.” He noted that: “Their postbreakthrough raps tend all too often to become celebrations of their new wealth and fame, of the now enhanced authority of their ‘Message.’”²¹¹ While rap and hip-hop culture can be viewed as a critical counterculture from the very beginning, the enormous success of many rappers changes its role in society as well as its content.²¹²

Flexing (urban term for showing off) with one’s opulent lifestyle is mostly justified by starting from the bottom.²¹³ Wallace noticed, that the acceptability of such transformation from the voice of the street hustle to a rich overspending persona is way more acceptable in rap than, say, rock music, even though wearing golden chains in a poor neighborhood while being praised as someone who can relate creates a startling juxtaposition: “[T]here are (comparatively) few of the accusations of selling out that accompanied a similarly oxymoronic co-opting phenomenon in late-’60s protest rock.”²¹⁴ Basically, these rappers can still relate, because of what they have been through, no matter that their lives are on the opposite end of the notional poverty-abundance wealth scale now. As *Time*’s journalist and anthropologist Raisa Bruner pointed out:

It’s impossible to talk about rap as a genre without also talking about issues of race and class, and in a national moment of deep division, it’s apt that people—especially young people of color—are turning to music to find an outlet. The barriers to entry, either as a fan or an artist, are lower than they’ve ever been; the visibility of those who have made it is, thanks to social media, higher than ever

²¹⁰ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 66.

²¹¹ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 78-79.

²¹² See Pope, H. Lavar, "Protest into Pop: Hip-hop's Devolution into Mainstream Pop Music and the Underground's Resistance," *Lehigh Review* 13 (2005), 79-98.

²¹³ See Drake, “Started from the Bottom,” *Nothing Was the Same* (Toronto & New York City & New Orleans: OVO & Republic & Young Money & Cash Money, 2013), album.

²¹⁴ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 79.

before. For kids, to become the next Migos, rising from the streets to hip-hop royalty, is a new American Dream.²¹⁵

Even though they experiment with different rap genres, Migos are mainly superstars of two prevailing rap genres/approaches—trap and mumble rap. Trap is arguably the dominating rap style now, even though its roots can be traced to 1980's in Atlanta.²¹⁶ This subgenre is, if I oversimplify it a bit for the needs of this thesis, characterized by the usage of Roland TR-808 drum machine, fast, complex hi-hat patterns and often slightly restrained focus on lyrical content in behalf of the sound qualities such as timbre, intonation and flow.²¹⁷ Mumble rap is a self-explanatory term, it is a technique which makes the rapper so difficult to understand that the role of lyrical content basically disappears.^{218,219} This can be interpreted as a way of imitating speech on benzodiazepines,²²⁰ or an avant-garde movement reminiscent e.g., of Dadaism. It is interesting to note that Trump also reminds some people of a Dadaist.²²¹ As Huxley put it: “On the level of politics and theology, beauty is perfectly compatible with nonsense and tyranny. Which is very fortunate; for if beauty were incompatible with nonsense and tyranny, there would be precious little art in the world.”²²² Most importantly, these rap techniques and styles are entertaining and “fresh.” Nevertheless, it is obviously revolutionary to willingly neglect lyrical content in rap—a genre that had been defined by it, similarly to abandoning of the art of rhetoric, one of the most important skills of a politician, as a presidential candidate.

²¹⁵ Raisa Bruner, “How Rap Became the Sound of the Mainstream,” *TIME Magazine* 191 (2018), 45.

²¹⁶ Richard Stacey, “Gangsta. Trap. Cloud Rap. Since the Late '70s, Hip-Hop Has Spawned Many Subgenres. Here's an Essential Glossary to Educate Yourself,” *Red Bull*, January 25, 2020, <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/types-of-rap> (accessed September 15, 2020).

²¹⁷ See Shawn Setaro, “How Trap Music Came to Rule the World,” *Complex*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.complex.com/music/2018/02/how-trap-music-came-to-rule-the-world> (accessed September 15, 2020).

²¹⁸ See Michael Waugh, “Every Time I Dress Myself, It Go mother*ckin' Viral': Post-Verbal Flows and Memetic Hype in Young Thug's Mumble Rap,” *Popular Music* 39 (2020), 208-232.

²¹⁹ Rather than an official name of a subgenre, the term “mumble rap” is still more often used as derogatory classification of this style of rapping by non-trap rappers.

²²⁰ See Thomas Hobbs, “In the 2010s a Crisis Spread across America like Wildfire, Taking Some of Hip-Hop's Brightest Stars with It,” *Dazed Digital*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/47214/1/xanax-the-drug-that-changed-rap-lil-peep-juice-world-end-of-decade> (accessed September 15, 2020).

²²¹ Frances Anderton, “Is Trump a ‘Conceptual Dadaist?’” *KCRW*, February 22, 2017 <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/design-and-architecture/is-trump-a-conceptual-dadaist> (accessed September 16, 2020).

²²² Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 69.

Migos are now a symbol of opulent wealthy lifestyle achieved through enormous success, which can be illustrated e.g., by the fact that their third album *Culture II* (2018) became number one album in the US on Billboard 200 Albums Chart.²²³ Their biggest hit, “Bad and Boujee,” (2017) became a worldwide phenomenon—only its music video has surpassed one billion views on YouTube.²²⁴ The song is also a prime example of the phenomena concerning money and “postbreakthrough” rap that have been dealt with in this chapter. Rapper Offset opened the song with a spoken-word introduction:

You know, young rich n*ggas
You know somethin', we ain't really never had no old money
We got a whole lotta new money though, hah²²⁵

The difference between “old money” and “new money” was well illustrated in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s (1896-1940) masterpiece, novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925),²²⁶ where the “old money” is associated with certain class, while the “new money” is somewhat more concerned about showing off and desperately trying to get into the “old money” circles. That might be considered the common view. In rap culture, we can witness the opposite perspective. Offset clearly marketed the fact that they had “new money” rather than “old money” as a virtue. It is not surprising, since the “old money” in the USA is often controversial for obvious reasons.²²⁷ We should keep in mind that this “old money” / “new money” dichotomy is also what distinguishes successful rappers from the likes of Donald Trump.

Furthermore, in the title “Bad and Boujee,” “boujee” is a deliberate misspelling of the word “bougie:” an abbreviation of French “bourgeois,” which is more often than not

²²³ Keith Caulfield, “Migos' 'Culture II' Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Albums Chart,” *Billboard*, February 4, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8097981/migos-culture-ii-debuts-at-no-1-on-billboard-200-albums-chart> (accessed September 16, 2020).

²²⁴ See Migos ATL, “Migos - Bad and Boujee ft Lil Uzi Vert [Official Video],” YouTube video, 5:34, October 31, 2016, <https://youtu.be/S-sJp1FfG7Q> (accessed September 17, 2020).

²²⁵ Migos featuring Lil Uzi Vert, “Bad and Boujee,” *Culture* (Atlanta: Quality Control & YRN, 2017), album.

²²⁶ It is suitable that the official soundtrack of the famous film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* (2013) had Jay-Z serving as the album’s executive producer.

²²⁷ See Matthew Desmond, “In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html> (accessed September 17, 2020).

used as a derogatory adjective. Therefore, Migos take what is often criticized about “postbreakthrough” rappers and embrace it with pride.

This particular song is full of bragging about luxurious items using slang terms for most of them. There is a “Rollie” for Rolex watches, pulling up in “Ghosts,” which refers to Rolls Royce Ghost, hopping in the “Lamb” or “Rari” i.e., Lamborghini or Ferrari and many more. “Bad and Boujee” has the whole package, which can be easily illustrated by a brief look at the chorus:

Raindrop (Drip), drop-top (Drop-top)
Smokin' on cookie in the hotbox (Cookie)
F*ckin' on your b*tch, she a th*t, th*t (Th*t)
Cookin' up dope in the crockpot (Pot)
We came from nothin' to somethin', n*gga (Hey)
I don't trust nobody, grip the trigger (Nobody)
Call up the gang and they come and get ya (Gang)
Cry me a river, give you a tissue (Hey)
My b*tch is bad and bougie (Bad)
Cookin' up dope with a Uzi (Blaow)
My n*ggas is savage, ruthless (Savage)
We got 30s and hundred-rounds too (Grrah)
My b*tch is bad and bougie (Bad)
Cookin' up dope with a Uzi (Dope)
My n*ggas is savage, ruthless (Hey)
We got 30s and hundred-rounds too (Glah)²²⁸

There are drugs,²²⁹ women, wealth, lines that address former poverty and the gangster lifestyle illustrated by ownership and usage of guns. The song was destined to succeed. It can be assumed that Migos do not take real risks of possessing guns and producing or selling drugs anymore, but they can still rap about it and be taken seriously due to their history, even though they currently walk on red carpets with such an amount of golden chains around their necks, that even these strolls must feel like working out.

²²⁸ Migos feat. Lil Uzi Vert, “Bad and Boujee.”

²²⁹ “Cookie:” slang term for a marijuana strain; “hotboxing:” smoking marijuana in an enclosed area, e.g., in a car; “brick:” slang term for a kilogram of cocaine...

Chuck D notes that their first album “was released just months after two-thirds of the group was arrested on drug and gun charges during a show in Georgia.”²³⁰ It seems like verifiably going through certain stereotypical life paths entitles rappers to rap about them even when these situations are mere history or even fiction. The substantial process that justifies such discrepancy between the day-to-day reality of affluent artists seems to be the aforementioned “started from the bottom” principle. However, this self-presentation of wealthy, arrogant, seemingly hard-working and drug-using hedonistic youth might be reminiscent of the yuppie lifestyle of the 1980s. When the necessary criminality factor and expressive hypersexuality are taken into account, one can remember the exaggerated yuppie-criminal Patrick Bateman of Bret Easton Ellis’ (*1964) *American Psycho* (1991). It is interesting to contemplate about the applicability of Ellis’ criticism to many rap stars, especially concerning the parts of the novel that problematize the superficiality of Bateman and his companions. Obviously, Donald Trump has been classified as a yuppie many times, too.²³¹

The upward mobility is unsurprisingly a dream of many who live in poverty. Also, it is a part of the American culture to measure success with money. As the historian and author of *The Pricing of Progress: Economic Indicators and the Capitalization of American Life* (2017), Eli Cook, put it in an article for *The Atlantic*: “By the early 21st century, American society’s top priority became its bottom line, net worth became synonymous with self-worth, and a billionaire businessman who repeatedly pointed to his own wealth as proof of his fitness for office was elected president.”²³²

An interesting irony and discrepancy between lyrics and real life of rappers can be pointed out by quoting Ice Cube’s diss track (a song which is made to verbally attack somebody) from 1991 aimed at his former group N.W.A and putting it into context:

And kept on stompin'
While y'all motherf*ckers moved straight outta Compton
Living with the whites

²³⁰ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 310.

²³¹ Bruce J. Schulman, “How the Biggest Yuppie of the 1980s Became the White Working Class’s President,” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/11/19/how-s-biggest-yuppie-became-white-working-class-president/> (accessed September 17, 2020).

²³² Eli Cook, “How Money Became the Measure of Everything,” *The Atlantic*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/10/money-measure-everything-pricing-progress/543345/> (accessed September 18, 2020).

One big house
And not another n*gga in sight²³³

In 2016, the rapper bought Jean-Claude Van Damme's Marina del Rey home for \$7.25 million.²³⁴ Admittedly, jabs from diss tracks should not be taken too seriously and this particular one is filled with irony and humor. Furthermore, Ice Cube meets the "started from the bottom" principle and his success story can serve as a motivation and as an example of one of not-so-many stories that could make one believe (again) in the actuality of the American Dream.^{235,236}

It is clear that the focus on wealth of many rappers has to be interpreted in wider context and the "started from the bottom" principle plays an important role. Where does Donald Trump stand in all this?

Even though common sense would lead one to consider Donald Trump the "old money" rather than the "new money," since he inherited considerable wealth from his father,²³⁷ he has occasionally tried to make a case that his way to success was also difficult and full of pitfalls. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Trump talked about the collapse of the real estate markets in the Nineties:

I never went bankrupt, but I was in deep trouble and now my company is much bigger, much stronger than it ever was before. So I don't view myself as 'comeback.' But when I speak, I have thousands of people come listen to speeches on success and everything else. Had I had a simple, smooth life, those crowds wouldn't exist.²³⁸

²³³ Ice Cube, "No Vaseline," *Death Certificate* (Los Angeles: Priority, 1991), album.

²³⁴ Neal J. Leitereg, "Ice Cube Buys Jean-Claude Van Damme's Canal-Front Home in Marina del Rey," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/business/realestate/hot-property/la-fi-hotprop-ice-cube-house-20160510-snap-story.html> (accessed September 18, 2020).

²³⁵ Monte Burke, "6 Immigrant Stories That Will Make You Believe in the American Dream Again," *Forbes*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/monteburke/2016/10/04/6-immigrant-stories-that-will-make-you-believe-in-the-american-dream-again/> (accessed September 18, 2020).

²³⁶ Cf. Sunyee Yoon and Christian Kim, "Keeping the American Dream Alive: The Interactive Effect of Perceived Economic Mobility and Materialism on Impulsive Spending," *Journal of Marketing Research* 53 (2016), 759-772.

²³⁷ Russ Buettner, Susanne Craig and David Barstow, "11 Takeaways from the Times's Investigation into Trump's Wealth," *The New York Times*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/us/politics/donald-trump-wealth-fred-trump.html> (accessed September 18, 2020).

²³⁸ Gaby Wood, "Donald Trump: The Interview," *The Guardian*, January 7, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/jan/07/media.citynews> (accessed September 18, 2020).

Regardless, this would not likely classify as starting from the bottom. Not abiding to the “started from the bottom” principle did not prevent Trump from becoming an important symbol of success in rap culture.

One of the reasons why getting rich as a signal of success is so important for many Americans is because it is associated with diligence, which is perceived as an important virtue. No wonder many rappers pride themselves with being hard-working, similarly to the way Trump talks about his work ethics.^{239,240}

“Rap critics that say he's Money, Cash, H*es
I'm from the hood, stupid! What type of facts are those?
If you grew up with holes in your zapatos
You'd celebrate the minute you was havin' dough

[...]

I'm from rags to riches, n*ggas, I ain't dumb.”²⁴¹

- Jay Z

²³⁹ Chris Cillizza, “Donald Trump Is Obsessed with How Hard He Works,” *CNN*, February 12, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/11/politics/donald-trump-hard-work/index.html> (accessed November 24, 2020).

²⁴⁰ Brad Callas and Brian Josephs, “Rap's Most Motivational Songs,” *Complex*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.complex.com/music/raps-most-motivational-songs/> (accessed November 24, 2020).

²⁴¹ Jay-Z, “99 Problems,” *The Black Album* (New York City: Roc-A-Fella & Def Jam, 2003), album.

ME AND ALL MY PEOPLES, WE ALWAYS THOUGHT HE WAS STRAIGHT

After Donald Trump started his first presidency campaign, everything for him and hip hop changed. Writer and journalist Deena Zaru wrote: “Upon jumping into the presidential ring, Trump quickly became hip-hop's public enemy, number one. Artists may have liked his persona, but they did not like his politics.”²⁴² This led to a complete paradigm shift, where this largely positive symbol became the villain in rap lyrics.

This change of perspective can be well illustrated on an example of one of the pioneers of “gangsta rap,” Ice Cube. In a song called “I Gotta Say What Up” (1990) from Ice Cube’s notorious debut solo album *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted* (1990), the rapper exhibited respect to different rap musicians:

I gotta say what's up to Digital Underground and Humpty Hump
Cause he makin' more than Donald Trump
you know what I'm sayin', yo²⁴³

Ice Cube used Donald Trump as a symbol for financial success. In this context, making as much money as Trump (or more) was obviously highly estimable. It was also a worthwhile life goal. In his fifth studio album, *War & Peace Vol. 1 (The War Disc)* (1998), Ice Cube used a Donald Trump reference once more, namely in a song called “3 Strikes You In” (1998), this time talking about his own aspirations:

That mothaf*cka Bill Clinton is a son of a b*tch
Had the nerve to throw out the first pitch
I'm just trying to get rich like Trump
The home run king is now in a slump, pass me a hunk²⁴⁴

²⁴² Deena Zaru, “Donald Trump’s Fall from Hip-Hop Grace: From Rap Icon to Public Enemy No. 1,” *ABC News*, October 11, 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trumps-fall-hip-hop-grace-rap-icon/story?id=58411276> (accessed September 19, 2020).

²⁴³ Ice Cube, “I Gotta Say What Up,” *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted* (Los Angeles: Lench Mob & Priority, 1990), album.

²⁴⁴ Ice Cube, “3 Strikes You In,” *War & Peace Vol. 1 (The War Disc)* (Los Angeles: Lench Mob & Priority, 1998), album.

While money and some sort of power based on street credit or naturally gained authority by success seem to be virtuous for Ice Cube, a formal political power, which is clearly represented by the president in the United States, is repulsive. We should not expect anything else from a rapper who gained publicity not only for his indisputable talent, but also for his controversial behavior and very critical politically charged lyrics that generally pushed boundaries of lyrical content. In the aforementioned diss track aimed at his former rap group N.W.A, called “No Vaseline,” Ice Cube criticized the so-called “godfather of gangsta rap” Eazy-E for meeting with George H.W. Bush.^{245,246} Its third verse starts with a repetition which clearly accused Eazy-E of selling out just by meeting the Republican president:

I never have dinner with the President
I never have dinner with the President
I never have dinner with the President
And when I see your ass again, I'll be hesitant
Now I think you a snitch
Throw a house n*gga in a ditch²⁴⁷

When Ice Cube was promoting the biographical movie about N.W.A *Straight Outta Compton*, eating with a president was already less of a no-go zone. He said he loved Barrack Obama and would have liked to have a dinner with him.²⁴⁸ It is no surprise that Barrack Obama deserved a special treatment by Ice Cube. Nonetheless, visiting the White House became an option again in 2018, when Ice Cube released his tenth studio album *Everythang's Corrupt* (2018). This album was published less than two years after Trump's inauguration and its lead single “Arrest the President” (2018) was a clear attack at the 45th president of the United States:

²⁴⁵ Black Dot, *Hip Hop Decoded: From Its Ancient Origin to Its Modern-Day Matrix* (New York City: MOME Publishing, 2005), 100.

²⁴⁶ Chuck Philips, “Rap's Bad Boy to Get Lunch with the Prez,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1991, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-03-18-ca-376-story.html> (accessed September 19, 2020).

²⁴⁷ Ice Cube, “No Vaseline.”

²⁴⁸ Kat Storr, “Ice Cube Wants Dinner with Barack Obama,” *Sky News*, August 21, 2015, <https://news.sky.com/story/ice-cube-wants-dinner-with-barack-obama-10348709> (accessed September 19, 2020).

Let's meet at the White House (Come on)
Run in and turn the lights out
Man, they treat it like a trap house (Yeah)
These motherf*ckers never take the trash out (Damn)²⁴⁹

It is apparent from the context that Ice Cube was rapping about a very different type of visit. He encouraged people to arrest the president with a strong, simple and repetitive hook, reminding the listener of a demonstration chant:

Arrest the president, arrest the president
Arrest the president, you got the evidence
Arrest the president, arrest the president
Arrest the president, you got the evidence²⁵⁰

This assumed evidence was for example the claim: “that n*gga is Russian intelligence,”²⁵¹ which addressed the fact that Donald Trump had been investigated by the F.B.I. for a conjecture of working on behalf of Russia.²⁵² Incidentally, the same controversy was also addressed by Pusha T (*1977), a successful rapper and the president of Kanye West’s label G.O.O.D. Music. In his song “Infrared” (2018), he rapped:

The game's f*cked up
N*ggas' beats is bangin', n*gga, ya hooks did it
The lyric pennin' equal the Trumps winnin'
The bigger question is how the Russians did it.^{253,254}

²⁴⁹ Ice Cube, “Arrest the President,” *Everythang's Corrupt* (Los Angeles: Lench Mob & Interscope, 2018), album.

²⁵⁰ Ice Cube, “Arrest the President.”

²⁵¹ Ice Cube, “Arrest the President.”

²⁵² Adam Goldman, Michael S. Schmidt and Nicholas Fandos, “F.B.I. Opened Inquiry into Whether Trump Was Secretly Working on Behalf of Russia,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/us/politics/fbi-trump-russia-inquiry.html> (accessed September 19, 2020).

²⁵³ Pusha T, “Infrared,” *Daytona* (New York City: GOOD & Def Jam, 2018), album.

²⁵⁴ Pusha T already criticized Trump on his 2015 album. See Pusha T, “Untouchable,” *King Push – Darkest Before Dawn: The Prelude* (New York City: GOOD & Def Jam, 2015), album. There is another irony in this situation, considering the relationship Kanye West has had with Trump.

Certain parts of Ice Cube’s “Arrest the President” seem a bit more like threats than plain criticism. Especially the line: “I turn a fruit into a vegetable,”²⁵⁵ which appeared in the third verse of a song about the POTUS who has often been associated with the color orange as well as the fruit, especially because of the color of his skin.²⁵⁶

In this album, Donald Trump was far from being a symbol of anything remotely positive. The significant voice of Ice Cube, a controversial rapper and by this time already a successful actor, filmmaker and businessman, clearly changed its tone. In a song “Chase Down The Bully” (2018), Ice Cube attacked racism and Trump as well as his supporters:

F*ck a Trump supporter talkin' 'bout law and order
But all you wanna do is go f*ck up reporters
Build a damn wall then f*ck up the borders
Hate to see a mother*ckin' n*gga with a quarter
Hate to see a n*gga wit'cha ugly ass daughter
They feed you bread and water, get you ready for the slaughter²⁵⁷

Even though Ice Cube was critical of Donald Trump on this album, only in April 2016, not a long time after his band N.W.A had been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame,²⁵⁸ Ice Cube demonstrated that he understood Trump’s appeal to Americans on Bloomberg Television’s series *With All Due Respect*: “Donald Trump is what Americans love. Donald Trump is what Americans aspire to be. Rich, powerful, do what you wanna do, say what you wanna say, be how you wanna be. That’s kinda been like the American Dream.”²⁵⁹ Later on, Ice Cube became even more conciliatory with the GOP, which will be dealt with later. The following chapter analyzes the stage where Donald Trump already became widely protested against in hip hop.

²⁵⁵ Ice Cube, “Arrest the President.”

²⁵⁶ Dennis Green, “Here’s Why Donald Trump’s Skin is So Orange,” *Business Insider*, October 21, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.de/international/why-is-donald-trumps-skin-orange-2016-10/?r=US&IR=T> (accessed September 19, 2020).

²⁵⁷ Ice Cube, “Chase Down the Bully,” *Everything’s Corrupt* (Los Angeles: Lench Mob & Interscope, 2018), album.

²⁵⁸ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 318.

²⁵⁹ Bloomberg Politics, “Ice Cube Explains Donald Trump’s Appeal to Americans,” YouTube video, 1:43, April 19, 2016, https://youtu.be/Lri5_nMwirE (accessed September 19, 2020).

FDT

“You build walls, we gon' prolly dig holes
And if your ass do win, you gon' prolly get smoked, n*gga!”²⁶⁰
- Nipsey Hussle, “FDT”

In the hit anti-Trump protest song “FDT”²⁶¹ by YG (*1990) and Nipsey Hussle (*1985) published half a year before the 2016 United States presidential election, Trump’s life seemed to be in considerable danger. The threat was rather serious, given that four US presidents have been assassinated while in office, all of them by guns.²⁶² At least thirteen additional American presidents survived seriously dangerous assassination attempts, while “the Secret Service has thwarted many more over the years.”²⁶³ Recently, many rappers have indicated that Trump was likely to join his predecessors at gunpoint. In rap music, Donald Trump as the Republican Party's presidential nominee for president of the United States has descended from his symbolic pedestal straight to mud. Allison McCann noted: “Things started to look a little different for Trump in 2015. Before that year, Trump had received only eight negative references in total; over the last year and a half, however, that number has quadrupled, to 34. (He still received 17 neutral and 16 positive references during that time.)”²⁶⁴ The trend continued with Donald Trump being more and more criticized and less and less praised as his campaign continued and more controversy came to the surface.

A staff writer at *The Atlantic*, who covers pop culture and music, Spencer Kornhaber, noted: “However contested its public impact may be, pop-culture protest serves as a vital barometer of American attitudes.”²⁶⁵ Rap, the major force in contemporary American pop-culture, has turned its back on Trump.

²⁶⁰ YG featuring Nipsey Hussle, “FDT,” *Still Brazy* (Compton & Atlanta & New York City: 4Hunnid, CTE, Def Jam, 2016), album.

²⁶¹ Short for “F*ck Donald Trump”

²⁶² See Lindsey Konkel, “How Presidential Assassinations Changed U.S. Politics,” *History*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/how-presidential-assassinations-changed-u-s-politics> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁶³ Aine Cain, “13 American Presidents Who Escaped Attempts on Their Lives,” *Business Insider*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/american-presidents-escaped-assassination-attempts-2017-5?r=US&IR=T> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁶⁴ McCann, “Hip-Hop Is Turning on Donald Trump.”

²⁶⁵ Spencer Kornhaber, “Can Protest Art Get Its Mojo Back?” *The Atlantic*, June 2018 issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/trump-protest-art/559127/> (accessed November 6, 2020).

To pinpoint the exact turning point would be quite difficult, even though it is clearly some time in 2015. When Nipsey Hussle was asked in an interview what made him turn against Trump so vocally, he answered:

Overall just hearing his stance on Hispanic people, especially being from L.A. Him being so vocal and one-sided on how he feels about Mexican people as far as categorizing [them] as illegal immigrants and that they make no positive contributions to the country. Number one, I'm from L.A. so I grew up with Mexican people and number two, I see Mexican people at all my concerts that really support. I felt like they needed somebody to ride for 'em.²⁶⁶

In the same interview, his colleague YG explained why he thought it was important for rappers to speak up: “This hip hop, this rap, we got a platform and we're going to use it for the right sh*t. I ain't hesitating no more.”²⁶⁷ Even without looking for an exact turning point, it can be assumed that the sole fact that Donald Trump, the heroic symbol, decided to be a candidate for the GOP was by itself a big enough reason for abrupt disillusionment. YG's hook for “FDT” sounds like a sincere and simple enough expression of how many people have felt about Trump:

F*ck Donald Trump
F*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, n*gga, f*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, yeah, f*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, f*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, f*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, n*gga, f*ck Donald Trump
Yeah, yeah, f*ck Donald Trump, yeah²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Adelle Platon, “YG & Nipsey Hussle Discuss Their Anti-Donald Trump Track 'FDT' & Why 'Trump Is Not the Answer,’” *Billboard*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7318769/yg-nipsey-fdt-fuck-donald-trump-2016-election> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁶⁷ Platon, “YG & Nipsey Hussle Discuss Their Anti-Donald Trump Track 'FDT' & Why 'Trump Is Not the Answer.’”

²⁶⁸ YG feat. Nipsey Hussle, “FDT.”

The hook became so popular that it was also used in a sequel remix to “FDT” called “FDT (F*ck Donald Trump) - Pt 2” (2016) by YG, this time featuring G-Eazy (*1989) and Macklemore (*1983).

Apart from the anthem “FDT,” one of the most significant and referenced rap criticisms of Trump was Eminem’s “The Storm” (2017), an a cappella freestyle performed at the 2017 BET Hip-Hop Awards, which has been dubbed “the fiercest and the most exhaustive attack against Donald Trump in hip-hop.”²⁶⁹ In this witty spoken word performance full of layered wordplay and complex internal rhyme schemes, Eminem covered topics reaching racism, gun control, ecology, corruption and many more. Also, he clearly considered Trump a real threat to the worldwide security:

'Cause what we got in office now's a kamikaze
That'll prolly cause a nuclear holocaust²⁷⁰

Eminem’s disgust with the POTUS led up to a point where he was willing to lose his fans over him, as he explicitly put towards the end of this freestyle in lines that have already become notorious:

And any fan of mine who's a supporter of his
I'm drawing in the sand a line, you're either for or against
And if you can't decide who you like more and you're split
On who you should stand beside, I'll do it for you with this:
F*ck you!²⁷¹

No wonder that Eminem’s performance became so protruding. He started his career as a battle rapper and is well-known for being a diss-track champion.^{272,273} Many rappers share this view and openly admit they would not like to have a dissension with

²⁶⁹ Deena Zaru, “Eminem Unleashes on Trump: The 11 Fiercest Lines,” *CNN*, October 12, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/11/politics/eminem-donald-trump-bet-hip-hop-awards/index.html> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁷⁰ BETNetworks, “Eminem Rips Donald Trump in BET Hip Hop Awards Freestyle Cypher,” YouTube video, 4:34, October 11, 2017, <https://youtu.be/LunHybOKIjU> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁷¹ BETNetworks, “Eminem Rips Donald Trump in BET Hip Hop Awards Freestyle Cypher.”

²⁷² Rap battle is a competition between (usually) two rappers, who stand against each other and take turns in prepared or improvised short rap performances aimed to convince the audience or the members of the jury of one’s superiority, hence becoming the winner.

²⁷³ See Directed by Curtis Hanson, *8 Mile* (Imagine Entertainment & Mikona Productions GmbH & Co. KG, 2002), movie.

Eminem or his alter ego, Slim Shady. Take for example 50 Cent's words: "You could put either one, you could get whoever you feel like is the best black artist and stand them face to face in a room with Em and they dead alive."²⁷⁴ This freestyle was not the only time Eminem attacked Trump. Only nineteen days before the 2016 presidential election, he published an almost eight minutes long masterly written freestyle rap song entitled "Campaign Speech" (2016), where attempts to debunk typical argumentation of Trump supporters could be found:

You say Trump don't kiss ass like a puppet
'Cause he runs his campaign with his own cash for the fundin'
And that's what you wanted
A f*ckin' loose cannon who's blunt with his hand on the button
Who doesn't have to answer to no one—great idea!²⁷⁵

Another of Eminem's jabs can be found for example in his featuring verse for Big Sean's (*1988) song "No Favors" (2017): "Trump's a b*tch, I'll make his whole brand go under."²⁷⁶ Incidentally, Trump had shown his respect for Eminem in 2004's *The Shady National Convention*, which was "a glorified Eminem concert and satellite radio ad with a few sketches peppered in."²⁷⁷ Trump clearly showed his admiration for Eminem, even though he mentioned his own name more times than Eminem's (a.k.a. Slim Shady): "I'm Donald Trump—I'm always right. I know a winner when I see one. And Donald Trump is telling you right now: 'Slim Shady is a winner!' He's got brains, he's got guts and he's got Donald Trump's vote!"²⁷⁸

Another example of the anti-Trump attitude can be seen in some songs by Kendrick Lamar, who has already been cited before. In a single "The Heart Part 4," (2017) he rapped:

²⁷⁴ Music Choice, "Chronicles: 50 Cent - Respect for Eminem," YouTube video, 2:30, August 26, 2014, <https://youtu.be/gKDdmRJBcrU> (accessed November 5, 2020).

²⁷⁵ Eminem, "Campaign Speech" (Santa Monica & New York City: Aftermath & Interscope & Shady, 2016), single.

²⁷⁶ Big Sean featuring Eminem, "No Favors," *I Decided* (New York City: GOOD & Def Jam, 2017), album.

²⁷⁷ Megan Friedman, "Donald Trump Earned His Political Expertise by Endorsing Eminem on Behalf of the 'Shady Party' in 2004," *Esquire*, August 4, 2016, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/news/a47337/donald-trump-shady-national-convention-2004/> (accessed November 6, 2020).

²⁷⁸ MTV News, "Donald Trump Says He Would Vote for Eminem at the Shady National Convention | MTV News," YouTube video, 2:04, October 11, 2017, <https://youtu.be/SuSkOQsv9fg> (accessed November 5, 2020).

Blacks that act white, whites that do the dab
Donald Trump is a chump
Know how we feel, punk—tell him that God comin'
And Russia need a replay button, y'all up to somethin'²⁷⁹

Kendrick Lamar also wrote about Trump in the song “XXX” (2017) from the Grammy-winning album *Damn* (2017), which was exceptionally successful and even allowed him to occasionally refer to himself as “Pulitzer Kenny.”²⁸⁰ The entire song is a thorough criticism of the contemporary USA, where Trump symbolized one of the problematic aspects:

It's murder on my street, your street, back streets
Wall Street, corporate offices
Banks, employees, and bosses with
Homicidal thoughts; Donald Trump's in office
We lost Barack and promised to never doubt him again²⁸¹

Nevertheless, it could be assumed that a rapper like Lamar would be even more vocal about Trump. In an interview for *The Rolling Stone*, which dubbed Lamar “the greatest rapper alive,”²⁸² he was asked about this partial quietness, to which he replied: “I mean, it’s like beating a dead horse. We already know what it is. [...] Speak on self; reflection of self first. That’s where the initial change will start from.”²⁸³

Other rappers would surely disagree. A rap superstar Rick Ross (*1976), whose albums always occupied prominent charts and mostly debuted at #1 on the *Billboard* 200,²⁸⁴ went far as to talk about assassination on his song “Free Enterprise” (2015). He

²⁷⁹ Kendrick Lamar, “The Heart Part 4” (Santa Monica & Carson: Aftermath & Top Dawg & Interscope), single.

²⁸⁰ Chris Johnston, “Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer Prize for Music,” *BBC*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-43789936> (accessed November 6, 2020).

²⁸¹ Kendrick Lamar, “XXX,” *Damn* (Carson & Santa Monica: TDE & Aftermath & Interscope, 2017), album.

²⁸² Brian Hiatt, “Kendrick Lamar: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *The Rolling Stone*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kendrick-lamar-the-rolling-stone-interview-199817/> (accessed November 6, 2020).

²⁸³ Brian Hiatt, “Kendrick Lamar.”

²⁸⁴ Chuck D, *Chuck D Presents This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History*, 228, 248, 279, 292.

referred to the death of Florida black teen Trayvon Martin (1995-2012), who was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmermann (*1983):²⁸⁵

Assassinate Trump like I'm Zimmerman
Now accept these words as they came from Eminem²⁸⁶

Interestingly, Rick Ross bragged about having a flat in the Trump Tower, using the businessman as a symbol of wealth, just three months before that on his mixtape *Black Dollar* (2015). Once again, this suggests a somewhat confused belief system leading to a sudden paradigm shift:

Bring me breakfast in bed and I'll handle the brunch
Bel Air bottles like a boss, penthouse at the Trump
Rollin' dice into stacks, bet I hit the triple
I really never been in love as I reminisce²⁸⁷

There are many rather radical comments on Trump in rap songs to come after he became the president, but not everybody has been so agitated. The rapper Logic (*1990), who managed to have a rather short, yet very successful career before officially retiring in 2020,^{288,289} promoted a very different approach to deal with Donald Trump in the office than Rick Ross and others. In his song "America," (2017) he asked for peaceful solutions:

Now, everybody gotta fight for equal rights
'Cause the richest people in the whole world equal whites
To make it happen though we gon' need patience

²⁸⁵ See Orlando Sentinel, "Florida Teen Trayvon Martin Is Shot and Killed," *History*, November 12, 2013, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/florida-teen-trayvon-martin-is-shot-and-killed> (accessed November 6, 2020).

²⁸⁶ Rick Ross, "Free Enterprise," *Black Market* (Miami & New York City: Maybach & Slip-n-Slide & Def Jam, 2015), album.

²⁸⁷ Rick Ross, "She Wanna F*ck," *Black Dollar* (Miami & New York City: Maybach & Def Jam, 2015), album.

²⁸⁸ Natalie Robehmed, "Inside the Methodical Rise of Rapper Logic," *Forbes* (April 13, 2016), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2016/04/13/inside-the-methodical-rise-of-rapper-logic/> (accessed November 6, 2020).

²⁸⁹ Lisa Respers France, "Logic Announces Retirement with 'No Pressure' Album," *CNN*, July 17, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/17/entertainment/logic-retirement-album-trnd/index.html> (accessed November 6, 2020).

And not violence, giving hospitals more patients now
Don't burn down the mom and pop shop
I'm just as angry another person got shot
Don't be angry at the color of they skin
Just be happy that as a people we could begin again, and
I'ma tell you what I need right now
I'ma tell you what we all need
I need my people of color...
Don't run from Trump, run against him²⁹⁰

Apart from attacking Trump in their songs, many rappers use their voice outside the records to support the “FDT” idea. Public Enemy’s legendary Chuck D used his platform at Public Enemy’s concert at the South by Southwest festival to shout “F*ck Donald Trump!”²⁹¹ Furthermore, his band Public Enemy released an anti-Trump song, which also did not spare the president of harsh criticism and warnings about potential re-election:

Vote this joke out, or die tryin'
Unprecedented, demented, many president'd
Nazi gestapo dictator defended (Hey!)
It's not what you think it's what you follow
Run for them jewels, drink from that bottle
Another four years gonna gut y'all hollow
Gutted out, dried up, broke and can't borrow (Hey!)²⁹²

Countless rappers also showed their disapproval on social media and in various interviews. Many artists made sure their voice was to be heard clearly and loudly. On the other hand, it has not been pure hatred only, as will be illustrated in the following chapter.

²⁹⁰ Logic featuring Chuck D, No I.D., Big Lenbo and Black Thought, “America,” *Everybody* (New York City: Visionary & Def Jam, 2017), album.

²⁹¹ Brian Anthony Hernandez, “Public Enemy's Chuck D Yells 'F--- Donald Trump' at SXSW, While Flavor Flav Has a Different Outlook,” *Billboard*, March 16, 2016, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/events/sxsw/7262951/public-enemy-chuck-d-flavor-flav-donald-trump> (accessed November 7, 2020).

²⁹² Public Enemy featuring DJ Premier, “State of the Union (STFU),” *What You Gonna Do When the Grid Goes Down?* (New York: Def Jam, 2020), album.

MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN. TOGETHER.

Joyner Lucas' (*1988) viral music video for his single "I'm Not Racist" (2017), nominated for the Grammy Award for Best Music Video,²⁹³ became provoking from the first moments, since the video begun with a white guy wearing the MAGA hat. This song, constructed as a dialogue between two men, serves as an example of rap music trying to look for similarities and potential understanding through sympathy rather than demarcation. The first verse exemplified the white man's perspective, who kept claiming he was not racist despite the fact that he rapped lines such as these:

But you lazy as f*ck
And you'd rather sell drugs than get a job and be straight
And then you turn around and complain about the poverty rate?
F*ck outta my face
You can't escape problems
You can pray for some change, but can't break a dollar
Got nobody else to blame, so you blame Donald
"They f*ck the world with a Make America Great condom"²⁹⁴

At the end of the verse, the man surprisingly asked his African American counterpart to share his point of view on these topics: "But there's two sides to every story, I wish that I knew yours."²⁹⁵

The second man accepted the challenge and tried to show his perspective on things, addressing one by one points that the person at the other side of the table made:

And even though Barack was half as black
You hated President Obama, I know that's a fact
You couldn't wait to get him out and put a cracker back
And then you gave us Donald Trump and now it's payback for that²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Joe Lynch, "Grammys 2019 Nominees: The Complete List," *Billboard*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grammys/8489045/2019-grammy-nominees-full-list> (accessed November 7, 2020).

²⁹⁴ Joyner Lucas, "I'm Not Racist" (New York City: Atlantic Records, 2017), single.

²⁹⁵ Lucas, "I'm Not Racist."

²⁹⁶ Lucas, "I'm Not Racist."

Later in the song, Lucas referenced Eminem’s BET Awards performance, once again illustrating the appreciation of such gesture, especially from a white rapper:

You know I make a lot of sense, but you just can't admit it
When Eminem went against Trump, that was the illest
'Cause even though he's white, he let us know he standin' with us²⁹⁷

The unravelling of the point of the song emerged towards the end of the second verse. The author made it clear that he was trying to illustrate that even a fairly escalated discussion about very sensitive topics could potentially lead to understanding:

I wish we could trade shoes or we could change lives
So we could understand each other more, but that'd take time
I'm not racist
It's like we livin' in the same building, but split into both sides
I'm not racist
But there's two sides to every story and now you know mine²⁹⁸

“I’m Not Racist” was one of the songs, which tried to look for common ground even though there is a clear disconnect. Kendrick Lamar also opposed beating the dead horse and thus potentially adding fuel to the fire. More examples will be mentioned later.

When it comes to Donald Trump serving unification purposes rather than playing a part of a divisive element, to a certain extent he might have served as a common enemy, which often helps overcoming differences. For example, YG and Nipsey Hussle, who worked together on making “FDT,” are associated with the notorious Los Angeles rival gangs Bloods and Crips, respectively.^{299,300}

²⁹⁷ Lucas, “I’m Not Racist.”

²⁹⁸ Lucas, “I’m Not Racist.”

²⁹⁹ Paul Meara, “YG Details Blood Gang Initiation, First Gun,” *HipHopDX*, September 20, 2014, <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.30734/title.yg-details-blood-gang-initiation-first-gun#> (accessed November 8, 2020).

³⁰⁰ Danielle Harling, “Nipsey Hussle Speaks on the Rollin 60s Reaching a ‘Corporate Level,’” *HipHopDX*, January 2, 2014, <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.26853/title.nipsey-hussle-speaks-on-the-rollin-60s-reaching-a-corporate-level> (accessed November 8, 2020).

It has been illustrated in previous parts of the thesis that Donald Trump is in many ways reminiscent of an MC. The following chapter investigates what happens when Trump picks up the figurative (or occasionally literal) microphone and fires back at the rappers who want to remove him from the office.

“Nineties rap treated Trump like a Cash App
Last four years was a smack black
Now we know, sixty-five percent of the United States is wack
If y'all let this dude come back

One, two, three, remove 4-5”³⁰¹
- Chuck D

³⁰¹ De La Soul featuring Styles P, Talib Kweli, Pharoahe Monch, Mysonne, Chuck D and Posdnuos, “Remove 45” (London: Kobalt, 2020), single.

BEEFIN' WIT' THE POTUS

“Much like the president, you’re known for having beefs with people.”³⁰²

- Stephen Colbert to 50 Cent

When Trump is attacked, he fires back. Having beefs with other people is another commonality between him and rappers. In rap, beef stands for a grudge between two people, often solved through diss tracks, yet potentially directly or indirectly leading even to death.³⁰³ The Notorious B.I.G. defined beef in his song “What’s Beef?” (1997) as follows:

Beef is when I see you
Guaranteed to be in ICU³⁰⁴

More often than not, rap beefs are solved or rather watered through music, frequently leading to direct profits, desirable attention and strengthening of personal brands.³⁰⁵ Recently, many rappers have started using their media and social media influence rather than mentioning their rivals in songs.³⁰⁶ Similarly, Donald Trump have frequently used social media to jab at his opponents, while many of his attacks have been aimed at different rappers. This behavior indicates that he is well aware of their importance and they are therefore a part of his tactics.

Trump has truly been very much aware of what has been happening in the rap “game.” In late 2019, he even supported an online rap challenge spread and conducted through social media called #MAGACHALLENGE, where his supporters recorded their rap verses for the prospect of becoming the winner and being invited to the White House

³⁰² The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, “Curtis '50 Cent' Jackson Teaches Stephen How to Beef,” YouTube video, 10:34, January 5, 2018, <https://youtu.be/XJiCE88hOmM> (accessed November 9, 2020).

³⁰³ See Dorian Lynskey, “Tupac and Biggie Die as a Result of East/West Coast Beef,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/13/tupac-biggie-deaths> (accessed November 10, 2020).

³⁰⁴ The Notorious B.I.G., “What’s Beef?” *Life After Death* (New York City: Bad Boy & Arista, 1997), album.

³⁰⁵ See J.S., “Music Feuds Can Be a Lucrative Marketing Tool,” *The Economist*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2018/08/17/music-feuds-can-be-a-lucrative-marketing-tool> (accessed November 10, 2020).

³⁰⁶ See Angel Diaz, “Rap Beef Is Dead and Social Media Killed It,” *Complex*, July 25, 2015, <https://www.complex.com/music/2015/07/drake-meek-mill-rap-beef-dead> (accessed November 10, 2020).

to meet Trump and perform there.³⁰⁷ Even though the quality of many of the competing rap “song” entries is very questionable and no significant rappers took part in it, it is yet another interesting link between Trump and rap, especially since he supported this challenge himself.

The POTUS simply cannot ignore the biggest music genre in America, especially since it has been the outlet for and representation of important minorities. Trump has been very aware of that and many times reacted to not so offensive comments of various rappers. For example, Jay-Z was asked on CNN’s “The Van Jones Show” if it was OK for Trump to be racist in his remarks about African Americans, when what matters is that their unemployment rate had dropped. Jay-Z opposed it: “It’s not about money at the end of the day. Money doesn’t equate to happiness. It doesn’t. That’s missing the whole point. [...] You treat people like human beings.”³⁰⁸ Trump’s condescending and bragging reaction on Twitter seemed to quite have missed the point:



Screenshot 1: Trump’s post on Twitter about Jay-Z³⁰⁹

A tougher exchange of opinion happened between Trump and Snoop Dogg. On March 12th, 2017, the rapper released a music video for his song “Lavender (Nightfall Remix),” which is a remixed version of a song “Lavender” (2016) by Canadian jazz/instrumental hip hop band BadBadNotGood (BBNG). The lyrics are for the most part concerned with police brutality, clearly meant as a universal warning message, in this sense similar to N.W.A’s “F*ck the Police.” Snoop Dogg’s hook, sung with an unsettling ease, is appropriately terrifying:

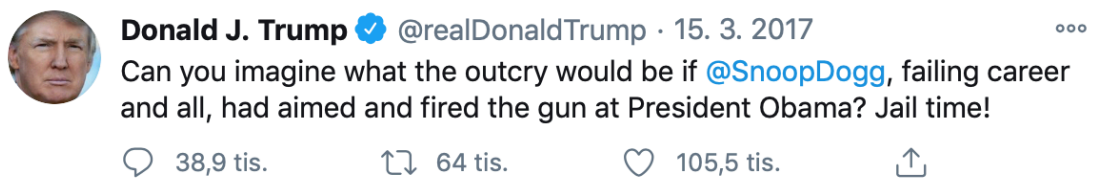
³⁰⁷ See Ryan Bort, “Trump Opens New Portal to Hell by Promoting #MAGACHALLENGE Rap Contest on Twitter,” *The Rolling Stone*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-magachallenge-rap-contest-910041/> (accessed November 10, 2020).

³⁰⁸ Maegan Vazgues, “Trump Hits Jay-Z on Black Employment Following CNN Interview,” *CNN*, January 29, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/28/politics/trump-tweet-jay-z-van-jones/index.html> (accessed November 10, 2020).

³⁰⁹ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, January 28, 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/957603800579297280?s=20> (accessed November 10, 2020).

And the night will fall
This is death to you all
When the nighttime falls
This the final call
This the final call, call, call³¹⁰

People in the music video are depicted as clowns and the parodic cartoon character of Donald Trump, the president of the USA called “Ronald Klump” from “The Clown House” gets his share of attention. The most controversial part of the music video is when Snoop Dogg comes to the Trump impersonator, takes out a gun and mock-executes the president, when the pistol fires a small flag with the word “bang” on it.³¹¹ Surely, Trump could not let this slide without a response, this time even questioning Snoop Dogg’s career and playing his favored double-standards argument:



Screenshot 2: Trump’s post on Twitter about Snoop Dogg³¹²

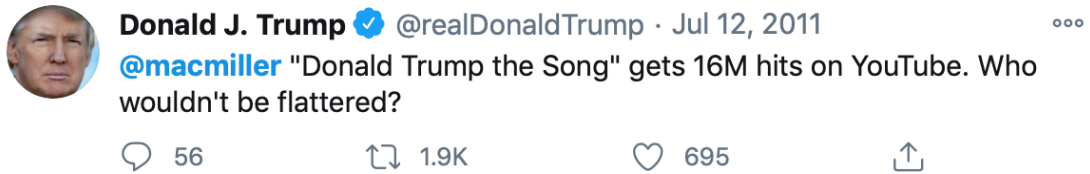
The most interesting example is a very long Trump’s feud with late Mac Miller. After Miller released one of his most successful songs called “Donald Trump” (2011), Trump reacted harder than ever. Later on, however, he totally switched his narrative. Gosa described this “styleswitch” as follows: “Candidate Trump, the target of many rap protest songs during the election, only exacerbated the situation by attempting to styleswitch. First, he threatened to sue Mac Miller over his song “Donald Trump” (2011), and then, when the song became a hit, encouraged his supporters to listen to the song. Conventional candidates may have faced a backlash for endorsing a song like ‘Donald Trump,’ but, ironically, the misogynistic song complemented his campaign branding against political

³¹⁰ Snoop Dogg, “Lavender (Nightfall Remix)” (Diamond Bar & San Francisco: Doggystyle & Empire, 2017), single.

³¹¹ Jesse, “SNOOP DOGG - BADBADNOTGOOD - Lavender (Nightfall Remix),” YouTube video, 4:24, March 12, 2017, <https://youtu.be/E4i3bAtEuJE> (accessed November 10, 2020).

³¹² Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, March 15, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/841967881516679168?s=20> (accessed November 10, 2020).

correctness.”³¹³ Trump’s tweets about Miller were truly too reminiscent of a rap beef. In 2011, Trump claimed to be flattered by the success of the song:

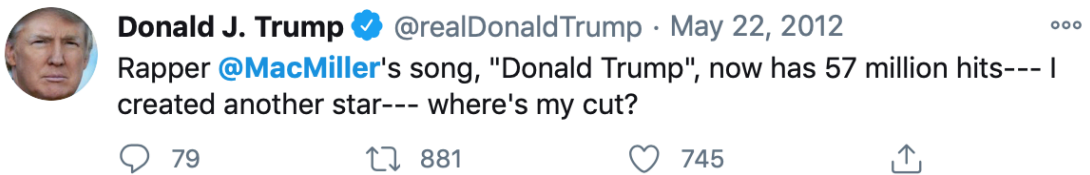


Screenshot 3: Trump’s post on Twitter about Mac Miller³¹⁴

One year later, he tweeted really extensively (more than twenty entries about Miller) about his alleged right to receive a cut from the song’s revenue:



Screenshot 4: Trump’s post on Twitter about Mac Miller³¹⁵



Screenshot 5: Trump’s post on Twitter about Mac Miller³¹⁶

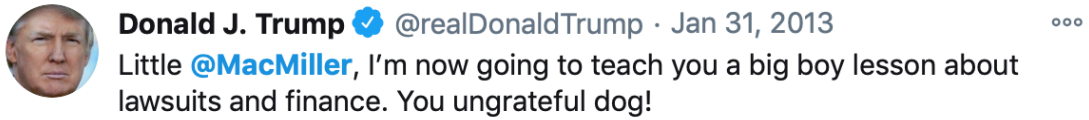
After some back-and-forth online beefing, Trump really started using very harsh language, incorporating threats:

³¹³ Gosa, “Hip Hop, Authenticity, and Styleshifting in the 2016 Presidential Election,” 9.

³¹⁴ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, July 12, 2011, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/90875305119592448?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

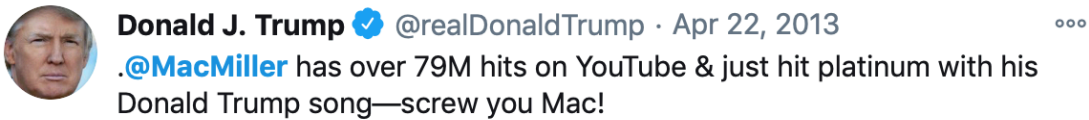
³¹⁵ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, April 20, 2012, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/193354765630046208?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

³¹⁶ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, May 22, 2012, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/204953292911030273?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).



1.1K 9.3K 5.5K

Screenshot 6: Trump's post on Twitter about Mac Miller³¹⁷



290 2.6K 1.7K

Screenshot 7: Trump's post on Twitter about Mac Miller³¹⁸

Miller reacted to Trump's behavior many times, most notably at *Comedy Central's* "The Nightly Show," where he was very generous with direct insults and harsh words: "I only have one thing to say. I f*cking hate you, Donald Trump. [...] Because I love America and I'm never giving it up to a troll like you. You b*tch!"³¹⁹ After Trump won the 2016 election, this line from Miller's "Donald Trump" suddenly acquired a new, unfortunate meaning, once again pointing out the value discrepancy at stake: "We gon' take over the world while these haters gettin' mad!"³²⁰

Trump's online beefs with rappers show yet another link between himself and hip hop and at the same time illustrate his own interest in rappers. Many of these beefs have had coverage from serious American media,³²¹ many of the considered songs became widely popular. In the eyes of the rap audience, these beefs surely shaped Trump's brand more than any other conflicts he has had.

It should be no surprise that there have been exceptions to the rule of hip-hop's turning against Trump. The following chapter will deal with them.

³¹⁷ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, January 31, 2013, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/297087613851017216?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

³¹⁸ Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, April 22, 2013, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/326368111546732545?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

³¹⁹ Comedy Central, "The Nightly Show - Mac Miller Unloads on Donald Trump," YouTube video, 3:36, March 10, 2016, https://youtu.be/Zm8ISls_TBA (accessed November 11, 2020).

³²⁰ Miller, "Donald Trump."

³²¹ See Deena Zaru, "Mac Miller Resurrects Donald Trump Feud," *CNN*, August 17, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/politics/mac-miller-donald-trump-feud/index.html> (accessed November 11, 2020).

YOU CANNOT BE A RAPPER AND SUPPORT PRESIDENT TRUMP, KANYE?

“I rebel—therefore we exist.”³²²

- Albert Camus

Rap is against the party line in default. Therefore, when there is a sense of pressure to behave or talk certain way, sooner or later a significant rapper will rebel against the expectations. Some of these exceptions to the rule will be dealt with now. The most notorious example of a rapper in Trump’s corner is Kanye West. The most significant moments of this friendship happened shortly after Trump was elected. West met with him in December 2016 in Trump Tower and, almost two years later, he visited Trump in the Oval Office where he delivered a rather confusing 10-minutes-long monologue and hugged the POTUS.³²³ The most controversial act, however, was when West posted a picture wearing the MAGA hat, saying, that he would have performed in it from then on.³²⁴ West said that putting on the MAGA hat “made him feel like Superman.”³²⁵ He explained his motivations at *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*:

Just as a musician, African American [...] everyone around me tried to pick my candidate for me. They told me, every time I said I liked Trump, I couldn’t say that out loud or my career would be over, I get kicked out of the black community—because we’re supposed to have a monolithic thought.³²⁶

³²² Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Bombay: The Times of India Press, 1960), 28.

³²³ John Haltiwanger, “Kanye West Called Himself a ‘Motherf---er’ in the Oval Office and Gave Trump a Massive Hug During His White House Visit,” *The Business Insider*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/read-the-full-transcript-of-kanye-wests-10-minute-oval-office-speech-donald-trump-2018-10?r=US&IR=T> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³²⁴ Jack Shepherd, “Kanye West Reaffirms Support for Trump, Says He Will Wear MAGA Hat in All Future Performances,” *The Independent*, January 2, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/kanye-west-trump-maga-hat-perform-kim-kardashian-a8707326.html> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³²⁵ Debanjali Bose, “Inside Donald Trump and Kanye West’s Unlikely Friendship,” *The Business Insider*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/kanye-west-donald-trump-friendship-timeline-history-relationship-2020-7?r=US&IR=T> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³²⁶ Jimmy Kimmel Live, “Jimmy Kimmel’s Full Interview with Kanye West,” YouTube video, 21:42, August 10, 2018, <https://youtu.be/PmZjaYdS3fA> (accessed November 13, 2020).

Later in the interview, he indicated he felt bullied into the standard beliefs: “You can’t bully me. Liberals can’t bully me. News can’t bully me. The hip-hop community, they can’t bully me.”³²⁷

West’s behavior stirred serious controversies and even people who tried to support him in his freedom of choice faced backlash, which even made some of them take their support back.³²⁸ West is generally used to behave contrary to expectations and provoke thought through controversy. Furthermore, he is in favor of Republican ideas and believes Trump strengthened the role of God in America.³²⁹ Potentially, he has been closer to Trump than to Obama, since the latter believes West “is a jackass.”³³⁰ Kanye, on the other hand, claimed that nothing has changed in Chicago during Obama’s eight years in the office.³³¹ The rapper also believed that Trump’s win raised his own chances of becoming the president,³³² which he expressed in his song “Ye vs. the People” (2018):

But ever since Trump won, it proved that I could be president³³³

In the same song, he also explained more about his motivations:

I feel an obligation to show people new ideas
And if you wanna hear 'em, there go two right here
Make America Great Again had a negative perception
I took it, wore it, rocked it, gave it a new direction

³²⁷ Jimmy Kimmel Live, “Jimmy Kimmel’s Full Interview with Kanye West.”

³²⁸ See Sonia Rao, “Chance the Rapper Apologizes for Defending Kanye West’s Pro-Trump Tweets,” *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2018/04/27/chance-the-rapper-apologizes-for-defending-kanye-wests-pro-trump-tweets/> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³²⁹ Randall Lane, “Kanye West Says He’s Done with Trump—Opens up about White House Bid, Damaging Biden and Everything in Between,” *Forbes*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/randalllane/2020/07/08/kanye-west-says-hes-done-with-trump-opens-up-about-white-house-bid-damaging-biden-and-everything-in-between/?sh=2c9e068747aa> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³³⁰ The Rolling Stone eds., “Obama Goes on Record to Call Kanye West a ‘Jackass,’” *The Rolling Stone*, April 12, 2012, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/obama-goes-on-record-to-call-kanye-west-a-jackass-204727/> (accessed November 13, 2020).

³³¹ See Kanye West, Twitter post, April 26, 2018, <https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/989272340432240641?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

³³² Without much success, West did run for president in 2020. See Reese Oxner, “Kanye West Says He’s Voting For The Only Candidate He Can Really Trust,” *NPR*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/03/930950719/kanye-west-says-hes-voting-for-the-only-candidate-he-can-really-trust?t=1606436699620> (accessed November 27, 2020).

³³³ Kanye West featuring T.I., “Ye vs. the People” (New York City: GOOD & Def Jam, 2018), single.

Added empathy, care and love and affection³³⁴

Recently, West claimed that he was done with Trump, taking his MAGA hat off once and for all.³³⁵ There were other rappers whose connection with Trump stirred controversy. 50 Cent claimed that he did not want to become 20 Cent after more progressive taxation caused by tax reform planned by Joe Biden’s team.³³⁶ “I don’t care Trump doesn’t like black people 62% are you out of ya f*cking mind,”³³⁷ the rap superstar and tycoon wrote on his Instagram. After considerable criticism, 50 Cent took his words back in his Twitter post: “F*ck Donald Trump, I never liked him.”³³⁸ This claim is rather questionable, given the rappers former utterances about Trump.

Ice Cube, who wanted to “Arrest the President” in 2018, became criticized for meeting with the Trump administration to discuss the Platinum Plan, which is a short document, which includes “efforts to bolster Black economic prosperity.”³³⁹ In response to the vast criticism, Ice Cube tweeted:



Screenshot 8: Ice Cube’s post on Twitter about consulting the Trump administration³⁴⁰

³³⁴ West, “Ye vs. the People.”

³³⁵ Lane, “Kanye West Says He’s Done with Trump—Opens up about White House Bid, Damaging Biden and Everything in Between.”

³³⁶ 50 Cent, Twitter post, October 20, 2020, <https://twitter.com/50cent/status/1318558550210301958?s=20> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³³⁷ 50 Cent, Instagram post, October 19, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGiai3nHu9f/> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³³⁸ 50 Cent, Twitter post, October 25, 2020, <https://twitter.com/50cent/status/1320184040654295040?s=20> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³³⁹ Maegan Vazquez, “Trump Unveils 'Platinum Plan' for Black Americans,” *CNN*, October 7, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/25/politics/donald-trump-black-empowerment-platinum-plan/index.html> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³⁴⁰ Ice Cube, Twitter post, October 15, 2020, <https://twitter.com/icecube/status/1316744924251840512?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2020).

His approach was about finding a common ground with everybody, an attempt to seek as much understanding as possible. Similarly, Lil Wayne also cited the Platinum Plan and even posted a picture with Trump, not without reaction. Joe Coscarelli of *The New York Times* wrote: “Following Kanye West, 50 Cent and Ice Cube before him, the rapper faced criticism on social media after posting a seeming endorsement of the president.”³⁴¹

Trump has also received more direct rap endorsement recently. In his last rally for the 2020 election, Trump was accompanied by Lil Pump (*2000), the young rap generation superstar mostly known for his hit song “Gucci Gang” (2017), whose music video exceeded one billion views on YouTube.³⁴² It is somewhat comical that when the POTUS asked him to join him on the stage, he called him “Little Pimp” instead of Lil Pump.³⁴³

This chapter briefly summarized some of the exceptions to the widely documented trend. It makes perfect sense that many of the rappers, who are often defined by their defiance, would not submit to ideology, which is de facto forced upon them. People stepping out of a line sooner or later create another one. If being maladjusted is a fundamental agenda, one must search for their own path outside anything even remotely reminiscent of a party line. The next chapter utilizes the gathered knowledge to express the main assumption of the thesis—that this abrupt perspective shift stems from a deeply rooted paradoxical value system.

³⁴¹ Joe Coscarelli, “Lil Wayne, Latest Rapper in Trump’s Orbit, Sees Backlash over Photo,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/30/arts/music/lil-wayne-trump.html> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³⁴² Lil Pump, “Lil Pump – ‘Gucci Gang’ (Official Music Video),” YouTube video, 2:10, October 23, 2017, <https://youtu.be/4LfJnj66HVQ> (accessed November 14, 2020).

³⁴³ The Independent, “Trump Mistakenly Calls Lil Pump ‘Little Pimp’ at Last Rally,” YouTube video, 1:37, November 3, 2020, <https://youtu.be/w-5MnfXxY8c> (accessed November 14, 2020).

THE PARADOX

“Genius has been the servant of tyranny and art has advertised the merits of the local cult.”³⁴⁴

- Aldous Huxley

Even though the point of this chapter is not to explore rap history in detail, it is important to shortly outline its roots to properly grasp the ideological common ground. Professor of African American Studies Cheryl Lynette Keyes summarized the scholarly recognized roots of hip-hop: “Most critics and scholars concur that rap is a confluence of African American and Caribbean cultural expressions, such as sermons, blues, game songs, and toasts and toasting—all of which are recited in a chanted rhyme or poetic fashion.”³⁴⁵ Additionally, it is possible to look for deeper roots, which has been done by Keyes and other scholars, too: “In traditional African societies, the bard is a storyteller-singer and above all a historian who chronicles the nation’s history and transmits cultural traditions and mores through performance.”³⁴⁶ Most often, rap music is presented as directly stemming from the music of African American slaves, usually in form of spirituals. An expert on African American Religious Studies Anthony B. Pinn wrote: “Those who survived this journey found themselves in new and strange locations, among a new people. Perhaps the sounds and sights of this experience, this journey, remained alive in the new rhythms of their new world musical expression, first presented through the spirituals.”³⁴⁷

The importance of music for the enslaved Africans in America was also emphasized by one of the most acclaimed fugitive slaves, writer and social reformer Frederick Douglass (181-1895) in his autobiography: “I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do. I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and

³⁴⁴ Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 69.

³⁴⁵ Cheryl Lynette Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 17.

³⁴⁶ Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 19.

³⁴⁷ Anthony B. Pinn, *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (New York City: New York University Press, 2003), 2.

apparently incoherent songs.”³⁴⁸ Furthermore, Keyes added that not only music flourished as the means of expression of the experience of enslavement, poetic language also played an important role: “Poetic language of African peoples eventually flourished in the New World as testimony of enslavement.”³⁴⁹ Surely, the African American culture started as a sort-of humanistic movement, a reaction to the non-sensical terrible new experience, an attempt to create a sense of identity as well as community. Pinn wrote: “[A]t its best, perhaps rap music is a continuation of the creative manner in which meaning is made out of an absurd world by promoting a style of living through which a sense of self and community is forged in a hostile environment.”³⁵⁰

The beginning of this journey had a strong religious context, which did not suit everyone. Pinn wrote: “Those who did not find meaning in Christian community and its teachings, as represented by the spirituals, made their presence known through the swaying and sultry sounds of the blues.”³⁵¹ Blues brought new topics, incorporated sexuality (black body positivity) and a real sense of identity. An important American author and activist, James Baldwin (1924-1987) wrote about this in his essayistic book *The Fire Next Time* (1963): “We had the liquor, the chicken, the music, and each other, and had no need to pretend to be what we were not. This is the freedom that one hears in some gospel songs, for example, and in jazz. In all jazz, and especially in the blues, there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged.”³⁵² Blues brought in factors of simple lyricism, certain wittiness and apparent straightforwardness with important underlying meanings and messages. Blues also puts emphasis on storytelling and rather intimate personal confessions.

Blues led to the emergence of massively popular American genres such as jazz, rock’n’roll, swing, rock and others. These genres drew from variety of sources but were without a doubt heavily inspired by the blues or gospel music. Wallace summarized the importance of black music from blues, jazz to funk for the music industry of the US: “Black music is American pop’s breath and bread.”³⁵³ Rap, the genre, which is clearly the strongest voice and the most successful result (so far) of the long development of black musicians trying to make themselves heard and highlight problems faced by

³⁴⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 13-14.

³⁴⁹ Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 22.

³⁵⁰ Pinn, *Noise and Spirit*, 1-2.

³⁵¹ Pinn, *Noise and Spirit*, 3.

³⁵² James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (London: Michael Joseph, 1963), 52.

³⁵³ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 31.

themselves and their communities is nowadays rap music. Pinn wrote: “What happened to musical movement and intent during the late twentieth century, in urban areas? Where does one turn for a raw and “natural” presentation, for an extension of the nitty-gritty expressivity found during earlier periods? The answer is easily located. It manifested itself anew in rap music.”³⁵⁴ Wallace sees the entire development, including rap music as a part of the story, as a natural consequence of shortage: “It’s more than arguable now that, in the serious rap Scene, black music’s American history is come weirdly full circle. For, like that music’s earliest incarnations—spirituals and one-wire Blues—its latest presents itself as proudly crude, shaped by nothing. But genius and what is at hand, homemade by and for special pockets of (once rural, now terribly urban) privation.”³⁵⁵ Surely, shortage is an important motivating factor of the success of rap, as illustrated before. It could be called the new African American Dream.

The well-studied and described emergence of rap music was accompanied by discrimination, not enough coverage and attention given to African American communities, who felt the need to create a new culture of their own, one that has against all odds become a worldwide phenomenon. However, it all started in communities and for communities. It has been shown that even heavily criticized “gangsta rappers” were motivated by the need to be heard and tell their story. For example, one of the most important rappers of all-time, 2Pac, wanted to use his acquired voice to promote social changes in the society, to help people from the neighborhood and function as a symbol, as someone they could look up to. The importance of rap music as a compass for self-identification and an incentive for different communities is rather apparent, but the real political power of rap is overlooked for the most part. Political scientist Lakeyta M. Bonnette wrote: “Within the genre of rap music, multiple subgenres exist. Most of the research on rap music is specifically on violent or ‘gangsta’ rap and its effect on behavior and attitude formation, while researchers rarely observe its impact on political attitudes and behavior.”³⁵⁶

However, there is often a big discrepancy between what rappers claim to worship and what they really worship. The clearest example is religious beliefs. Rap has always been connected to religion, from the connections to Nation of Islam to the most

³⁵⁴ Pinn, *Noise and Spirit*, 12.

³⁵⁵ Wallace and Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, 30.

³⁵⁶ Lakeyta M. Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 22.

contemporary Christian rappers.³⁵⁷ Even though many rap stars talk about God in their songs, the Christian message in these lyrics seems to be inconsistent with other lyrics about gangster lifestyle or selfish values. Pinn wrote: “But we must also acknowledge that when not at its best, rap music provides a celebration of radical individualism and nihilism over against community and hope.”³⁵⁸ Even though Pinn’s claim that this is not rap at its best is disputable, it is clearly the most successful rap of today, which can be evidenced by the number of sales, views or streams. The direction of the causality is difficult to assess, yet this phenomenon is likely to reflect a certain value shift on the streets. Keyes wrote: “The streets are an institution as important as the church, school and family in African American culture. Yet unlike the other three institutions, the survival center represented by the street operates as a primary reference for many African Americans living in the inner city.”³⁵⁹

The success of rap songs as well as rappers is determined by their listeners. They also determine the shape of most of the new production, since many rappers openly perceive their art as a business platform, therefore aim to make successful records in terms of sales. Rap has always contained a certain superficiality, however, the examined values shared by Trump and rappers have in the recent years been more visible than anything else.

Many prominent rappers back their behavior with humanistic principles and values that hip hop has even historically stemmed from. The problem is that these values seem to lack substance when compared to real behavior. Rap musicians tend to often look up to their idols based on superficial values and glorify gangster characters who, to a certain extent, might be even responsible for some of their problems. It goes without saying that their often impoverished and overlooked background should be taken into account. Such a gangster character has been personalized by Donald Trump in this thesis, who had become, despite his privileged starting point, a false idol in hip hop.

The abrupt switch of perspective reveals the deeply rooted paradox. When it comes to appreciation of symbols, Trump was rap music’s hero for years, even though he shared very little ideological common ground with most rappers, who glorified him. The paradox lies in the fact that the symbols, which are systematically created and worshipped

³⁵⁷ Ryan Bassil, “God Complex: How Religion Became the Bedrock of Modern Rap,” *The Guardian*, April 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/apr/14/rap-religion-stormzy-kendrick-lamar-humble> (accessed November 19, 2020).

³⁵⁸ Pinn, *Noise and Spirit*, 14.

³⁵⁹ Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 29.

in rap music, in reality directly collide with the values that are generally accepted in hip hop. Rap music glorifies gangster characters who, irrespective of their motivations or external factors forcing them towards such a behavior, undoubtedly hurt the communities represented by rap artists. Similarly, rap glorified Donald Trump even though he had led a company which demonstrably chose tenants with racially biased decisions.³⁶⁰

This case study showed the danger of creating positive symbols based on superficial values. In the extreme form of the paradox, the glorified persona, are, in fact, the ones harming the glorifiers. The analysis of this abrupt change of perspective in Donald Trump's coverage in rap music sufficiently illustrates the conflicting principles of community pro-social sympathetic thinking and extreme egocentrism. When real power comes about, all the superficial reasons for glorification seem to disappear. One of the strongest positive symbols of rap music for decades lacked really essential ground to become one. Interestingly, the values, which in reality prove to be the least important, are the most visible in rap music.

Each chapter exploring similarities between Trump and rappers explored these conflicting principles. The asserted importance of "self" proved to be directly incompatible with fundamental pro-social values of majority of rap artists. Hereinafter are summarized the points that were implied through each chapter. Needless to say, art naturally does not have the same roles as politics.

Famous like Trump

The quest for fame is in direct opposition to community thinking, it illustrates one's need to stand out. While monetary motivations can be charitable, the pursuit of fame is more likely to be solely about one's own egoistic aspirations.

Braggadocio

When generalized, braggadocio lyricism helps elevate concepts of black pride or black excellence. It is an inherent part of the hip hop ethos, more often than not a game. On the other hand, it might be a double-edged weapon, since it requires excessive emphasis on the self, as opposed to expressing oneself with more awareness of others.

³⁶⁰ Jonathan Mahler and Steve Eder, "'No Vacancies' for Blacks: How Donald Trump Got His Start, and Was First Accused of Bias," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/us/politics/donald-trump-housing-race.html> (accessed November 19, 2020).

Careless like Trump

Carelessness is incompatible with pro-social activism and humanistic thinking. It is rather unfortunate to expect people to invest their attention into agendas one is personally affected by without showing interest in topics that does not directly concern him or her.

Keep it Simple

Difficult topics need to be handled with certain level of complexity to avoid misunderstandings. Oversimplified utterances require overinterpretation to be understood as intended. This creates much space for misapprehension or overlooking of the encoded message. Undoubtedly, this is substantially more important for politicians in democratic countries than for artists, who truly can say whatever they want, since they have not been voted for. On the other hand, there is unquestionable power in hands of successful rappers and their words can have real-life consequences.

Dystopian like Trump

The emphasis put on criticism rather than seeking solutions is clearly less productive than formulation of clear visions and goals. Scrupulous anti-establishment is enticing, yet rather dangerous, especially when alternatives are not presented. Even though artists have no responsibility toward anybody, rappers have become (possibly without wishing to be) often perceived as spokesmen of different causes, most of which are greatly complex.

Treating Women like Trump

The most striking example of conflicting principles is fighting for one's own rights as a member of an oppressed minority without considering the needs of other potentially oppressed social groups.

Rich like Trump

The prospect of aiming to get enormously rich seems to be incompatible with criticism of social differences, the wealth-gap and other systemic discrimination, which is often supposed and evidenced in rap lyrics. It is rather strange to ask others to share

their wealth and at the same time clearly express that getting rich is one of the most worthwhile goals in life.

In summary, extreme individualism is not that consistent with appeals to pro-social community thinking. Creating an omnipresent positive symbol of somebody who does not hold the principal proclaimed values of the creators of the symbol is arguably short-sighted. This is not to say that there is an expected monolithic thinking of all African Americans or all rappers, however, these trends have been sufficiently documented and even though there are exceptions to the rule, there is demonstrable agreement on basic values for most significant rappers, which has also become clear right after Trump started campaigning. The narrative of rap music's perspective on Trump abruptly changed, which was documented with empirical evidence.

Many authors of Hip-Hop Studies literature either tend to be overly apologetical by choosing solely conscious rappers for their examples; or overly critical, choosing solely controversial rappers for their studies. I would argue that in most cases, the relevance of artists should be determined by quantifiable criteria such as sales, streams and views. Rap does not need to fight for acceptance anymore, its reflections should be as sincere and realistic as possible—more often than not, the best-selling songs and albums set the trends and change the world, not the Ivy League rap.

The extremely substantial benefits that hip-hop culture has brought to different minorities for their identity, platform and culture in general are undeniable. Many rappers are truly charitable,³⁶¹ do all in their power to help their communities and help the situation of their peers. On the other hand, this should not mean that rap music has to be approached uncritically. It is worth noting that at this point, rap music is truly mostly entertainment rather than a conscious part of a bigger movement with set agendas. This, however, does not make it less powerful. One way or another, it would be absolutely inappropriate to blame artists for any real-life outcomes, they truly exercise their rights for free speech and should not be held accountable for the way their fans perceive their music, neither for wider trends, which are not in their power. In an ideal world, all listeners would be able to differentiate between what was written for purely entertainment purposes and what is to be taken seriously. However, it would be naïve to expect such

³⁶¹ Jon Blistein, "Dr. Dre Donates \$10 Million for Compton High School Arts Center," *The Rolling Stone*, June 15, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/dr-dre-donates-10-million-for-compton-high-school-arts-center-203604/> (accessed November 20, 2020).

understanding given the mainstream appeal of rap and its power to approach groups that bear no relation to one another and have limited insight to the background of hip hop.

On the other hand, there truly seems to be a sufficiently documentable paradox in place. Most importantly, this particular cultural paradox might have real-life consequences. Given the evenness of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 United States presidential election and other factors, which were considered in this thesis, the most powerful music genre of our time most likely helped Trump win his first presidential election.³⁶² After all, the impact of art on politics is without the slightest doubt immense, not to mention mainstream art that reaches masses on everyday basis through all the thinkable media. In this context, it is suitable to take into consideration Huxley's words once again:

In commercial propaganda the principle of the disproportionately fascinating symbol is clearly understood. Every propagandist has his Art Department, and attempts are constantly being made to beautify the billboards with striking posters, the advertising pages of magazines with lively drawings and photographs. There are no masterpieces; for masterpieces appeal only to a limited audience, and the commercial propagandist is out to captivate the majority. For him, the ideal is a moderate excellence. Those who like this not too good, but sufficiently striking, art may be expected to like the products with which it has been associated and for which it symbolically stands.³⁶³

It is important to note that the goal of the thesis was not to criticize rap music, hip hop culture or individual rappers, nor Donald Trump. Every point has to be interpreted in wider context, taking into account social, cultural and economic situation. If there even was anyone to blame for anything, it might just as well be the consumers, the music industry, or even the American society and its political system as a whole. Music labels still often sign artists under unreasonable long-term contracts. The life of underprivileged American citizens is often a determined nightmare.

³⁶² It would be too far-fetched to claim that Trump's loss of the 2020 United States presidential election was due to hip hop's turn on him. Nevertheless, it would be plausible to claim that this paradigm shift reflected changes in the public's sentiment and was also reflected in it.

³⁶³ Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 69.

Rap music is in many ways fascinating and genius, rappers, these urban poets let an enormous audience walk through paths they would otherwise have no access to, hip hop brings attention to issues that need to be addressed and could hardly have a better outlet. There is undeniably and astounding amount of talent, artistry and work invested in every single analyzed song. Rap has various functions—it is understandable that for example songs created for clubbing and parties purposefully suppress lyricism in favor of danceability and sound. The fact that topics of such club rap music lyrics often oscillate around drinking, partying and sex makes perfect sense and it should not be assumed that life of a writer who specializes in such production truly only involves clubs and parties. Rap lyrics should therefore ideally only be interpreted in their context, considering motives of the artist. Different cultural roles of rap demand different authorial approach. The attempt to unweave the given paradox was descriptive, not normative or condescending.

“They tryin to blame this rap sh*t for all of our ills
Like I can stick you up with a mic
Like I can rape you with a verse or use a verb as a knife”^{364,365}
- Phonte

³⁶⁴ Little Brother featuring Carlitta Durand, “Sirens,” *Getback* (Oakland: ABB Records, 2007), album.

³⁶⁵ For an analysis of rap stereotypes as a legitimizing ideology for discrimination, see Christine Reyna, Mark Brandt and G. Tendayi Viki, “Blame It on Hip-Hop: Anti-Rap Attitudes as a Proxy for Prejudice,” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 12 (2009), 361-380.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Donald Trump and rap music has been interesting, historically significant and can be interpreted as an indicator of various widespread phenomena. Hip hop loved Donald Trump until it nearly suddenly stopped and started hating him. The analyzed samples showed that there is an underlying code of accepted beliefs held by significant rappers. At the end of this thesis, it becomes obvious that these predetermined sets of values are very likely contradictory to a certain extent. Rap music has proven to be utterly important for American culture and politics. Donald Trump turned out to be oddly reminiscent of an MC in many aspects. The analysis of Donald Trump and his journey from one of the most glorified symbols in rap to almost unconditional banishment sufficiently illustrated how rap's admiration for gangster characters and superficial qualities does not correspond with underlying humanistic values. There is no monolithic thought to be expected in hip hop culture, not to mention African American culture as a whole, however, there is without a doubt rather wide field of common characteristics shared by the vast majority of commercially successful rappers. It is worth repeating once again that the outcomes might therefore speak more about rap fans than rap artists.

The first part of the thesis made a case for often underestimated, yet undeniable power of rap music. The chapter proves that it substantially influences how American rap fans irrespective of their demographics talk, dress, move and think. The importance of rap music in politics became obvious, which has also been reflected by many political candidates in recent elections. Hip hop is a powerful tool of political marketing, while its immense influence can be effective on political preferences of rap fans even if rappers are not necessarily aware of systemic creation of positive or negative symbols they might participate on as if they were a unified movement.

The following part of the thesis is its backbone. To understand the entire story, it was important to explore, why rappers looked up to Trump and referenced him almost unconditionally with implicit respect. Trump became such a relevant and positive symbol in rap music for various reasons, explored in this part of the thesis. Some chapters dealt with obvious phenomena such as fame or wealth, but different chapter inquired into similarities in rhetoric, general outlook on world and success or even sexist behavior. When necessary, relevant exceptions were mentioned and explicated.

The third part of the thesis analyzed the case study of Ice Cube, which was used to illustrate the abrupt and radical paradigm shift in hip hop's perception of Trump as a symbol in rap music. The chapter demonstrated the journey from one's aspiration to be like Trump in various aspects up to suggestions of his assassination.

The penultimate part inquired into Trump as a radically negative symbol after the perspective had been turned over. It went from the radical refusal and hatred through reconciliation attempts to analysis of exceptions, who supported Trump contrary to the trend, facing major backlash for that. One chapter in this part also analyzed Trump's own communication with rappers, who had voiced disapproval for him, which is, once again, peculiarly reminiscent of rap lyricism, particularly of rap beefs.

The last part utilized the research and drew conclusions from it, leading to postulation of a conflicting values, which, due, to the potency of given medium, might even contribute to a remarkable paradox leading to self-inflicted damage during a battle for one's rights and safety.

Studying of the relationship between Donald Trump and hip hop has been a fascinating journey, exposing remarkable information about the currently most popular and potent music genre in the USA as well as about one of the most controversial presidents in the country's history. It helped understanding important conditions of his appeal. It led to postulation of interesting paradoxes, which are potentially rooted in the notion of the American Dream itself. Donald Trump's love-hate relationship with hip hop is an illustration of the fragility of cultural symbols and idols. It is a metaphor of the never-ending struggle between egocentric individualism and community as ideology.

RESUMÉ

Ve své diplomové práci se zabývám vývojem vztahu Donalda Trumpa a rapu. Věnuji se procesu, kdy se z Trumpa, coby výsostně pozitivního symbolu a idolu v rapu, téměř náhle stal veřejný nepřítel hip hopu. Snahou práce je především popsat vývoj obsahu aluzí na Trumpa a vysvětlit tak náhlou změnu paradigmatu.

V první části práce rozebírám vliv rapu, který se v posledních letech stal nejvýznamnějším hudebním žánrem v USA. Kromě vysoké poslechové a prodejnosti je také specifický výraznými kulturními dopady od módy přes dopadu na chování a mluvu široké skupiny obyvatelstva až po politické preference posluchačů. Význam na chování spotřebitelů a voličů je výrazně reflektován nejen významnými soukromými subjekty, ale i vysoce postavenými politiky a kandidáty v rámci volebních klání. Kapitola naznačuje, že dlouholeté budování pozitivního symbolu Donalda Trumpa v rapu mohlo mít výrazný vliv na jeho vítězství v prezidentských volbách v roce 2016.

V následující části se věnuji společným rysům rapperů a Trumpa a analyzuji pozitivně zabarvené zmínky ve významných rapových písních. Kapitoly téhle sekce o smířlivosti se věnují podobnostem v rétorice či v chování vůči ženám, ale především v proklamovaném hodnotovém systému a obecném světonázoru. Rozbor společných rysů mezi slávou a přeháněným důrazem na ego a bohatství odhalují důvody přitažlivosti Trumpa pro rap a vysvětlují, jakým způsobem se z něj stal tak výrazný pozitivní symbol a idol skrz množství písní, které na něj odkazují jako na personu, ke které je třeba vzhlížet. V několika případech jsou zmíněny výjimky a rozebrány motivace vedoucí k pozorované glorifikaci.

Třetí část sleduje změnu perspektivy z extrémně pozitivní do extrémně negativní polohy na příkladu rappera vystupujícího pod přezdívkou Ice Cube. V téhle části se odhaluje proces, ve kterém může interpret aspirovat na to, být podnikateli Donaldu Trumpovi co nejpodobnější, a posléze naznačuje možnost spáchání atentátu na prezidenta Donalda Trumpa.

Předposlední část se věnuje Trumpovi jako téměř bezvýhradně negativnímu symbolu po zmiňované změně perspektivy, ke které došlo v rámci jeho první kandidatury v prezidentských volbách. Jsou sledovány vyhrocené nenávistné polohy, ale i snahy o kompromis. Je dán prostor i výjimkám, jsou zde rozebírání významní rapperi, které přímo podporovali Trumpa či jen hledali prostor pro spolupráci, ti však byli bez výjimky

vystaveni nepřehlédnutelné a často zdrcující kritice za své postoje. Jedna kapitola tohoto segmentu se věnuje Trumповým reakcím na kritiky, kdy výměny názorů nepřehlédnutelně připomínaly rapové konflikty.

V poslední části jsou použita všechna analyzovaná data k postulování paradoxu v hodnotovém systému, který může vést k tak rychlé změně perspektivy, která svou jednoduškou připomíná organizovaný pohyb, i když se zjevně jedná o pohyb nezávislých prvků tvořících hip hopovou kulturu. Postulovaný rozkol spočívá ve vzhlížení k povrchním a výrazně egoistickým hodnotám při zakotvení v komunitních a humanistických hodnotových systémech. Vzhledem k dokázanému výraznému vlivu rapové hudby jsou potenciální důsledky tohoto rozkolu prezentovány jako nevědomé podřezávání vlastní větve.

Výzkum a zpracování práce přineslo zajímavý pohled na značku Donalda Trumpa, hodnotový systém hip hopu, potenciál rapu pro politický marketing či dokonce samotnou koncepci Amerického snu. Vývoj symbolu Trumpa a jeho reflexe v rapové hudbě zároveň poukazuje na nestability a křehkost kulturních symbolů a idolů. Celý tento příběh podtrhuje nekonečný rozkol sebestředného boje o zdroje a komunitního, humanistického smýšlení.

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ANNOTATION

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The thesis is focused on the relationship between rap music and Donald Trump from its early stage of worshipping him as a symbol of success and a person worthy of following until its later stage of rejection and aversion. The goal of the thesis is to summarize the development of the rhetoric of commercially successful, influential rappers and seek reasons for the abrupt and radical paradigm shift. At the same time, the aim is to demonstrate the power of rap music and its potential for political marketing.

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Práce se zabývá vztahem rapové hudby k Donaldu Trumpovi od jeho počátečního vzývání jako symbolu úspěchu a osobnosti hodné následování po zavržení a odpor. Cílem práce je shrnout vývoj rétoriky komerčně úspěšných, vlivných rapperů a odhalit důvody k náhlé radikální změně paradigmatu. Zároveň je snahou poukázat na vlivnost a politický potenciál hip hopu.