Rap on the Radio: Making Hip Hop into Hit Pop, 1986-1994

Amy Marion Coddington
Eugene, Oregon

B.A., Music and Mathematics, Macalester College, 2008

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Abstract

Throughout the 1980s, hip hop expanded from a local subculture to a hugely popular and ubiquitous musical style embraced by listeners all over the United States. My dissertation investigates how and why this genre transformed so quickly during this period. I theorize that radio, a medium largely neglected in popular music scholarship, played an important role in introducing hip hop to a wider audience in the late 1980s, and that the programming practices of radio stations fundamentally altered the future of the genre as well as popular music more broadly. I argue that the wider public's rapid acceptance of hip hop over these years wasn't simply an adjustment in inclination towards rap's *musical* characteristics. Rather, because rap was—and still is—closely associated with urban black identity, the acceptance of rap by radio programmers and national audiences, who were mostly white, displays the transformation of American racial attitudes during this period.

In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I examine how Top 40 radio facilitated the exponential growth in rap's popularity during the late 1980s. My first chapter analyzes the rap played on Top 40 radio between 1986 and 1991 to determine what musical techniques made rap songs likely to obtain Top 40 airplay. In the late 1980s, Top 40 radio programmers and music executives were hesitant to wholeheartedly promote rap for fear of alienating listeners. Instead, they eased their audience into this new sound by playing songs which incorporated elements of rap into the sound of pop. In this chapter, I combine close musical analysis of individual songs with commentary from musicians and radio programmers, arguing that new jack swing and pop rap artists such as Bobby

Brown, Milli Vanilli, and Vanilla Ice combined rap aesthetics with various musical styles already played on Top 40 radio stations, creating an easy-to-program style of music that was hip enough to excite younger audiences and familiar enough to not offend older listeners.

In many ways, rap's successful move to Top 40 radio adheres to a common pattern of crossover in which African-American musical innovation is followed by white acceptance and appropriation. Black music that crosses over to white audiences has historically been both criticized for pandering to white tastes and celebrated for fostering a multiracial audience. In Chapter Two, I argue that structural changes in the radio industry in the late 1980s complicated the racial politics of rap's crossover. Beginning in 1986, a new type of Top 40 subformat, the Crossover station, found success across the country. Using primary sources from radio trade journals, I construct a history of Crossover stations and evaluate the influence these stations had on rap's crossover into the mainstream.

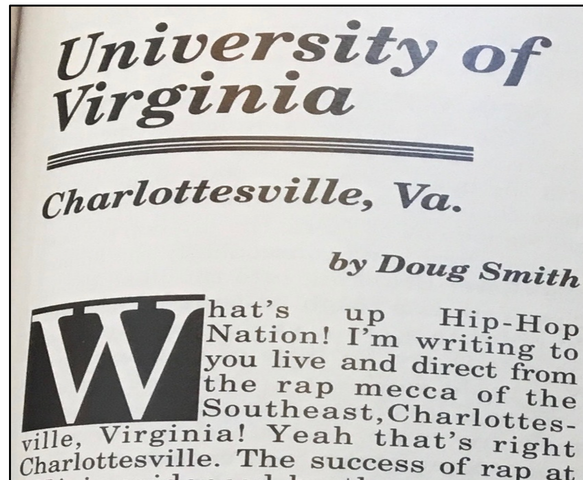
In the second half of this dissertation, I assess subsequent negative reactions to rap's move to the mainstream. Chapter Three investigates how the new, rap-friendly Crossover format inspired further fragmentation in the radio industry. Immediately after admitting rap onto their playlists, Top 40 stations experienced a mass exodus of listeners. Programmers blamed a number of factors for Top 40's rapid decline, but at the top of their list was a growing fear that Top 40 listeners had grown weary of hip hop and switched to other stations which did not play the genre. Scrambling to keep listeners, many Top 40 stations eliminated rap from their playlists. This intentional excision of rap,

based on programmers' beliefs that their audience disliked rap's associations with urban black youth culture, segregated Top 40's airwaves.

My fourth chapter explores how the hip hop community constructed standards of authenticity for hip hop in the early 1990s. At the same time that listeners were tuning out from the rap on Top 40 stations, many rappers, critics, and academics also tried to disassociate from the very same style of rap. Grappling with the mainstream acceptance of what had once been an underground art form, the hip hop community created and enforced a dichotomy between pop-influenced rap and authentic rap and between pop-influenced rappers and authentic creators of hip hop culture. This debate reached its zenith just as the field of hip hop studies emerged, and scholars in this field also contributed to rap's investment in this particular form of authenticity.

To conclude, I consider the historical ramifications of rap's move towards pop. Radio hits have continued mixing the sonic elements of rap and pop, creating pop-influenced rap as well as rap-influenced pop. By finding music that could fit on Top 40 radio, by mixing rap's new sound with more traditional sounds, by turning rap into pop and pop into rap, hip hop took over America.

Acknowledgements



University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Va.

by Doug Smith

What's up Hip-Hop Nation! I'm writing to you live and direct from the rap mecca of the Southeast, Charlottes-ville, Virginia! Yeah that's right Charlottesville. The success of rap at

Fig. 1. Doug Smith, "Rap on Campus," *The Source*, July 1991, 21.

As Doug Smith wrote in July 1991 in *The Source*, "I'm writing to you live and direct from the rap mecca of the Southeast, Charlottesville, Virginia!" Although I very much doubt the veracity of Smith's statement, Charlottesville twenty-five years later, rap mecca or not, has been a vibrant and stimulating place to write a dissertation on rap. I would like to thank the faculty at the University of Virginia, who have given me ample reign and support to study whatever bad pop I want. In particular, thank you to Richard Will for his ample and thoughtful advice, and for giving me a fantastic distraction in the form of a lot of pre-WWII Don Giovanni recordings. A huge shout-out goes to Matthew Vest and Tyler Magill of the UVA library, who found and gave me access to a complete run of *Radio & Records* in a very cold part of Alderman Library.

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Finally, my family. It's not everyone that gets blessed with two loving, supportive, talented, and intelligent older sisters with great partners and adorable children. Thanks, sisses, for everything, not just including finding me apartments and helping me frame chapters, and thanks to Matt and Marshall for loads of academic and life advice and opening your homes to me during many much-needed vacations. And the greatest thanks of all goes to my outstanding and loving parents, who have never stopped offering to help during this whole thing.

Table of Contents

Abstract ………………………………………………………………………………. iii

Acknowledgements ……………………………………………………………….. vi

List of Figures ……………………………………………………………………....... x

Introduction: Why Pop Rap? ………………………………………………………. 1

Chapter One: Rap Becomes Pop ………………………………………………….. 54

Chapter Two: Pop Becomes Rap ………………………………………………... 101

Chapter Three: Pop is not Rap …………………………………………………... 165

Chapter Four: Rap is not Pop ……………………………………………………. 217

Conclusion: Rap on the Radio at the Close of the Twentieth Century………………... 260

Appendix One: Songs on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" Which Include
Rapped Vocals, 1986-1995…………………………………………………………..265

Appendix Two: Crossover Music on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100," 1981-2003……………...281

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………………284

List of Figures

Figure 1. “Rap on Campus” …………………………………………………………..vi

Figure 2. “Hitmaker Teddy Riley Signs New Zomba Publishing Deal” ………………. 89

Figure 3. “The Mental Smash Hit Ready to Sky Rocket to Multi-Platinum” …........... 92

Figure 4. “Vanilla Ice’s “Electronic Rap Game” ………………………………………. 98

Figure 5. Portion of George Clinton’s *R&B Skeletons in the Closet* Cover Artwork … 113

Figure 6. “UC, Black Stations Reverse Popularity” ………………………………….. 126

Figure 7. “The Last Word” ……………………………………………………………. 164

Figure 8. “Rating Rap Music” ………………………………………………………... 176

Figure 9. “Music Map of American Tastes” ………………………………………….. 208

Figure 10. Number of National Stations Per Format …………………………………. 211

Figure 11. “CHR Has Stopped Rapping and Resumed Entertaining” ………………... 215

Introduction: Why Pop Rap?

On June 24, 1990, Robert Hilburn, pop music critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, implored his readers to give rap a chance. He wrote that although the genre "receives scant national airplay," rap's "aggressive, black street-spawned sound" was "the most exciting inner-city contribution to pop since the Motown hits of the '60s." Recently, he noted, rap had caused national controversy, and Hilburn thoughtfully reasoned through the genre's more contentious elements. Ending the piece by declaring his support for the genre, he claimed that in time, rap will be "vindicated." The article is remarkably even-handed in its evaluation of rap, noting rap's politically forceful lyrics, positive message, and the "creative jolt" it has administered to popular music alongside reports of violence at rap concerts, the "possibly dangerous and irresponsible" nature of Professor Griff of Public Enemy's recent anti-Semitic remarks, and the recent obscenity trial against rap group 2 Live Crew.[1]

Responses to Hilburn's piece were anything but measured. One reader wrote to Hilburn that his "failure to appreciate the absolute danger and sheer irresponsibility" of Professor Griff's anti-Semitic remarks was "most unforgivable."[2] Another was disgusted

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[1] Hilburn's commentary is particularly unbiased compared to other contemporary articles about rap; for example, see Adler and Foote, "The Rap Attitude." While Hilburn examines both sides rather fairly, he ends his piece on a positive note, writing that

> [t]o bypass rap is to miss the most creative energy in all of pop these days. And rap's most important message may not be in the music or words at all, but in the establishment of rappers as role models.… And it is healthy--both for the rap audience to have a forum for debate and for outsiders to hear the debate and realize that inner-city spirit and ambition haven't been crushed by social and economic deprivation.

See Hilburn, "Getting a Bad Rap."

[2] Shames, Henry J., "Hilburn's Defense of Rap—Fans and Foes React."

by the lyrics of rap, claiming that rap was a "disservice to all of the people…who have worked tirelessly to promote a positive image and make our world a better place."[3] "Not even time," this reader claimed, "will vindicate such an assault on the senses."

While both of these letter writers understood rap to be unnecessarily provocative, Ronald D. Brown, of Los Angeles, wrote in to inform readers that rap's lyrics were representative of the reality of black life in America. "Rap music," he waxed, "cries out from the wilderness to remind America that a good part of the wealth of this nation was, and continues to be, built on the deprivation and degradation of the African, and, though we labor in the midst of economic and cultural disrespect, rap affirms the dignity of our African heritage and serves as the voice of dissent in the land." For Brown, rap was uniquely black, a musical style that linked African Americans to their past as Africans and as slaves. It was "the expression of both pride and protest of African-American youth," one that "stands on its own merit and needs no defense."[4]

Joseph P. Hubbell, of Grover City, also agreed that rap needed no defending, but not because of its political potential and representational power. Instead, Hubbell disagreed with the premise of Hilburn's article, writing:

> Is Hilburn living on the same planet that I am? He claims that rap music has been relegated to "largely underground status" and receives "scant national airplay." I pulled out my latest issue of Rolling Stone and found that several of the top spots on the charts were held by rap groups, including M.C. Hammer at No. 2 and Public Enemy at No. 6. I hear rap music utilized constantly in commercial advertisements, public service messages and nationally syndicated TV shows. Wasn't that Run DMC running neck and neck with Woody in the "Tour de Lite" TV commercial? How about the Lakers' "Just Say No to Drugs!" video a couple seasons back? And who could forget that god-awful "We Are the Bears," which showcased the rapping abilities of Jim McMahon and William (The Refrigerator)

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[3] Evans, "Hilburn's Defense of Rap—Fans and Foes React."
[4] Brown, "Hilburn's Defense of Rap--Fans and Foes React."

> Perry? Didn't Theo Huxtable perform a rap song on the nation's No. 1 TV show? Heck, rap even has its own TV show, "Yo! MTV Raps!"[5]

Hubbell's and Brown's responses to Hilburn's article represent two major ways of thinking about hip hop in the early 1990s: understanding the genre as a musical sound created as a pop commodity, or as a politically cogent force able to give voice to disenfranchised black youth. In this dissertation, I investigate how rap came to be the former—how rap gained mainstream popularity and became the most popular genre in the United States by the end of the 1990s—to probe how the latter became the standard discourse for hip hop criticism and scholarship. Rap music was both commodity and politics. It was an entertaining, ubiquitous sound that soundtracked commercials, school lessons, Top 40 radio and movies, *and* it was speaking truth to power, educating American youth about black nationalism, and voicing marginalized African-American perspectives. It was "We Are the Bears" and "the voice of dissent in the land." It was, as KRS-One opined, "edutainment," both entertainment and education. And yet scholars have largely neglected one side of rap's identity, its role as commodified entertainment.

In this dissertation, I explore rap's transformation into a mainstream commodity by analyzing the racial politics of hip hop's expansion from a local subculture created primarily by and for African Americans to a hugely popular and ubiquitous form of entertainment embraced by listeners of all ethnicities across the United States during the years 1986-1994. Commercial Top 40 radio, a medium largely neglected in popular music scholarship, introduced rap to a broader audience in the late 1980s and controlled the influence of the genre in the early 1990s. The marketplace-driven particularities of

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[5] Joseph P. Hubbell, "Hilburn's Defense of Rap—Fans and Foes React."

radio influenced hip hop's racial identity, gender politics, sound, and style. But the impact of Top 40 radio airplay extended beyond the genre and its musical aesthetics. Because rap was—and still is—closely associated with urban black youth identity, the acceptance, or lack thereof, of rap by radio programmers and national audiences displayed the transformation of American racial attitudes.

Hip Hop's Standard Narrative

My work builds on the conventional narrative of rap, one reigned over by a canon of artists less commercially successful and more critically acclaimed. Hip hop scholars and journalists typically characterize the genre as sounding the political potential of marginalized minority communities and focus on artists whose work illuminates hip hop's politics.[6] Through these works, a canonized narrative of the history of the genre has emerged.[7] It begins in the South Bronx in the early 1970s, where minority youth responded to economic turmoil in the wake of the loss of manufacturing jobs, social devastation as drugs moved into the inner city, decreased opportunities as funding for education and social services declined, and a physical barrier to social and economic prosperity presented by the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway.[8] Hip hop—a

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[6] See Rose, *Black Noise*; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*; Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*; Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*; Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*; and George, *Hip Hop America*. Besides Chang, these books are not explicit histories of the genre; however, they explore the genre's development.

[7] See Meghelli, "Remixing the Historical Record," 94.

[8] See Keyes, "At the Crossroads," 231; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; Rose, *Black Noise*; Toop, *Rap Attack 2*; and Hager, *Hip Hop*. H. Samy Alim describes this origin story as hip hop's "original myth," which, like all myths, takes effort to canonize.

four-part artistic movement including breakdancing, graffiti, MCing, and DJing—emerged out of this social debris.[9] Often combining the talents of DJs and MCs, rap music first encountered wide commercial success with the Sugarhill Gang's 1979 single "Rapper's Delight," a song which borrowed its backing beat from Chic's disco hit "Good Times" and borrowed its rhymes from other Bronx-area rappers.[10] The next milestone in rap's history occurred in 1982, with the release of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message," the first rap record to put politics front and center. Three years later, Run-D.M.C., followed quickly by their white label-mates the Beastie Boys, successfully crossed hip hop over to white audiences on Rock and Top 40 radio. From

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See Alim, "Straight Outta Compton, Straight Aus Munchen," 7. Gail Thomas writes that there was "very little absolute change in the [black] poverty rate" between 1970 and 1986, as opposed to between 1959 and 1970 when the black poverty rate fell from 55.1% to 33.5%. See Thomas, *U.S. Race Relations in the 1980s and 1990s*.

[9] The use of hip hop in this sentence refers to the culture as a whole. In the rest of this dissertation, except where noted, I use rap and hip hop interchangeably, regardless of the politics of these terms. At a literal level, these terms are not interchangeable, as rap is one part of hip hop's four-part culture; see Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 8. But throughout rap's history, the terms have been conflated, reseparated by some in the hip hop community who wanted to distinguish between commercialized rap and more "real" hip hop, and redefined again so that rap meant music dominated by rapped vocals, as opposed to R&B/hip-hop, which had more prominently sung vocals. See Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 23; Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 287; and Sister Souljah, quoted in Gil Griffin, "Confab Hip to Evolution of Hip Hop," *Billboard*, March 16, 1991, 22. Currently, *Billboard* has separate charts for "Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs" and "Hot Rap Songs," but as of the time of this writing (chart dated May 27, 2017), seven out of the top ten songs on these charts are the same, and appear in the exact same order on the charts.

[10] For more on the inauthenticity of "Rapper's Delight," see Barnes, "Redefining the Real," 33-36. Houston Baker writes that "the release of 'Rapper's Delight' began the recommercialization of B-ing. The stylistic credo and cryptography of hip hop were pared away to a reproducible sound called a 'rap.' And rap was definitely a mass-market product after 'Rapper's Delight' achieved a stunning commercial success. 'B-Style' came in from the cold. No longer was it—as crossover/commercial— 'too black, too strong' for the popular charts." See Baker, "Hybridity, the Rap Race, and Pedagogy for the 1990s," 219. This is an overly idealistic assessment, for reasons I'll discuss in this dissertation.

here, most authors chronicling rap's development either remain centered in New York City, focusing on Public Enemy's records of the late 1980s—which voiced black nationalist politics atop noisy beats—or travel over to the West Coast to examine the rise of gangsta rap with N.W.A's debut studio album *Straight Outta Compton*, released in 1988.[11]

Hip hop scholarship has historically highlighted rap's political potential, a focus which has brought vital attention to the genre's political and social import.[12] However, hip hop historians are often hesitant to acknowledge rap's move to the mainstream in the decade after "Rapper's Delight."[13] Their reluctance to see hip hop as a mass-produced, mainstream commodity has canonized a version of hip hop's history that only partially represents hip hop's first decade on record and only partially predicts the future of the genre, problems that hip hop scholars have recently started to acknowledge.[14]

Tricia Rose begins her 2008 book *The Hip Hop Wars* by drawing attention to the negative traits that she believes have taken over hip hop; she writes that contemporary

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[11] Perkins, "The Rap Attack". Also see Toop, *Rap Attack 2*; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*; Rose, *Black Noise*; Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*; Keyes, "At the Crossroads"; Keyes, "The Roots and Aesthetic Foundation of Hip-Hop Culture"; Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*; and Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*.

[12] For discussion of the canonization of hip hop texts, see Forman, "About a Salary or Reality?," 5.

[13] Basu, Dipannita, "Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Music Industry in Los Angeles," 20. Some authors are resistant, rather than hesitant. For example, see Bowser, *Gangster Rap and Its Social Cost*, 29; and Quick, "The Cultural Commodification of Identity," 3.

[14] David Brackett writes more generally that crossing over is an essential stage of genre formation because it "strengthens the genre in question." See Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, xiii.

commercial hip hop has had the "beauty and life force…squeezed out."[15] This music is different than the hip hop that she wrote about in *Black Noise*, her first book and hip hop studies' first major monograph published in 1994. *Black Noise* characterizes hip hop as a resistant art form which gives voice to marginalized young urban African Americans, a "hidden transcript" that draws attention to and challenges social inequalities.[16] But as Rose accurately notes in 2008, it's not particularly clear that commercial hip hop positively and cogently articulates the struggles of the urban poor anymore; she writes that the most widely consumed rap "has really dramatically gutted the genre of its vitality, excitement and complexity."[17] The subversive multiplicity of possible identities, political positions, and messages that, to Rose, characterized hip hop in the late 1980s and early 1990s have moved underground, while the corporate media disseminates "some of the worst understandings and representations of Black people by Black people to Black people."[18] The genre has changed so much that Rose's descriptions of hip hop in her first book are barely recognizable; she starkly reports that "[t]he world of hip hop on which *Black Noise* was based— the vision of hip hop on which a good deal of the field has been grounded—is not what dominates the U.S. airwaves and recording industry today."[19] Rose holds the corporate media responsible for changing hip hop. As rap became more popular, the music industry and the mainstream media valorized an

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[15] Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, ix.
[16] Rose, *Black Noise*, 100.
[17] Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 52.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., x.

increasingly specific type of hip hop, one that didn't resemble the positive and progressive voice that characterized the genre according to her account in *Black Noise*.[20]

Rose is not the only scholar to recognize that rap changed considerably as it grew from a local subculture to a mainstream genre. Josh Kun, writing in 2002, asks: how should scholars approach hip hop "if what hip-hop is has changed so much since the last time it was talked about in any sustained way?"[21] Mickey Hess, summarizing the field in 2007, notices that many recent texts have "question[ed] if an industry as economically dominant as rap music still can be considered resistant."[22] Like Rose, many of these authors blame record companies and other influential players in the music industry for stimulating and manipulating its stylistic evolution, a process that Murray Forman describes as "dilution."[23] While nearly every book about hip hop wrestles with the changes that have occurred since hip hop hit the mainstream in the early 1990s, hip hop's move to the mainstream is often the proverbial elephant in the room; authors mention that this change occurred, but it is most often explained away as something that happened while more subversive music was also being made.[24]

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[20] Ibid., 3.

[21] Kun, "Two Turntables and a Social Movement," 582.

[22] Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 15.

[23] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 146. For similar evaluations, also see Bowser, *Gangster Rap and Its Social Cost*; Asante, *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop*; Jeffries, *Thug Life*; and Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*. Anthony Kwame Harrison, in his ethnographic study of underground rappers in the Bay Area positions the underground hip hop scene as a response to the music industry's manipulation of the genre. See Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 33.

[24] See, for example, Rose, *Black Noise*. Exceptions include George, *Hip Hop America*; Diehl, "Pop Rap"; Tanz, *Other People's Property*; and Charnas, *The Big Payback*.

The premise that music expresses politics naturally privileges styles of music that emphasize rebellion or subversion; hip hop historians often focus on the importance of underground, politically expressive artists without acknowledging the impact of more widely accessible rap.[25] As Rose notes in her 2008 book, the "wider audience in America…relies on mainstream outlets" for their culture and entertainment, and yet few scholars have attempted to understand what hip hop these mainstream listeners heard.[26] By 1991, "rap was a very familiar sound," according to Rush Communications president Carmen Ashhurst-Watson, thanks not only to rock-rap crossover groups like Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys, but also to commercials, movies, and "safe" rappers played on the radio that "white kids could feel comfortable with."[27] These "safe" rappers are rarely acknowledged for their influence in bringing hip hop to the masses.[28] But as Bakari Kitwana argues, hip hop would not have grown into its present state as a "national cultural movement" without becoming an easily consumed commodity; its importance is contingent on its commodification.[29] Hip hop didn't reach the mass American public

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[25] In one exaggerated instance of this (although the basic ideology is in no way uncommon among hip hop scholars and critics), S.H. Fernando Jr. writes, "Despite the millions of dollars currently tied up in rap, despite sales demographics that say rap is now more popular among teens in the vanilla suburbs than in chocolate cities, despite all the bad press, and hype…hip-hop is alive and well and thriving in the underground—a place far removed from the pop charts, commercial radio, executive suites, malls and MTV. Real creativity, as well as the soul of hip-hop, dwells in the underground, where rap music originated." See Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 287. Robin D.G. Kelley makes a related point about the tendency of scholars to forget hip hop's "incredible hybridity." Kelley, "Looking for the 'Real' Nigga," 131.

[26] Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 3.

[27] Ashhurst-Watson is quoted in Rose, "Contracting Rap: An Interview with Carmen Ashhurst-Watson," 128.

[28] David McCrickard argues that these "lite" rappers helped move rap into the mainstream. McCrickard, "Fight the Power," 31.

[29] See Kitwana, 201. See also George, *Hip Hop America*, 65.

because of its political importance. Rather, it reached the mainstream because much of it was not explicitly political and could be sponsored by the music, movie, television, and advertising industries.[30]

Prioritizing politically conscious artists similarly privileges a certain subset of hip hop listeners. In order to hear politically conscious rap, you couldn't turn on your radio or television to just any station. For example, to listen to Public Enemy in the late 1980s, you needed to purchase their CD or tune in to a certain station very late at night.[31] The rap that most authors focus on, in part because of their focus on its political importance, was music for insiders. It was music aimed at the hip hop subculture, accessible to a mainstream audience only through, in the words of Ice Cube, "eavesdropping."[32] The standard narrative of hip hop doesn't just overlook the conspicuous presence of not explicitly political rap on the radio and in commercials; it also neglects the experiences of listeners who encountered rap not through specialized media, but through easily accessible spaces like Top 40 radio.[33]

By listening to the music produced for these spaces and for these mainstream audiences, by listening to the music played on Top 40 radio, another history of hip hop emerges, one that not only accounts for how hip hop's popularity rose so rapidly in the

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[30] For examples of its reach, see Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 214.

[31] Jason Tanz claims that pop radio stations in the 1980s did not play "rap's most beloved, respected, and important musicians." See Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 89.

[32] Ice Cube, quoted in Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 129. According to David McCrickard, hip hop lent people in the know cultural capital, allowing them to "readily identify with their peers and to unite their voice in resistance to mainstream culture." McCrickard, "Fight the Power," 256.

[33] See Brennan, "Off the Gangsta Tip," 689; and Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 289. Nelson George writes that "a straight line can be drawn" between hip hop in 1998, when he wrote his book, and "Rapper's Delight" simply by looking at what rap hits are embraced by white audiences. See George, *Hip Hop America*, 80.

late 1980s and early 1990s but also helps explain how hip hop changed into something that hip hop scholars were reticent to acknowledge. This dissertation tells this history. It is the history of how most people in the United States encountered rap, how the sounds of hip hop were framed for them, and how this encounter affected their understanding of the genre, their ideas of mainstream music, and their conception of themselves and others.[34]

Some Terminology

Drawing on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, I understand race as in the process of being reshaped and rearticulated by consumers and cultural producers. Race, Omi and Winant write, is at once a malleable construct and a lived reality, a "concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies."[35] For much of this dissertation, I reduce the complexity of racial identity in America to a black and white binary, in large part because this is how the music industry in the 1980s and 1990s conceived of the American public.[36] I use the terms black and African American interchangeably and use the term

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[34] The question of what has happened to rap as it transitioned into the mainstream, writes Eithne Quinn, is one that "should be fought over all the more, particularly since this fight is vital for understanding race, gender, and culture today." Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang*, 87.

[35] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55. See also Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 7; and Jones, "Crossover Culture: Popular Music and the Politics of 'Race,'" 144. Loren Kajikawa writes that while race might be a cultural construct, "it is a fiction that continues to shape life in the United States." Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 6.

[36] Chapter Two of this dissertation complicates this dualism by thinking about the importance of Hispanic audiences' tastes in influencing hip hop's airplay. In Chapter Three, I discuss how multiculturalist movements in the 1990s shifted the binary from black vs. white to black vs. non-black.

Hispanic to describe what were much more culturally and racially diverse populations, because radio professionals used these terms during the late 1980s and early 1990s.[37]

While I treat American racial attitudes as continually in formation, quantitative studies offer a general overview of racial attitudes in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Manning Marable writes that in the second half of the twentieth century, desegregation gave white Americans opportunities to interact with black culture, but it did not change their opinions about electing black candidates, living in black neighborhoods, and actively working towards racial equality.[38] Instead, the "overt hostility" modeled by the Reagan Administration towards African Americans "created a political culture among broad sections of the white public that was scarcely sympathetic to blacks' interests."[39] Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders posit that these years were marked by growing "racial resentment," where white Americans exhibited "subtle racial hostility without violating democratic norms of racial egalitarianism."[40] In 1990, the

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[37] Influenced by Herman Gray's work on blackness in the media, I use blackness to refer to, as Gray writes, a "constellation of productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings associated with black presence in the United States." Gray, *Watching Race*, 12. See Chapter Two for more on attitudes concerning the difference between African American and black.

[38] Marable, *Race*, *Reform*, *and Rebellion*, 187. Cedric Herring and Charles Amissah write that during this period, "the desire for social distance from African Americans is generally greater than the desire for social distance from virtually all other groups on virtually all fronts." See Herring and Amissah, "Advance and Retreat: Racially Based Attitudes and Public Policy," 142.

[39] Marable, *Race*, *Reform*, *and Rebellion*, 202.

[40] Their ideas are summarized in Wilson and Davis, "Reexamining Racial Resentment," 118–9. As Wilson and Davis write, racial resentment, first laid out by Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders, is difficult to measure without understanding attitudes toward the government more generally. See Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*. For one study that tries to take this into account, see Feldman and Huddy, "Racial Resentment and White Opposition to Race-Conscious Programs." For a broader analysis, see Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 232. In a focus group done in Michigan with Democrats who had voted for Reagan in 1985, researchers found that these voters

University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center found that a majority of white Americans polled believed that whites were superior to blacks across measures of merit, including work ethic, intelligence, and patriotism.[41]

Hip hop, as I discuss throughout this dissertation, is largely understood as black music. Adding to a growing body of research which interprets music's racial identity as historically and culturally constructed, this dissertation portrays rap's musical blackness as a changing idea dependent on who is defining it rather than a determined set of characteristics.[42] Rap acts as a "sonic force," as Loren Kajikawa writes, that helps elucidate the changing meanings of American racial identity.[43] By situating the sounds of rap artists in their historical moment—where musical producers, radio executives, and musicians voice contested and shifting expressions of how music intersects with identity—this dissertation troubles the stability of a rigid definition of musical blackness.

"express[ed] a profound distaste for blacks, a sentiment that pervades almost everything they think about government and politics." For them, "virtually all progressive symbols and themes have been redefined in racial and pejorative terms." Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 304. In a more overt display of racism, Klan memberships rapidly increased in the late 1970s and early 1980s. See "Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism."

[41] See Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, 118; and Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 336. These beliefs about race-based differences were reinforced by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's 1994 book *The Bell Curve.* For a critical analysis of the impacts of *The Bell Curve* on attitudes and policy, see Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*.

[42] See, for example, Miller, *Segregating Sound*; Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*; Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*; and Radano, *Lying up a Nation*.

[43] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 149. Kajikawa writes that "as one of the most influential music genres of the last three decades, rap has cultivated a mainstream audience and become a multi-million-dollar industry by promoting highly visible (and often controversial) representations of black masculine identity…. Thus, to call attention to the way that rap has remained 'black' is to do more than acknowledge the skin color of its most popular and best-known practitioners." Ibid., 5. The use of this categorization, as Eric Johnson has noted, should not be mistaken for the endorsement of this term. See Johnson, "Crossover Narratives," 29.

In this dissertation, I refer to the music played on Top 40 radio as pop.[44] In contrast to scholars who theorize that Top 40 stations choose music based on sales figures rather than sound, I understand pop in the late 1980s and early 1990s to have an identifiable sound and a definite audience, to be both a sonic description and a collection of songs aimed at a particular group of people.[45] Pop, in this historical moment, comes close to being a genre, which unites the "conception of how music sounds with a notion of who will consume it."[46] In the late 1980s, pop music was dominated by sung melodies

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[44] For the sake of clarity, I capitalize all radio format names and group certain format descriptions. I refer to stations programmed primarily for African-American audiences as Urban, which is not always historically accurate. During the 1980s, many of these stations changed their name from Black to Urban, Urban Contemporary, or Progressive Contemporary to gain advertisers who were less inclined to promote their products on stations that called themselves Black (see Chapter Two for more on this). Similarly, I refer to stations that played current hits as Top 40, even though many of them described themselves differently in the 1980s and 1990s, using the industry term CHR (Contemporary Hits Radio).

[45] Top 40 has often been theorized as a "loose grouping of songs from different traditions" that are the most popular songs in the country as defined by commercial activity. Straw, "Consumption," 59, 142. See also Barnes, "Top 40 Radio: Fragment of the Imagination"; and Clover, "Good Pop, Bad Pop," 246; Clover writes that pop music is a "metagenre" that includes "metal, fusion, punk, country, hip-hop, and tubthumping." As I'll explain, this is a rather simplistic notion of how Top 40 radio works. The anecdotes from programmers mentioned throughout this dissertation show that programmers have a pretty good sense of what they believe the Top 40 should sound like at any given moment. Clive Davis put this succinctly, saying, "Radio appeal is simple: Does a song have verses and choruses that include the elements for a potential breakthrough? Is it the type of song that radio stations that play the hits might play?" Davis and DeCurtis, *The Soundtrack of My Life*, 404. In my definition of pop, I'm influenced by Craig Watkins, who writes that pre-SoundScan, pop was "largely defined by sweet melodies, stylistic conservatism, and amicable lyrics." He argues that SoundScan changed this, turning pop into something "defined by economics and marketplace resonance." Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 39. I don't agree that the change caused by SoundScan was this drastic, because of Top 40 radio's dominant influence over chart positions on the "Hot 100" well into the early 2010s.

[46] Szabo, "Ambient Music as Popular Genre," 17. Szabo's conception of genre is similar to that of Robert Walser, who writes that genres "come to function as horizons of expectation for readers (or listeners) and as models of composition for authors (or musicians)," and Franco Fabbri and Allan Moore, who argue that musical genres are not

backed by light electric guitars, lush synthesizer harmonies, and grooves influenced by light rock, disco, and funk music.[47] I use the term mainstream to apply to an audience that loosely expands out of the Top 40 audience to what cultural producers conceive of as a general American public, coded as majority white.[48] The racially based organizational

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inherent descriptions of music but are instead a discursive space defined by listeners and producers. Chris Molanphy views genres similarly, writing that "[i]deally, any effective genre chart—be it R&B, Latin, country, even alt-rock—doesn't just track a particular strain of *music*, which can be marked by ever-changing boundaries and ultimately impossible to define. It's meant to track an *audience*." Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 29; Fabbri, "A Theory of Musical Genres - Two Applications"; Moore, "Issues of Style, Genre and Idiolect in Rock"; and Molanphy, "I Know You Got Soul." Craig Warner writes that pop is defined by its audience; see Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 7. Others authors describe subcultures, scenes, and art worlds in similar terms; see, for example, Thornton, *Club Cultures*; Bennett and Peterson, *Music Scenes*; and Becker, *Art Worlds*. Tamara Roberts, in an article about Michael Jackson, evaluates "the sonic and racial implications of defining pop as its own genre." She concludes that pop and the mainstream "are based not on a specific sonic or racial category but on the tension between realizing and transcending race through sound," a "discursive no man's land between categories that relies on those very categories for its makeup." Roberts, "Michael Jackson's Kingdom," 20, 23. This article questions the role of economics in defining the mainstream; Roberts instead focuses on Michael Jackson's aesthetics. My dissertation argues that understanding musical aesthetics without an understanding of the contemporary marketplace in which music is consumed does not sufficiently explain musical production.

[47] There are exceptions, of course, but this dissertation shows that radio programmers understood the music they played on their stations as having an ideal and specific sound. In 1990, as Simon Frith notes, the music industry in Britain complained about the legislature's recent definition of pop music as "all kinds of music characterised by a strong rhythmic element and a reliance on electronic amplification for their performance," complaining that this definition didn't do a good enough job explaining "the sociological difference between pop…and rock." See Frith, "Pop Music," 94-5. Frith concludes from this example that pop "does not have a specific or subculture, communal market/culture. It is designed to appeal to everyone." As is evident from my definition, I conceive of pop as more narrowly defined, along the lines of what Frith describes as "teenpop" in this chapter. Diane Railton writes that scholars have typically distinguished between pop music and popular music, focusing their attention on the latter as a more serious style. See Railton, "The Gendered Carnival of Pop," 231.

[48] David Brackett writes that although the mainstream, ideally, would be the largest segment of an audience, "there frequently exists an unstated default audience" that, in the historical moment he is discussing, are "white, bourgeois, northeastern urban dwellers in the United States." Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 38n48. Other authors

structure of the music industry presupposes the whiteness of the mainstream, as racial minorities are grouped into racialized segments of the music industry.[49] In order for music by minorities to become mainstream, the music must cross over after first becoming successful with its base audience.[50]

Critical Interventions: Media, Race, Gender, and Politics

My dissertation's focus on the mechanics of how hip hop became mainstream via programming on Top 40 radio not only brings new insight to scholarly understandings of rap's past but also contributes to developing musicological theories about the cultural significance of music. In particular, examining rap's move to the mainstream via commercial radio programming contributes to four main fields of hip hop studies and popular music scholarship more generally: the role of the mainstream media in musical production and consumption, the racial identity of crossover music, the role of women in popular music, and the political work that music does.

I. Media

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conflate the mainstream with the audience who listens to pop. See Garofalo, "Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?," 235; and Harper, "Synesthesia, 'Crossover,' and Blacks in Popular Music," 106. Eric Weisbard defines pop by its relationship to the broad mainstream, defining it as "music that crosses over, that has qualities that reach beyond the context in which the sounds originated." Weisbard, *This Is Pop*, 4.

[49] Shank, "From Rice to Ice: The Face of Race in Rock and Pop," 260.

[50] Reebee Garofalo notes that, in industry terms, crossovers always "connot[e] movement from margin to mainstream." Garofalo, "Culture Versus Commerce," 277. See also Garofalo, "Black Popular Music," 241.

Through my focus on the radio, I show how the mass media influenced hip hop's movement into the mainstream by framing the genre in specific ways. Hip hop scholars often theorize that the genre's crossover occurred because of musical decisions facilitated by the promotion departments at record companies.[51] However, genres do not simply cross over to the mainstream through record company willpower or artistic decisions. Instead, all forms of mass media play an important role in introducing audiences to new genres, framing styles in ways that new listeners will be able to comprehend. In particular, crossover is mediated by commercial radio; in hip hop's case, individual radio stations, radio trade publications, and informal networks of radio personnel all influenced rap's crossover into the mainstream.

Radio airplay was essential to introducing rap to a general audience.[52] From the beginning of its commercially recorded history, rap was intended to be played on the radio, and radio airplay in these early years was crucial in spreading the sound of hip hop beyond live shows in certain neighborhoods.[53] "Rapper's Delight" experienced its first

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[51] See, for example, Charnas, *The Big Payback*; and Diehl, "Pop Rap."

[52] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 295. Some of the artists interviewed in Brian Cross's book note the importance of radio airplay on KDAY and KPWR. See Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 38, 136. Forman begins his book by talking about the radio but does not investigate rap's airplay further. See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, xv. Jason Tanz explores how hip hop radio stations framed rap for white audiences, but primarily focuses on broadcasting in the mid-2000s, twenty years after the genre was initially introduced by mass media to a general audience. See Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 94. Similarly, Charnas devotes a section of his book to crossover stations KMEL and KPWR, but approaches these from the angle of whether they played canonized rap rather than looking at pop rap. See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 293-351.

[53] My claim here is strictly about the period after rap's first commercial recording. Afrika Bambaataa claims that early hip hop was created against the disco that was being played on the radio; according to him, "The Bronx wasn't really into radio music no more. It was an anti-disco movement." Bambaataa, quoted in Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 65. It's

major break when it was programmed on WESL in St. Louis; in New York, Grandmaster Flash recalls hearing the song on the radio every single night.[54] Record companies lobbied for radio airplay, knowing that sales of their singles would increase substantially with radio exposure.[55] For example, Jive Records rented airtime on New York station WHBI in the 1980s to promote their rap artists.[56] At Def Jam Records, radio airplay was essential to ensure the broad success of Run-D.M.C.'s "Rock Box," whose 7-inch single format was chosen to appeal to non-black consumers. Even though MTV played the song's music video, Russell Simmons and others in the office still spent full workdays calling radio stations, relentlessly bugging them to play the record.[57] Similarly, Run-D.M.C.'s following single, "Walk This Way," was successful because of airplay on Top 40 radio stations.[58] As rap became more popular, radio airplay was so important to many independent rap record labels that they chose to merge with major labels in order to increase their influence on radio programming.[59]

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clear, however, from Bambaataa's own testimonials, and those of others in books chronicling rap's early sound, that its stylistic influences were incredibly diverse and included all genres, including disco. Alex Ogg and David Upshal stress the importance of radio, writing that "for those living outside the Bronx, the main access to hip hop was provided by the WHBI radio show hosted by Mr. Magic." Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 85. Brian Cross claims that KDAY had a similar influence in Los Angeles. See Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 38.

[54] Jean Williams, "Quick Natl Reaction to Sugarhillers," *Billboard*, October 13, 1979, 50; and Flash, quoted in Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 76.

[55] Shawn Hanley, "Rap Records Inducing Listener Participation," *Billboard*, July 19, 1980, 51, 53.

[56] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 295.

[57] See Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 174; Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 98, 109; and Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 245.

[58] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 162.

[59] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 163.

Most authors who chronicle rap's rise to mainstream success note the importance of radio airplay for the Sugarhill Gang and Run-D.M.C. but forget the necessity of airplay as they progress forward, implicitly assuming that after the mainstream success of Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys, the radio apparatus for rap's crossover was already in place.[60] Many scholars give MTV and other music television networks credit for disseminating rap to the masses in the late 1980s, noting radio's initial reluctance to program the genre.[61] Some additionally focus on a burgeoning economy of rap magazines and other publications catered towards rap fans.[62] But as the individual anecdotes noted above demonstrate, radio airplay was still vitally important for making rap mainstream, for turning, as Jarl Ahlkvist writes, "recorded music into popular music."[63]

II. Race

By examining hip hop at the moment of its expansion into the mainstream, my dissertation recognizes the monumental transformation that hip hop's racial identity underwent as it crossed over. As Loren Kajikawa notes, despite the genre's ethnic and

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[60] Others, like Cheryl Keyes, simply state that rap was not played on radio, an assumption that I counter throughout this dissertation. See Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 99.

[61] See George, *Hip Hop America*, 97, 101; Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 3; Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*; Jones, "Crossover Culture," 110; Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry, 1969 to 1990"; and Neal, *What the Music Said*, 143. Josh Tyrangiel notes that music video changed the nature of crossing over, as it made what had once been audio into something visual. See Tyrangiel, "Hip Hop Video," 142.

[62] For more on hip hop's magazines, see Chang, "Word Power"; McLeod, "The Politics and History of Hip-Hop Journalism"; and Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 226–239.

[63] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 106. See also Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 135.

racial diversity rap became popular through its representation of black identity.[64] Rap's audience and its creators were never exclusively black; from rap's first commercially available recordings, rap songs were produced and consumed by a multiracial public.[65] But the genre was marketed, created, and bought by people who understood rap to be the sound of black urban teenage life.[66] The terms of rap's crossover into the mainstream, the conditions of the incorporation of a black genre into the white cultural imaginary that is the mainstream, were contingent on contemporary racial politics as well as historical ideas of cultural difference.[67]

Music in the United States has long been theorized as a repeating cycle of African-American innovation and occasional crossover followed by white appropriation and popularization, and hip hop scholarship has often analyzed rap as another piece of

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[64] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 5.

[65] See Flores, "Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee!," 91; and George, *Hip Hop America*, 80. More generally, David Brackett writes that all African-American music is influenced by its position in a multiracial and multicultural nation. See Brackett, "Black or White?," 171.

[66] Kwame Harrison writes that "despite rap's multiracial fan base, through most of its thirty-year history, an enduring aspect of virtually all authentic hip hop musical performances has been their near complete reliance on black racial identities." Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 28. See also Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 5; Rose, "Hidden Politics," 237; Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*, 150; Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries"; and Fenster, "Understanding and Incorporating Rap." Hip hop's associations with blackness will be discussed in Chapters One and Three.

[67] See Rose, *Black Noise*, 5.

this historical progression.[68] Rap's crossover has typically been evaluated in two ways.[69] African-American artists of all genres who cross over to white audiences are often accused of neglecting their black musical heritage and erasing their racial identity; many hip hop critics similarly decried the "dilution" of rap as it crossed over to wider and whiter audiences.[70] According to these critics, white rappers such as the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice were only the next natural step in rap's crossover into the mainstream, as hip hop—like African-American musical traditions before it—was taken over by white

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[68] For two examples of this progression, see Baraka, *Blues People*, 164; and Phinney, *Souled American*, 18. For critiques of Baraka's cycle of innovation and appropriation, see Ramsey, *Race Music*, 158; and Mackey, "The Changing Same," 361-2. Norman Kelley argues that "[t]he history of black music has been a continuous replay of the uncontested and lucrative expropriation of black cultural forms by whites." Kelley, *R&B*, *Rhythm and Business*, 12. Richard Middleton writes that the commodified music industry uses black musical traditions to revitalize lackluster periods. See Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 69. Gayle Wald disagrees with an essential difference between black and white music, arguing that "Pop" and "Black" music (her quotations and capitalization) share almost all musical qualities and that it is, rather, the music industry that separates these into individual markets. See Wald, "White Soul, Nostalgia, and the Culturally Constructed Text," 144.

[69] Throughout this dissertation, I largely take it as a given that white Americans are willing and interested in consuming black culture at large, and instead am more interested in how that culture is framed and what happens once a white audience is established. Many authors have theorized on why, as Bakari Kitwana puts it, "[w]hite kids love hip hop." Nelson George writes that white listeners find pleasure in rap just as they have in other black popular music; he writes that "it speaks to them in some deep, joyous sense as a sweet memory of childhood fun. In a frenzy of rhymed words, familiar beats, and chanted hooks the suburban crowd drinks, laughs, and tongue kisses with their heads pressed against booming speakers." George, *Hip Hop America*, 75. See also Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*; Tanz, *Other People's Property*; Rose, *Black Noise*; Charnas, *The Big Payback*; Jeffries, *Thug Life*; Chrobak, "The Rhetoric of Appropriation"; and Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*.

[70] See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 146; Jeffries, *Thug Life*; and Rose, "Contracting Rap," 126. In the 1980s, concerns about crossover's musical blackness came to a head as the music industry increasingly directed their African-American artists to cross over to white audiences. For one contemporary example of this, see Whitaker, "Lionel Richie." For a broader historical contextualization, see Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*; Garofalo, "Culture Versus Commerce"; Danielsen, "The Sound of Crossover," 163; and Roberts, "Michael Jackson's Kingdom," 23.

performers.[71] But other scholars and journalists, noting that neither of these artists ushered in a new era of white hip hop, interpret hip hop's crossover as a progressive triumph. Rap, in the words of hip hop journalist and publicist Bill Adler, "reintegrated American culture" by influencing white America to accept the sounds and sights of young African Americans.[72] To these writers, hip hop was unique because it was the first black musical style that didn't assimilate into the white mainstream as it crossed over. According to David Harleston, one-time Def Jam president, rap's crossover was less about rap crossing over to the mainstream than "the pop world coming to us."[73] Rap extended an "invitation to join in the cool" to mainstream audiences while still maintaining its black identity, initiating what marketing guru Steve Stoute describes as "the tanning of America," as white audiences accepted unassimilated, or in certain circles, Afrocentric black culture.[74]

But as hip hop's black identity became commodified, many worried about the effect that white consumers and the white-dominated record industry might have over

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[71] See, for example, Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 210.

[72] Adler, quoted in Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 245.

[73] Harleston, quoted in Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 171.

[74] See Stoute, *The Tanning of America*, xviii. Anthony Kwame Harrison, Craig Watkins, and Todd Boyd make similar points; see Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 28; Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 70–1; and Boyd, *Young*, *Black*, *Rich and Famous*, 15. Nelson George writes that rap "chrystallized a post-civil rights, ultra-urban, unromantic, hyperrealistic, neonationalistic, antiassimilationist, aggressive Afro-centric impulse reflecting the thoughts of city kids more deeply than the celebrated crossover icons." George, *Buppies*, *B-Boys*, *Baps*, *And Bohos*, 93. Reebee Garofalo argues that as rap crossed over, it "became more Afrocentric." Garofalo, "Culture Versus Commerce," 283. The major difference between rock and roll and hip hop's crossover into the mainstream, according to Greg Tate, was the role of African Americans as "arbiters of who is and who is not a legitimate purveyor of hip-hop." See Tate, *Everything But the Burden*, 9.

rap's portrayal of black identity.[75] Michael Jeffries, summarizing these fears, writes that "it is assumed that white male hip-hop fans consume and derive pleasure from racist representations of black masculinity in order to access a desirable, distinctive, and trendy masculine self-concept without regard for the poisonous racial and ethnic politics that enable such consumption."[76] Rap, in these instances, creates a fictional black identity for white audiences to voyeuristically consume without ever encountering an African-American person.[77] Rather than being "a door that swings open between our two cultures," hip hop, as Jason Tanz writes, might be "a revolving door, endlessly spinning, allowing us to pass in opposite directions without ever actually touching."[78]

My focus on commercial radio's programming of rap complicates these understandings of the racial politics of rap's crossover into the mainstream. I contend that the radio industry cultivated and compromised hip hop's transformation of American racial identity, as structural changes within the radio industry both fostered and challenged rap's radical potential.[79] In the late 1980s, a new offshoot of the Top 40 radio

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[75] See Delaney, "Amos 'N Andy in Nikes"; Kylo-Patrick R. Hart, *Mediated Deviance and Social Otherness*; Bynoe, "Money, Power, and Respect," 230; and Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*.

[76] Jeffries, *Thug Life*, 7. For example, a store manager referred to white suburban teenagers who bought N.W.A's album as "T.B.W.A.s [teenage boys with attitude]" and "rebels without a clue." See Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 95.

[77] See Jones, "Crossover Culture: Popular Music and the Politics of 'Race,'" 112; and Ross, "Introduction," 6.

[78] Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 192.

[79] Simon Jones notices the need to examine the structures of commercial crossover; see Jones, "Crossover Culture," 103. Murray Forman's work is one of the more nuanced interpretations of rap's crossover, noting that different historical moments created distinct hurdles for rap to overcome. He writes that it's important to understand rap's crossover as not just crossing over from black to white, but also from a small group of black teens near New York City to a wider geographic black teenage market. See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 151, xv. Despite my focus on white audiences, my work conceptualizes rap's crossover similarly by emphasizing the necessity of

format brought the black sounds and styles of hip hop to the mainstream by assembling and targeting new multiracial publics. By the early 1990s, these stations inspired fragmented and segregated radio programming throughout the industry, which halted the progressive promise of rap's entry into white American culture.

III. Gender

Nelson George classifies hip hop fans into three major categories: white aggressive males, the hip hop intelligentsia, and "kids and girls."[80] The first two types of rap consumers have been explored widely in rap scholarship, which has mostly focused on understanding the relationship between hip hop and its young male audience; the third category of consumer has been almost entirely neglected.[81] When rap's female fans are

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geographically expanding rap's audience via the radio. Mark Anthony Neal also analyzes rap's move to the mainstream as two-sided, writing that hip hop's changing identity "has come to symbolize the utter ambivalence of the black situation; on the one hand, serving up versions of a richly 'black' identity, on the other showing an eagerness to join the American mainstream." Neal, *Soul Babies*, 189. More broadly, Cornel West understands music's potential to change American race relations as ambiguous, writing that "[l]istening to Motown records in the sixties or dancing to hip hop music in the nineties may not lead one to question the sexual myths of black women and men, but when white and black kids buy the same billboard hits and laud the same athletic heroes the result is often a shared cultural space where some human interaction takes place." West, *Race Matters*, 84.

[80] George, *Hip Hop America*, 67.

[81] See Rose, *Black Noise*, 110. Michael Jeffries writes that hip hop's mainstream appeal is defined by the white male distribution and consumption of black male performances. See Jeffries, *Thug Life*, 9. Matt Diehl's chapter on pop-rap, Tricia Rose's work, and T. Deenan Sharpley-Whiting's book about black female audience's relationship with hip hop are almost the only exceptions to this lacuna. See Diehl, "Pop Rap"; Rose, *Black Noise*; and Sharpley-Whiting, *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*. Female rappers, for Rose, play an important political role; they "are carving out a female-dominated space in which black women's sexuality is openly expressed." Rose, *Black Noise*, 170. For more on women rappers, see Guevara, "Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'"; Pough,

acknowledged, these audiences are often characterized as victims who are hurt by hip hop's violent and misogynistic lyrics, anti-Semitic language, and celebration of a largely unequal capitalist and patriarchal system.[82] In one of the few works to focus on what rap can contribute to female audiences' social lives, Kyra Gaunt writes that because rap reutilizes playground songs, women should "recognize signs of their own private play in hip-hop music in addition to hearing it as an expression of black male life."[83]

My dissertation goes a step further, arguing for the central role female audiences played in the development of hip hop aesthetics. Understanding how rap became popular through Top 40 airplay acknowledges the presence and importance of female audiences because Top 40 radio stations highly valued their female listeners, and the music industry specifically targeted women on these stations in order to increase the reach of rap's audience.[84] Paying attention to hip hop's female audience also illuminates how hip hop aesthetics were defined in opposition to these very listeners.[85] Hip hop studies' omission

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Check It While I Wreck It; Pough, "Seeds and Legacies"; Pough, "What It Do, Shorty?"; Pough et al., *Home Girls Make Some Noise!*; Morgan, "Hip-Hop Feminist"; Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile"; and Keyes, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces."

[82] Sharpley-Whiting, *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*; Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*; see also Peoples, "'Under Construction.'"

[83] Gaunt, "Translating Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop," 262.

[84] As I discuss throughout this dissertation, Top 40 radio aimed their musical choices at women; more generally, mass culture is often conceptualized as feminine. See Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman." Pop, as opposed to more serious popular music, is also gendered as female. See Railton, "The Gendered Carnival of Pop." The targeted approach of Top 40 radio and the cultural impressions of pop have led to female listeners' dominance of radio; teenage women in the early 1990s listened to the radio more than men and ranked radio as their primary form of media. See Carroll and Silbergleid, "Meanings of Radio to Teenagers in a Niche-Programming Era." Eric Weisbard writes that radio "offer[s] a female audience a place to rock out," among other roles. Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 233.

[85] Many rappers explicitly made music that defined itself against what the radio might play. Capone-N-Noreaga, for example, stated, "We're like 'Fuck Radio!' We need

of female audiences is not unique to this discipline; popular music studies more broadly also frequently undervalues the tastes and influence of both female performers and female listeners.[86] Norma Coates argues that critics, fans, and performers developed ideas about rock's authenticity in opposition to female audiences and, more generally, feminized mass culture.[87] As rappers and hip hop critics grappled with the growing popularity of the genre in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they similarly defined hip hop's authenticity in opposition to the feminized mainstream, equating hip hop's authenticity with black masculinity.[88]

IV. Politics

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radio, but we're not going to aim for the radio. If the radio play our record, cool, but we're not sitting down in the studio making a record to go on the radio." Quoted in Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 189..

[86] Susan Douglas has written extensively about how critics and academics have scorned female-oriented mass media. See Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*; and Douglas, *Listening In*. See also Fast, "Calling Ellen Willis"; and Warwick, *Girl Groups*, *Girl Culture*. Nicola Dibben and Melanie Lowe, among others, have written about how female listeners construct identity through Top 40 music; see Dibben, "Representations of Femininity in Popular Music"; and Lowe, "Colliding Feminisms." Scholarship about female performers, while not equal to that about male performers, is too numerous to fully note here, but some compelling examples include Brooks, "'This Voice Which Is Not One'"; and Randall, *Dusty!* The media industry largely discounts female audiences; Elizabeth Wollman writes that "men are regularly taken more seriously than are women by mass media industries" and that the media uses "production techniques that depict men as active participants in culture and women as passive objects who have no legitimate role to play, aside from the purpose of pleasing men." Wollman, "Men, Music, and Marketing at Q104.3 (WAXQ-FM New York)," 15, 1.

[87] Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques," 71, 66.

[88] For more on hip hop authenticity, see Jeffries, *Thug Life*; Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*; and Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*.

As noted above, hip hop has long been theorized as political. Some authors derive their work from the lyrical content of rap, which has had some explicit political content since the early 1980s.[89] Others, including Loren Kajikawa and Robert Walser, argue that hip hop's very sound, through its noisiness, is political.[90] Most often, scholars find hip hop's politics in its potential for giving voice to marginalized youth who are often underrepresented in the public sphere; for these scholars, rap represents cultural resistance.[91] Rap, writes Cheryl Keyes, "is much more than dance music. It is a display of cultural values and aesthetics, a vehicle for social control and cohesiveness, a political forum, and more importantly, a phenomenon of consciousness."[92] Tricia Rose similarly claims that rap's politics lie in its ability to speak truth to power, arguing that its "capacity as a form of testimony…has profound potential as a basis for a language of liberation."[93] These theories align hip hop within a longer tradition of African-American counter-hegemonic music; according to Mark Anthony Neal, hip hop's production of "digitized town meetings" resembles the "Black Public Sphere."[94] In one of the more evenhanded renderings of this argument, Alan Light writes that "[h]ip hop is first and foremost a pop

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[89] For example, Jeffrey Decker examines Public Enemy's black nationalism, and notes that not all hip hop shares Public Enemy's politics. See Decker, "The State of Rap." Also see Rose, *Black Noise*; and Nielson, "'My President Is Black, My Lambo's Blue,'" 345-6.

[90] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 51; Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," 197.

[91] Basu, "Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Music Industry in Los Angeles," 20.

[92] Keyes, "At the Crossroads," 243.

[93] Rose, *Black Noise*, 144.

[94] Neal, *What the Music Said*, 161. Cornel West writes that "Afro-American music is first and foremost, though not exclusively or universally, a countercultural practice with deep roots in modes of religious transcendence and political opposition." West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 177. See also Rose, *Black Noise*, 25.

form, seeking to make people dance and laugh and think, to make them listen and feel, and to sell records by doing so." But, he continues, hip hop "by definition has a political content; even when not explicitly issues-oriented, rap is about giving voice to a black community otherwise underrepresented, if not silent, in the mass media."[95] Although Light recognizes hip hop's identity as a commodified art form, he positions rap and its political potential against hegemonic mass culture, an unwieldy and influential villain that hip hop scholars often see as mischaracterizing the style.[96] Appelrouth and Kelley verify this mischaracterization in their survey of mainstream press articles about rap; they find that that mainstream news accounts rarely described rap as a form of social protest.[97]

But hip hop isn't just about protest. As Light notices, it's a complex genre that negotiates between levity and seriousness, between mass market and the underground, and between block parties and political parties.[98] And as Rose writes, "the contexts for

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[95] Light, "About a Salary or Reality?," 143-4. McCrickard takes a similar view, writing that even if rap is commercialized, it can still "[sow] the seeds of more subversive forms." McCrickard, "Fight the Power," 135.

[96] Walter Hart, for example, writes that the "culture industr[y]…acts upon historically negative racial perceptions and reinforces those perceptions by only allowing a one-dimensional version of hip hop music to define the genre as a whole and projects the negative characteristics of one-dimensional hip hop onto the Black community and individual Blacks." Hart, "The Culture Industry, Hip Hop Music, and the White Perspective," 12. Mark Anthony Neal implies as much, noting that it is "despite its intense commodification" that "hip-hop has managed to continuously subvert mass-market limitations by investing in its own philosophical grounding." Neal, *What the Music Said*, 134. See also Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 127, 138.

[97] Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 310.

[98] It's not clear that rappers on the whole were any more educated about national politics and the government than the general public. While some openly and cogently expressed their political opinions, Michael Small and Al Pereira note that in their 1991 interviews with rap stars, responses to "the political system" ranged from "disgust" to "total apathy" to "shocking ignorance" and that "very few [of the rappers interviewed] were familiar with the presidential candidates." They claim that it wasn't until the middle of 1992, when Sistah Souljah started appearing in headlines, that "many rappers began to wake up and think about politics." Small and Pereira, *Break It Down*, 81.

creation in hip hop were never fully outside or in opposition to commodities," meaning that understanding hip hop's politics as oppositional to its commodification denies hip hop political agency.[99] To understand the cultural impact of this genre, it is necessary to be realistic about its commodification and relationship to mass culture. This isn't to say that hip hop can't be political; instead, it requires a shift in conceptualization to a musical politics that is not in opposition to fun, accessible commodification. Hip hop's move to the mainstream changed American racial politics *not* in spite of, but because of, its commodification.

A Brief History of Contemporary Radio Formats

Jarl Ahlkvist and Gene Fisher argue that the role of radio in the production of popular music has been undervalued.[100] Even though the radio industry is not directly responsible for creating music or developing musicians, radio airplay determines the success of songs; conversely, because of the primacy of radio airplay in popularizing songs, the radio directly influences what music companies and artists produce.[101] Furthermore, as Tom McCourt and Eric Rothenbuhler note, "because the recording industry measures the value of particular songs in terms of how much airplay they receive—and the sales that airplay helps stimulate—popular music is, for the most part, designed to meet the needs of the radio industry rather than individual consumers or the

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[99] Rose, *Black Noise*, 40.
[100] Ahlkvist and Fisher, "And the Hits Just Keep on Coming," 303.
[101] Rothenbuhler and McCourt, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music," 309; and Negus, "Plugging and Programming," 66.

culture at large."[102] Ahlkvist understands radio's marketplace particularities as playing a crucial role in determining what music gains popularity; he writes that "studying the cultural significance of popular music texts and their consumption by the public without understanding fully how the formal commercial production process operates results in the obscuring of crucial questions about the role of popular culture in late twentieth century society."[103] Thus in order to understand how radio affected rap's entry into the mainstream, it is necessary to first develop an understanding of how commercial radio worked in the 1980s and 1990s, a story which begins a decade earlier.

In the 1970s, commercial radio stations transitioned from trying to appeal to everyone by playing a little bit of everything to conceptualizing of the American public as discrete demographic segments from which they could select an audience. These stations operated by selling the public's attention to advertisers, who typically wanted to target only a select portion of the general audience. In response to this, radio stations in the 1970s were designed to appeal to a certain segment of the population—defined by age, race, and class—and music stations did this by selecting music that they thought only their desired audience would want to hear.[104] This change didn't come out of a consumer demand to change the radio industry. Instead, a policy change and a new technology

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[102] Rothenbuhler and McCourt, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music," 309.

[103] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 292.

[104] They also attract certain audiences through non-musical material, such DJ patter, prizes, morning shows, community outreach, and even the description of the station. See Baade, "Radio," 313. For evidence of the importance of these non-musical elements in a trade journal, leaf through a copy of *Radio & Records* to see a copious amount of articles not about music programming. The radio industry had long been segmented by race; syndicated programs and later complete stations aimed at African-American audiences had been around since before World War II, and these stations will be discussed later.

inspired radio programmers and advertisers to pay closer attention to the differences between segments of the public. In the 1970s, two major changes took place that gave stations a greater capability and reason to segment their audience: the expansion of FM stations and the development of Arbitron.

The technology for FM stations had existed since the 1930s, but for many years, the FCC allowed AM stations to simulcast in FM frequencies. Simulcasting didn't leave a lot of space for FM-only stations, and so in the 1960s, the FCC banned this duplication and began encouraging new radio stations to broadcast only on FM frequencies.[105] While FM didn't broadcast as far as AM, it was possible to cluster stations more closely on the dial, allowing for more stations in any given area. Small, independent FM stations flourished; between 1964 and 1967, over 500 new stations went on air across the nation.[106] Many of these were progressive rock stations which played long rock songs or albums, unlike AM stations which mostly played short pop singles. Stations like these, which used music to attract a specific segment of the population, quickly became popular. With the invention of audience measuring methods developed by Arbitron, it was possible to more clearly understand the link between musical tastes and demographics.

In the late 1960s, Arbitron began connecting musical taste to purchasing behavior and measuring what radio stations people listened to through diaries in which chosen listeners would describe their listening habits.[107] By using this information to carefully select playlists, radio stations could appeal to only the demographic they wanted.

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[105] Simpson, *Early '70s Radio*, 13.

[106] Ibid. The increase in FM stations also had to do with the expansion of the receiver market; for more on this see Sterling and Keith, *Sounds of Change*, 151.

[107] Simpson, *Early '70s Radio*, 14.

Throughout the 1970s, stations experimented with their music mixes until they settled on a certain style of music that attracted the demographic they desired. As the connections between music and audience coalesced, the radio industry grouped stations that attracted similar demographics into formats, groups of stations that Eric Weisbard writes are "marketing devices" which try to "convince sponsors of the link between a mediated product and its never fully quantifiable audience."[108]

Radio station playlists are composed of songs from musical genres that the radio industry imagines their desired demographic will like.[109] Because the music industry has historically marketed music according to race, in a process that Karl Hagstrom Miller describes as "segregating sound," the demographic slices that commercial music radio uses are almost always divided by race and age.[110] Music is typically marketed towards audiences who match the race of the performer, as the music industry broadly assumes a homology between the race of musicians in a given genre and the people who might listen to that genre.[111] Programmers in the 1970s believed that women tended to like a lighter mix of music than their male peers, so the industry created Adult Contemporary stations for them. In addition, the southern working class had long been understood as the target audience for country music, and with format segmentation, this socioeconomic class could be targeted with their own station. By the end of the 1970s, the radio industry had thoroughly linked the racial and socioeconomic identity of audiences with certain genres of music, creating modern commercial music radio with its Adult Contemporary,

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[108] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 9.
[109] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 54.
[110] Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 2.
[111] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 23.

Rock, Top 40, Urban, Country, and Classical format separations aimed at specific demographics.[112]

The economic particularities of the radio industry influence the music formats play. Radio doesn't sell music; instead its product is the audience's attention, which is sold to advertisers.[113] Advertisers prefer certain audiences because of their spending power, meaning that radio stations cannot appeal to just any demographic. Radio stations aren't interested in appealing to demographics who buy music; instead, they attempt to attract audiences who appeal to advertisers who sell non-music consumer items. Music, for these stations, offers a cheap source of programming material and simplifies the process of audience generation.[114] Most advertisers in the 1980s wanted to advertise to white audiences, who they believed had more disposable income than minority audiences.[115] Similarly, advertisers preferred female adult audiences because they often controlled household budgets.

Top 40 stations, in ideal terms, play the top forty songs in the country, which likely appeal to a broad audience. In the early 1970s, this meant that Top 40 stations were "characterized by an extreme form of eclecticism," as David Brackett notes.[116] But as FM

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[112] See Peterson and Davis Jr., "The Contemporary American Radio Audience," 300–1.

[113] Berland, "Radio Space and Industrial Time," 183. As Lowry Mays of Clear Channel put it, "If anyone said we were in the radio business, it wouldn't be someone from our company.… We're not in the business of providing news and information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers' products." Mays is quoted in Klinenberg, *Fighting for Air*, 63.

[114] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 2.

[115] John Rockwell writes that for radio stations, "'demographics' are a code word for racism." See Rockwell, "Pop View; Hammer and Ice, Rappers Who Rule Pop." Also see Napoli, *Audience Economics*, 106, 112.

[116] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 284.

radio became a more successful industry, programmers at these stations skewed their musical selections to attract more lucrative audiences. By the 1980s, most Top 40 stations wanted to attract white adult females, who were highly valued by companies that advertised on the radio. These stations were often conceptualized as stations for white teens and their mothers—teens gave the stations hipness and energy, and moms paid the bills.[117] Minority audiences were tolerated, but rarely catered to.

Finding a balance between young, hip listeners and older, wealthier ones proved difficult for the Top 40 format throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Top 40 radio in the late 1970s was dominated by disco, which appealed to a certain segment of the public—young, female, gay, and non-white listeners—but was hated by many others, including white male rock fans.[118] In the summer of 1979, Chicago DJ Steve Dahl organized a demolition party for listeners' disco records between doubleheader White Sox games at Chicago's Comiskey Park. This event proved to be far more popular than even Dahl suspected, and Top 40 programmers immediately reacted to this overt hatred of disco, as well as falling revenues at their stations, by playing less disco and more rock.[119] This programming change wasn't sustainable, however, because advertisers were not interested in the teenage male demographic who were associated with rock. In order

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[117] See Alan Burns, "Maturing Generation Seeks New Formats," *Radio & Records*, March 29, 1991, 24.

[118] Alice Echols notes the race-based nature of disco haters, citing a group formed by Detroit DJs called the Disco Ducks Klan, and writing that "the backlash against disco reflected anger and frustration with America's changing sexual and racial rules." See Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 205, 209.

[119] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 181. Steve Greenberg writes that "while in a typical week in the first half of 1979 nearly 50 percent of the records on *Billboard*'s pop singles chart could also be found on the R&B chart, by the first half of 1980 that number had dropped to twenty-one percent, and by the end of 1982 the crossover percentage was at a rock-era low of seventeen percent." See Greenberg, "Sugar Hill Records," 23.

to attract older listeners, Top 40 radio turned to a softer mix, which pleased advertisers but drove away one of Top 40's major potential audiences, teens.[120] Mike Joseph, programmer in Hartford, CT, devised a more balanced mix in the early 1980s, Hot Hits, which revitalized the format. This teen-friendly programming shortened the playlist to only the top 30 songs, regardless of genre, with very few oldies thrown in.[121]

In the mid-1980s, *Billboard* expected Top 40 stations to play all of the songs in the upper reaches of its "Hot 100" chart without omitting or adding too many songs from any genre, and most industry members agreed that musical diversity was the lifeblood of a Top 40 station.[122] Programmers preferred songs from the "Hot 100" which appealed widely, or "horizontally," in the words of radio consultant Lee Abrams.[123] A certain disposition was also an essential component of Top 40 programming; Nationwide Communications President Steve Berger wrote that Top 40 promoted an attitude of "I am hip, you are hip, our friends are hip. The world is hip."[124] Other programmers agreed that the format needed to have a trendy vibe and that listeners wanted to feel on top of the latest music, regardless of age.[125]

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[120] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 181.

[121] See Joel Denver, "The Way It Was," *Radio & Records*, October 7, 1988, 58.

[122] See ibid. and Joel Denver, "Shining Up the Crystal Ball," *Radio & Records*, January 11, 1991, 52.

[123] Eddy, *Rock and Roll Always Forgets*, 297.

[124] John Parikhal, "The Heart of the Format," *Radio & Records*, July 20, 1990, 30.

[125] See ibid. and Joel Denver, "CHR: Still on Course," *Radio & Records*, April 29, 1988, 24. Because of their interest in being plugged in to current lifestyle trends, Top 40 stations often had a reputation for having a very young audience; however, in 1988, Soundata reported that Top 40 audiences proved to be older than this assumption, as almost a quarter of 21-24-year-olds and around a sixth of those aged 25-44 listened to CHR stations. See Mike Shalett, "CHR and AOR's Role Reversal," *Radio & Records*, October 21, 1988, 34.

Within the stylistic constraints of their formats, radio programmers choose music to play on their stations based on a variety of factors. Payola, or pay-for-play, has long been standard in the radio industry, but beyond this, the music that stations tend to play has either been promoted to them by record companies, written about in trade magazines, or played on other stations in the format or by trustworthy programmers in other formats.[126] Trade magazines, and charts within these magazines, offer space for programmers to consolidate resources, compare programming decisions, and reduce the number of possible song choices.[127] Because programmers often make choices based on trade magazine reports of what is already being programmed at other stations, airplay begets more airplay.[128] Typically, songs start on smaller market stations and move to larger market stations because smaller market stations have less to lose if they play a song which their audience doesn't like, although in the late 1980s, stations developing new subformats in urban areas also wielded considerable influence.[129] Radio programmers are conservative about their programming choices; an industry dictum states that "you can't get hurt for what you don't play."[130] Because radio is not interested in selling music, programmers at radio stations are often not particularly well versed or even interested in

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[126] According to longtime DJ Casey Casem, "One station was infamous for having *every single* record in the Top 40 that they listed on their playlist every week paid for. No matter who it was, if you wanted to be listed at number 1, you paid for it." See Durkee, *American Top 40*, 25.

[127] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 67.

[128] See Denisoff, *Tarnished Gold*, 263; and Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 309.

[129] See Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 99. These new subformats will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

[130] See, for example, Kim Freeman, "Gavin Panelists Debate Urban Label," *Billboard*, February 27, 1988, 10. Mark Percival writes that record companies were aware of the conservative nature of radio, and argues that the job of song pluggers hired by record companies is "to know in advance what radio stations are going to say and what they'll be scared off by." See Percival, "Music Radio and the Record Industry," 469.

the music the station they work for plays. One programmer bragged about his ability to easily program a variety of formats, saying that "once you establish yourself in how to program you can employ certain philosophies and get away with it everywhere…. The strategies are more important [than the musical knowledge], they really are!"[131]

The Significance of Radio

Despite the almost mechanical nature and conservative style of radio programming and some programmers' lack of musical knowledge about the music they play, radio has remained one of the most consumed forms of media for most of the last century.[132] In the 1990s, even with increasing competition from video games, music television, and other forms of media, well over ninety percent of the American public listened to the radio daily.[133] The amount of time Americans spend listening to the radio has decreased since the 1990s, at a rate of around two percent per year.[134] But even with this decline, radio is still very popular; Arbitron calculated that ninety percent of the population of the United States listened to the radio weekly in the spring of 2012.[135]

Jarl Ahlkvist argues that radio is a producer of culture, rather than simply a disseminator or gatekeeper, because radio creates new cultural products by combining

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[131] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 349.

[132] Ahlkvist writes that "programmers also consistently emphasize that, for most listeners, regardless of their musical sophistication, radio is a very low priority. Even music-oriented programmers acknowledge that for most of their listeners, radio music is background noise." See Ibid., 153.

[133] Shane, "Modern Radio Formats," 9.

[134] Rossman, *Climbing the Charts*, 9.

[135] Arbitron, "Network Radio Today: 2013 Executive Summary," 3.

music into sellable formats. Radio stations do more than just transmit; they are "involved in constructing the parameters of the culture," setting the boundaries of American popular music.[136] The Top 40 format, at its most ideal, sounds the American musical mainstream because it plays all of the most popular songs. It constructs normalcy and broadcasts a consensus of what music mainstream Americans like. The music that crosses over onto Top 40 from other formats is able to do so because it is close enough to the sound of the mainstream or because it disrupts the mainstream enough to shift the mainstream to include it. Radio programming thus illuminates, as Eric Weisbard argues, how American culture assimilates diverse viewpoints and normalizes upstart political and social movements.[137]

Formats, Weisbard contends, "[do] not just sell music—they normaliz[e] it." They "[do] not just sell products—they tou[t] categories of consumers."[138] In disseminating packaged collections of normalized songs to gain a certain type of listener, radio coalesces individual listeners into groups of consumers. Some scholars interpret radio's transmission of music as candidly sounding the voices of a community because it can provide communities with a space for local news, music, pressing concerns, and political

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[136] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 47.

[137] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 3.

[138] Ibid., 2. Weisbard is ultimately concerned with thinking about formats as an alternative to understanding music in relationship to genre as a way to get around the tricky issues of authenticity and genre construction. He writes that formats "can't be accused of corrupt commodification, since it is only through commercial processes that they achieve viability." See Ibid., 25. I'm not as interested in the difference between genre and format, and hope to elaborate, in further work, how formats grew even closer to genres in the late 1990s. In regards to authenticity, my dissertation argues that radio formatting brings up questions of authenticity because authenticity is only conceivable against its antithesis, which often the mainstream.

discussions.[139] John Hartley, likely riffing off Benedict Anderson, argues that radio in the 1920s created an "imagined community" of listeners as everyone listened to the same sounds at the same time.[140] His conception of radio, which stresses the agency of broadcasters and listeners, is overly idealistic for the media economy of the late twentieth century, especially considering how large of a role radio station and record company influence plays in the creation of contemporary commercial radio formats.[141] I interpret radio less idealistically, building off of Greil Marcus's description of listening to the radio; he writes, "We fight our way through the massed and leveled collective safe taste of the Top 40, just looking for a little something we can call our own. But when we find it and jam the radio to hear it again it isn't just ours—it is a link to thousands of others who are sharing it with us."[142] Radio links listeners to others, but it is a persistently mediated link, one which values corporate profits and musical conservatism.

Formatting Race on Commercial Radio

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[139] "Radio for the Next Millennium."

[140] Hartley, "Radiocracy," 153. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. Kelly Askew, not writing about radio but instead about musical performance, writes that the dissemination of music which contains "multiple and often contradictory layers and fragments of ideology" throughout a space fosters an imagined political community that creates "continually shifting conceptions of [a] given nation." Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 273.

[141] However, authors who write about corporate media consolidation in the late 1990s use similarly grandiose language to describe how radio's potential for creating an imagined community can go wrong. Take, for example, Ronald Bettig and Jeanne Lynn Hall, who describe media consolidation as "inhibit[ing] citizens' ability to imagine alternative realities." They continue, writing that "Big Media" "impeded the very concept that new forms of existence are possible—a concept that would enable the full development of human potential." See Bettig and Hall, *Big Media*, *Big Money*, 280.

[142] Street, *Rebel Rock*, 186.

In this dissertation, I examine how radio formatting, the production of a musical package which creates this "link with thousands of others," affects American racial identity. Historically, radio has acted as a sonic form of racial representation. William Barlow writes that since the 1940s, the Urban radio format has acted as a means of communication and community-building in black neighborhoods, "constructing and sustaining an African-American public sphere."[143] In the 1960s, Urban radio was important to the civil rights struggle because it inspired protesters with music and relayed important information to African-American communities.[144] This format expanded throughout the twentieth century; by 1985, eight percent of all radio stations were aimed at African-American audiences.[145]

Ownership of these stations has varied considerably. Cathy Hughes, founder of Radio One Incorporated, the largest black-oriented communications company in the country, stresses the importance of black ownership of black-oriented stations. Ownership not only financially benefits local black communities, but also gives these communities freedom to interpret and express what is important to them. To Hughes, ownership can make "the difference between life and death…between slavery and liberation."[146] The first black-owned radio station, WERD in Atlanta, started broadcasting in 1949.[147] Calls

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[143] Barlow, *Voice Over*, xi. He also characterizes Urban radio as "the 'talking drums' of their respective communities." See Ibid., 294. This format wasn't called Urban until the 1980s; I use this term to describe all African-American-oriented stations for the sake of consistency throughout the dissertation.

[144] Martin Luther King, Jr.. for example, thanks radio announcers in his keynote to the NARTA convention, Atlanta, Sept. 28, 1967. He is quoted in Barlow, *Voice Over*, 195. Also see Shonekan, *Soul*, *Country*, *and the USA*, 62.

[145] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 64.

[146] Hughes is quoted in Webb, "Black Radio: Telling It Like It Was," Episode 8. Also see Ofori, *Blackout?*, ix.

[147] Barlow, *Voice Over*, 136.

for black economic self-sufficiency during the civil rights movement and increasing capital in black communities allowed many black entrepreneurs to purchase radio stations during the 1970s; in 1970, there were only twenty black-owned radio stations nationwide, but ten years later that number had risen to 140.[148] In 1978, the FCC made it easier for minorities to acquire radio stations by authorizing loans to prospective minority owners and made sales to minorities more desirable by offering sellers tax credits. The number of black-owned stations continued to rise until 1991, when there were 181 black-owned stations.[149] Entrepreneurs such as Hughes expanded beyond individual station ownership, creating broadcasting networks which produced news segments and talk shows which Urban stations could purchase, providing national black-oriented programming at a low cost to stations.

Urban station playlists varied quite considerably. Selecting a mix of music from what Ernest Hakanen calls the "super genre" of black music, including the music on *Billboard*'s "Hot Black Singles" chart, Urban stations were often more free-form than other formats.[150] In the mid-1980s, most Urban stations were designed to attract African-American listeners of all ages by playing songs that they thought would appeal to this general audience, meaning that most of these stations played contemporary R&B, funk, and some older soul. Some stations leaned closer to the Quiet Storm subformat, which gained popularity in the mid-1970s, especially with the black middle class. This format, which played softer R&B and jazz and excluded grittier sounds, silenced what Mark

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[148] Ibid., 249. Most of these stations only had a single owner, which Jannette Dates and William Barlow note "indicates the small-business dimension of the operations." See Dates and Barlow, *Split Image*, 231.

[149] Barlow, *Voice Over*, 262.

[150] Hakanen, "Counting Down to Number One," 108.

Anthony Neal describes as the "sonic rumblings of an urban underclass."[151] More diverse Urban stations often played Quiet Storm-influenced shows at night because this music attracted older and more desirable demographics.

Black music, writes Barry Shank, can be a "crucial site for the articulation of blackness – that is, for negotiating the meaning of belonging to the black community."[152] Anthony Kwame Harrison and Craig E. Arthur argue similarly that commodified music is a "key site" for discussions about black identity.[153] Urban stations' programming of black music, along with their emphasis on community involvement and political engagement, created African-American spaces on the airwaves where black identity could be expressed and performed. Their interest in building community distinguished Urban stations from Top 40 and other formats, whose political aims were less overt.[154]

But all formats, not just the community-oriented Urban format, sound racial identity, as the music on these stations sounds signifiers linked to racial identity.[155] Music neither projects or reflects an essential racial character. Instead, the interaction between a piece of music and its position in the music industry, its relationship with the media, and

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[151] Neal, "Postindustrial Soul," 363.

[152] Shank, "From Rice to Ice: The Face of Race in Rock and Pop," 263.

[153] Harrison and Arthur, "Reading Billboard 1979–89," 319. Todd Fraley writes similarly that "popular culture and media are implicated in the social construction of race by providing texts reinforcing and maintaining essentialized notions of Blackness and Whiteness, and hip hop is central to this process." See Fraley, "I Got a Natural Skill...: Hip-Hop, Authenticity, and Whiteness," 371.

[154] Jason Tanz writes that Urban stations' open commitment to their communities distinguished them from white stations, even if the stations had similar playlists. See Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 95. Also see Walt Love, "UC Radio: More than Just Music," *Radio & Records*, March 11, 1988, 50; and Shonekan, *Soul*, *Country*, *and the USA*, 61–2.

[155] Herman Gray writes that popular music is one of the "cultural battlegrounds where important struggles were waged in and over the sign of blackness." See Gray, *Watching Race*, 35.

its audible identification with genre locates it in the unpredictable and fluid terrain of racial identity. Race, thus, is audible; country music scholar Geoff Mann claims that "there is little in contemporary American popular culture more 'obvious' than the 'colour' of music."[156] Listening to these sounds can contribute to identity formation and what Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman term one's "racial imagination."[157] Popular music can serve as a point of contact between cultures. Josh Kun writes that music creates "audiotopias," which he describes as "sonic spaces of effective utopian longing" where listeners are invited to experience difference, encouraged to embody that difference, and prompted to respond to that experience.[158] Popular music and race, for Kun, are inseparable, as they "have always been experienced not alongside each other, not as complements, supplements, or corollaries of each other, but through each other."[159]

Radio gives listeners a chance to experience the music and identity of an other without having to encounter that other. Susan Douglas writes that radio is a "trapdoor" through which "whites could partake of the spirit of black culture without being forced to

[156] Mann, "Why Does Country Music Sound White?," 77.

[157] Radano and Bohlman, *Music and the Racial Imagination*, 5.

[158] Kun, *Audiotopia*, 23. I find Kun's language a little too idealistic to describe how listeners negotiate identity via radio listening, considering the influential role of the radio industry in controlling content. Other authors describe the work that popular music does similarly; Dave Hickey writes that music creates a "momentary acoustic community," Guthrie Ramsey writes that popular music provides "resources for experiments with self-making [or self-imagining] in all sorts of societies for all sorts of persons," and Ray Pratt describes music as a "utopian [prefiguration]" that allows listeners to envision the society in which they want to live. See Hickey, *Air Guitar*, 81; Ramsey, *Race Music*, 77; Pratt, *Rhythm and Resistance*, 36. Also see Frith, "The Popular Music Industry," 38.

[159] Kun, *Audiotopia*, 26. Gilbert Rodman argues that thinking about race is necessary to understand any form of American popular music. See Rodman, "Race. .. and Other Four Letter Words," 107.

witness or experience its deprecations and injustices."[160] But radio is more than just an opportunity for individual experience; it expresses the boundaries of American racial identity. Music choice vaguely reflects individual sentiment and identity experimentation. Radio station playlists are much more forceful expressions of sentiment, albeit not directly of the individuals listening to the music, as individual listeners are not part of the economic model of radio.[161] Alone, playlists reflect the anxieties of the industries that control each station; together as formats, they not only reflect the ideologies of the music industry and the national community of radio professionals, they also influence individual audience members to conceptualize themselves as a member of a given public.

Listeners are active members in this rendering. Jennifer Lena contends that listeners sense genres while hearing music and by selecting certain genres, they in turn choose communities to associate themselves with.[162] By listening to a certain radio station, listeners affiliate themselves with other people who listen to the station; the radio industry indeed relies on the assumption that "radio listeners have internalized the format and music genre distinctions presented to them by radio."[163] Audiences, through listening, create a segment of the population that the radio station can either accommodate or reject

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[160] Douglas, *Listening In*, 18. Patricia Hill Collins writes more generally that "under conditions of racial segregation, mass media provides a way that racial difference can safely enter racially segregated private spaces of living rooms and bedrooms." Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 29; bell hooks writes similarly that mass culture has made the pleasure of partaking in difference both facile and conspicuous. See hooks, *Black Looks*, 21.

[161] Napoli, *Audience Economics*, 22. Kate Lacey notes, importantly, that listeners have choices; they can always just change the channel; this means there is not a one-to-one correlation between music choice and an affect on an individual listener. See Lacey, "Listening in the Digital Age," 18.

[162] Lena, "Social Context and Musical Content of Rap Music, 1979-1995," 481.

[163] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 309.

through the music the station chooses to play. In doing so, radio formats recognize chosen communities and ideal publics.

The Top 40 format models who belongs within the mainstream and who doesn't, creating a "centering [guide]" as Eric Weisbard describes it, that normalizes certain identities.[164] The ever-changing framework that delimits the possibility of Top 40 airplay depicts how corporate America envisions their audience, and the buying and listening habits of this audience displays their interactions with these mass-produced identities.[165] Michael Omi and Howard Winant write that racial categories are created through "historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized," projects that through repetition and reproduction later become ways of making sense of people in the world.[166] Radio formats are one such racial project. By linking racialized audiences to styles of music, radio formats create what Omi and Winant describe as a "racial common sense" for understanding who listens to what.[167] Historically, this has meant that African Americans listen to the music that the

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[164] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 20. David Brackett writes that charts, which are directly correlated to possible airplay, "[create] a representation of what is popular and what is not, what is mainstream and what is marginal, while helping to maintain American's illusions about its society and participating in the process that funnels the products of musicians' labor in ever the same direction." See Brackett, "The Politics and Practice of 'Crossover' in American Popular Music, 1963 to 1965," 793.

[165] Ahlkvist makes a similar point, writing that "In this sense, radio is the ideal object of study if one wants to understand the interaction between the audiences for and the mass producers of popular music because radio provides the mediating framework through which recorded music is disseminated to the various audience segments defined by radio programmers and advertisers in local market. Not only does radio make something new out of what the record industry produces, but the outcome is a cultural product upon which the recording industry depends for its continued mass production of 'marginally differentiated' musical commodities." See Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 45.

[166] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 56.

[167] Ibid., 60.

culture industry understands as sounding their blackness, that which is played on Urban stations. Top 40 stations, despite playing some of the same music, are defined by their non-blackness. The incorporation of hip hop onto Top 40 radio stations, the mainstream of American commercial music, displays the record and radio industries' changing attitudes about the racial identity of this music and the mainstream—it is a vivid depiction of, as Greil Marcus writes, "what it is that diverse people can authentically share."[168] By examining playlists, song popularity charts, first-hand accounts of programming decisions by Top 40 radio personnel, and articles from radio trade journals *Billboard* and *Radio & Records* which summarize contemporary issues among radio programmers, my work narrates and critiques the shifting parameters of rap's acceptance on Top 40 radio.[169] It details, as Jason Tanz writes, "our transgressive fantasies against

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[168] See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 9; and Marcus, *Mystery Train*, 113.

[169] Throughout this dissertation, I assume that the presence of a song on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" indicates Top 40 airplay. For the time period this dissertation covers, especially before the incorporation of SoundScan and BDS data in late 1991, this is a relatively accurate assumption because sales and airplay weren't measured as absolute quantities. One example of how a song with relatively no airplay charted before SoundScan/BDS is Metallica's "Enter Sandman"; Michael Ellis reported in August 1991 that the song entered the "Hot 100" at #47 with 99% of its points coming from sales. The song was #5 in the SoundScan sales chart that week. After SoundScan/BDS, it was possible but rare to chart on the "Hot 100" on sales alone, although this became more common as the decade wore on. The first song I have found which charted on sales alone was Billy Ray Cyrus's "Achy Breaky Heart" in May 1992. When a song charted on sales or airplay alone, it was often mentioned in the "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight" column in *Billboard.* In 1993, Michael Ellis quantified how well a song could do with just airplay, writing in response to a letter to the editor that "A song that receives virtually no top 40 airplay cannot top the Hot 100; however, a record that reaches the top five on either the sales or airplay chart alone will usually amass enough points to be top 20 on the overall Hot 100 chart." See Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, August 24, 1991, 69; Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, May 9, 1992, 88; and Michael Ellis in Mark Dobson, "Hot 100 Part Two," *Billboard*, March 27, 1993, 6.

our plodding realities," telling us "just who, and in this case how black, we allow ourselves to be."[170]

Track Listing: Chapter Summary

In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I examine how Top 40 radio facilitated the exponential growth in rap's popularity during the late 1980s. While in 1986, radio stations were hesitant to play rap, by 1991 songs with rapped vocals made up over a fifth of all songs played on Top 40 radio. My first chapter analyzes the rap played on Top 40 radio between 1986 and 1991 to determine what musical techniques made rap songs likely to obtain Top 40 airplay. In the late 1980s, Top 40 radio programmers and music executives were hesitant to wholeheartedly promote rap for fear of alienating listeners. Instead, they eased their audience into this new sound by playing songs which incorporated elements of rap into the sound of pop. In this chapter, I combine close musical analysis of individual songs with commentary from musicians and radio programmers, arguing that new jack swing and pop rap artists such as Bobby Brown, Milli Vanilli, and Vanilla Ice combined rap aesthetics with various musical styles already played on Top 40 radio stations, creating an easy-to-program style of music that was hip enough to excite younger audiences and familiar enough to not offend older listeners.

In many ways, rap's successful move to Top 40 radio adheres to a common pattern of crossover in which African-American musical innovation is followed by white acceptance and appropriation. Black music that crosses over to white audiences has

[170] Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 78.

historically been both criticized for pandering to white tastes and celebrated for fostering a multiracial audience. In Chapter Two, I argue that structural changes in the radio industry in the late 1980s complicated the racial politics of rap's crossover. Beginning in 1986, a new type of Top 40 subformat, the Crossover station, found success across the country. Using primary sources from radio trade journals, I construct a history of Crossover stations and evaluate the influence these stations had on rap's crossover into the mainstream. By playing more rap than any other major format and inspiring standard Top 40 stations to incorporate rap songs onto their playlists, Crossover stations substantially supported the growth of this genre. These stations also fundamentally changed the way in which rap and other music by African-American performers crossed over, as these white owned-and-operated stations aimed at multicultural audiences became the new gatekeepers for black music on Top 40 stations.

In the second half of this dissertation, I assess subsequent negative reactions to rap's move to the mainstream. Chapter Three investigates how the new, rap-friendly Crossover format inspired further fragmentation in the radio industry. Immediately after admitting rap onto their playlists, Top 40 stations experienced a mass exodus of listeners. Between 1989 and 1993, over a third of Top 40's audience left for other stations, and, in response, half of all Top 40 stations switched formats. Programmers blamed a number of factors for Top 40's rapid decline, but at the top of their list was a growing fear that Top 40 listeners had grown weary of hip hop and switched to other stations which did not play the genre. Scrambling to keep listeners, many Top 40 stations eliminated rap from their playlists. This intentional excision of rap, based on programmers' beliefs that their audience disliked rap's associations with urban black youth culture, segregated Top 40's

airwaves. This audience segmentation mirrored contemporaneous efforts by politicians, television stations, and community planners to separate white middle-class consumers from poor, urban African Americans.

My fourth chapter explores how the hip hop community constructed standards of authenticity for hip hop in the early 1990s. At the same time that listeners were tuning out from the rap on Top 40 stations, many rappers, critics, and academics also tried to disassociate from the very same style of rap. Grappling with the mainstream acceptance of what had once been an underground art form, the hip hop community created and enforced a dichotomy between pop-influenced rap and authentic rap and between pop-influenced rappers and authentic creators of hip hop culture. I argue that in distinguishing between the real and the fake, rappers and critics defined hip hop authenticity against the sound of rap on Top 40 radio and against the identity of these audiences. This debate reached its zenith just as the field of hip hop studies emerged, and scholars in this field also contributed to rap's investment in this particular form of authenticity.

To conclude, I consider the historical ramifications of rap's move towards pop. Radio hits have continued mixing the sonic elements of rap and pop, creating pop-influenced rap as well as rap-influenced pop. By finding music that could fit on Top 40 radio, by mixing rap's new sound with more traditional sounds, by turning rap into pop and pop into rap, hip hop took over America.

Outtakes

In this dissertation, I neglect two important changes in the radio industry: the consolidation of radio station ownership that began in 1992 and the introduction of Broadcast Data Systems (BDS) and SoundScan monitoring airplay and sales data into *Billboard*'s charts in 1991. In August 1992, the FCC raised the radio station ownership limits from twelve AM and twelve FM stations to eighteen of each in response to the radio industry's financial troubles in the early 1990s.[171] This change, which increased the appeal of radio stations to outside investors, is part of a longer story whose effect on radio programming accelerated dramatically in 1996, when the United States Congress passed the Telecommunications Act.[172] This bill, which eliminated the cap on how many radio stations a single company could own, so thoroughly altered the structure of the radio industry that a full examination of these changes is outside of the scope of this project.[173] While not discussed in this dissertation, my preliminary research has shown that ownership consolidation intensified the narrowcasting which is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

The omission of SoundScan and BDS in my work departs from other histories of this era, which emphasize the importance of *Billboard*'s June 1991 switch to SoundScan-

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[171] Phyllis Stark, "FCC Ownership-Rule Changes Are Seen as Good News by Most, A Bad Move by Some," *Billboard*, August 22, 1992, 68, 71.

[172] Bill Holland, "Telecommunications Act Signed," *Billboard*, February 17, 1996, 6, 107.

[173] For more on the effects of the Telecommunications Act, see DiCola and Thomson, "Radio Deregulation: Has It Served Musicians and Citizens?"; Arnold, "The Effects of Media Consolidation on Urban Radio"; Bates and Chambers, "The Economic Basis for Radio Deregulation"; Ofori, *Blackout?*; Foege, *Right of the Dial*; Huntemann, "Corporate Interference"; Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*; Sauls and Greer, "Radio and Localism: Has the FCC Dropped the Ball?"; and Saffran, "Effects of Local-Market Radio Ownership Concentration on Radio Localism, the Public Interest, and Listener Opinions and Use of Local Radio."

measured piece counts on their album chart to the rap music industry. Jeff Chang writes that SoundScan, which tracked records sales more accurately than previous reporting systems by measuring barcode scans at records stores, "shocked the music industry," because albums from niche genres did well on the updated chart.[174] The most surprising moment occurred, as David Samuels put it, when "America awoke on June 22, 1991, to find that its favorite record was not *Out of Time*, by aging college-boy rockers R.E.M.," but N.W.A's *Efil4Zaggin,* "a musical celebration of gang rape and other violence."[175] But while John P. Kellogg presents several compelling anecdotes of how SoundScan changed the record industry's opinions about the American music market and David Brackett and Philip Napoli have convincingly argued for the importance of what is on the *Billboard* charts, it's not clear from radio trade journals that SoundScan had the same effect on radio programming, and particularly on Top 40 programming, as it had on the record industry.[176] This is likely the case for five major reasons. First, Top 40 stations play singles, not albums, meaning that N.W.A's album reaching number one on the album chart wouldn't directly affect radio airplay, especially since their record company hadn't

[174] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 416.

[175] Samuels, "The Rap on Rap," 147.

[176] See Brackett, "The Politics and Practice of 'Crossover' in American Popular Music, 1963 to 1965," 792; Napoli, *Audience Economics*, 94; and Kellogg, "The Urbanization of the Billboard Top Album and Singles Charts," 51–2. Ogg argues that while gangsta rap benefitted from SoundScan's incorporation, pop rap, the style that was played on the radio, did not. See Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 149. Sernoe writes that likely SoundScan's affect on country's role in the music industry is larger than that for rap, which was already displaying broad appeal before SoundScan was incorporated. See Sernoe, "'Now We're on the Top, Top of the Pops,'" 658. However, Chris Molanphy has claimed that "It's inarguable that SoundScan made it much clearer to the industry that hip-hop was not a fad and that it was worthy of major label promotion." See Molanphy in "Charting the Charts."

promoted a single to radio by the time the album reached number one.[177] Second, when *Billboard* incorporated SoundScan measurements into the singles chart, the "Hot 100," they changed the measurement systems for both of the components that determined chart position, sales and airplay. In late 1991, they introduced BDS, which used computerized monitoring to determine precisely what songs a radio station played, and SoundScan measurements at once.[178] For many radio programmers the BDS change was closer to home, as their exact airplay, rather than their generally inaccurate previous reports via the telephone, now factored into chart.[179] Third, programmers were already aware of the disparity between airplay and sales of rap music that SoundScan showed; it was one they had been contributing to and struggling with for the past few years.[180] Fourth, *Billboard* understood that the incorporation of BDS and SoundScan data would significantly change the charts, and presented movement on the charts before, during, and after the changes in an extremely clear and transparent manner, which made the changes seem less drastic regardless of their consequence.[181] Finally, *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" changed

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[177] Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, June 22, 1991, 8.

[178] Tom McCourt and Eric Rothenbuhler write that this change did affect the "Hot 100," but it was extremely well documented and thoughtfully analyzed by *Billboard* staff as to avoid any confusion. See McCourt and Rothenbuhler, "SoundScan and the Consolidation of Control in the Popular Music Industry," 207.

[179] Chris Morris and Eric Boehlert, "BDS: The Real Thing," *Billboard*, June 19, 1993, 1, 89.

[180] See, for example, Sean Ross and Ken Terry, "Labels Praise Rockin' Top 40s," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 1. The disparity was also already visible in *Billboard*, as the magazine published various charts comparing charts and airplay, and often discussed the difference between how songs did on each of these charts. See, for example, Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Spotlight," *Billboard*, November 16, 1991, 90.

[181] See, for example, Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, June 1, 1991, 10; Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Spotlight," *Billboard*, September 14, 1991, 93; Geoff Mayfield, "New POS Charts: Everything You Wanted to Know," *Billboard*, January 11, 1992, 1, 78.

methodology almost six months after the album chart, lessening the shock such a change might have caused.[182]

[182] *Billboard* changed "The Billboard 200" to using SoundScan piece-count measurements on May 25, 1991. The "Hot 100" didn't transition to the new system until November 30, 1991. See "Monitored Airplay, Piece Counts Now Used to Track Hot 100," *Billboard*, November 30, 1991, 5, 79; and "Billboard Debuts Piece Counts on Two Music Sales Charts," *Billboard*, May 25, 1991, 1, 77.

Chapter One: Rap Becomes Pop

The final scene in *Rappin'*, one of two 1985 sequels to the 1984 box office smash about breakdancing *Breakin',* begins with Rappin' John Hood, the male lead, and his mighty crew rapping as they walk down the street, celebrating their recent success at driving several nefarious characters out of the neighborhood. In this scene, rapping is a flexible musical technique that is accessible to all, regardless of the rapper's identity. Following a verse in which each member of the crew rather poorly lays down rhymes about how their non-violent and considerate actions successfully drove out predatory businesses and brought the neighborhood together, Hood encounters his white nemesis, Duane. Throughout the movie, Hood and the violent yet handsome Duane have been at odds because Hood courteously won the heart of Duane's ex-girlfriend. As the backing track transitions from a synthesizer-heavy electro/R&B beat to one dominated by the twangy sounds of a banjo, Duane begins rapping:

> I may not rap, I may not rhyme
> But I got something to say this time.
> Hood, you're okay, Hood, you're alright
> So let's choose words instead of fists to fight.
> Now you're as cool as cool as cool can be,
> But you're still only half as cool as me.[1]

Duane erupts into laughter, walking away, and the music continues to morph as Hood walks down the street to encounter various members of his multiracial community: his African-American adversary raps a couple lines backed by a jazzy trumpet, the Jewish baker raps along to an approximation of a klezmer clarinet melody, and the Greek,

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[1] Silberg, *Rappin'*.

Roman, and Chinese shopkeepers all rap along to sounds that stereotypically and crudely reference their cultural backgrounds. Hip hop's sound here is malleable: each member of the community can integrate the sound of rapping into the clichéd musical characterization of their ethnic or racial identities. They can mix rapping with the music that their rather painfully stereotyped identities feel comfortable with. And rapping, like Duane makes clear, is accessible to all; even though he claims to neither rap nor rhyme, he is free to participate in the genre. The scene ends with a record label representative signing Hood, demonstrating the growing sense within the music industry that rap, which had experienced its first taste of commercial success only six years earlier, was a genre worth investing in. Throughout the early 1980s, rap grew in popularity; as independent record labels tried their luck with the new genre, the sounds of hip hop spread across the country.[2]

Rap's relationship to *radio*, however, was less straightforward, as Top 40 radio stations were hesitant to embrace the genre. Stations of all formats in the mid-1980s approached rap with a combination of trepidation and confusion. Top 40 programmers, in particular, were reluctant to play this music not only because it sounded considerably different than the lush guitar- and synthesizer-based music that their stations played for much of the early 1980s, but also because station managers were worried about possible negative advertiser and listener responses based on rap's associations with urban black male youths.[3] Nonetheless, throughout the late 1980s, an increasing number of rap artists

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[2] See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 65–105.

[3] Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, "Rap Rates with Adults, Say Radio, Retail," *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 1, 91.

made their way onto Top 40 radio such that by 1991, over a fifth of all songs played on Top 40 radio had some kind of rapped vocals in them.[4]

In this chapter, I examine the hip hop that was played on Top 40 radio stations between 1986 and 1991 and analyze the musical techniques hip hop artists used to make their songs easier to play on Top 40 stations. Rap artists made it onto these stations by creating music that downplayed the distinctive musical features of rap and conformed to the musical sound of pop.[5] During these years, rap became a part of the Top 40 sound by mixing its sonic elements with the sound of other genres more commonly played on the radio; specifically, rap songs made it onto radio stations by employing three crossover techniques: mixing rap with rock, with slow pop, and with R&B. Like the final scene in *Rappin'*, the rap played on Top 40 stations transparently showed Top 40 listeners that hip hop was not alien to their tastes, but instead was a musical technique that could be combined with the music they were already listening to. These rap songs did not simply make rap palatable for mainstream audiences; they also taught these audiences how to listen to rap, taught programmers that rap could appear on radio stations, and taught record labels that rap could appeal widely.

Rap on the Radio: An Early History

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[4] See Appendix One.

[5] Letrez Myer and Christine Kleck argue something similar about hip hop in the 1990s, writing that "homogenization of music and corporate ownership and influence helped to cross hip-hop music over into the mainstream." Unlike this dissertation, they see the "homogenization of music" as an aesthetic downfall of rap in the later part of the 1990s, one that "watered down" "hip-hop/rap's message." Myer and Kleck, "From Independent to Corporate," 145.

Most people in the music industry initially viewed rap as a fad.[6] *Billboard* described rap as a "craze" taking over black discos and boomboxes in New York City in its first mention of the genre in 1979.[7] The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," released that same year, gave hip hop its first taste of mainstream success. Initially played on WESL in St. Louis, the record generated instant listener response, with people calling the station wondering what they were hearing and where they could buy the song.[8] In New York, one of the first stations to program the record played it as a joke, one which led to "thousands and thousands of calls."[9] Across the country, Denise Smith, receptionist at KKTT Los Angeles, complained that "the phones nearly drove us crazy" when the station began playing the record.[10] "Rapper's Delight" was so popular that it reached #36 on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" chart despite being only available as 12-inch single, a format that many consumers did not regularly purchase.[11]

Even with the success of this song, the industry continued to fear that rap would crash as fast as it had taken off.[12] But throughout the early 1980s, rap proved to have sticking power. In 1980 a news director for a station that had banned "Rapper's Delight" only a few months prior wrote and released a rap about recent events in Iran, and an

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[6] Even early hip hop artists Eddie Cheeba and DJ Hollywood did not recognize the viability of the genre; these two claimed that they rapped as a first step in becoming radio DJs. See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 73; and Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 83.

[7] Robert Ford Jr., "Jive Talking N.Y. DJs Rapping Away in Black Discos," *Billboard*, May 5, 1979, 3.

[8] Jean Williams, "Quick Natl Reaction to Sugarhillers," *Billboard*, October 13, 1979, 50.

[9] Sal Abbotiello is quoted in Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 69.

[10] Jean Williams, "Quick Natl Reaction to Sugarhillers," *Billboard*, October 13, 1979, 50.

[11] Ibid., 52.

[12] Harrison and Arthur, "Reading Billboard 1979–89," 306.

article in *Billboard* that same year, with the telling title “Rap Records: Are They a Fad or Permanent?” had a hopeful tone, encouraging labels to get involved in a genre that might have potential.[13] Rap grew in popularity over the next five years, launching seventeen rap singles onto the *Billboard* “Hot Black Singles” charts in 1982, sixteen the next year, and 42 the following year.[14]

Despite its growing popularity, most radio stations across the country would not play the genre.[15] But judging by the genre’s growing presence on *Billboard*’s charts, it was becoming increasingly clear that without airplay, rap albums and singles were selling well. With airplay, who knew how big rap could get? In 1984, when radio stations in New York City began playing the new single from Def Jam Records, Run-D.M.C.’s “It’s Like That,” sales of the record exploded from 1000 per week to 3000-4000 copies per day.[16] While Def Jam’s Russell Simmons insisted the following year that he didn’t make rap records with radio airplay in mind, he quickly conceded that “radio play helps.”[17]

A few months later, he clarified this point in a *Billboard* editorial by pleading radio stations to give rap a try.[18] He began the editorial by noting rap’s tremendous commercial success, stating, “I've made my living for almost 10 years with rap music, a

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[13] Harrison and Arthur note the connection between the ban and the Iran record, ibid., 314. See also “Rapping Disk Covers Iran,” *Billboard*, January 26, 1980, 25; and “Rap Records: Are They Fad or Permanent?,” *Billboard*, February 16, 1980, 55, 59.

[14] Lena, “Social Context and Musical Content of Rap Music, 1979-1995.”

[15] See, for example, Brian Chin, “Top 40 Explosion Changing New York ‘Street’ Sounds,” *Billboard*, November 10, 1984, 21 for discussion of New York City’s reluctance to play the genre. Some radio stations in the early 1980s played rap on specialty mix shows, or late at night. See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 217.

[16] Harry Weinger, “Top 40 Challenges Clubs as Hitbreaker,” *Billboard*, August 11, 1984, D-3, D-11.

[17] Russell Simmons, “Rap Visionary Russell Simmons,” *Billboard*, April 20, 1985, R-2.

[18] Russell Simmons, “Rappin’ for Equal Access to Radio,” *Billboard*, October 12, 1985, 10.

'fad' which, like the twist, was supposed to have come and gone in one season." But the point of the editorial was not to celebrate; instead, he asks radio stations to give rap a chance. Simmons made separate appeals to Urban, Top 40, and Rock formats, pleading with Urban formats to take their teenage listenership seriously and asking Top 40 and Rock formats to "close your eyes to differences in color, and open them to similarities in music and overall audience appeal."[19]

Rap on the Radio: Sonic Objections

While Simmons' editorial fell on deaf ears, his entreaties to the individual formats are rather astute observations about why radio stations, and in particular Top 40 stations, were unwilling to play rap. Top 40 stations typically selected songs based on their positive qualities (catchiness, star factor, melodic material, and interesting rhythms, among other qualities) and also their lack of presumed negatives for the stations' audience. Rap, unfortunately, had a lot of presumed negatives.

At the most basic level, rap sounded different than the other music that was played on Top 40 radio. To some, rap was too complicated; countdown host and former novelty disco performer Rick Dees complained that his listeners couldn't understand rap's complex and lengthy lyrics.[20] To others, it was too simple; in an early article about

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Dees suggested that radio audiences preferred more repetitive rapping like in Right Said Fred's "I'm Too Sexy," claiming that "you know he is too sexy for a dozen things, and in a week I can memorize that." Dees is quoted in Craig Rosen and Rochelle Levy, "Reviving Radio Focus of Gavin Meet," *Billboard*, February 29, 1992, 65. Throughout this section I use programmer and journalist opinions from throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. I'll argue in this chapter that programmers believed they could get around some of these sonic objections, meaning that a quote like Dees's, from the early

rap in the *New York Times*, John Rockwell wrote that "Rap has its limits" because the style "eschews the melodic element that has been essential to most popular music."[21] The genre was "very hard to program," noted one radio station operator, because it didn't "sound like anything else and [was] difficult to line up next to a ballad, a top 40 hit, even Van Halen."[22] Consistency and familiarity of sound was important to Top 40 programmers. Casey Casem, longtime countdown host, contended that,

> Unfamiliarity can get people tuning out. You have to lead people into a new record, and you have to give them a reason for wanting to hear it…. People want to know where you're taking them, and they want to be led by the hand. They feel comfortable when they know that you've embraced them and that you and they have the same interests and loves in music. And they feel good about that as long as you're driving the bus. But the minute the driver of the bus walks away from it, they get nervous.[23]

Audiences, for Casem, were like frightened stray animals who had had to be introduced safely to new sounds and accommodated to through programming choices.

Journalists repeatedly characterized rap by its lack of melody and its emphasis on rhythm. It was, according to reporter Hugh Downs in an early *20/20* episode, "all beat and all talk."[24] In the *Los Angeles Times*, Victor Valle noted rap's "aggressive, jackhammer rhythms," *Newsweek* writers David Gates and Vern E. Smith described rap as "chanting over gut-whomping drumbeats," and Janice Simpson of *Time* wrote that rap was "propelled by a slamming polyrhythmic beat."[25] Rap's emphasis on the rhythm

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1990s, wouldn't make much sense. But as I point out in Chapter Three, programmers' careful introduction of rap didn't satisfy all listeners, and certainly didn't satisfy Dees.

[21] Rockwell, "Rap: The Furious Five."

[22] Yvonne Olson, "As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 68.

[23] Durkee, *American Top 40*, 240.

[24] Fox, "Rappin' to the Beat."

[25] Valle, "Some Anxiety Clouds Rap Concert Tonight"; Gates and Smith, "Decoding Rap Music"; and Simpson, "Yo! Rap Gets on the Map." Nelson George, in no way complaining about this aspect of rap, writes that "Rap records aren't primarily about

rather than on the melody, according to Boston Program Director Steve Hill, “was the first real substantial break in the music chain. It didn't really follow the link through blues to rock 'n' roll to R &B. Rap completely threw out the melody at first, and it jolted people.”[26] Others noted that rap sounded unwelcomely “noisy.”[27] Jerry Adler and David Foote of *Newsweek* wrote that rap was a “thumping, clattering, scratching assault,” *Los Angeles Times* writer Robert Hilburn described the music as “a jittery sonic assault,” and Jon Pareles of the *New York Times* acknowledged that many people found hip hop confusing, like “rude, jumbled noise.”[28]

Programmers, who believed rap appealed to younger audiences, worried that adults did not like rap’s different sound. Steve Hill, quoted above, felt that adults responded unfavorably to rap’s emphasis on rhythm at the expense of a melody, and Sean Ross of *Billboard* summed up many programmers’ opinions by saying that the adults he knew who didn’t like rap thought it was “noisy, hostile, and dirty.”[29] It wasn’t clear to some that rap even counted as music; a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*

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the rap. They’re about the intensification of rhythm, about how much beat you can stand before your mind explodes into angel dust and your legs crumble to the dance floor.” See George, *Buppies*, *B-Boys*, *Baps*, *And Bohos*, 74.

[26] Hill is quoted in Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, “Rap Rates with Adults, Say Radio, Retail,” *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 1.

[27] Rap promoter Russell Simmons makes this claim, see Russell Simmons, “Rap Visionary Russell Simmons,” *Billboard*, April 20, 1985, R-2.

[28] Adler and Foote, “The Rap Attitude”; Hilburn, “Getting a Bad Rap”; and Pareles, “JPW Rap Moves to Television’s Beat.” Tim Brennan, who published an early academic article about rap in 1994, describes rap similarly, writing that “There is no aural stream to lounge in, or patterning to sleepwalk through. Those who despise rap's fraying of the nerves are not hearing different sounds from the devotees. They are simply missing the point.” Brennan, “Off the Gangsta Tip,” 680.

[29] Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, “Rap Rates with Adults, Say Radio, Retail,” *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 1, 91; and Sean Ross, “Why Mom Hates Rap, Why it Doesn’t Matter (And Other Notes on the Top 40 Crisis),” *Billboard*, November 3, 1990, 12.

described rap as “nonmusical hype” and a letter in response to Pareles’ article stated equivocally, “The fact of the matter is quite simple, really. [Rap] is not music in any definition of the word. This is garbage, it's boring and insulting to anyone of any intelligence at all!”[30] A more sarcastic but less forceful letter to the editor noted the discrepancy between rap and what the letter writer understood music to be:

> Now that rap ‘music’ has made it to lead article status in the Arts and Leisure section, I suppose it must be considered a legitimate form of pop music. Until Jan. 14 I believed that “rap music” was an oxymoron. But given my respect for Jon Pareles as a musical scholar, I must reconsider that belief. I always thought that music was a combination of rhythm, melody and harmony, but after re-listening to a performance of Grandmaster Flash, I found it difficult to locate either a melody or harmony, leaving only rhythm, which most definitely was present. Perhaps the definition of music has changed.[31]

Rap, here, was not recognizable as music, because it lacked certain musical qualities.

Programmers were also concerned about rap’s associations with violence, and worried that their advertiser-friendly adult listeners in particular didn’t like rap’s violent reputation.[32] Some of their apprehensiveness was informed by actual injuries and deaths that occurred at rap shows in the mid-1980s, including a stabbing, gang fights, and an instance in which girls were trampled after a show.[33] Nelson George writes that fights during hip hop shows in the late 1970s were a normal occurrence, “the price of the ticket.”[34] But their concerns were also influenced by the media’s representation of rap, which sensationalized violence at concerts. Reporting on rap was rare, and, as Robert

[30] Shafer, “Rap and TV: Empty Values”; Evans, “Hilburn’s Defense of Rap--Fans and Foes React.”

[31] Block, “Rap and TV: Is Rap Music an Oxymoron?”

[32] Yvonne Olson, “As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out,” *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 68; Janine McAdams, “The Rap Against Rap: Sexist Images Put Down Women on Road to Big Sales,” *Billboard*, June 17, 1989, B-14, B-22; and Whitaker, “The Real Story Behind the Rap Revolution.”

[33] Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 274.

[34] George, *Hip Hop America*, 25.

Hilburn argues, many of these reports approached rap "as a social time bomb" and focused on, or certainly did not spare the details of, any relevant violence.[35] For example, the front page of a 1988 issue of the *New York Daily News* announced a "Rap Rampage" in which a "well-disciplined and organized group" of criminals prowled about looking for victims at a rap concert, leaving one stabbing victim dead and twelve others wounded.[36] In response to this incident, many venues refused to host rap shows.[37] Radio stations took rap's violent associations into account when determining airplay; Bob Sherwood, senior vice president of marketing for Columbia Records complained that programmers used a violent incident at a Long Beach concert as an excuse to not program Run-D.M.C.[38] Programmers also worried about the language on rap songs, which could be, according to journalists, "frightening [and] angry," with the potential to be "violent, sexist and bigoted."[39]

While these accounts are hardly historically accurate descriptions of what rap sounded like in the 1980s and early 1990s—years of extreme stylistic diversity in hip hop—they provide an idea of what a poorly rendered caricature of rap might sound like, what stylistic features seemed distinctive to an unfamiliar ear. They also don't describe every radio programmer's experience with rap, as some were more comfortable with the

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[35] Hilburn, "Getting a Bad Rap." Scott Appelrouth and Crystal Kelley calculate that almost a quarter of all stories about rap contained references to violence. See Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 309.

[36] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, September 24, 1988, 27.

[37] Rose, *Black Noise*, 130.

[38] Earl Paige, "NARM Confab Covers ABCs of Trade Issues," *Billboard*, November 8, 1986, 1, 76.

[39] Morgado, "We Don't Have to Like Rap Music, but We Need to Listen"; Cervantes, "Messages and Signals from the World of Rap." Also see Yvonne Olson, "As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 68.

music.[40] But complaints about the difficulty of programming rap and conversations about what rap was easiest to program were common in radio trade journals throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s and, regardless of their accuracy, these concerns about how rap's sound would fit into radio playlists informed programmers' impressions of the genre, for, as Harrison and Arthur write, the content of trade journals can "powerfully influence the course of an emergent music form's growth."[41]

It's important to note here that Urban stations, those programmed for African-American audiences, also were hesitant to play rap for exactly the same reasons. Many Urban stations did not want to play rap because it they worried it might offend older listeners and would attract young listeners who were less attractive to advertisers.[42] Sonny Taylor, Program Director at WGCI Chicago, referred to playing rap as "a risk I'm not willing to take" because his older listeners—even those as young as in their late twenties—did not want to listen to rap.[43] Taylor shared with *Billboard* that while he had confidence in the longevity and popularity of the genre, he did not feel comfortable programming very much of it. One rap record once in a while was acceptable to older audiences, but Taylor presumed that any more than that would cause adult listeners to switch stations.[44] Greg Mack, DJ at Los Angeles' KDAY, a station that played much more rap than any other station in the country with rap songs typically making up 80-90% of its

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[40] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 306–309.

[41] Harrison and Arthur, "Reading Billboard 1979–89," 322.

[42] See, for example, Rochelle Levy, "Urban Panel Studies State of Black/AC," *Billboard*, February 22, 1992, 69; and Sean Ross, "What Should Summer Sound Like?," *Billboard*, July 1, 1989, 12, 14.

[43] Dan Stuart, "The Rap Against Rap at Black Radio: Professional Suicide or Cultural Smokescreen?," *Billboard*, December 24, 1988, R-21.

[44] Ibid.

playlist, sympathized with more broadly formatted Urban stations, and agreed that rap would never attract adult listeners.[45]

A growing distance between the black middle class who owned and operated radio stations and the poor urban youth audience who made up hip hop's original audience (and artists) also contributed to Urban radio's unwillingness to play the genre.[46] Mark Anthony Neal writes that rap was "far removed from the daily realities of an expanding black middle class," a group he suspected were more interested in listening to Quiet Storm music.[47] This class-based reticence to embrace rap stretched beyond radio; black record executives were also wary of the genre. The "bourgeois blacks," according to Russell Simmons, "don't understand it. It's not sophisticated enough for them. They're looking to sign up Peabo Bryson again and again. It's also *too black* for them. Rap reminds them of the corner, and they want to be as far away from that as they can get."[48] Tellingly, as Mark Fenster notes, *Ebony*, the magazine aimed at black middle class adults, didn't publish in-depth articles about the genre until 1989, a decade after rap's commercial debut.[49]

Rap on Radio: Race-Based Objections

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis note that black politics since the Civil Rights movement have been divided along class lines. See Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*, 66.

[47] Neal, *What the Music Said*, 126.

[48] Simmons is quoted in Adler, *Tougher Than Leather*, 67. Also see George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*, 191; Alex Henderson, "Artists on Image: Rappers Answer Critics, Pinpoint Resistance to Youth Wave," *Billboard*, December 24, 1988, R-5, R-13; and Dan Stuart, "The Rap Against Rap at Black Radio," *Billboard*, December 24, 1988, R-8, R-21. Blackness is connected to class identity; in Shelby Steele's interpretation, middle-class values are assimilationist. See Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, 95.

[49] Fenster, "Understanding and Incorporating Rap," 233.

As Simmons' statement indicates, rappers' racial identity also informed Top 40 and Urban radio's unwillingness to play hip hop.[50] Top 40 programmers chose music in part for its ability to innocuously appeal to upper- and middle-class white audiences. Rap, on the other hand, acted as a sonic symbol for poor urban African-American youth, a demographic that the media linked to criminal activity during the 1980s.[51]

From their earliest accounts of rap, the mainstream press situated the music in black urban spaces and portrayed it as a style of music that was rooted in black youth culture.[52] Radio trade journals used the same language; in a May 1979 article explaining the developing trend of people rapping along to records in discos, *Billboard* explicitly noted the blackness of the clubs where rappers were performing.[53] In a primetime special about rap broadcast on *20/20* in 1981, the narrator traced rap's origins back hundreds of years to earlier African-American cultural traditions, including black preaching, jazz, and funk. Rock columnist Lisa Robinson, quoted in the special, characterized rap as "very black and very urban."[54] One year later, John Rockwell of *The New York Times* described rap as "chanted black street dialect," and *Time*, the next year, introduced rap to its readers by immediately noting its connection to black youth.[55] Yet as rap gained popularity outside of the New York City minority communities where it began, the tone of many

[50] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 130; Rose, *Black Noise*, 9.
[51] Jones, *Fear of a Hip-Hop Planet*, 62. For more on this, see Chapter Three.
[52] See Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 311.
[53] See Robert Ford Jr., "Jive Talking N.Y. DJs Rapping Away in Black Discos," *Billboard*, May 5, 1979, 3.
[54] See Robinson in Fox, "Rappin' to the Beat."
[55] See Rockwell, "Rap: The Furious Five"; and Cocks and Koepp, "Chilling out on Rap Flash."

reports changed, enthusiastically celebrating the possibility of this style crossing over into the mainstream while still continuing to note that the original audience and creators were African-American urban youth.[56] For example, promoter Vito Bruno, in a 1986 editorial for *Billboard*, wrote that he hoped rap could act as a "bridge" between its "black teen" creators and a more mainstream audience.[57]

Even when reporters did not overly focus on race, many mainstream press accounts of rap implicitly connected rap to a young urban black identity. Scott Appelrouth and Crystal Kelly argue that regardless of the precise subject matter, race was the lens through which writers approached rap to the extent that it "was constructed such that [it] was aligned with, or homologous to, the social category of race."[58] In his survey of the popular press's early reporting on rap, Mark Fenster notes that "the music was most often approached as the expression of an essential racial difference: an authentic expression of 'blackness' and particularly of urban underclass 'blackness.'"[59] Anthony Kwame Harrison and Craig E. Arthur argue that hip hop gained national attention at a moment in which the music industry and the public at large were debating the racial categorization of music; thus it should not be surprising that much of the discourse surrounding rap presented this music as defined by its racial identity.[60] Rap, and its focus

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[56] Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 321–22.

[57] Vito Bruno, "Rap: A Positive Force for Social Change," *Billboard*, November 8, 1986, 9.

[58] Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 302. Fenster also comes to a similar conclusion.

[59] Fenster, "Understanding and Incorporating Rap," 225.

[60] Like this dissertation, Harrison and Arthur write about the discourse surrounding early rap reporting in their 2011 article; however, they focus on the years 1979-1986.

on black urban neighborhoods, writes Tricia Rose, “brought the ghetto back in the public consciousness.”[61]

While rap, according to Nina Eidsheim (summarizing Mendi Obadike’s work on hip hop), could “summon the presence of blackness,” regardless of whether listeners knew the race of the performer, the audible connection between rap and blackness was largely subjective, and often tenuous.[62] Eidsheim understands sonic blackness as a reproducing cultural construct: the listener expects raced bodies to sound a certain way and raced bodies consciously or unconsciously fulfill that expectation.[63] Radio programmers’ conceptions of what blackness and rap sounded like were similarly culturally contingent, because, as Loren Kajikawa argues, hearing hip hop’s racial identity is dependent on “racially based standards of authenticity that vary according to time and place.”[64] Their impressions of musical blackness were formed in a specific historical context in which hip hop’s diverse sound was only partially understood by those in the music industry. For programmers, musical blackness was not a definite sound, technique, or process; rather it was an anxiety-inducing specter that threatened negative advertiser and listener responses. Expressions of concern over the music’s supposed improper lyrical content likely masked programmers’ and audiences’ concerns

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[61] Rose, *Black Noise*, 11.

[62] Eidsheim, “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera,” 647.

[63] Ibid., 663. Rodman writes, similarly, that “racialized ways of categorizing music are very real—and very powerful—but they are not simply natural facts. Rather, they are culturally constructed *articulations* processes by which otherwise unrelated cultural phenomena—practices, beliefs, texts, social groups, and so on—come to be linked together in a meaningful and *seemingly* natural way.” See Rodman, “Race... and Other Four Letter Words,” 107.

[64] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 10. Ellis Cashmore writes that “what people define as difference and who they interpret that difference changes from context to context, from one historical epoch to another, depending on the specific calculus of power and knowledge that holds sway.” See Cashmore, *The Black Culture Industry*, 179.

about the race of the performers, continuing in a long tradition of claiming fears about moral decay as an excuse to not program music made by African Americans.

Many Top 40 and Urban radio stations were unwilling to program such a racially defined style of music because companies preferred to advertise on stations with a high percentage of white listeners.[65] In 1987, Tom Joyner, the host of multiple shows on Urban radio stations, revealed the negative impact black audiences had in securing advertisers in a letter published in *Radio & Records.*[66] In the letter, he details one of many experiences he has had with an advertising agency who requested a "No Black" audience.[67] He explains how the station in question attracted the age of listener that the advertiser wanted, but the company, a family steak house chain, was unwilling to advertise on the station because of the racial makeup of the audience. Joyner encouraged Urban stations to collaborate in responding to companies not willing to advertise on an "ethnic" station; these accounts included national companies selling mass market goods such as A&W Cream Soda, Moosehead Beer, and Johnson & Johnson's baby shampoo.[68] Demonstrating the inaccuracies of some of these negative stereotypes, at a 1988 conference with other Urban radio executives, Joyner joked about a client that wouldn't

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[65] More generally, advertisers value minority audiences less than white audiences. See Napoli, *Audience Economics*, 106, 112. Studies such as those done by Richard Peterson and Russell Davis, Jr. only contributed to these evaluations. See Peterson and Davis Jr., "The Contemporary American Radio Audience."

[66] See Tom Joyner, "Losing National Buys," *Radio & Records*, September 25, 1987, 56. In the 1980s Joyner used to host a morning show in Dallas and an afternoon show in Chicago, flying between the cities at midday. The aversion to advertising to minority audiences continues through the period this dissertation studies; See McConnell, "Kennard Concerned about Rep Remarks. (FCC to Investigate Advertising Industry's Impact on Minority-Owned Stations)."

[67] Tom Joyner, "Losing National Buys," *Radio & Records*, September 25, 1987, 56.

[68] Ibid.; and Walt Love, "Ad Dollar$: Still Fighting Bias," *Radio & Records*, March 18, 1988, 46.

advertise their airline on his station because "blacks don't use airplanes." Looking around, he asked, "then how did all of these black executives come to the same city?"[69]

By playing rap, radio stations could lose advertising accounts from companies that did not want to be associated with the genre's black sounds. In an article in *Adweek*, a rap-friendly ad executive complained that some clients thought hip hop was threatening. His company's biggest task, he revealed, was "convincing the client that it's not race music and the artists aren't necessarily angry."[70] According to Carmen Ashhurst-Watson, president of early rap promotion company Rush Communications, radio stations of al formats stations were hesitant to play rap because the advertisers did not want to increase "the number of black kids who are coming into their store with baggy pants and their hats on backwards."[71]

Crossing Rap Over

For all of these reasons, as well as the novelty aspect of many early rap records, record companies and radio programmers believed that the genre had, in the words of one record producer, "limited" appeal.[72] Producers and record executives wanted rap records to be played more widely, but in order to be played on Top 40 radio stations, rap needed

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[69] Walt Love, "Ad Dollar$: Still Fighting Bias," *Radio & Records*, March 18, 1988, 46.

[70] Tyrangiel, "Hip Hop Video," 138.

[71] Ashhurst is quoted in Rose, "Contracting Rap: An Interview with Carmen Ashhurst-Watson," 139.

[72] Producer Robert Ford quoted in Shawn Hanley, "Rap Records Inducing Listener Participation," *Billboard*, July 19, 1980, 51. Early hip hop records were often novelty songs, not made to last. See, for example, Kurtis Blow's "Christmas Rapping" and Dave Lampell's "I Ran Iran."

to have the potential to appeal to the stations' white adult audience.[73] And in order to do that, the records needed to sound quite a bit different. According to various record executives interviewed after "Rapper's Delight" became popular, if rap was going to continue crossing over to a white audience, the songs needed to have a slicker, more polished sound, with a "natural, not too busy" rhythm. The subject matter needed to be light, showing "a sense of humor" and having "a good storyline."[74] Rap, in other words, needed to sound more like a good upbeat pop song, with differentiated textures that wouldn't overwhelm radio audiences with complexity, catchy humorous lyrics, and an easy-to-follow, relatable plot. In order for Top 40 listeners to find meaning in rap, they needed to understand rap as music rather than noise. As Richard Middleton writes, for listeners to enjoy a genre, they first have to understand it as *music*—legible sounds where the genre's "procedures and values are understood."[75] These procedures and values come from a listener's own experience, meaning that in order for rap to become popular on Top 40 radio, it needed to sound similar to the music Top 40 listeners were already familiar with.[76]

I. Beats and Rhymes (and Rock): Rap-Rock

[73] Ibid. and David Peaslee, "Radiowise Musicians Plug in Rap's Greatest Beats to Stir Up Media Culture in Fresh Way," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-4, D-6.
[74] Shawn Hanley, "Rap Records Inducing Listener Participation," *Billboard*, July 19, 1980, 51.
[75] Middleton, "Pop, Rock and Interpretation," 221.
[76] Ibid.; also see Moore, "Authenticity as Authentication," 6.

The next rap song to achieve comparable chart success after "Rapper's Delight" was Run-D.M.C's "Walk This Way," featuring Aerosmith.[77] In 1986, Run-D.M.C.'s label, Def Jam Records, successfully promoted the song to Rock, Top 40 and Urban radio stations, where it gained enough airplay to make it into the top ten of the "Hot 100."[78] The rap-rock song adheres to the crossover advice of the label executives described above by combining Run-D.M.C.'s amusing wordplay detailing their sexual adventures with the recognizable guitar riff of Aerosmith's original song over a very simple beat.

"Walk This Way" wasn't the first single that Russell Simmons and Bill Stephney of Def Jam marketed towards a broader audience than the urban black New York City community that hip hop acts emerged from and rap groups subsequently courted.[79] Two years earlier, in 1984, they managed to get Run-D.M.C.'s song "Rock Box" played on MTV, making it the first video by a rap group to air on the music video channel famously averse to African-American music.[80] The video to "Rock Box" blatantly caters to an audience different than that of a typical rap song by not only leading the song off with a blistering guitar solo, but also starting the video with a white professor explaining what rap is. His explanation of rap makes little sense, but it's an important rhetorical move. Like the beginning of "Rapper's Delight," in which the Sugarhill Gang make it clear that the lack of singing in the song is intentional, the beginning of the video for "Rock Box" introduces the song as rap, a remark only necessary for outsiders. As the rapping begins,

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[77] Here, I'm adhering to other hip hop histories which neglect Blondie's number-one hit "Rapture" from 1980, which included some rapping. For more on "Rapture," see Chapter Four.

[78] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 245.

[79] Bill Stephney had experience working with radio; he had previously launched the Urban chart at CMJ. See Ibid.

[80] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 115.

Run-D.M.C.'s Jam Master Jay exchanges winks with a white kid, welcoming him, and the potential white crossover audience watching the video, to the genre.[81] The multiracial nature of the desired audience is exemplified by the group's entry into the legendary punk club, Danceteria—a conspicuous choice that displays allegiance to rock fans—and their dancing with an integrated audience. Musically, the song is such a blatant mix of racialized genres that Run-D.M.C. released two different versions of the song intending to serve the two different audiences. Side A of the single had the standard version of the song with rock guitars; on side B, according to Profile Records owner Cory Robbins, there was a more "black-oriented" version which was included to prevent "alienat[ing] black stations."[82]

Rap's crossover to white audiences was part of the business plan of Def Jam from the company's inception, betraying that the social aspirations of the genre were inseparable from commercial interests.[83] Def Jam nonetheless fashioned itself on the vanguard, as Bill Adler, its publicity director, noted that Simmons was different than other rap executives of the 1980s because "He was never gonna just be a guy who operated within the confines of black cultural institutions…. He was gonna take this black culture and promote it everywhere."[84] Tellingly, Def Jam's distribution deal in 1985

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[81] Ibid.

[82] "High Profile for Profile Label," *Billboard*, March 3, 1984, 50.

[83] It should be noted that Run-D.M.C. did not feel similarly about crossing rap over. See Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 82.

[84] Adler quoted in Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 244. Simmons stated this explicitly in a memo to Tommy Mottola in 1989; he writes, "Def Jam does not just make black music, we make hip music which appeals to a broad audience." See Gueraseva, *Def Jam*, *Inc.*, 164.

with Columbia Records signed them as part of the pop department, not the black music department.[85]

While “Rock Box” was moderately successful, “Walk This Way” more effectively created a coalition between white listeners and the mostly African-American rap audience. “Walk This Way” gained popularity by capitalizing on the name recognition of Aerosmith among rock fans, to be sure, but the song also catered to Rock and Top 40 audiences by embracing the most ubiquitous pop musical form. While “Rock Box” consists of rapped verses with changing instrumental interludes, “Walk This Way,” like practically every other song on Top 40 and Rock radio, is in verse-chorus form, with the chorus always the same. This structural change, according to Dan Charnas, “made it possible for rappers to express themselves as pop artists” because they were able to meet listener expectations.[86] Rick Rubin noted that the song “showed people that rap was ‘music’” by giving them a “familiar reference.”[87]

By mixing the sounds of rock with rap, this song rebranded rap as the new sound of rebellion.[88] Loren Kajikawa writes that Run-D.M.C.’s music “encouraged listeners to hear breakbeats as capturing the same defiant, youthful, and care-free attitude that electric guitars had long symbolized.”[89] By equating rap with, or substituting rap into, rock’s typical role as the music of youth rebellion, Run-D.M.C. repackaged rap as something

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[85] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 151.

[86] Ibid., 202.

[87] Rubin is quoted in Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 83.

[88] Group member Run recalls that the group played many rock venues in the first half of the 1980s, playing to “long-haired white kids, cut-off jeans, drunk.” See Ibid., 81.

[89] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 69.

white audiences could understand.[90] By making it fit into a familiar framework, Run-D.M.C. helped rap cross over.[91]

Despite its sonic similarities with rock songs, not all listeners were sold on "Walk This Way." Tallahassee's Top 40 station Music Director Rich Stevens reported to *Billboard* that although the song received some positive feedback, the negative reviews were "things we couldn't repeat." After a week or so, however, people either stopped listening to the station or revised their views, and Stevens noted that he was "getting requests from male and female adults, blacks, whites, kids, everyone."[92] San Jose Program Director Dave Van Stone revealed that the song appealed across race and class divisions, as he noticed "white middle class kids listening to it on the street."[93] The response was similar across the country, and the song eventually became the first rap song to chart in the top ten of the *Billboard* "Hot 100," demonstrating the appeal of rap music outside of its black urban roots.[94]

"Walk This Way" successfully brought rap, a genre that previously was almost never heard on the radio, onto Top 40 stations.[95] For the next two years, many rap groups imitated this style of crossover hit, a rap-rock hybrid combining the new sounds of hip

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[90] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 151–53.

[91] Ibid., 70. Also see Rick Rubin in Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 83.

[92] Kim Freeman, "Out of the Box," *Billboard*, August 2, 1986, 10.

[93] Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, August 23, 1986, 86.

[94] Songs with raps had hit the top 10 of the Billboard "Hot 100" before "Walk This Way," including Chaka Khan's "I Feel for You," New Edition's "Cool it Now," and Blondie's "Rapture." None of these artists, however, were known before or after these songs as rappers; instead they were understood as mainstream artists incorporating rap into their songs. See Chapter Four for more about the distinction between rap and other genres.

[95] Sasha Frere-Jones refers to Run-D.M.C. as "rap's Moses," pushing through the pop charts to show that indeed rap could have a spot on the charts. See Frere-Jones, "Run-D.M.C.," 65.

hop with a familiar rock chorus. Rapper Kool Moe Dee praised this style, which he called "cover tunes," acknowledging that these songs made rap more widely appreciated because they showcased the new style in a recognizable context.[96] Programmer Steve Hill agreed and noted that "bringing back old songs and rapping over them…[made rap] appealing."[97] In late 1986, Def Jam successfully marketed the Beastie Boys, a white rock-rap group, to a similar coalition audience to those who had embraced Run-D.M.C.'s rock-rap hybrid sound.[98] Their first hit, "Fight For Your Right to Party," begins, like "Walk This Way" and "Rock Box," with a heavily distorted guitar. It also features a drum track that is so close to something a rock group might use that the Beastie Boys complained that it was too much of a "Top Forty cheesy rock sound."[99]

Some rock-rap songs sampled older rock songs in an attempt to attract older audiences, updating classic songs rather than engaging in more contemporary collaborations. The Fat Boys, a Brooklyn hip hop duo, rose to fame with their rap cover of the Surfari's "Wipeout," which hit number twelve on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" in the summer of 1987. They followed this up a year later with two other rap singles featuring female- and older-listener-friendly 1960s rock songs, including "The Twist (Yo Twist)," which featured the original singer Chubby Checker singing new lyrics about their collaboration, and "Louie Louie," which covered The Kingsmen's song of the same name from 1963.

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[96] David Peaslee, "Radiowise Musicians Plug in Rap's Greatest Beats to Stir Up Media Culture in Fresh Way," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-4.

[97] Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, "Rap Rates with Adults, Say Radio, Retail," *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 91.

[98] Rick Ruben told Al Teller that the Beastie Boys had "an even more suburban flavor" than Run-D.M.C.; see Gueraseva, *Def Jam*, *Inc.*, 82.

[99] Ibid.

In 1989, Tone Loc's single "Wild Thing," which combined rap with a sample from a 1970s Van Halen song, peaked at number two on the *Billboard* "Hot 100." According to Daddy-O of rap group Stetsasonic, the song appealed to a mainstream audience because it fit the sound of Top 40 music by having an upbeat tempo, "sparse instrumentation, and a perfect musical hook." The subject matter was something, he believed, "everybody, even grandma," could relate to.[100] In San Francisco, the song was promoted to and played on the Top 40 station before the Urban station, indicating that the music industry was aware of the song's mainstream appeal.[101] Sales of this song were tremendous; in February 1989, *Billboard* noted that "Wild Thing" had sold more than four times the number of records as any other song in the Top 30.[102]

II. Rhymes, not Beats: Slow Pop Rap

By combining rap with hard rock, "Walk This Way" created a style of music that appealed across demographics and introduced many listeners to the sounds of rap. In response to Run-D.M.C.'s crossover success, major labels signed rap acts, and rap's popularity continued to grow.[103] The multiracial success of Run-D.M.C., The Fat Boys, and the Beastie Boys made it clear to the music industry that rap could appeal to a broad audience, and radio stations scrambled to figure out how to program the music.

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[100] Janine McAdams, "The Rap Against Rap: Sexist Images Put Down Women on Road to Big Sales," *Billboard*, June 17, 1989, B-14.

[101] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 229.

[102] Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, February 18, 1989, 85. Despite these incredible sales, the song never reached number one on the "Hot 100" because some Top 40 stations refused to play it. See Sean Ross and Ken Terry, "Labels Praise Rockin' Top 40s," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 1, 90.

[103] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 245.

While the musical language of "Walk This Way," writes Murray Forman, "made rap accessible to white teens" by combining the sounds of rap with hard rock, the song didn't solve the problems that programmers had with rap.[104] Run-D.M.C. didn't eliminate the "all beat" or the "all talk" that characterized rap's difference from pop; they simply added guitar riffs to them, creating a sound that Forman describes as the "antithesis of mainstream commercial pop."[105] Rap and hard rock were both genres primarily listened to by young audiences, and combining them didn't necessarily help Top 40 radio gain their most advertiser-friendly demographic, older females, despite isolated reports of adults calling in to request the song.[106] And judging by the racially-motivated negative responses that radio programmers heard, this song hardly eliminated rap's racial associations.[107]

Most authors who write about rap's early history skip from Run-D.M.C. to the more political and less radio-friendly groups Public Enemy and N.W.A.[108] But this jump, from a group whose popularity was created, or at least reinforced, by Top 40 radio to

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[104] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 154. Forman notes that crossing over is "never simply a commercial endeavor," claiming that artists need to "[merge] the signs and codes that are assumed to represent audience formations of different races." My claim here is similar to his second assertion, but recasts focus on the commercial aspect of crossover by looking at exactly what those signs and codes were in commercial radio programming. See Ibid., 150.

[105] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 155.

[106] Kim Freeman, "Out of the Box," *Billboard*, August 2, 1986, 10. John Seabrook writes that Def Jam's emphasis on "aggressive and dangerous-seeming blackness…limited its appeal to white soccer moms." He continues, writing that hip hop was defined by what it was not—pop, sung, danced. Because of this, "it seemed there were barriers to how big hip-hop was going to get." See Seabrook, *The Song Machine*, 180.

[107] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 162. Harper argues that rock-rap's crossover was dependent on the style maintaining its blackness, "an alien entity which the 'progressive' rock establishment benevolently allow[ed] into its midst." See Harper, "Synesthesia, 'Crossover,' and Blacks in Popular Music," 118.

[108] See, for example, Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; Rose, *Black Noise*.

artists who were rarely played on Top 40 stations forgets a different set of rappers who became popular through radio airplay. A year after programmers tested rap's acceptability on radio stations with Run-D.M.C.'s shouting rhymes atop distorted guitar shreds, programmers turned to a different type of artist who captured some of the rap's spirit but softened its edges by combining it with lighter pop sounds.

In 1987, rapper LL Cool J released *Bigger and Deffer,* his second studio album. The first track off the "Deffer Side" of the record, side B, utilized Run-D.M.C.'s technique of combining rap and rock; in this song, "Go Cut Creator Go," LL Cool J raps along to a sample of the famous guitar lick from Chuck Berry's 1956 song "Roll Over Beethoven." But this song didn't prove to be as popular as another track off the same side, "I Need Love," which reached number 14 on *Billboard's* "Hot 100" chart later that year.

In "I Need Love," LL Cool J raps slowly with careful enunciation on top of a melodic accompaniment played by the 1980s pop ballad synthesizer of choice, the Yamaha DX7, used in songs by Whitney Houston, Chicago, and Phil Collins, among many others. A clear bell-tone melody rings out above synthesizer chords as LL Cool J waxes about his need for a woman he can treat like a goddess, and another distinct synthesizer melody appears between his rapped verses. This texture, a melody atop a multi-measure chordal accompaniment, is rarely replicated elsewhere on the album. Instead, most of the other songs have loud, sharply accented drum-machine beats with an occasional melody or bass line repeated in short segments. For instance, "Go Cut Creator Go," lacks the 12-bar blues form of Chuck Berry's original; the song only hints at a harmonic progression with a harsh guitar line slowly alternating between the tonic and

leading tone. On the sparsest song of the album, "Kanday," LL Cool J is backed by only a drum beat, a short James Brown sample in the chorus, and a single melodic pitch used more as a percussive element than as a melodic instrument.

This "stark as a moonscape" style of rap, in the words of music critic Don Howland, hadn't succeeded in getting LL Cool J onto the "Hot 100" in the past.[109] Many radio stations had treated his similarly "percussive, minimalist-style" album *Radio*, released in 1985, "with trepidation."[110] Influenced in part by Run-D.M.C., many rap records in the late 1980s including *Radio* and Public Enemy's debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* intentionally supplanted the disco-inspired sound of early recorded rap hits with "harder beats [and] harder rhymes," as Jeff Chang puts it, to try to distance rap from pop and R&B.[111] In particular, Public Enemy wanted their music to be noisy, to be "music's worst nightmare."[112] Group member Hank Shocklee claimed that the group designed their music to avoid "traditional R&B stuff—bass lines and melodies and chord structures and things of that nature."[113] Chord progressions, bass lines, and melodies, of course, made up the bulk of what was played on pop radio, and by rejecting these musical elements, rappers created music that bore a striking resemblance to the noisy "all beat and all talk" that programmers were worried about playing.

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[109] Howland, "SPINS: Platter Du Jour."

[110] Fred Goodman, "LL Cool J is Rapping on the Door of Widespread Success," *Billboard*, April 26, 1986, 25.

[111] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 241.

[112] Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, August 25, 1990, 21. Cheryl Keyes writes that for Hank Shocklee, "atonality [was] a predilection." Keyes, "At the Crossroads," 240.

[113] Shockley is quoted in Clover, *1989*, 33.

"I Need Love" sounded different, and Top 40 programmers found the song so compelling that they began playing it before Def Jam promoted it to their stations.[114] With harmonies that gesture to pop by mimicking the four-measure phrase length of a conventional pop song, along with melodies played on a recognizable synthesizer, the song combines rapping with the musical language of pop. Contributing to this hybridization, the bass drum and snare of the 808 drum machine in this song are quieter and higher in pitch than on any of the album's other tracks, toning down the "rhythm that'll rock the walls" which LL Cool J promised on the third track of the album.

This song gestures towards a different demographic than LL Cool J's music had in the past. *SPIN* magazine's Annette Stark noticed during a 1987 performance that young males in the audience were "put off" by this song.[115] LL Cool J shows his softer side in this track, appealing to not only a different audience than he does in the rest of the album, but also a different audience than Run-D.M.C. aimed for with their hard rock-rap hybrid. Rap and hard rock were both genres primarily listened to by teens and young adults; their combination was intended for the same demographic.[116] Ballads, on the other hand, appealed to a broader age range, including radio's coveted adult females. Broadly, programmers worried that adults did not like "hard" sounds, and praised songs that were a little softer. For example, a program director claimed that Mixmaster's "Don't You Want to Be Loved," a song with a male rapper who raps just as gently as LL Cool J does

[114] Gueraseva, *Def Jam*, *Inc.*, 122.

[115] Stark, "Def Not Dumb," 54. Also see Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 166.

[116] This demographic was also gendered; Deena Weinstein argues that "the heavy metal sub-culture, as a community with shared values, norms, and behaviours, highly esteems masculinity." Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 104.

in “I Need Love,” was “not too hard,” which led him to think that “adults could tolerate this!”[117]

By combining the edgy sounds of rap, popular with young demographics, with the supple sounds of a pop ballad, a style that programmers believed appealed to adult females, songs like “I Need Love” created, according to one programmer, a “more sophisticated” version of rap that was successful on both Top 40 and Urban formats.[118] The general manager of Jackson, Mississippi’s WJMI, Carl Haynes, described this song as one of a few rap songs that “adults will enjoy—or tolerate—for a short time.”[119] Steve Crumbley of Norfolk, Virginia’s Urban station reported that his older listeners didn’t find the song offensive and that it was the first rap song this demographic had ever requested.[120]

LL Cool J’s direct appeal to the radio was not coincidental. Beginning in 1987, his label Def Jam purposefully promoted his music to Top 40 radio; one indication of their success came in 1988 when LL Cool J’s song “Going Back To Cali” broke on the “Hot 100” chart before it appeared on the “Hot Black Singles” chart.[121] In a 1989

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[117] Yvonne Olson, “Outa’ the Box,” *Billboard*, June 11, 1988, 10.

[118] Sean Ross, “Beaumont/Port Arthur’s Major Market FM,” *Radio & Records*, September 11, 1987, 100.

[119] Walt Love, “WJMI/Jackson Wins Big Again,” *Radio & Records*, August 28, 1987, 60. Two weeks later, Steve Hedgewood of station KHYS in Beaumont/Port Arthur noted that many Top 40 stations played “I Need Love” before Urban stations did. See Sean Ross, “Beaumont/Port Arthur’s Major Market FM,” *Radio & Records*, September 11, 1987, 100.

[120] Betty, “Inside Urban Radio,” *Gavin Report*, June 26, 1987, 55.

[121] Nelson George refers to LL Cool J as “crossover rap” in his year-end review column in December 1987 and Bill Stephney, six months later at the Black Radio Exclusive conference, notes that “Going Back to Cali” had early success at Top 40 stations. See Nelson George, “Spoken Here,” *Billboard*, December 26, 1987, Y-4 and Yvonne Olson, “As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out,” *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 1.

advertisement aimed at radio programmers, his song "I'm That Type of Guy" was promoted as a crossover single and was described by Phoenix PD Bob Case as "clean family fun for all ages."[122] Acknowledging most stations' hesitation towards playing rap, another program director quoted on the same advertisement declares that "Very few artists can bring this type of music to a higher level," but LL Cool J "has done it!"[123] A year later, his single "Around The Way Girl," which *Billboard* described as an "inventive R&B/rap mosaic" that "cleverly blends both formats" to the extent that it "nearly creates its own genre" was similarly promoted to radio; an advertisement for the song featured one programmer describing the song as "cool, mass-sounding rap" and another quoted as saying that "the sophisticated production and strong melody line makes this much more than a rap record."[124] LL Cool J wanted his music to appeal widely and he marketed himself to a crossover audience, proclaiming that rap "isn't only for the black kids."[125] While many of LL Cool J's other songs are harder and feature more aggressive rapping than "I Need Love," all of LL Cool J's songs that hit *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" feature musical elements that are close to sounds that a Top 40 audience might like: backgrounds that are easy to listen to, comprehensible rapping at a moderate pace, and lyrics that focus on topics germane to a broad audience.

Two years later, a strikingly handsome rapping duo from Germany promoted their single "Girl You Know It's True" to both Urban and Top 40 stations in the United States,

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[122] "It's a Proven Fact: L.L. Cool J "I'm That Type of Guy" Is a Huge Hit!," *Radio & Records*, June 30, 1989, 30.

[123] Ibid.

[124] "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, November 10, 1991, 91; and "What's the *Real* Rap on Top 40 These Days?," *Radio & Records*, November 23, 1990, 21.

[125] See Michel, "L.L. Cool J," 83.

attempting to sell their similarly laid-back style of rap to a multi-format audience just as LL Cool J had. Much like "I Need Love," their hits combined hip hop sounds with the aesthetics of pop ballads, resulting in a sound that Top 40 audiences across the nation embraced. Famously, the duo did not actually rap or sing—they were Milli Vanilli, beautiful frontmen for their producer's sonic vision. Milli Vanilli's songs feature soft, easy, and slow raps above smooth synthesizers, backed by beats that, in one song, sound awfully similar to Eric B. and Rakim's "Paid in Full."[126]

Notably, their songs also have catchy sung choruses, which "I Need Love" lacked. Milli Vanilli's combination of traditional pop elements, such as sung vocals over chord progressions, with hip hop's rhymes, stuttered vocal samples, and beats, proved to be tremendously popular. According to Janine McAdams of *Billboard*, the duo "evinced screams from young suburban white girls that recalled the passion of the Beatles days."[127] But they were also popular with older audiences. The success of "the first adult rap group," as Program Director Keith Naftaly described them, proved to advertisers and radio stations alike that rap could appeal to a multiracial and age-varied audience.[128] Two of Milli Vanilli's 1989 songs which included rapping reached the top of the "Hot 100" and another peaked at number two. Their songs were inescapable on Top 40 radio. For example, listeners of KQEB Kansas City were inundated with the duo's songs between February 1989 and March 1990, with one on each and every weekly playlist in this

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[126] See the review of "Girl You Know It's True" in "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, December 17, 1988, 57.

[127] Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, August 12, 1989, 24.

[128] "Radio Already Dialing Up Milli Vanilli's Hot New Number," *Gavin Report*, April 14, 1989, 21.

interval. Nationally, one or more of their songs were in the Top 40 for nearly 60 weeks.[129] Although the duo was far more successful at Top 40 radio, and charted there before charting on *Billboard*'s "Hot Black Singles" chart, all of their singles charted in the top fifteen of the "Hot Black Singles" chart, indicating their success on Urban radio stations.[130]

Much like the music of Run-D.M.C. and LL Cool J, Milli Vanilli's songs sonically held Top 40 listeners' hands, guiding them through the unfamiliar terrain of rap by giving listeners something familiar to latch onto while they were listening to rap. But unlike Run-D.M.C. and LL Cool J, Milli Vanilli didn't come out of rap's traditional birthplace, geographically, socioeconomically, or culturally. Even if they had been the ones performing the rapping, they had no relationship with the neighborhoods of New York City, and no connection to the hip hop traditions of freestyling, breakdancing, and DJing. Instead, Milli Vanilli used the sound of hip hop just as the characters in *Rappin'* did—both as a unique sonic element added to preexisting musical styles, and as a new and exciting sound that captures the attention of a certain demographic while not alienating others.

Milli Vanilli quickly fell from glory, but their influence on popular music was longer lasting. Critics lambasted the group, who won a Grammy Award for Best New Artist in 1990. Eventually, after their Grammy was taken away for lip-syncing in late 1990, most fans moved onto something new, but the music industry did not.[131] Milli

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[129] While this is remarkable, other artists managed to achieve this feat as well, such as Roxette and Paula Abdul during the same time period.

[130] Milli Vanilli's broad popularity caused a chart crisis at *Billboard*, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

[131] For one example of fans' disappointment with the group, see Meyer, "Milli Vanilli Meltdown Angers Former Fans."

Vanilli's style of pop-rap, soul-rap, or whatever one might call the combination of hip hop beats and rapped verses with soulfully sung pop choruses, inspired Top 40 music for at least the next several years.[132]

III. Beats, not Rhymes: New Jack Swing

Two months before Milli Vanilli's first hit was released, another song that combined elements of rap with the sounds of more traditional Top 40 music reached the top ten of *Billboard'*s "Hot 100," displaying the growing mainstream popularity of a new style, new jack swing. This song, Keith Sweat's "I Want Her," ushered in a five-year period where new jack swing ruled the airwaves.[133] Unlike the other rap hybrids mentioned earlier, this song doesn't have any rapped vocals in it. Instead, Sweat subtly incorporates features of the genre's style in the musical background.

The foreground of Keith Sweat's "I Want Her" features Sweat singing in a nasal voice atop a sparse background track. His vocals in "I Want Her" are mostly sung in a melismatic R&B style but occasionally mimic rap. In certain parts of the song, such as at the beginning of the second chorus, he reduces the number of pitches that he sings and

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[132] Billboard, in the course of a year, describes their music as "pop/rap" ("Single Reviews," *Billboard*, April 29, 1989, 73), "commercially-tailored rap/pop ballad" ("Single Reviews," *Billboard*, August 5, 1989, 81), "pop/soul" (Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, August 12, 1989, 24) and as inhabiting a "gray area" (Sean Ross, "New Kids Hysteria Reminds Top 40 PDs of Beatlemania," *Billboard*, September 23, 1989, 99). For a few months in the spring of 1989, their song "Girl You Know It's True" appeared on the "Hot Rap Singles" chart but was removed on June 3, 1989. For the persistence of Milli Vanilli style songs on the radio, see the review of MC Ice's "Easy" in "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, April 28, 1990, 73.

[133] Richard Ripani finds, in his study of R&B music, that the triplet swing which characterized new jack swing disappears after 1992. See Ripani, *The New Blue Music*, 168.

uses an aggressive timbre to percussively emphasize the lyrics, creating a harsher and more rhythmic tone that approximates rap. There is also the sound of record scratching in the background, and the background singers interact with Sweat's vocals by speaking in rhythm as well as singing.

But these are the more overt rap-like characteristics—this song, like all new jack swing songs, is influenced by hip hop's production techniques rather than its rapped vocals. The drum part, like many in rap songs, is harshly metallic. A booming bass drum and fat bass line are balanced with thin and harsh high hat hits and faux tambourine shakes that sound as though their lower partials have been edited out. For parts of the song, there is little else besides the vocals and this rhythm track, imitating the sparse "reduced," rather than produced, sounds of late 1980s hip hop.[134] At other times a metallic synth hit marks the first beat of the measure. Chords such as these, "techno minor triad[s]" as Robert Fink describes them, derive from a synthesizer patch used in Afrika Bambaataa's 1982 song "Planet Rock," and were commonly used by hip hop producers throughout the 1980s to "create an up-to-the-minute, 'electro-funky' style of hip hop."[135] As such a sound connects to the historical tradition of hip hop culture, Sweat locates the song's aesthetic roots in hip hop.

Like LL Cool J's "I Need Love," the song gestures to another genre through its harmonic language, in this case rap. "I Want Her" is harmonically static, mimicking hip hop's propensity for short looped phrases. For the entirety of the verse and chorus, the bass alternates between elaborating the tonic or the dominant, and when chords appear

[134] Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 309. Rose notes that engineers understood that rap required different equalization techniques than other genres. See Rose, *Black Noise*, 76.

[135] Fink, "The Story of ORCH5," 353, 352.

above the bass line, they quietly outline ambiguous tonic and subtonic harmonies. This harmonic progression lasts only eight beats and is repeated without variation for over eighty percent of the song.

Compared to Whitney Houston's "So Emotional," one of the most popular songs of 1988, Sweat's song is strikingly empty. The two songs have a similar bass line, but "So Emotional" fills the middle range with sustained synthesizer chords and fast guitar lines. The silence of "I Want Her" might seem counter to the aesthetics of some contemporary rap artists like Public Enemy, who were famous for creating multileveled background tracks filled with noisy sounds. However, "I Want Her" is noisy in a certain way, especially compared to Houston's song. The timbres in the background are neither lush nor particularly melodic, sharing a hollow yet simultaneously harsh quality with many other popular contemporary rap songs, including tracks by Kool Moe Dee ("Go See the Doctor"), the Beastie Boys ("Brass Monkey"), and Whodini ("Friends"). These rap songs consist of little else besides a beat and a bass line with an occasional melodic sample thrown in.

The hip hop style of "I Want Her" isn't accidental. In July 1988, David Peaslee wrote in *Billboard*, "The most influential R&B producers of 1988 were previously 1987's most successful rap producers."[136] Chief among them was Teddy Riley, a childhood musical prodigy from New York City who had formerly worked as a producer for Kool Moe Dee and Heavy D & The Boyz.[137] At Sweat's request, Riley made a couple of hip hop beats, including the one for "I Want Her," and together they added Sweat's

[136] David Peaslee, "Rap Report: Its Strength and Potential Still Echo in the Streets," *Billboard*, July 23, 1988, D-2.

[137] Williams, "'We Gave R&B a New Lifeline.'"

melodious vocal stylings. By adding a sung vocal line to musical backgrounds inspired by rap, Sweat and Riley combined the foreign sounds of rap with the conventional sounds of R&B singing, creating what Riley called "street funk," which later came to be known as new jack swing.[138]

Hitmaker Teddy Riley Signs New Zomba Publishing Deal

Songwriter Teddy Riley, right, and Zomba Enterprises CEO Clive Calder have worked out a five-year extension of Riley's co-publishing agreement with Zomba. In addition to his songwriting successes (including being ASCAP's current R&B songwriter of the year), Riley is known for producing hits by artists including Michael Jackson, Bobby Brown, Hi-Five, Keith Sweat, Wreckx n' Effect, and Riley's own groups, Guy and Blackstreet. Referring to Riley, Calder said, "I believe that in 25 years' time, when the history of music is being written, it will be noted that in the late '80s and early '90s one individual singlehandedly changed the sound and style of black music in America with the creation of his new-jack-swing sound."

Fig. 2. "Hitmaker Teddy Riley Signs New Zomba Publishing Deal," *Billboard*, September 4, 1993, 6.

R&B and funk musicians had been borrowing from hip hop for many years, beginning with the Fatback Band's "King Tim III (Personality Jock)" in 1979, but, as of late, this wasn't a two-way street.[139] Many rappers in the mid-1980s consciously avoided

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[138] Ibid.

[139] See Alex Henderson in Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Soul*, 853. Authors differ in their genre classification for this song, Henderson calls it funk, Murray Forman calls it "the first single featuring rap elements," Jeff Chang refers

sounding anything like R&B. But new jack swing, distinguished by just how hip hop-influenced it was, offered a middle-ground, a bridge between what Nelson George described as the "warring aesthetics" of rap and R&B.[140]

Teddy Riley is often credited for developing the new jack swing sound, which he claims was created to transform Parliament/Funkadelic's complex grooves and keyboardist Bernie Worell's playing into something more modern and street-savvy.[141] New jack swing shared this interest in 1970s funk with rap, which used samples from Parliament/Funkadelic as well as from James Brown and Rick James. While new jack swing songs often relied on a jaunty dotted drum-machine rhythm differing from the steady hip hop beats of the era—the "swing" of new jack swing—the style was influenced by rap's emphasis on the beat rather than on mid-range frequency synthesizers, a product of, as Riley puts it, growing up with rap.[142] Balancing the frequency ranges in a song was vital to Riley's sound; Riley told *Billboard* writer Havelock Nelson, "You've got to have the bottom and the highs so people [can] really feel the music. If you don't have that I don't think your record will do very well."[143] This aesthetic came out of his work with rappers; in an interview given in 2012 to

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to the band as "Brooklyn funkateers," Charnas calls them an "R&B group," but notes that the leader of the band called it "country funk." See Ibid.; Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 73; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 130; Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 28.

[140] George, *Hip Hop America*, 115. Alex Henderson writes that the amount of hip hop influence in the music defined new jack swing; see Henderson in Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Soul*, 853.

[141] David Peaslee, "Keith Sweat's Single Brings Back '70s Funk Sound," *Billboard*, January 9, 1988, 26.

[142] Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, July 18, 1992, 19, 22. Also see Ripani, *The New Blue Music*, 131.

[143] Riley quoted in Havelock Nelson, "Teddy Riley Moves Away from Hit-Making Sound," *Billboard*, October 29, 1988, 26. DJ Kool Herc, close to a decade earlier, had given Grandmaster Flash nearly the same instructions, see Hager, *Hip Hop*, 35.

commemorate the 25th anniversary of Sweat's first album, Riley disclosed that he "had no plans to do R&B music. New Jack Swing would've been just rap if I didn't get with Keith Sweat."[144]

Sweat's success inspired many other artists to combine R&B singing with hip hop production techniques, including Bobby Brown, Riley's group Guy, Al B. Sure!, and New Edition. Riley shared his aesthetic with other producers who incorporated hip hop elements into some of their music, including Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, and L.A. Reid and Babyface. These songs were welcomed on Urban stations that were hesitant to accept rap wholeheartedly. Urban stations "embraced [rap's] progeny" while still "thumbing their noses at rap" because new jack swing songs were closer in sound to the R&B-filled playlists at these stations than rap songs which lacked melodies.[145]

New jack swing combined the new with the old so successfully that it not only dominated Urban radio but also crossed over to Top 40 stations.[146] New jack swinger Bobby Brown had six top ten *Billboard* "Hot 100" singles in less than a year, including the number one hit "My Prerogative." Brown, wrote Peter Watrous of the *New York Times*, "fully incorporate[d] rap's beats, rhythms and hard street attitudes into a pop-music format" that appealed to diverse audiences, revealing that perhaps there was more in common between the tastes of white mainstream audiences, R&B fans, and rap audiences.[147]

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[144] Williams, "'We Gave R&B a New Lifeline.'"

[145] Jones IV, "New Jack Swing Beats the Rap."

[146] Jones IV that same year described the Urban charts as "overrun for the past year by teeny-boppers and twentysomethings who either rap, sing with rappers, rap and sing or sing over rap beats," indicating new jack swing's success. See Jones IV, "Black."

[147] Watrous, "Pop View; Bobby Brown Brings a New Attitude to Pop."

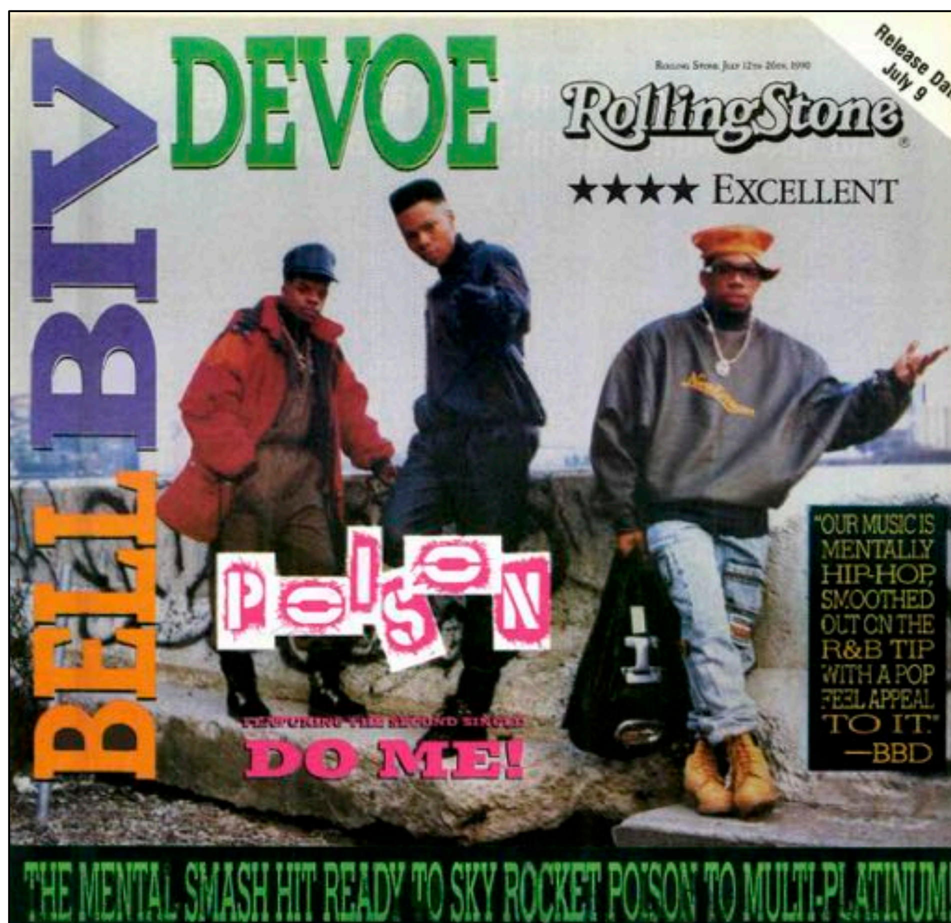

Fig. 3. "The Mental Smash Hit Ready to Sky Rocket to Multi-Platinum," *Radio & Records,* June 29, 1990, 11.

Bell Biv Devoe, a group whose take on new jack swing included rapping, became popular with "Poison," a song that Programmer Dave Van Stone thought was easy to program—even though the song had a rap in it—because "What people seem to dislike are the raps with no melody at all."[148] The song was popular across formats, as was evidenced by its reaching number one on the "Hot Black Singles" chart the same week it

[148] Sean Ross, "'No Rap' Slogan Rings Loud & Clear," *Billboard*, October 13, 1990, 12.

entered the top ten on the "Hot 100" chart.[149] Like LL Cool J, Bell Biv Devoe stressed the multi-format potential of their sound. Group member Ronnie DeVoe described their sound as "hip hop, smoothed out on the R&B tip, with a pop-feel appeal to it," a slogan that scrolls across the screen during the music video for "Poison."[150] Their record company promoted their album by emphasizing their integration of hip hop with pop; in an advertisement for their first album, their music is described as "juxtaposing hip hop's beats and samples with pure pop's deepest aural secrets."[151]

Many radio programmers loved new jack swing because they thought it would appeal to listeners who were still a little squeamish about straight-ahead rap songs.[152] In 1989, *Billboard* columnist Nelson George wrote, referring to new jack swing, "It is one of the ironies of the moment that this new direction in R&B…may be a big long-term threat to rap. If an act can rap and sing adequately…they may soon be able to outposition their rap-only counterparts."[153] These songs gave a hummable melody to listeners while still keeping the emphasis on the intensified rhythms of rap, rerouting the sound of popular music from something like Whitney Houston's "So Emotional" dance-pop sound to something less melodic, something more percussive, and something with differentiated textures. By integrating melodies into hip hop aesthetics, new jack swing made rap production audible on radio stations across the country. Like slow rap, the style muddied

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[149] "Hot 100 Singles," *Billboard*, May 5, 1990, 76; and "Hot Black Singles," *Billboard*, May 5, 1990, 30.

[150] Devoe quoted in Bill Francis, "New Edition Trio Steps into Spotlight," *Billboard*, March 31, 1990, 21.

[151] See "The Mental Smash Hit Ready to Sky Rocket to Multi-Platinum," *Radio & Records*, June 29, 1990, 11.

[152] Dan Charnas writes that "one of the best ways" to get a rap song onto Urban stations in the early 1990s was to give it a new jack swing vibe. See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 431.

[153] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 27.

the water between pop and rap, giving programmers another option for playing hip hop as they negotiated the musical terrain between the new style and what they believed their audience and advertisers might tolerate.

Crossing Over, taken *To The Extreme*: MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice

By combining rap with more mainstream musical elements, rock-rap, pop rap, and new jack swing artists created music that effectively disguised the sounds of rap in pop-friendly clothing, allowing Top 40 listeners to become accustomed to rap aesthetics and programmers to avoid fallout from advertisers. These artists paved the way for hip hop to be heard on Top 40 radio stations, teaching programmers that rap had mainstream appeal and advertisers that white adults would listen to rap. The efficacy of these musical techniques became impossible to ignore by the end of 1990, when two rappers, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, dominated the nation's playlists. Like songs by Run-D.M.C., Milli Vanilli, LL Cool J, and Keith Sweat before them, Hammer and Ice's music avoids the characteristics of rap that programmers thought adults found offensive by using the techniques outlined in this chapter.

MC Hammer began his rapping career by self-producing a record and selling it out of the back of his car, but in 1988, he secured a record contract with Capital Records. During these first years, Hammer was respected as a rapper, but mainstream success proved elusive.[154] Hammer noticed the music industry's preference for mass-appeal acts

[154] Nelson George describes Hammer as "potentially the most potent of the new wave of West Coast rappers" and notes Urban radio's reluctance to play his latest single. See Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, February 25, 1989, 24.

and decided that "The time was right for a different style of music that was more danceable and that appealed to both young and old."[155] Looking for just that style, the industry noticed him. In May 1989, Terri Rossi of *Billboard* wrote that she initially became aware of him because the success of his song "Turn This Mutha Out" was an aberration from the normal progression of rap records on the "Hot Black Singles" chart, which often fell off the charts quickly because of scant radio airplay. Hammer's music videos, featuring his unique dancing, proved to be popular, which inspired Urban radio stations that typically didn't play rap records to add his last single off of his first album.[156] A year later, after Hammer appeared on Arsenio Hall and was embraced by radio and MTV, his album *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* hit number one on the *Billboard* album chart and stayed there for 21 non-consecutive weeks.[157]

Hammer's songs build directly off of the techniques of the pop-influenced rap artists that have been already discussed: the first single "U Can't Touch This" combines his easy to understand rap about partying with a familiar R&B riff in verse-chorus form, the second single "Have You Seen Her" is a slow rap about love that samples a 1970s soul ballad that twenty years earlier experienced crossover success, and the third single "Pray" is an uplifting, well-enunciated rap that samples a recent hit single by Prince.[158]

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[155] See Hammer in Krulik, *M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice*, 3.

[156] Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, May 13, 1989, 25. Hammer distinguished himself from other rappers by noting that other rappers just stood around while rapping. See Krulik, *M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice*, 14.

[157] His breakthrough single "U Can't Touch This" only made it to number eight on the chart because it was only sold as a 12-inch vinyl single. At the time, record companies were experimenting with not releasing singles to see if consumers would buy the album. See Craig Rosen, "M.C. Hammer Shoe Promo Plugs His New Label Acts," *Billboard*, September 8, 1990, 6, 70.

[158] David Toop writes that "[y]oung America had been primed [for Hammer] by artists like Bobby Brown, singers who used dancing and a hybrid R&B/rap style to grab a broad audience." See Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 206.

All three singles off of the album were successful both on radio as well as on MTV, and with this popularity came other benefits. MC Hammer signed promotion deals with Pepsi, whose CEO joined Hammer on his tour in 1991, and he starred in a feature film also titled *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*.[159]

In the fall of 1990, Hammer conceded the top position on the *Billboard* album chart to another pop-influenced rap album. White rapper Vanilla Ice's *To The Extreme* spent 18 weeks at number one, and its first single became the first rap song to hit the top of the "Hot 100."[160] The album's three singles are strikingly similar to the singles from *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*: "Ice Ice Baby" features hip slang and loosely samples Queen's 1982 "Under Pressure," the easily understandable "Play That Funky Music" samples a popular funk song from the 1970s, and the last single, "I Love You," follows in the slow rap tradition a little too directly from "Have You Seen Her" and "I Need Love." These singles not only copy crossover techniques from Hammer but also mimic the crossover strategies outlined earlier in this chapter. "Ice Ice Baby" mixes rap and light rock, "I Love You" combines rap with a slow pop ballad, and "Play That Funky Music" a little more loosely echoes new jack swing's mix of rap and R&B.

These songs ameliorate the issues that programmers had with rap. They have innocuous lyrics rapped slowly enough that even Rick Dees might be able to remember them, their lyrics are about themes accessible to a mainstream audience, and they have melodies.[161] Songs like those by Hammer, according to Urban programmer Todd Lewis

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[159] Maeda, *How to Open & Operate a Financially Successful Independent Record Label*, 50.

[160] I am here neglecting Blondie's number-one hit from 1980 with rapping in it, "Rapture." I'll discuss this song in Chapter Four.

[161] For crossover rap artists, understandability was a major issue. Vanilla Ice emphasized that one of the things that distinguished him from other more hardcore

didn't "get classified as *real* rap records," because they "fall outside of the genre and become 'special' rap records."[162] In "Ice Ice Baby," Vanilla Ice can tell his audience to "Check out the hook while my DJ revolves it," because there *is* a memorable hook. In these songs, pop has so thoroughly influenced rap that all of Hammer and Ice's songs have extended melodic and harmonic material.[163]

Between the two of them, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice held the top spot on the albums chart for 37 weeks total from June 1990 to February of the following year. MC Hammer alone held one of the top two spots on the albums chart for longer than any album since the mono and stereo charts merged in 1963.[164] The success of each of these rap-influenced songs took radio programmers one step closer to accepting rap's "thumping, clattering, scratching assault."[165] While rap group Boogie Down Productions insisted at the beginning of their 1990 album *Edutainment* that "rap music is the voice of black people," that very same year rap was being performed and listened to by anyone regardless of race and regardless of whether they lived in high rise apartments in Brooklyn, New York or the white-fenced suburbs of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.[166] Pop-influenced rappers' ability to bring rap to the suburbs wasn't just metaphorical. Ice and Hammer both guided rap one step closer to the safe confines of a suburban household by each releasing their own board game in which players rapped verses based on cue cards

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groups is that the audience could understand every word he is saying. See Van Winkle, *Ice by Ice*, 98.

[162] Walt Love, "Rap's Role in Mainstream Radio," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 56.

[163] Adam Krims notes that the amount of singing in rap songs increased during the years of his study. See Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, 127.

[164] Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, December 15, 1990, 9.

[165] Adler and Foote, "The Rap Attitude."

[166] In 1990, rap music sales topped $100 million. See Small and Pereira, *Break It Down*, 8.

to win, musical accompaniment provided. The box for Ice's game prominently features a picture of three white preteens enjoying the game; in fact, the only people on the box for this "easy to play rap happy" game are white.

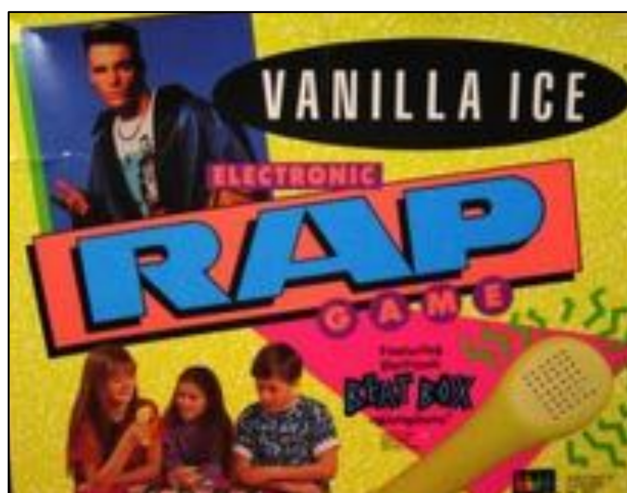

Fig. 4. Vanilla Ice's "Electronic Rap Game"

And it wasn't just rappers and new jack swingers that brought these sounds to the mainstream American public. By the beginning of the new decade, rap was such an acceptable style of music that it was used for literacy campaigns, in advertisements, and by a police department that only a few years earlier had arrested store owners for selling a rap album.[167] Other famous musicians also incorporated hip hop into their music. For example, Michael Jackson hired Teddy Riley to produce the first half of his 1991 album *Dangerous* and featured rappers on several of the tracks. Even Neil Diamond felt rap's

[167] See Foltz, "Madison Ave. Turns an Ear To Rap Music"; Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 45–6; Terry Wood, "More Top 40 Jocks Rock to the Rhythm with Rap," *Billboard*, January 28, 1989, 10, 14; and Rimer, "Obscenity or Art?"

influence; in 1989, he started a live performance of his song "Red Red Wine" by rapping a short verse.[168]

In five years, the sound of popular music had completely changed. Over a fifth of the songs on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" in 1991 had rap in them, compared to only two percent of songs in 1986. Both of the biggest albums of 1990, New Kids on the Block's *Step By Step* (which won *Billboard*'s "Top Pop Artist" category for combined album and singles activity) and Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation 1814* (which was the top-selling album for the year) had singles with rapped vocals on them.[169] New Kids on the Block's Donnie Wahlberg showed his allegiance to hip hop culture by wearing a Public Enemy shirt in the music video for the title track of the album. Janet's album is thoroughly influenced by rap. In comparison to her previous album, *Control*, which came out in 1986, the songs are harder and more percussive. Most of the songs feature the stiff, metallic sounds of drum machine triplet rhythms popularized by new jack swing songs, and the melodic background material for many of the tracks is created by looping samples.[170] On several of the songs, producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis make the sound even tougher by sampling the sounds of gunshots and windows breaking, mimicking the violence that many programmers, listeners, and critics associated with rap.[171]

This album's incorporation of these sounds is telling, for what had once scared programmers away was now, after the continued and growing presence of rap on Top 40

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[168] Paul Colbert, "Rappin' Neil Diamond," *Radio & Records*, June 15, 1990, 42.

[169] For these statistics, and more, see Paul Grein, "The Year in Charts," *Billboard*, December 22, 1990, YE-26.

[170] Pareles, "Recordings Janet Jackson Adopts a New Attitude."

[171] Henderson, "Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814."

stations, necessary to ensure a contemporary sound on an album. Jazz drummer Max Roach contended that "The thing that frightened people about hip hop was that they heard people enjoying rhythm—rhythm for rhythm's sake. Hip hop lives in the world of sound—not the world of music—and that's why it's so revolutionary."[172] But now, rap was fully ensconced in the world of music. By making the sound of rap easier for Top 40 audiences to listen to, rappers overcame the genre's negative associations. Rap was no longer "unintelligible," it was no longer "frightening [and] angry," and it was no longer "noisy"—instead, it was a ballad, it was a moderately fun board game, and it had catchy choruses.[173] Rap had become mainstream.

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[172] Roach is quoted in Owen, "Hip Hop Bebop," 61.

[173] Whitaker, "The Real Story Behind the Rap Revolution," 34; Morgado, "We Don't Have to Like Rap Music, but We Need to Listen"; and Sean Ross, "Why Mom Hates Rap, Why it Doesn't Matter (And Other Notes on the Top 40 Crisis)," *Billboard*, November 3, 1990, 12.

Chapter Two: Pop Becomes Rap

In a stunningly quick five year period, rap had become pop. While in 1986, rap was an underground niche genre lacking mainstream appeal, by 1991, rap's sound was on nearly every Top 40 radio station across the country. By making rap more radio-friendly, rappers and singers in the late 1980s turned what had once been dismissed as a local fad into a long-term presence in mainstream American music. Five years after being avoided by Top 40 programmers, rap made up over twenty percent of the pop charts.[1] What had once been "noisy," a "thumping, clattering, scratching assault," was now an integral part of pop music.[2] A style of music that signified blackness—and to be more specific, poor urban blackness—now captured the ears of millions regardless of race. The genre had transitioned from something performed only in certain sections of New York City to a style that could be learned from a board game purchased at any mall, and could be perfected on the Casio Rapman, "the world's first rap keyboard," released in 1991, which made rap "sound effects" and included a mic.[3]

More importantly, the mass acceptance of a genre that so vividly sounded blackness perhaps meant something deeper than a change in American musical preferences. Were racial attitudes in the United States changing as Americans of all races began appreciating a genre that they understood as black? Rap put all Americans in contact with African-American culture. Even if they lived in white neighborhoods,

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[1] See Appendix One.

[2] Russell Simmons, "Rap Visionary Russell Simmons," *Billboard*, April 20, 1985, R-2, and Adler and Foote, "The Rap Attitude."

[3] Small and Pereira, *Break It Down*, 9.

attended white schools, and worked at white jobs, Americans heard black music every time they turned on the radio, and they witnessed black expression every time they saw a commercial for Sprite, Taco Bell, Adidas, Legos and other national brands. Perhaps the growing acceptance of African-American music and culture would correlate to a growing acceptance of African-American people because, as Todd Boyd argues, “It’s a little more difficult to go talk about hate when your music collection is full of black artists.”[4]

But despite being responsible for this incredible shift in American musical taste and perhaps American race relations, pop-influenced rappers were almost universally panned by critics and others in the hip hop community. For MC Hammer, cross-cultural success came with complications. Endorsements and support by a white audience led fans and other rap artists to question his credibility as a rapper, his relationship to black culture, and even his ability to rap. Jon Pareles of *The New York Times* caustically remarked that Hammer had somehow become America’s most beloved rapper “by rapping as little as necessary.”[5] Hammer’s success was often credited not to his rapping but to his colorful image, his unique dancing, and his entertaining stage shows.[6] Hammer’s credibility issue was representative of a systemic problem for all mainstream rappers. As corporate media companies and Top 40 radio became the primary outlets for audiences to hear rap, Mark Anthony Neal argues that “The discourse itself was subject to social controls rooted in corporate attempts to mainstream hip-hop for mass consumption.”[7] Hammer’s clothes, notes Neal, were a white-friendly take on black

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[4] Boyd is quoted in Farley, “Hip-Hop Nation.”

[5] Pareles, “M.C. Hammer, the Star and Onstage Impresario.”

[6] For example, Gil Griffin describes Hammer as “an exciting, tireless entertainer using rap as his medium.” See Gil Griffin, “Talent in Action,” *Billboard*, August 25, 1990, 32.

[7] Neal, “Postindustrial Soul,” 379.

culture, and his music was no different. By making it, by being complicit in and responsible for the mainstreaming of hip hop, Hammer was tainted.

In many ways, the critiques leveled at Hammer were nothing new. Musical traditions in the United States are often theorized as the inevitable white appropriation and popularization of African-American artists' new musical ideas and genres, and this latest round of rap hits seemed to be no different. This process often begins as black musicians alter the style of a new genre in order to gain mainstream acceptance, and crossing over has typically led to a white artist (most famously Elvis) achieving the highest levels of success regardless of the quality of his or her music. By criticizing the mass acceptance and white appropriation of a black subculture, mainstream rap's critics tied the popularization of rap into a long-standing historical narrative of how African-American music has been co-opted by mainstream white America.

In this chapter I theorize how rap fits into the long tradition of crossover music in the United States. I examine two different meanings of crossover: the first as the contemporary understanding of this longer tradition, and the second as a radical change in how music was disseminated. The first half of this chapter situates rap in contemporary conceptions of crossover. Rap became popular at the same time that many in the music industry were debating about the politics of black artists crossing over to mainstream audiences, and hip hop immediately became part of this conversation.[8] However, significant structural changes occurred in the radio industry that made the racial politics of rap's crossover unique. In the second half of this chapter, I narrate the rise of the Crossover format, a Top 40 offshoot which defied the rigid segregation of the music and

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[8] Harrison and Arthur, "Reading Billboard 1979–89," 320.

radio industries by programming rap in order to appeal directly to a multiracial audience.[9] By the end of the decade, these stations, which recognized rap's broad appeal, played more rap than any other radio format. They also inspired mainstream Top 40 stations across the country to begin programming hip hop, guiding rap from an underground niche genre to an integral part of mainstream American music. The role these stations played in the rise of rap's mainstream popularity is rarely acknowledged in academic or popular press accounts of rap's history.[10] Attending to the rise of rap on radio not only elucidates how rap gained mass popularity in the late 1980s, but also exposes how this growing format asserted control over the future of the genre.

Crossing Over, Combining Genres

Before rap rose to popularity in the late 1980s, Top 40 playlists were filled with songs by African-American artists who crossed over to the pop charts by mixing the sonic elements of pop with the sounds of R&B. These artists used the same techniques as the rap songs detailed in the previous chapter—in fact, they likely inspired rappers' techniques of mixing rap with other genres in order to reach a broader audience. By appealing to both R&B and pop audiences, crossover songs increased the potential number of radio stations that might play a song and the potential number of people who

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[9] Stations in this subformat used the labels "Dance," "Crossover," "Churban," "Rhythmic," and "Top 40/Rhythmic." among others to describe their format. I use Crossover, the term *Billboard* initially used for their chart to emphasize the stations' role in crossing music over from Urban to Top 40. The format now is typically called Rhythmic.

[10] Two brilliant exceptions are Tanz, *Other People's Property*; and Charnas, *The Big Payback*.

might purchase the song. In the 1980s, record companies, attempting to maximize audience size and the associated profits on any given album release, shrewdly demanded that their African-American artists produce music which matched their understanding of what appealed to multiple formats and their associated demographics. According to Jerome Gasper, the vice president of black music A&R at Polygram Records, albums would often be designed to have "two or three cuts to cover the black base." After that, the rest of the album would probably consist of "music that [could] generate Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie or Prince numbers" because "the industry [could] no longer deal with a narrow minded mentality in making and marketing music."[11]

Michael Jackson's 1982 single "Beat It" exemplifies how R&B musicians in the 1980s created crossover songs by combing the musical elements of two distinct genres. Writing about the song, Tamara Roberts argues that genres are characterized by distinguishing instruments.[12] By using instruments other than those used in their normal genre, artists can share a common musical language with whatever listeners and genre they are aiming towards. Jackson did just this in "Beat It," combining R&B vocals with a rock guitar.[13] A couple minutes into the song, Jackson stops singing and lets rock guitarist

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[11] Gasper is quoted in Fred Goodman and Nelson George, "Majors See Black Music Boom," *Billboard*, January 25, 1986, 1.

[12] See Roberts, "Michael Jackson's Kingdom," 28. Griffith Woodworth writes similarly about Prince, arguing that by foregrounding either his guitar or a live horn section, he could make his music sound whiter or blacker. See Woodworth, "Just Another One of God's Gifts," 90. David Brackett de-essentializes Michael Jackson's sound a bit more, writing, "what makes the process of crossover possible in the first place is that these genres were already mixed. That is, hard rock as employed in 'Beat It' and 'Black or White' already has 'blackness' as part of its buried history, 'forged' as it was out of blues." See Brackett, "Black or White?," 177.

[13] Anne Danielsen also writes about Jackson's musical sound, noting that he combines pop production with microrhythms common in African-American musical traditions. See Danielsen, *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, 152.

Eddie Van Halen take over, launching into a guitar solo full of huge melodic jumps, wailing high notes, and fast arpeggios. Van Halen uses a little bit of distortion, but not too much, at producer Quincy Jones's request. Jones didn't want the guitar to sound too rough, likely so that the guitar wouldn't change the funky sound of the song.[14] After almost thirty seconds, Van Halen hits a high note, and lets it soar as Jackson comes back in, taking over for him. Jackson is a little louder than Van Halen, and almost immediately, Van Halen slides from the high note and completely vanishes from the song during a brief moment where Jackson isn't singing. The song finishes without Van Halen playing again, meaning that the two artists hardly sound at the same time. However, they do share a bit of musical material; Jackson's vocal fills towards the end of the song adopt the register of the long, soaring high note, a register Jackson hadn't explored until after the guitar solo.

"Beat It" doesn't hide its crossover formula of taking musical elements from two genres and stirring; it openly displays the difference in sound between the two genres, making sure to stir gently enough so that the two genres are still independently audible. Jackson and Van Halen each bring their own genre-specific sound to this song. They are careful to keep their sound to themselves; it's not until the very end of the song that Jackson sings in Van Halen's range, perhaps lending cohesion to a song that previously felt partitioned according to genre. Jackson and Van Halen also each bring an audience to this song, two audiences believed by record companies to be distinct in both taste and racial identity, and force the audiences to get along for a brief moment. Run-D.M.C.'s "Walk This Way" similarly combines the sounds of two genres but makes sure to keep each separate enough so that both genre's audiences can hear its distinguishing

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[14] See Cadman and Halstead, 28.

characteristics. Like “Beat It,” “Walk This Way” allowed audiences to experience a bit of difference while still feeling comfortable and accommodated to because their genre of choice was recognizable.

Perhaps the most blatant efforts at crossing over in the early 1980s were a flurry of interracial duets. Between 1982 and 1983, Paul McCartney released three interracial duets, “Ebony and Ivory” with Stevie Wonder, and “The Girl is Mine” and “Say Say Say” with Michael Jackson, all of which peaked at number one or two on the *Billboard* “Hot 100.” In 1984, Diana Ross and Julio Iglesias released “All of You,” and R&B singer James Ingram teamed up with country artist Kenny Rogers for “What About Me.” 1985 brought what Reebee Garofalo describes as “the ultimate crossover recording”—the charity song “We Are The World,” featuring Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, Cyndi Lauper, and Ray Charles, among many others.[15] That same year, “Motown Returns to the Apollo,” a show live broadcasted on NBC, featured, to name a few, duets by Smokey Robinson and George Michael, who sang Michael’s “Careless Whisper,” and Stevie Wonder and Boy George, who performed Wonder’s “Part-Time Lover.”[16] A year later, in 1986, Patti Labelle and Michael McDonald released a duet (“On My Own”), as did Jeff Lorber and Karyn White (“Facts of Love”) and James Ingram and Linda Ronstadt (“Somewhere Out There”). That same year, Aretha Franklin and George Michael combined their own massive core audiences in the ballad “I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me),” and Lionel Richie, after crossing over to the Top 40 with songs such as “Dancing on the Ceiling,” took one step further away from his core

[15] Garofalo, “Crossing Over: 1939-1989,” 113.
[16] Shaw, *Black Popular Music in America*, 307.

African-American audience in 1987 and released “Deep River Woman,” a song sung with the country band Alabama who were themselves crossover artists in their own right.[17]

Even without the help of duet partners, most African-American, and some white, artists were expected to make music that would appeal across racial lines. These musicians often accomplished this by mixing the sonic qualities of R&B and pop music, resulting in a sound approximately halfway between the genres. For example, the number one songs on Urban and Top 40 radio in 1985 were so deliberately aimed at a crossover audience that they sounded, in the words of music critic Chuck Eddy, “beige.”[18] These songs, Freddie Jackson’s “Rock Me Tonight (For Old Time’s Sake)” and George Michael’s “Careless Whisper,” sound very similar even though their core audiences are different—they are both slow ballads sung by tenors featuring soft string textures atop slightly funky grooves. Each of these songs was popular on both the black and pop charts: “Rock Me Tonight” was number one on the *Billboard* “Hot Black Singles” chart for six weeks and reached number eighteen on the “Hot 100” chart, and “Careless Whisper” held the number one spot on the “Hot 100” for three weeks and reached number eight on the “Hot Black Singles” chart. These artists weren’t the only ones to cross over that same year. As *Billboard* writer Paul Grein notes in his year-end roundup, the charts in 1985 were full of crossover artists: Prince, Billy Ocean, and Madonna all cracked the top ten in the year-end tallies for three different radio formats; Kool & the Gang appeared in the top twenty in four different formats; Stevie Wonder’s “Part Time

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[17] Reebee Garofalo writes that Lionel Richie’s “goal had always been maximum crossover.” One striking example of this is that the B side of “Deep River Woman” was the ballad “Ballerina Girl,” another crossover hit which reached number five on the “Hot Black Singles” chart and also did extremely well on adult contemporary radio. See Garofalo, *Rockin Out*, 270.

[18] See Eddy, *Rock and Roll Always Forgets*, 172.

Lover" reached number one on four different charts during the course of the year; and Sade, astoundingly, appeared on year-end charts in five different formats.[19]

From a radio station perspective, the popularity of these and other crossover songs meant that Top 40 and Urban stations were often playing many of the same songs. In 1986, the program director of highly successful Top 40 station KIIS in Los Angeles reported to *Billboard* that "black product" constituted at least fifty percent of his playlist, and at the end of that year, Paul Grein of *Billboard* heralded "the breakdown of the color line between pop and [Urban] radio," as six out of the top seven pop songs were by black artists.[20] Even if Urban and Top 40 radio weren't playing the exact same songs, the "beige" style of music on these stations was close enough to make Chuck Eddy complain at the end of 1985 that the playlists on Top 40 and Urban stations sounded too alike.[21]

I. Critiques of Crossover

As Eddy's complaint about the similarity in sound between Top 40 and Urban radio indicated, many in the music industry did not celebrate this "beige" music. In his book *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, Nelson George argues that African-American crossover artists, and the white-controlled record industry who created music designed to cross over, were responsible in the late 1970s for the depressing pronouncement of his book title, because the "conglomerate control of black music" tore apart the

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[19] Paul Grein, "Charts '85," *Billboard*, December 28, 1985, T-4.

[20] Kim Freeman, "Welcome Mat oOut for KPWR Los Angeles," *Billboard*, January 25, 1986, 12; and Paul Grein, "Chart Recap: Whitney is Top Artist," *Billboard*, December 27, 1986, 93.

[21] See Eddy, *Rock and Roll Always Forgets*, 171–2.

"interconnection between black musicians, independent black (and white) business people, and the black community." Due to their control over black music despite their lack of understanding about black cultural products, the media and music industry ruined black music. In his interpretation, black and white music are two unique fields that, while interconnected, have different priorities.[22] Other writers share this understanding. Henry Louis Gates theorizes in his influential book about black artistic practices, *The Signifying Monkey*, that black and white musicians operate in "two parallel discursive universes" that are forever linked but cannot be united.[23] Cornel West writes that certain African-American artists who model black aesthetics are unable to be emulated by non-black musicians because their style of black music "accentuates the 'blackness' of black music, the 'Afro-Americanness' of Afro-American music."[24] Under these formulations, crossing over changes the music's value, because both white artists who appropriate black genres and black artists who combine their sound with white genres create an aesthetically inferior style of music.[25]

The evaluation that crossing over necessitated an aesthetic loss made it nearly impossible for crossover artists to gain critical approval. Record companies pushing artists to pump out crossover songs exacerbated this problem. Nelson George complained

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[22] George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*, 167. George's understanding is supported by the fact that the record industry has a separate black music division.

[23] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 45.

[24] West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 182. Also see Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form"; Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*; Ripani, *The New Blue Music*; Baraka, *Blues People*; and Ramsey, *Race Music*. Jack Hamilton makes a compelling critique of what he describes as the "belief that there is a clear and definable boundary between 'black music' and 'white music' in America that resists porosity." See Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 9.

[25] In the radio industry, David Brackett notes, crossover could reduce the uniqueness of formats. See Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 282.

in 1986 that R&B crossover hits were insipid and formulaic, writing that "Black pop's most prominent figures make records seemingly created with paint-by-number crossover kits. When they hit, they hit big. But when they miss, and they miss more than the industry admits, you have some of the wimpiest music this side of Air Supply."[26] Pop rap was similarly attacked for being "formulaic and homogeneous" a result of attempting to gain mass approval.[27] For example, the rap group 3rd Bass accused Vanilla Ice of feebly turning rap into something easy to understand. In their song "Pop Goes the Weasel," they rap, "I guess it's the fact that you can't be artistic/ Intricate raps, becomin' so simplistic/ I gotta strong mind, it doesn't have to be spoon-fed." Making the same criticism of MC Hammer, Jon Pareles of *The New York Times* describes Hammer's rapping style as "simple," arguing that "To sell multi-millions of albums, rappers can't get fancy."[28]

In a 1984 editorial written for *Billboard* about the negative consequences of crossing over, writer Gerrie E. Summers notes that for black artists aiming for a crossover audience, the perks are clear: a bigger audience as well as a better supported division of the record company. However, as she writes, there are serious downsides to crossing over to a white audience: "alienation of listeners, dilution of a musical genre," and, above all else, the "destruction of the human spirit."[29] For Summers, African-American artists who gain a mainstream audience lose something consequential, whether it be musical quality or the social significance of the music in question. The same criticisms were made about

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[26] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, July 26, 1986, 23.
[27] Stoute, *The Tanning of America*, 52.
[28] Times, "M.C. Hammer, the Star and Onstage Impresario."
[29] Gerry E. Summers, "The Graying of Black Music," *Billboard*, October 13, 1984, 10.

rap. MC Hammer's bid at crossover success, writes Janine McAdams of *Billboard,* caused many to worry that he "diluted [rap's] cultural authenticity."[30]

Artists who crossed over were critiqued for losing touch with their African-American audience. At a conference in 1986, Urban station Program Director Lynn Tolliver criticized crossover artists for neglecting their roots. In particular, she singled out Lionel Richie, who rose to stardom as a member of R&B group The Commodores but had recently crossed over to become one of the most successful African-American artists on pop radio, for being one of those crossover singers who "get on their high horse and forget where they came from."[31] Successful rap artists were similarly criticized. At a rally supporting Yusef Hawkins, a black teen killed by a group of teenagers in an Italian neighborhood in New York City, LL Cool J was booed by the African-American crowd as he went on stage to perform, indicating a disconnect between the immediate concerns of the audience and the audience's impression of his political and cultural commitment.[32]

Artists who crossed over weren't just criticized for neglecting their cultural roots; they were also accused of erasing their racial identities. Writer Charles Whitaker described crossover music as music where black singers "affect a lighter, less racially identifiable sound in order to attract white fans."[33] Musician James Mtume described crossing over not as putting authentic music out for a multicultural audience but instead

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[30] Janine McAdams, "Wrapping Up the Year Rap Went to the Top," *Billboard*, December 22, 1990, 33.

[31] Adam White, "Penguins Under Fire, Etc. About NME Seminar," *Radio & Records*, August 1, 1986, 39.

[32] Michel, "L.L. Cool J," 86.

[33] Whitaker, "Lionel Richie."

as crossing out one's black identity. Hammer too was accused of putting out "deracinated" rap music that whitewashed his black identity.[34]

On the back cover of his 1986 album *R&B Skeletons in the Closet*, George Clinton mocks both the white music executives that rely on the marketing ideologies detailed above and the artists who are careerist enough or, in his opinion, spineless enough to make music that denies their racial heritage. The cover art displays a book collection for black musicians who want to cross over, including books entitled "Your Roots Erasing Manual" and "Kiss the Booty Goodbye and Other Facts." Each book comes with a cassette that teaches "proper English" and the results of paying attention to these books and tapes are found in a set of before and after pictures. In these pictures, after crossing over, a man and a woman's skin lightens, their hair becomes smoother and lighter, and, in the case of the man, he is shown changing from a hip black jacket to a collared shirt. They have become less black, but this isn't just a transformation of skin color and hairstyle; it's also about taste.

Fig. 5. Portion of George Clinton's *R&B Skeletons in the Closet* Cover Artwork

[34] Clover, *1989*, 41.

Trey Ellis made this same criticism of successful crossover artists, writing, "Lionel Ritchie's 'Dancing on the Ceiling' and Whitney Houston's 'I Wanna Dance with Somebody' are so lifeless precisely because they have applied Porcelana fade cream to their once extremely soulful throats. The two now-pop singers have transformed themselves into cultural-mulatto, assimilationist nightmares; neutered mutations instead of thriving hybrids." He continues, noting that the resulting product doesn't lend itself to satisfying audiences. He writes, "Trying to please both worlds instead of themselves they end up truly pleasing neither."[35] Rap's crossover was conceptualized in the same terms; Vito Bruno wrote in *Billboard* in 1986 that after Run-D.M.C.'s crossover, "there is a more urgent need to promote rap in such a way that neither its core audience nor its newer fans are alienated or threatened."[36]

On another part of George Clinton's album cover (which is densely decorated with similar tongue-in-cheek artwork) cartoon character Captain Crossover instructs the reader in "What to DROP to go POP," which includes the following advice: "For some reason, certain powertollahs feel more comfortable about co-opting your butt by not looking too African" and "DON'T use a lotta slang and stuff in your lyrics, because it'll be easier for somebody else (in Vegas, probably) to make 'their' versions of your songs." Crossover, thus, does not just entail denying the heritage of one's authentic self, but also creates music that is easier for mainstream artists to co-opt for their own uses. Extending this critique to rap reveals that Vanilla Ice was only able to appropriate rap because other rap artists had crossed over. By turning rap into pop, MC Hammer for example, made it

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[35] Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 242.

[36] Vito Bruno, "Rap: A Positive Force for Social Change," *Billboard*, November 8, 1986, 9.

easier for Vanilla Ice to adopt the style and create an even more white-friendly version of rap.[37]

II. Crossover Debates Move to Radio:

Radio stations aimed at African-Americans also struggled with balancing expanding their audience while retaining their commitment to the local African-American community.[38] Stations formatted for African Americans in the early 1980s were labeled as Black, but some considered changing their names because advertisers categorized stations described as Black as less desirable.[39] In an effort to increase the size of their audience and distance themselves from the negative associations of a Black station, many African-American-oriented stations in the mid-1980s rebranded to Urban or Urban Contemporary stations.[40]

Urban, as a format description, spotlighted a station's non-black audience. Increasing the diversity of a station's audience was financially beneficial, not just because a larger audience share demanded higher advertising rates, but also because advertisers paid more to reach white audiences than minority audiences. President and General Manager of WGCI Chicago Marv Dyson argued that because "an Urban Contemporary

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[37] John Rockwell writes, "It's fortunate for rap that M.C. Hammer is black. Had Vanilla Ice come along all by himself, with his Nordic cheekbones and male-model good looks, pundits would be lamenting how whites had co-opted a black art form. In that sense, M. C. Hammer got there first." See Rockwell, "Pop View; Hammer and Ice, Rappers Who Rule Pop."

[38] For more on this debate, see Harrison and Arthur, "Reading Billboard 1979–89"; and Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*.

[39] Walt Love, "Combatting the Negative Selling Crisis," *Radio & Records*, February 27, 1987, 52.

[40] Ibid. Also see Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 295–7.

radio station is one that plays contemporary music for urban dwellers" his station's name indicated that it appealed broadly, regardless of race.[41] Other radio executives agreed; Rochester, NY Program Director Andre Marcel, for example, thought that the name Urban sounded "not as ethnic" as calling a station Black.[42]

Format names revealed more than just audience makeup; they also corresponded to certain types of musical programming.[43] Dave Allan of WOCQ Ocean City revealed that he referred to his station as Urban rather than Black because he played a large number of crossover songs, including songs performed by white artists like George Michael, in an attempt to court a multiracial audience.[44] Columbus Program Director K.C. Jones speculated that if stations wanted to rename their format but not play many white artists, they could use the label "rhythm," because it "connotes a little more blackness than perhaps being Urban Contemporary does."[45]

But it wasn't just the music that differentiated Urban station programming from that on Black stations. Urban stations often employed DJs that they thought would connect with a multiracial audience. According to consultant J.C. Floyd, "Urban stations [took] a more mass appeal approach in their on-air presentation" than Black stations.[46]

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[41] Walt Love, "Combatting the Negative Selling Crisis," *Radio & Records*, February 27, 1987, 52.

[42] See Walt Love, "WDKX: Winning an Uphill Battle," *Radio & Records*, November 21, 1986, 64.

[43] Nelson George writes that after disco's successful crossover, Urban radio started supporting white artists as well as black artists. See George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*, 137.

[44] Walt Love, "OC-104 Scores its First TD," *Radio & Records*, September 26, 1986, 59.

[45] Walt Love, "Black/Urban's 'Position' Paper," *Radio & Records*, February 7, 1986, 46.

[46] Walt Love, "Consultants Confront Format Issues," *Radio & Records*, February 24, 1989, 44.

WDXX in Rochester, NY adopted the term Urban to avoid the racist stereotypes of what a Black radio station might sound like; programmer Andre Marcel characterized this older outdated style of radio station as “neckbone radio,” which recalled “the old chitterling circuit.”[47] *Billboard*’s Kim Freeman wrote that although many Urban and Black stations programmed similar music, Urban stations might “project a more upscale image with some jazz, and smoother personality presentations,” conforming to the desires of the more lucrative middle class, older, and perhaps non-black demographics.[48]

Just as crossover artists were denounced for increasing their audience at the expense of their identity, many in the industry questioned these stations’ desire for a broader audience. By accepting, advertising, and working to attract non-black listeners, these Urban stations were vulnerable to the critique that they no longer served the African-American community as a Black radio station should. Chuck Eddy noted this about their musical choices, saying that “the upwardly mobile sound of black radio…implies a socioeconomic progress that doesn’t exist in real life”[49] General Manager Joe Shamwell, in an editorial in *Billboard*, railed against stations which changed their formatting to Urban, writing that Urban was “bland [and] uncontroversial.” In an extended analogy, he compared the name Urban to margarine.[50] Like margarine, Urban was nondescript, and like margarine, the Urban format would always be directly compared to a more popular and successful product —Top 40 radio—rather than

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[47] Walt Love, “WDKX: Winning an Uphill Battle,” *Radio & Records*, November 21, 1986, 64.

[48] Kim Freeman, “Urban Stations Score as Heavyweight Contenders in Major Arbitron Races,” *Billboard*, September 27, 1986, B-6.

[49] Eddy, *Rock and Roll Always Forgets*, 171.

[50] Joe Shamwell, “Urban: ‘Margarine’ for Black Radio,” *Billboard*, November 1, 1986, 9.

establishing and maintaining its own identity. Shamwell continued, noting that using the term Urban would "[destroy] the community base of listeners" because "There are no communities made up of 'urbans,'" and ends by predicting the fall of Urban radio, writing, "History has shown us that those market leaders that abandon their bases lose their strategic advantage."[51]

Black-oriented radio stations provided African-American communities with a unique viewpoint tailored to black interests. By focusing on a more diverse audience, this perspective could disappear. For many, including Shamwell, the name change signaled "the homogenization of one of the few remaining bastions of ethnic identity."[52] Nelson George of *Billboard* conceded that Urban Contemporary and crossover were clever forms of marketing, but noted that because of the history of systematic inequality, maintaining a focus on the African-American public was vitally important. According to George, despite the problems inherent in calling a station Black, "The realities of the marketplace and the history of the music demand a more straightforward declaration."[53]

These interconnected debates about crossing over and radio format names originate out of two major positions in African-American political and aesthetic thought. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington

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[51] Ibid. His forecast is incorrect; as Steve Stoute notes, the "tanning of America" has created an entire community of urban consumers; however, in certain sense, Shamwell is right: these consumers are not all African American. See Stoute, *The Tanning of America*, 172.

[52] Joe Shamwell, "Urban: 'Margarine' for Black Radio," *Billboard*, November 1, 1986, 9. Jackie Rhinehart writes in a letter to *Billboard* a couple weeks later that Shamwell's editorial was such a necessary and eloquent piece of writing that she photocopied it and started handing it out. See Jackie Rhinehart, "The Real Thing," *Billboard*, November 22, 1986, 9.

[53] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, November 29, 1986, 24.

famously debated the place of African Americans in American culture, arguing over whether assimilation into white society would be beneficial for African Americans. This debate has framed and inspired subsequent African-American political thought, but racial politics, as Charles P. Henry writes, have significantly changed since the beginning of the 20th century, with the rise of the civil rights movement, the black power movement, and what he describes as the "conservative racism" of the post-civil rights era.[54] Nelson George too noticed in 1992 that contemporary attitudes about crossover and assimilation have changed, writing, "Looking over the last 20 years, it's apparent that when confronted by crossover, assimilation, and white standards of success, most African Americans have said, 'Well, I guess they're all right by me.'" He continues by noting that even the most "nationalist pop culturalists," which include Chuck D and Spike Lee, work within the white-owned systems of commodified culture.[55] In an attempt to cohesively articulate how contemporary economic models had affected black artists' relationships with the mainstream, Trey Ellis argued in 1989 that a new vanguard of black artists had formed a "New Black Aesthetic." According to Ellis, artists by the late 1980s "no longer need[ed] to deny or suppress any part of [their] complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black."[56]

The struggle over whether to cross over, and whether that entailed assimilating into the white mainstream, pervaded the musical discourse of the late 1980s, and in many ways Ellis' New Black Aesthetic reflects on and responds to these debates. A final complication revealed itself as white artists such as George Michael, Hall & Oates,

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[54] Henry, "Who Won The Great Debate - Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. DuBois?," 15.

[55] George, *Buppies*, *B-Boys*, *Baps*, *And Bohos*, 6.

[56] Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 235.

Expose, and Taylor Dayne began crossing over onto Urban radio in the late 1980s. The success of these "boomerang" or reverse crossover artists sparked questions about the veracity of George Clinton's claim that crossing over makes it easier for white artists to appropriate African-American music.[57] In 1989, George Michael, whose first commercial single in 1982, "Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)," featured him clumsily rapping about his street credibility and his identity as a "soul boy," won the Favorite Male Vocalist in both the Pop and the Soul/R&B categories at the American Music Awards. George Michael beat out superstar Michael Jackson and new jack swing artist and Urban radio darling Bobby Brown in the Soul/R&B category. Michael was the first white person to win in this category, which was typically awarded to African Americans; Nelson George described it as the "black male vocal category."[58] This win changed the stakes of the crossover and format naming debate—what did calling a station Black mean if George Michael's most recent album was a staple on those same station playlists?[59] Were Urban stations owners, in trying to expand their audience, encouraging another instance of white appropriation? Black musician Vernon Reid argued that George Michael winning this award made some in the music industry question the racial identity of music, asking, "If George Michael can be the 'best black artist,' then what does it mean to be a black artist?"[60]

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[57] David Nathan, "The World of Black Music," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, B-1, B-12, B-22.

[58] See Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, February 18, 1989, 26 and Hunt, "Black Radio Debates the Inclusion of White Artists."

[59] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, February 18, 1989, 26.

[60] Reid is quoted in Dave DiMartino and David Nathan, "Trade Debates Black Terminology: Does 'African American' Strike a Musical Note?," *Billboard*, February 25, 1989, 82.

In contrast to those who thought that crossover entailed a necessary selling out or crossing out, many critics celebrated the increase in crossover songs in the mid-1980s, hoping that these integrated playlists were signs of social progress. Crossover songs, to these critics, were a positive step forward because they erased the racist categorizations that negatively defined and impacted the music industry. Like rap bringing urban blackness to the white mainstream, crossover music perhaps helped promote racial integration. This optimistic analysis is hardly unique to the 1980s; journalist Steve Perry argues that rock and roll in the 1950s gave American youths their first opportunity to consciously integrate.[61] A few years later, the crossover singers of Motown were credited with facilitating the white consumption of black culture. As Susan Douglas writes, artists such as Diana Ross represented a new type of role model that rejected racist stereotypes, because she was a black woman who was emulated and adored by women and girls of all races and ethnicities.[62]

Twenty years later, the same argument was made about R&B crossover in the 1980s. In response to Joe Shamwell's editorial about the flaws of "margarine" Urban stations, *Billboard* published a number of letters from readers who disagreed with Shamwell's support of radio stations which strongly identified as Black. Randall Neal Cohen from Los Angeles wrote, "the shift from the term Black to Urban simply reflects how archaic it is to describe music by race when, in fact, music has (thankfully) destroyed such barriers. There is no place in the modern music business for a racially segregated mentality."[63] Similarly, David A. Knight admonished Shamwell, writing that

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[61] Perry, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," 69.
[62] See Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 96.
[63] Randall Neal Cohen, "Sounding Out on Race," *Billboard*, November 22, 1986, 9.

"black is a color, not a musical description. Let's try to keep color out of music. Remember, it's great music, not black music."[64] Their ideas about musical styles not being racially specific were validated by the amount of soul- and funk-derived music on Top 40 stations, a reminder that, as David Brackett writes, "the mainstream was already saturated with musical style markers that bore strong associations with African Americans."[65]

Other writers in *Billboard* felt similarly. David Nathan wrote in 1988 that the popularity of crossover music is "reflective of important social developments [such as] the effects of integration in high schools."[66] In a letter to the editor two years earlier, *Billboard* reader Jeff Scheckner celebrated the rise of integrated bands which he thought indicated the mixture of two styles of music that "not too long ago…seemed miles apart."[67] Another *Billboard* reader noticed that "something very nice" was happening on the charts and hoped that what he described as "one-style radio stations" would continue to diversify their playlists.[68] In an article published in 1986, the National Director of Black A&R for Warner Bros, Bennie Medina, connected an increase in black artists on Top 40 stations to an "intermingling of the races" outside the music business.[69]

In the same article, a record label executive from Arista forecasted that crossover success would lead to record companies allotting more resources for African-American artists who crossed over into the mainstream.[70] Steve Perry elaborated on this two years

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[64] David A. Knight, "Color Confusion," *Billboard*, November 22, 1986, 9.
[65] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 311.
[66] David Nathan, "The World of Black Music," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, B-1.
[67] Jeff Scheckner, "Integrating Top 40," *Billboard*, January 18, 1986, 8.
[68] Brett Fortney, "Crossovers Are Nice," *Billboard*, April 26, 1986, 9.
[69] Fred Goodman and Nelson George, "Majors See Black Music Boom," *Billboard*, January 25, 1986, 1, 72.
[70] Ibid.

later, encouraging black artists to cross over because mainstream success meant financial security.[71] Largely uninterested in the musical material of crossover hits, Perry argues that black artists have historically been confined to racially-classified sections of the record industry that do not pay or promote their artists as well as the pop section of record companies. By showing their ability to cross over, Perry hypothesizes that artists will receive the full backing of record companies and will rid themselves of the "inferior marketing category" of black music.[72] This conjecture was confirmed by John McClain of A&M, who provided an example of the support record companies would give to crossover artists in claiming that his company was "looking at the new Janet Jackson album with the same enthusiasm as a major white release."[73] Integrating into the white-controlled music industry would give black artists the opportunity to be treated like any other artist. Integration, for Perry, was worth it, because it would eventually lead to financial equality.

III. Crossover Debates on the Charts

With the complexities outlined above, it's no wonder that the radio industry continued arguing over how to refer to stations aimed at African-American audiences throughout the decade.[74] Format names mattered for these stations, and events inside and

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[71] See Perry, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough."

[72] Garofalo, "Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?," 232.

[73] Fred Goodman and Nelson George, "Majors See Black Music Boom," *Billboard*, January 25, 1986, 72.

[74] Not everyone in the music industry agreed on the importance of this debate. Primus Robinson, Vice President of Urban Music at Elektra Records didn't think there was a difference between Black and Urban, saying that "all of the terms are interchangeable" and that these semantics simply boil down to an intellectual debate. See

outside of the radio industry in the late 1980s displayed how discourse limited opportunity. Renaming stations seemed have an effect on attracting advertisers. Tom Meriendorf of Milwaukee's WLUM told *Billboard* that changing his station's description to Progressive Contemporary allowed the station "to present our audience…to any potential advertiser," which increased the station's financial strength.[75] Categorization also mattered for individual groups. Being labeled as black music had negative consequences for the group Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam. Bob Sherwood, senior vice president of marketing for Columbia Records revealed that even though the group's lead singer was Hispanic, they were treated as a black group, which caused their 1985 album to not be carried in some stores which considered black material to be either unsellable or unacceptable.[76] The impact of racial categorization was also visible in broader politics outside of the music industry. In 1988, Jesse Jackson called for blacks to begin referring to themselves as African-American, a term connecting people who identified as African American to their cultural heritage rather than to the color of their skin. According to Jackson, "Black tells you about skin color and what side of town you live on. African-American evokes discussion of the world."[77] For many, these two words had different

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Dave DiMartino and David Nathan, "Trade Debates Black Terminology: Does 'African American' Strike a Musical Note?," *Billboard*, February 25, 1989, 82.

[75] Walt Love, "Combatting the Negative Selling Crisis," *Radio & Records*, February 27, 1987, 52.

[76] Earl Paige, "NARM Confab Covers ABCs of Trade Issues," *Billboard*, November 8, 1986, 1, 76.

[77] Jackson is quoted in Wilkerson, "'African-American' Favored by Many of America's Blacks."

connotations as African-American connoted a seriousness or significance that black did not.[78]

Billboard and *Radio & Records* also struggled with appropriate terminology. In 1982, in the seventh such name change since its inception in 1942, *Billboard* renamed the chart that monitored airplay and sales of music targeted to an African-American audience from "Hot Soul Singles" to "Hot Black Singles."[79] This name change was in response to the rise of disco and funk, genres of music that were hard to fit under the category of soul, and the exact terminology was decided on by a survey of people in the black music industry.[80] But only a few years later, as many radio stations and music executives began shying away from using the word black to describe the style of music and the people who were listening to that style of music, *Billboard* was faced with yet another possible name change for its charts and feature pages. When questioned in 1986 about the name of the "Hot Black Singles" chart, Nelson George justified the use of the label black by noting that most of the artists on the chart and most of the people that bought music off of the chart were African-American. The term, George acknowledged, could be offensive, but he insisted that it reflected the realities of the racist world around him.[81]

Over the next few years, it became increasingly clear that labeling the chart as black not only was wrong in some cases, but also harmed artists more than it helped

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[78] Ibid. Later research has proved that there is a measurable difference between referring to someone as black versus African American. See Pinsker, "The Financial Consequences of Saying 'Black,' vs. 'African American.'"

[79] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, November 29, 1986, 24-5; and "Chart Histories," *Billboard*, 100th Anniversary Issue, 1994, 262-9, 271-3. David Brackett writes that the frequency of name changes "speak to a struggle over racial classification itself." See Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 236.

[80] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, November 29, 1986, 24-5.

[81] Ibid.

market them. *Radio & Records* changed the name of their chart in the middle of 1987, saying that the new name more accurately represented the choice that people in the Urban radio industry had made to work in that format rather than a predetermined racial appointment.[82] Stations followed suit; by 1989 *Radio & Records* reported that over two-thirds of stations referred to themselves as Urban rather than Black, up from 22% in 1983.[83]

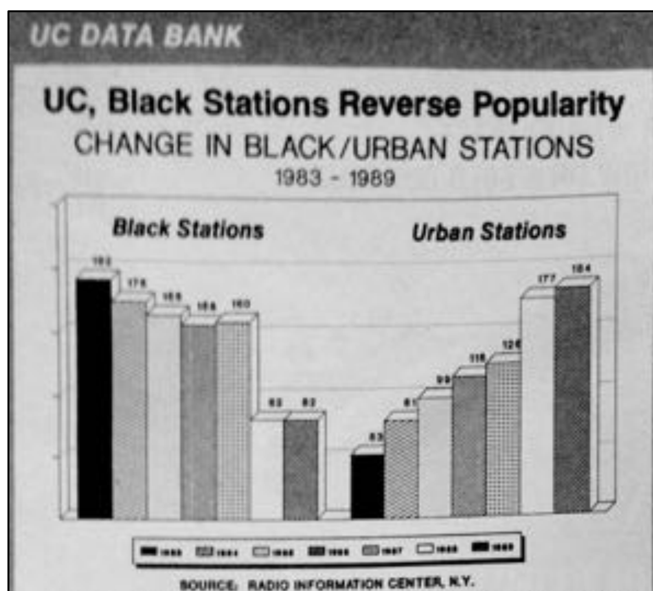

Fig. 6. "UC, Black Stations Reverse Popularity," *Radio & Records*, July 21, 1989, 60.

Billboard didn't adopt a name change until three years later, after Nelson George had retired his post as the editor of the Black music section, and after the magazine published a letter to the editor that claimed "*Billboard* itself is partly responsible for the racism that still pervades the record business, and it will continue to be fostered until you

[82] Walt Love, "The Change to Urban," *Radio & Records*, May 1, 1987, 44.
[83] Walt Love, "UC, Black Stations Reverse Popularity," *Radio & Records*, July 21, 1989, 60.

change the name of your black chart to R&B (or something else)."[84] A little over six months later, the editors of *Billboard* changed the chart name to R&B, sheepishly declaring that "While there is no consensus against the use of the term 'black music,' it is apparent that, for many, it is becoming less acceptable to identify music in racial terms."[85]

The name change was celebrated with the same rhetoric that many used to praise crossover music. On the pages of *Billboard,* a simple word choice was seen as a drastic change that would promote racial equality. Terri Rossi, the chart editor of what was now the Urban charts, wrote that "of all the events of 1990, the most important for me was the name change" because it gave music industry personnel more freedom to work in different genres.[86] Like the letters to the editor three years prior in response to Joe Shamwell's insistence on the relevance of Black stations had stated, the Senior Vice President of Black Music at Warner Brothers, Erni Singleton, insisted on music's universal nature, saying that there is no need to have such a "racist definition" to describe a style of music.[87] Breaking down barriers between the different segments of the music industry might have made a difference for individual rap artists' careers, as Russell Potter claims that it is these industry boundaries which "again and again forced black artists and producers" to balance between dropping their racial identity to go pop and staying true to

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[84] Adam Dobrin, "Reverse Racism?," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 11.

[85] This statement is from 1990, a rather recent date which reveals the extent to which the music industry has always understood music as tied to racial identity. See "Billboard Adopts 'R&B' as New Name for 2 Charts," *Billboard*, October 27, 1990, 6.

[86] Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, December 22, 1990, 35.

[87] Dave DiMartino and David Nathan, "Trade Debates Black Terminology: Does 'African American' Strike a Musical Note?," *Billboard*, February 25, 1989, 82.

their roots.[88] Glynace Coleman, the vice president of Urban promotions at EMI celebrated the change, saying it opened the doors for artists of all ethnicities to become popular. However, she warned that this might backfire as Vanilla Ice's progenies could now take over rap.[89]

Crossover Radio

Although the critiques of pop rap mirror the criticism of crossover music more generally in the 1980s, structural changes in the radio industry make the racial politics of hip hop's crossover into the mainstream more complicated. And while crossover artists initiated the debate, new radio formats made this issue more pressing. In the second half of this chapter I detail a shift in the radio industry, the development of the Crossover format, that fundamentally changed the nature of rap's crossover.

Tricia Rose argues that the essential difference between rap and other black music that was appropriated by the mainstream is that independent, rather than major, labels fostered the growth of hip hop. In the 1980s, major labels recognized that most of their A&R staff was not qualified to evaluate rap acts, because these older employees were mostly of the same mold as the staff at Urban radio stations who didn't understand or appreciate the value of the new genre. Instead of trying to sign rap acts to their labels, these corporations bought independent labels and signed distribution deals with these smaller record companies, trusting the staff at independent labels to evaluate new acts.[90]

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[88] Potter, "Soul Into Hip-Hop," 143.

[89] "Billboard Adopts 'R&B'as New Name for 2 Charts," *Billboard*, October 27, 1990, 6, 35.

[90] Rose, *Black Noise*, 6–7.

But this was not the only structural change that made rap crossover unique. Crossover, of course, is dependent on musicians and the record industry; artists need to make music which captures the fancy of mainstream audiences, and record companies need to promote that music in a way that facilitates crossover. Rap artists did this, to great acclaim and disparagement, and record labels helped. But crossing over is also dependent on access; mainstream audiences need to be able to easily encounter crossover music. In the late 1980s, radio programmers designed a Top 40 subformat to foster such a space.

I. The Birth of Crossover Radio

In early 1986, Program Director Jeff Wyatt moved to Los Angeles and reformatted the failing adult contemporary radio station "Magic 106" to KPWR, or "Power 106," a new version of the Top 40 format that capitalized on the growing similarities in white and African-American audiences' musical taste detailed earlier in this chapter. The station was an offshoot of the Top 40 format, but unlike standard Top 40 stations, its innovative blend of Top 40, R&B, and dance music was intended to attract a multiracial audience made up of whites, African Americans, and Los Angeles' large Hispanic population.[91] DJs at the station played mostly uptempo "Big Beat dance music," as the *Los Angeles Times* described the sound of the station, with an occasional popular ballad mixed in. Top 40 hits initially made up almost two-thirds of the playlist; the other third consisted of original dance mixes and other less nationally-recognized dance songs

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[91] Goldstein, "Kpwr Wields Power in Radio Ratings War."

by black, white and Hispanic performers.[92] This mix proved to be appealing, and the station immediately saw its ratings improve thanks to its success at attracting a multiracial audience.[93]

The radio industry didn't quite know what to make of this station. Its combination of music for black, white, and Hispanic audiences, what Billboard described as "upbeat, pop/urban fare," didn't fit into the radio industry's preexisting categories.[94] Contemporary hit stations in the past were usually pop *or* Urban, not some "pop/urban" mixture; radio stations typically attracted mostly white *or* black audiences, not both. The station's ability to attract a Hispanic audience was even more surprising, as the radio industry was only beginning to acknowledge this demographic.[95] KPWR's success in appealing to a multiracial audience struck a blow to the radio industry's belief that whites and blacks by and large preferred different music played on separate stations, not to mention the added confusion of what to make of Hispanic audiences liking the same music.

Billboard and *Radio & Records* couldn't decide how to label the station, and argued with KPWR's staff for about a year about whether it counted as a Top 40 station when it played so much music aimed for a minority audience.[96] The station quickly grew

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[92] Ibid., and Kim Freeman, "Wyatt Gets PD Nod at L.A.'s KPWR," *Billboard*, February 22, 1986, 14.

[93] KPWR's audience was originally at least forty-eight percent non-black listeners. See Lee Michaels, "Crossover Begins at Urban Radio," *Billboard*, October 4, 1986, 9.

[94] Kim Freeman, "Out of the Box," *Billboard*, January 31, 1987, 10.

[95] The radio industry was rather slow to target Hispanic audiences; in 1980, there were only 67 "Spanish-oriented" stations nationwide, although this increased to 390 by 1990 and 600 by 2000. See Casillas, "Listening to Race and Migration on Contemporary U.S. Spanish-Language Radio," 97.

[96] McDougal, "L.A. Turn-On Is a Top 40 Turnoff."

too popular for the trade magazines to continue skirting the issue: by the beginning of 1987, the station claimed the largest audience in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. And yet its playlists were not factored into the charts at trade publications nor reported alongside other Top 40 stations because, according to Wyatt, the station refused to report its playlists as long as the trade magazines continued to "pigeonhole" the station.[97] Put another way: the tastes of one of the largest radio audiences in the country didn't affect official measures of song popularity because the station played too much music for black and Hispanic audiences to count as a mainstream Top 40 station.

Power 106 challenged the radio industry's racial logic, where white audiences listened to white stations, black audiences listened to Urban stations, and Hispanic audiences, if they lived in the right area, listened to a Spanish-oriented station. Instead, Power 106 was defined by its multicultural audience. The station desegregated one part of the radio dial, monetizing diverse audiences and normalizing their existence. In an industry that had for decades imagined their audience as racially segregated, they consciously created a multiracial public. And Power 106 wasn't the only station fusing the radio industry's divided airwaves and recognizing the possibility of a more integrated mainstream. This style of station was attractive to advertisers because it appealed to a broad multiracial audience but had enough white listeners to avoid the negative associations of an Urban station. New York and Miami quickly established their own version of this blended format, and stations in other cities followed. In February 1987, *Billboard* proposed a solution to the problem of these popular stations not reporting to

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[97] Ibid. *Billboard* listed Los Angeles station KIIS-FM, which KPWR overtook in ratings in early 1987, as one of the top five largest stations in the country. See, for example, "Power Playlists," *Billboard*, January 17, 1987, 18.

their charts by including these stations on a new "Hot Crossover 30 chart." This chart provided a place to measure the popularity of songs played by what were called Crossover stations, but also didn't require the radio industry to come to terms with these stations that so fundamentally challenged the racially-demarcated radio landscape.[98]

II. Crossover Sounds

In the early 1980s, Top 40 radio stations excised disco from their playlists due to the overwhelming antipathy displayed towards it by rock fans.[99] But only a few years later, the sound returned to the airwaves under the new label of dance music made popular by stars like Madonna, Michael Jackson and Prince.[100] Crossover stations programmed all of these artists, playing a majority of songs that were inspired by disco.

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[98] David Brackett writes that the appearance of this chart "tells us that certain forms of movement between categories had become conventionalized, and that crossover itself could become expanded to a market category or reduced to a musical style. Crossover had become its own convention, and the stakes were lowered in terms of what the term meant for homologies between musical and social categories." See Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 315. I don't necessarily agree with his conclusion, especially since his book focuses on genre rather than radio format, which this chart measured. As I note later, Crossover programmers still paid considerable attention to the racial identities of performers and audiences.

[99] Eric Weisbard writes that "resistance to black records [was] declared at 'an all-time high' in early 1982." See Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 181.

[100] See Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 216. Madonna's sound in the early part of her career was racially ambiguous; in his biography of her, Christopher P. Andersen writes that her record company was unsure of what picture to put on her first album as to not alienate black audiences who thought she was black. He writes, "If the record executives had assumed from listening to her sing that Madonna was black, then the public would make the assumption as well. In addition, her early records had received their best exposure on black radio stations. Would black radio stations continue to play her records and young black audiences buy them if they were confronted with the fact that Madonna was not one of them? Finally the decision was made to call the album *Madonna*, but to leave her face off the jacket." See Andersen, *Madonna*, 110.

Noting the similarities, the radio industry initially conceived of the popularity of Crossover stations as a revival of disco-formatted stations of the late 1970s; however, as these stations matured and outlasted the lifetime of disco-formatted stations, these ideas largely were disregarded.

Each Crossover station played a unique set of songs; their playlists varied to the extent that *Billboard* designated some stations as pure Crossover stations, some as leaning more towards the Top 40 format, and some as closer to the Urban format.[101] What united the stations, who described themselves as "Hot," "The Fresh New Music Mix," and "Danceable Top 40 without any hard-edged rock records," was that their playlists were distinct from the music heard on a more traditional Top 40 station.[102] The week that *Billboard* created the Crossover chart in February 1987, for example, most Top 40 stations across the nation were playing quite a bit of pop and a fair amount of rock; their playlists contained Huey Lewis and the News, Journey, and Bon Jovi's number one single for three weeks running, "Livin' on a Prayer."

Stations in the Crossover format that same week were playing R&B songs (by artists such as Club Nouveau and Cameo), a considerable amount of upbeat pop that mostly derived from disco (songs by Madonna, Samantha Fox, Cyndi Lauper), and some freestyle by artists such as The Cover Girls and Exposé. Despite *New York Times* critic Jon Pareles's dismissive remark that the music on Crossover stations all sounded like "Madonna wannabes," the music played on Crossover radio in early 1987 was quite

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[101] In October 1987, twenty-seven stations reported to *Billboard*'s "Hot Crossover 30" chart, thirteen of them exclusively to that chart. See "Two Billboard Charts Revised," *Billboard*, October 31, 1987, 6.

[102] *Billboard's* Brian Chin describes these stations as "so-called top 40/urban hybrid/crossover/hot/power radio stations." See Brian Chin, "Radio's Resurgent Dance Beat Puts Heat in 'Hot' Format," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-3.

diverse in style, ranging from Janet Jackson's shimmery ballad "Let's Wait Awhile" to Bruce Willis's cover of The Staple Singers' 1970s soul hit "Respect Yourself" and Madonna's synthesizer-rich jaunty song "Open Your Heart" (and, to Pareles's credit, some similar-sounding songs by Samantha Fox and Cyndi Lauper).

Freestyle, which combined the electronic-rich beats of electro songs like Africa Bambaataa & the Soulsonic Force's "Planet Rock" with vaguely Latin rhythms and often rather stifled female vocals, arose out of Puerto Rican and African-American hip hop culture in New York in the early 1980s; venues would play freestyle records in between rap songs or would alternate between hip hop and freestyle nights.[103] Despite the common perception that hip hop arose out of African American neighborhoods in New York City, Puerto Ricans were integral members of the New York hip hop communities of the late 1970s and early 1980s.[104] By the mid-1980s, Puerto Ricans were largely excluded from hip hop's center; Raquel Rivera writes that "the growing African Americanization of hip hop" in the second half of the 1980s occurred largely due to misrepresentation of hip hop in the mass media, one that displayed a "reductive notion of blackness as exclusively African American" and "suffer[ed] from severe cultural-historical amnesia."[105]

Freestyle arose as a response to the growing marginalization of Puerto Ricans as hip hop gained popularity and became understood as something created primary by African Americans, and African-American males in particular.[106] The style, writes Rivera, gave Puerto Ricans, and other New York Hispanic populations, a music that uniquely belonged to them. This music allowed *these* marginalized communities, much like the

[103] Rivera, *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*, 88.
[104] Ibid., 1.
[105] Ibid., 89.
[106] Ibid.; and Vazquez, "Instrumental Migrations," 180.

African Americans creating hip hop who were distancing themselves from Puerto Ricans, a chance to see people from their communities as stars. Freestyle singer George LaMond recalled that "I felt like I was representing my hometown and my Puerto Rican people. It made me that much more proud of being a Latino."[107] Songwriter and producer Andy Panda similarly noted that freestyle, much like hip hop had for young African Americans, gave Puerto Ricans a "sense of identity," adding that it also provided opportunities and spaces for Puerto Ricans to thrive in the music industry.[108] Outside of New York Puerto Ricans, freestyle was popular among a variety of racial and ethnic groups, in particular Italian-Americans in Northeast urban areas.

Despite its origins in the hip hop community, freestyle sounded quite different from the rap that is typically canonized from the mid-to-late 1980s. The lyrics were mostly about urban heartbreak and other matters of love; according to singer Judy Torres, the genre was "a soap opera set to music."[109] Rappers, Rivera notes, were "broaching topics more concerned with ghetto life, racial strife, and personal/artistic prowess."[110] Musically, freestyle shared many qualities with disco, including its reliance on female vocalists who sang atop fast-paced, beat-forward textures played mostly by synthesizers, allowing these songs to fit in on Crossover playlists rather easily.

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[107] LaMond is quoted in Rivera, *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*, 90.

[108] Panda is quoted in ibid.

[109] Torres is quoted in Vazquez, "Can You Feel the Beat?," 107. David Toop describes the music as "faithful to the old electro sound of [Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force's] 'Planet Rock' adding Latin percussion elements and an overlay of teenage romance." Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 174–5.

[110] Rivera, *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*, 88. Rivera's description, written to accentuate the difference between these genres, simplifies what was the extremely diverse lyrical content of the rap at the time.

Regardless of the artists' racial diversity and the songs' origins in various genres, Crossover station playlists consisted of songs that, in Jon Pareles's belittling but rather accurate description "percolate and kick with an electronic drumbeat, an overlay of gleaming keyboard sounds and Latin percussion and, most important, a chirpy, girlish vocal dispensing come-ons or back-offs." The music played on these stations, like most dance and pop music, was rarely celebrated by critics. Pareles, just a year after the debut of KPWR, wrote a rather patronizing short article on the format, deriding both the artistry of the music played on these stations as well as the audiences who turn to these stations. He writes,

> "Hot" music is the kind of urban hybrid that seems inevitable in hindsight - a poppy dance music, built on disco, with a new infusion of Latin rhythm and a younger, deracinated image. It's like "lite" disco music, steering clear of disco's grand passions. Instead of the commanding voices of disco divas, "hot" songs depend on lilting jingles; they evoke a teen-aged mating game in which singers treat a new romance or a breakup about as seriously as missing an aerobics class. Unlike disco, a confluence of American and European, black and white dance rhythms that eventually hardened into a genre, "hot" music was born generic. Records are already being cranked out to fit "hot" radio formats, and to anyone who pays attention, the formula is already getting pretty thin; hearing Stacy Q only makes a listener wonder why the station's not playing Madonna herself. But just like disco radio, "hot" stations are functional; people who want an up-tempo, metronomic pulse for the day can turn to a "hot" station.[111]

While Pareles claims that the music these stations played "deracinated" disco, the racial identities of the stations were much more complex. Instead of understanding the music they played as unraced sound that would appeal across demographics, programmers at these stations paid considerable attention to how the exact racial makeup of their audience determined what music they played. These stations were listened to by what KPWR's owner described as a "coalition" of white, black, and Hispanic audience

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[111] Pareles, "Critic's Notebook: Clones of Madonna."

members, and often the audience's demographic makeup determined the amount of music taken from the Top 40, Urban, and Dance charts, respectively.[112] Despite the similarities in tempo and mood between the various styles of music that they played, programmers found pleasing this multiracial audience to be challenging, as the three demographic groups' tastes did not always align. Duff Lindsay of XHRM San Diego described his station's playlist as a careful negotiation between the tastes of the black, white, and Hispanic segments of his audience. During music meetings, the staff "openly discussed who they thought a song would appeal to, and who would be turned off by it," and tried to only play songs that they thought at least two out of the three groups would enjoy.[113] Another programmer recounted the "nightmare" experience of trying to balance the sound at the station, especially because it was often hard to find musical common ground between Hispanic and African-American audiences.[114]

Lining up dance music alongside Top 40 and R&B records might "seem like strange bedfellows" to someone who didn't understand local audience tastes, according to Bill Tanner, program director at Miami's Crossover station.[115] But for him and his listeners, the mashup of genres was "perfectly correct."[116] The stations, according to

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[112] Kim Freeman, "Crossover Outlets Prove Their Power," *Billboard*, September 5, 1987, 80. Also see Brian Chin, "Radio's Resurgent Dance Beat Puts Heat in 'Hot' Format," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-3, T-8. In New York, for example, when WGTZ switched to a Crossover format, consultants disagreed on whether the station should lean Urban, straight down the middle, or more like "a white-boy, Italian-based dance station." See Sean Ross, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, March 14, 1992, 82.

[113] Walt Love and Sean Ross, "The Return of the Zebra," *Radio & Records*, January 2, 1987, 44.

[114] Sean Ross, "More Dance Stations Are Now Stepping to an Urban Beat," *Billboard*, October 6, 1990, 13.

[115] Brian Chin, "Radio's Resurgent Dance Beat Puts Heat in 'Hot' Format," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-3.

[116] Ibid.

dance music journalist Brian Chin in *Billboard*'s 1987 annual special issue on dance music, didn't try to cultivate a certain sound so much as they programmed records that other stations "generally ignored for an audience that was not directly served."[117]

III. Crossover Stations Add Rap

For programmers reading these words in Chin's article on Crossover stations, they only had to turn the page to find another style of music (and an associated audience) that was also being generally ignored: rap. Radio airplay in the mid-1980s for rap records was rare. The industry's most natural fit for the genre was the Urban format, whose stations were programmed to attract African-American audiences.[118] But Urban stations were reticent to play the genre; many Urban stations only played rap on exclusive mix shows aired in the wee hours of the morning, when station owners were relatively certain that the higher-income older demographics they were courting were not listening.[119]

On the following page in the dance music special section were two articles about rap. The first adhered to the standard narrative of hip hop's growth in popularity, bragging about rap's sales despite the lack of support from radio.[120] For the first decade of the genre, rap was often classified as dance music by the music industry, likely because of its popularity in nightclubs, the racial identity of its performers, and its use of disco beats as background tracks. Alex Ogg and David Upshal argue that rap grew

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[117] Ibid.

[118] See Barlow, *Voice Over*; Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*.

[119] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 217.

[120] See Stephanie Shepherd, "Rap's Amazing Sales-Without-Airplay Muscle," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-3, D-6, T-8.

directly out of disco, appropriating the style because the physical spaces of disco were unavailable to urban youths.[121] Thus it's not entirely surprising that in 1987, rap would still appear in the dance music special section of *Billboard*. But this article didn't link rap with dance; in fact, it featured mostly rappers who intentionally distanced themselves from the sounds of disco.[122] This meant that these styles of rap wouldn't have sonically fit in at Crossover stations, whose playlists were dominated by disco-inspired music.

But the second article about rap on this page made it clear that there were other styles of rap that could fit in on Crossover stations. David Peaslee's article on rap advertised the methods of "radiowise" rappers and producers who were making music that would work well on radio.[123] According to Peaslee, rap was "originally developed as an alternative to radio," echoing the assertions of Ogg and Upshal. Lately, however,

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[121] Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 18.

[122] Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 216. Also see Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 153. Run D.M.C., who is profiled in Shepherd's article, famously rejected disco's sound. Rick Rubin noted that he and Russell Simmons,

> both liked and disliked the same things in music, except that we came to it from different directions. Russell like[d] beat-oriented material derived from R&B, and I liked beat-oriented material based in rock, like AC/DC and Aerosmith. In both cases, it was dance music that was a reaction against boring disco…What differentiates our records from disco records is the kick drum. Rock goes boom-ba-*cha*, boom-boom-ba-*cha*. The publse beat of disco does *boom-boom-boom-boom-boom.* In other words, rap is rock even if there isn't a big stupid guitar in your face.

Rubin is quoted in Adler, *Tougher Than Leather*, 107. Kalefah Sanneh writes that Run-D.M.C. "helped invent (and popularize) rapping as we know it, severing the ties between hip-hop and disco. They didn't dress as if they were going to a party, and they didn't rhyme like it, either." While it's unclear what he means by "rap as we know it," his interpretation of Run-D.M.C.'s role in changing the sound of rap rings true to Rubin's recollection. See Sanneh, "Rapping about Rapping," 225.

[123] David Peaslee, "Radiowise Musicians Plug in Rap's Greatest Beats to Stir Up Media Culture in Fresh Way," *Billboard*, July 18, 1987, D-3.

things have changed; “rap music,” he writes, “is often produced with radio exposure as a prime consideration.”[124]

Peaslee focuses most of his attention on an emerging style of rap characterized by its use of long, recognizable samples of non-rap songs. “Cover tunes,” as discussed in the previous chapter, made rap legible for outsiders by repackaging the unfamiliar sounds of rap in a familiar song. For example, The Fat Boys’ “The Twist (Yo Twist),” released in 1988, added rapped verses to the 1960s hit song “The Twist.” The choruses were performed by the original artist, rock and roll star Chubby Checker, who sang updated lyrics backed by a synthesized update of the song’s original musical background. This style of rap was not all that different from the music typically played on Crossover radio stations, and the format embraced the song.[125] The chorus was upbeat and familiar, and, what’s more, the production style was familiar to Crossover audiences as the song was produced by one of the most popular freestyle producer groups, the Latin Rascals.[126]

Aside from “cover tunes,” other rap artists in the late 1980s made styles of rap which similarly attracted Crossover station programmers’ attention. Indeed, the very same styles of rap discussed in the previous chapter were easy additions to Crossover playlists because their musical sound matched the pop, R&B, and dance music that was already played on Crossover radio. New jack swing artists, like freestyle artists, based their sound on the musical backgrounds of hip hop, and this blend of musical genres made the style easy to program on Crossover stations. Pop rap mitigated concerns about

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[124] Ibid.

[125] The week of its release, music director Chris Bailey at the Crossover station in Charlotte, N.C. recommended the song to Billboard’s readership. See Yvonne Olson, “Outa’ the Box,” *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 10.

[126] See “Fat Boys are Coming Back Hard Again,” *Billboard*, June 11, 1988, 1.

rap's "unintelligibility," "aggressiveness," and "frightening" nature among Top 40 and Crossover programmers alike. For example, Young M.C.'s 1989 pop rap hit "Bust A Move" avoided many of the negative qualities that programmers associated with rap. The upbeat danceable song has a chorus with a catchy sung melody, with clearly enunciated humorous lyrics that Janine McAdams of *Billboard* noted are "inventive, humorous, and don't offend."[127] Florida programmer Ron Brooks claimed that his adult female audience liked the song "because they could understand the words."[128]

Crossover station programmers noticed that these upbeat, melodic songs with rapping in them appealed to their diverse audience. According to some program directors surveyed by *Billboard*, their Hispanic audience's tastes were "becoming blacker."[129] This revelation, that musical taste was not always predetermined by a listener's ethnic origin, made programming Crossover stations easier because all members of their audience agreed on a style: pop- and R&B-influenced rap. They liked this music so uniformly that *Billboard*'s Sean Ross hypothesized in 1990 that new jack swing and pop-influenced rap were safer to play on Crossover stations than the freestyle that these stations had played so frequently in the late 1980s because not all demographics who listened to the stations liked freestyle. Rap, on the other hand, was a "common denominator" between the often-divergent tastes of all three parts of their multiracial audience, meaning that hip hop songs were easy and convenient additions to Crossover station playlists.[130]

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[127] Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, October 7, 1989, 21.

[128] Dave Sholin, "Inside Top 40," *The Gavin Report*, October 29, 1989, 14.

[129] Sean Ross, "More Dance Stations are Now Stepping to an Urban Beat," *Billboard*, October 6, 1990, 13.

[130] Ibid.

Rap songs soon dominated the playlists at these stations. While in June 1988, hip hop was getting more airplay on Urban stations than anywhere else, by 1989, Crossover stations played more rap than any other format.[131] That year, new jack swing and rap songs topped *Billboard*'s "Hot Crossover 30" chart for most of the year. This increase in rap and new jack swing made Crossover stations the most likely place to hear hip hop on the radio, as only three hip hop inflected songs hit number one on traditional Top 40 stations in 1989 and less than a third of the number-one songs on Urban radio that year sounded at all like hip hop.

The following year, the amount of rap heard on Top 40 and Crossover airwaves increased substantially. During the last half of the 1980s, songs with rap in them made up somewhere between two and four percent of the music played by Top 40 stations as reported by *Billboard*. In 1990, this increased to seventeen percent.[132] Part of this change had to do with a change in *Billboard*'s chart methodology; in late 1989, the editors relaxed their requirements and allowed all Crossover stations, rather than just some, to count towards the "Hot 100" chart.[133] But the primary cause of the increase in rap's airplay had to do with how successful these Crossover stations had become. As the format flourished, Top 40 station programmers, who were notoriously bad at

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[131] Yvonne Olson, "As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 1, 68; and Leo Sacks, "The Majors," *Billboard*, December 16, 1989, R-3, R-25, R-28, R-32.

[132] See Appendix One.

[133] Complicating this is the effect that Rock 40 stations had on the "Hot 100"; these stations leaned more towards rock sounds and avoided playing rap, pop, and R&B. Like Crossover stations, *Billboard* initially did not count all of these stations' airplay towards the "Hot 100" chart, but switched the methodology in September 1989. See Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 84.

programming rap, began to poach songs from Crossover playlists.[134] Crossover stations had quite a bit in common with Top 40 stations. Most of their operating staff had experience working at Top 40 stations and were familiar with Top 40 audience tastes. Crossover stations also understood the game of how simultaneously satisfy their conservative advertisers and their adventurous listeners. Recognizing these correspondences, many Top 40 programmers began treating Crossover playlists as testing grounds for songs that they were considering playing on their own stations.

In 1988, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that all but one of the fourteen songs that reached number one on *Billboard*'s "Hot Crossover 30" chart that year made it to the top five on the "Hot 100," meaning that Top 40 programmers were regularly and frequently incorporating the popular songs from Crossover stations onto their playlists, which, as the 1980s wore on, sounded more and more like rap.[135] As pop-rap and new jack swing began doing well on Crossover stations, Top 40 programmers began playing these same songs. Due to the influence of Crossover stations on Top 40 radio stations' playlists, Urban crossover hits accounted for a greater percentage of *Billboard* "Hot 100" hits in 1990 than any year since at least 1979, and this percentage only continued to increase

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[134] According to programmer Dave Allan of Philadelphia, "Top 40 radio doesn't seem to have any real science as to what rap they play, nor do I think they understand why they play it." Allan is quoted in Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, February 25, 1989, 23. This complaint differs from the accounts I quote in the first chapter, where programmers are rather articulate about why they play the rap they choose to play. This discrepancy indicates a certain amount of distance between insider/outsider accounts of playing rap, but also at the likelihood that Top 40 stations were taking considerable influence from other formats or subformats in their decisions of what rap to play.

[135] Grein, "Mass-Appeal Dance Music Still Calling the Tune"; and Sean Ross, "PDs Struggle with Crossover Logic," *Billboard*, January 28, 1989, 1, 12.

over the next few years.[136] Top 40 stations that did not embrace the sounds coming from Crossover radio fared poorly, as Indianapolis programmer Don London warned in *Radio & Records* in the summer of 1990. Indeed, by the end of 1990, Crossover songs were so ubiquitous on Top 40 stations that Billboard did away with the "Hot Crossover 30" chart because, according to the chart editors, it didn't make sense to have a separate chart with almost all of the same songs on it.[137]

IV. Rap is Pop

By 1991, hip hop was a constant presence on Top 40 radio. In this year, songs with rap in them made up about a fifth of Top 40 playlists, a tenfold increase from 1986.[138] Rap was no longer unprogrammable, and it was no longer assumed to appeal only to minority youths. It was music for everyone—it had become part of the everyday sound of these stations. To borrow from the rather staid and sober comments the president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences made a few years earlier when

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[136] See Appendix Two. This is based on a data set beginning in 1979, so the number of years for this statistic could be greater. I calculated these amounts based on year. For a slightly more detailed result based on quarterly estimates, see Dowd and Blyler, "Charting Race," 99. In 1993, rap songs were so popular on the "Hot 100" (based both on sales and airplay on certain stations) that it caused a bit of a controversy. See Jim Sanches, "More Variety on Hot 100," *Billboard*, February 20, 1993, 6; Carlos Siliceo, "Chart Debate," *Billboard*, March 13, 1993, 12; Mark Doddington, "Hot 100 Debate Continues," *Billboard*, March 27, 1993, 6; and Mark Dobson, "Hot 100 Part Two," *Billboard*, March 27, 1993, 6.

[137] See "Billboard Drops Crossover Radio Airplay Charts," *Billboard*, December 8, 1990, 84.

[138] See Appendix One.

he introduced the new Grammy category for rap, the music had once been "an urban black music form," but had "evolved into something more than that."[139]

This triumphant change had only been possible through the influence of Crossover stations, where rappers making dance- and pop-influenced music could easily be played. By inspiring mainstream Top 40 stations to play rap, they changed the sound of the mainstream, the unstated white imaginary, to include rap. To be clear, they didn't change the mainstream to include *all* styles of rap—Top 40 radio was extraordinarily picky about what it would play—but these stations challenged the idea that rap was only something listened to by poor, urban youths. Rap, the genre that was still being defined by Robert Hilburn in the *LA Times* as "black street music" was also now mainstream music.[140]

Through its exposure on Top 40 stations, rap became integrated into the sounds of everyday popular music. This airplay made rap at once accessible and unavoidable. Turning on Top 40 radio in 1991 was a bit of a gamble—you might hear a slow, melismatic sweet ballad by Whitney Houston, Madonna flitting on top of a dance beat, or some thorny guitar licks on a Poison rock song. But you also might hear Freedom Williams rapping over C&C Music Factory's jock jams beat in their recent hit "Here We Go (Let's Rock & Roll)." While Williams in this song asserts that his musical lineage goes back to rock and roll, his more immediate influence is freestyle; the song's hip-house style descends from freestyle's close relationship with electronic dance music. You

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[139] See Ken Terry, "Grammys Get New Categories," *Billboard*, June 4, 1988, 6, 68. Forman writes that "this quote offers a classic example of the continuing devaluation of rap, and of black cultural expression in genre, in the culture industries." See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 173.

[140] Hilburn, "Getting a Bad Rap."

might encounter Salt-N-Pepa's explanation about the virtues of taking relationships slowly along to new jack swing beats in their song "Do You Want Me," or you might hear Paula Abdul's dancey duet with a rapping cartoon cat "Opposites Attract," a song which makes pop rap's combination of pop music and rapped vocals almost comically clear. On the radio, you'd hear the styles of hip hop that Crossover stations made famous, the style chosen to attract a multiracial audience.

Hearing rap on these stations was just like hearing any other genre of music; rather than segregating it on a rap show, rap formed a part of the Top 40 sound. Top 40 radio forced listeners to confront rap—to experience something new. But this confrontation was easy. Hearing rap in these contexts required little knowledge of hip hop's culture and didn't demand effort on the part of the listeners. Audiences hearing rap on Top 40 stations were not trying to hear hip hop, they were instead trying to hear the hits.

Top 40 radio wasn't the only place that forced mainstream audiences to encounter rap. By the time Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer hit the top of the charts, rap was audible across mainstream media: major market advertisers used professional and amateur rappers to sell their products on television and radio; news broadcasts, sitcoms and late night television shows occasionally featured rappers; children in the early 1990s learned their multiplication tables or state capitals by rapping along to educational rap cassettes; and, of course, rap could be heard just walking around.[141] Like Top 40 radio, these

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[141] For example, Legos, Pillsbury, Sprite, and Taco Bell all used rappers in their commercials. Rappers appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, *Married with Children*, and on *The Cosby Show*, among other shows. For two examples of educational rap, see Caudle, *Multiplication Rap*; and Jones, *Map Rap*. Also see Sean Ross, "Teens, Adults Split on Top 40 Hits," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 1, 12, 18.

encounters with rap were not driven by listener choice; they were unintentional. As rap made its way onto Top 40 radio, into advertisements, onto television shows, and into schools, it became mainstream, ubiquitous, and, according to Carmen Ashhurst-Watson of Def Jam, a "comfortable" sound.[142] It became normalized.

V. What About MTV?

This version of rap's crossover contrasts drastically with traditional accounts of rap's rise in popularity, which give MTV, and in particular the rap show *Yo! MTV Raps*, credit for exposing a mass audience to the music because it increased national, and even international, exposure to hip hop.[143] Nelson George, for example, argues that MTV gave young people all over the country an opportunity to not just hear rap, but also to embrace its visual culture, making hip hop into a replicable style rather than simply a musical genre.[144] *Yo! MTV Raps*, much like *Rappin'* and Crossover radio, made rap legible for millions by introducing rap as something familiar that fit into the everyday lives of mainstream audiences. The initial episode of *Yo! MTV Raps* began rather inauspiciously, with Ready Rock C, DJ Jazzy Jeff, and The Fresh Prince sitting on a couch in a backstage

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[142] Ashhurst-Watson is quoted in Rose, "Contracting Rap: An Interview with Carmen Ashhurst-Watson," 128.

[143] See Jones, "Crossover Culture: Popular Music and the Politics of 'Race,'" 110; Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 3; Monica Lynch in Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 112; Rose, *Black Noise*, 4, 9; and Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 58. Michael Eric Dyson holds MTV partially responsible for rap's transformations as it moved into the mainstream; See Dyson, "The Culture of Hip-Hop." Nelson George writes that "of everything that has affected the evolution of hip hop—cash, corporations, crack, sampling, crime, violence—nothing is more important than music videos." See George, *Hip Hop America*, 97. Chart guru Chris Molanphy claims that the rise of hip hop on the charts can be "attributed directly to MTV." See Molanphy, "100 & Single."

[144] George, *Hip Hop America*, 101.

area. Ready Rock C is beatboxing, but quietly, and the other two are talking to each other while they get ready to start. As the three introduce themselves, it's hard to tell whether they are rapping or speaking. It's not until The Fresh Prince says, "Hold up, bust this" and Ready Rock C starts beatboxing louder that the sounds of rap are apparent, that the difference between this show and every other show on the music video network which usually played pop and rock becomes audible. The opening of this show makes clear how easily a person can become part of the hip hop nation, as The Fresh Prince observably transitions in front of his audience from his non-rap speaking persona into a rapper. The entire show continues similarly, as it makes hip hop culture visible, audible, and legible to a large audience.

This first episode of the show, broadcast in 1988, was a remarkable success, achieving three times the typical viewership of MTV's other shows, with an audience made up primarily of white suburban men in their teens and early twenties.[145] MTV was surprised by the show's popularity, just as they had been by the success of every single one of the handful of rap songs programmed on the channel. As Dan Charnas writes, MTV disregarded the "evidence of rap's currency with mainstream America" regardless of the popularity of music videos by Run-D.M.C., the Beastie Boys, and even DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, whose most recent song had become the most popular video on the channel.[146] But within months, *Yo! MTV Raps* was the most watched show on the channel, and, capitalizing on the success of this show, MTV increased its amount of rap

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[145] Steven Dupler, "The Eye," *Billboard*, August 20, 1988, 46; and Samuels in Sexton, *Rap on Rap*, 249.

[146] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 239. Run-D.M.C.'s "Rock Box" was the first video by a rap group to be played on the station, but the music "polarized MTV's audience." See Ibid., 115. Before that, MTV had played "Rockit," a collaboration between Herbie Hancock and Grandmaster DST. See Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 80.

programming over the next year to a peak of fourteen hours of rap specialty shows per week, although the exact amount of time rap was programmed on MTV varied considerably throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.[147] Scholars, acknowledging radio's hesitation to play rap until the late 1980s, give MTV and other music video channels credit for rap's growing popularity among non-black audiences.

Rappers themselves furthered this narrative by protesting radio's timidity; for example, Public Enemy declared on their 1988 album that "radio suckers never play me," and Chuck D, at a panel at the 1989 New Music Seminar, declared that "Radio is out of here," because "video is the thing now."[148] While his prediction of the demise of radio did not prove correct, Chuck D's statement about music video is true. MTV's influence on the genre's growth is undeniable; as the president of Profile Records noted in 1989, MTV was "an incredible help in breaking artists for us."[149] But despite its importance, MTV didn't make rap mainstream, for reasons that are worth noting.

First, radio's reach is far greater than MTV's. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, well over 90 percent of the American public tuned into radio daily. Most Top 40 stations in the late 1980s claimed an audience much larger than MTV did, even when the channel was broadcasting *Yo! MTV Raps*.[150] Second, Top 40 airplay represented a more profound

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[147] See Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 238; Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 241–7.

[148] Public Enemy, "Rebel Without a Pause." The statement is also sampled on Ice-T's "Radio Suckers." Also see Janine McAdams, "Black Music Panels Call for Greater Control of Product," *Billboard*, August 5, 1989, 86.

[149] "Rappers Gain More Staying Power," *Billboard*, August 19, 1989, 78.

[150] Top 40 in the late 1980s regularly got well over fifteen percent of the total national radio audience; The initial episode of *Yo! MTV Raps* was viewed by two percent of the total national television audience. See "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1988, 4; "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1989, 4; "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1990, 4; and Steven Dupler, "The Eye," *Billboard*, August 20, 1988, 46.

move to the mainstream. Music radio is deeply invested in consensus, as almost all stations within a format play the exact same songs. Television, on the other hand, programs diverse content to win viewers away from other networks. While MTV could program rap to take selected young viewers away from other television shows, Top 40 airplay of this genre depended on whether programmers considered the genre to be popular enough that most people in the country would like it. Top 40 acceptance depended on rap being mainstream, rather than being intended for a specific demographic. Finally, by the beginning of the 1990s, radio was playing rap more regularly than MTV. In order to hear rap on MTV in the late 1980s, you had to turn to the channel at a very specific time. During *Yo! MTV Raps*, MTV rapped. But aside from this show, which accounted for at the very most fourteen hours a week of MTV's twenty-four hour-per-day programming, MTV played less rap than Crossover stations for most of the late 1980s.[151]

As rap expanded its reach from Crossover station playlists to traditional Top 40 stations at the turn of the decade, MTV maintained the same practice of programming rap almost only during genre-specific shows.[152] Unlike Top 40 radio, they did not add a great number of songs with rap into them into their regular rotation. Top 40 played more rap than MTV did during their regular programming, and played it more frequently.[153] Even

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[151] Rap programming at MTV varied, see Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 214–4. MTV also had a Crossover-formatted show called "Club MTV." See David Peaslee, "New MTV Show Spotlights Dance Acts," *Billboard*, October 10, 1987, 31.

[152] See Stoute, *The Tanning of America*, 84.

[153] For example, according to the charts published in the November 24, 1990 issue of *Billboard*, Crossover stations were playing more than twice the number of rap singles as MTV was, and played them more frequently than MTV did. See "The Clip List," *Billboard*, November 24, 1990, 62; and "Crossover Radio Airplay," *Billboard*, November 24, 1990, 81.

stations in smaller towns and cities in 1990 whose playlists leaned towards playing rock at the expense of R&B and rap programmed rap more consistently than MTV.[154] When questioned about adding some of the rap they played during *Yo! MTV Raps* into their all-day programming (which, at the time, was playing some pop rap like Milli Vanilli), MTV was quite adamant that this would be "risky."[155] According to MTV Programming Chief Abbey Konowitch in 1989, less than one-third of MTV's audience were teenagers. She estimated that fifty percent of their total audience was apt to turn off the station if they heard rap or heavy metal.[156]

When MTV did play rap during their regular rotation, they almost always played songs that were also played on Crossover and Top 40 stations, but often these songs made up a smaller proportion of MTV's regular playlist than Crossover radio playlists. It's not possible to tell from published charts whether MTV's programming of rap was influenced by the success of certain songs on Crossover and Top 40 stations, or vice versa. Anecdotally, it seems that the lines of influence, which at the beginning of the 1980s had traveled almost unidirectionally from MTV to radio with nearly every song starting at MTV and radio following its lead, were flowing in both directions by the late 1980s.[157]

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[154] To see how stations in smaller cities and towns were programming rap, compare the parallel charts, published weekly, in *Radio & Records*. See, for example, "Parallel Chart Analysis," *Billboard*, November 23, 1990, 85.

[155] Melinda Newman, "The Eye," *Billboard*, November 10, 1990, 75.

[156] Steven Dupler, "The Eye," *Billboard*, July 22, 1989, 50.

[157] See Joel Denver, "MTV's Effect on the Format," *Radio & Records*, February 13, 1987, 38 and Joel Denver, "WDJZ: Kind Fights to Stay on Top," *Radio & Records*, May 31, 1991, 30. Kevin Phinney writes that when Michael Jackson's "Thriller" was released, "record companies observed a 10-15 percent bump in sales for artists whose videos debuted on MTV." See Phinney, *Souled American*, 279. For an analysis of the relationship between MTV and radio, see Crane, "Mainstream Music and the Masses."

Acknowledging how rap achieved mainstream success illuminates another history of rap, one which reveals different audiences and different sounds than the traditional narrative in which *Yo! MTV Raps* introduced rap to mainstream audiences and codified rap's traditional canon. In particular rap's crossover via Crossover and Top 40 radio clarifies the role that female audiences played in the growing popularity of rap. The music that is played on Top 40 stations is selected for its ability to appeal to a wide swath of Americans, but in the late 1980s and 1990s these stations particularly catered towards females. Without appealing to female audiences, hip hop would not have been regularly programmed on these stations who could not afford to irritate their female listeners.

Female audiences' tastes are traditionally undervalued or, worse, scoffed at, in popular music scholarship.[158] Sherry Ortner writes that "the universal devaluation of women" is visible in popular music, which genders authenticity, virtuosity, and originality as masculine.[159] In an astute rebuttal to this tradition, Susan Douglas argues that Motown girl groups (and later the Spice Girls) cultivated a rhetorical space for women to discuss their uniquely female experiences.[160] Crossover radio likely provided the same opportunities for female audiences in the late 1980s, and the music on the stations reflected this female perspective. Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam's song "Lost in Emotion," for example, topped the "Hot Crossover 30" in September 1987, and discusses the intentions and fidelity of a lover in a frank manner that, as Douglas writes about

[158] Eric Weisbard writes that such undervaluing is common throughout genres, as rejecting the mainstream "registers entitlement and privilege: middle—class, male, white, heterosexual, northern, hipster, genre, or some other form." See Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 20.

[159] Jarman-Ivens and Biddle, "Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music," 11.

[160] See Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*; and Douglas, *Listening In*.

Motown girl group music, perhaps "gave voice to all the warring selves inside [listeners, who were] struggling, blindly and with a crushing sense of insecurity, to forge something resembling a coherent identity."[161] Pop rap and new jack swing occupied a similar rhetorical space despite almost entirely male narrators; Biz Markie's hit "Just a Friend" and Bell Biv DeVoe's "Poison," for example, describe the problems of contemporary sexual relationships. Other more explicit songs, such as Salt-N-Pepa's "Do You Want Me," or Tone Loc's "Wild Thing," like "Leader of the Pack" and other more rebellious girl-group music, gave female audiences, in Douglas's words, again about Motown, "an unprecedented opportunity to try on different, often conflicting, personas."[162]

Histories of rap, which inherit popular music scholarship's tendency to associate authenticity with masculinity, typically disregard the tastes of female audiences or simply overlook this demographic.[163] Expressions of masculinity are often characterized as part of rap's identity—the music gives voice to poor black young men—to the extent that Public Enemy's Chuck D defined the group's music in opposition to what females liked, saying that the group's "formula" was to make "records that girls hated."[164] But in order to become mainstream, hip hop had to appeal to women. Without female listeners, the genre would not have become the cultural force that it is today.

Acknowledging the importance of Top 40's female audiences on rap's crossover into the mainstream presents a contrasting history to those narratives which credit MTV

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[161] Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 87. Craig Werner makes a similar point about later pop-rap-R&B group TLC, see Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, 327.

[162] Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 97.

[163] Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile," 110; and Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques," 71.

[164] Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile," 110. Chuck D is quoted in Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 94.

for crossing rap over. In 1986, rap songs were rarely played on MTV, which famously focused on white rock artists at the expense of musicians of color as they attempted to copy the exclusionary playlists of AOR radio stations, which presented themselves as a masculine alternative to Top 40.[165] While MTV's programming philosophy changed by the late 1980s to admit more styles of music besides rock, they primarily marketed rap towards their rock listeners, capitalizing on not only the similarities in spirit between both rebellious styles of music, but also similarities in their musical style.[166] Run-D.M.C.'s rap-rock crossover music, for instance, fit into MTV's masculine programming because its musical sound was dominated by guitars instead of, for example, the more feminized synthesizer.[167] According to *Billboard*'s music video journalist Steven Dupler in 1989, MTV was "one of the most aggressive programmers" to notice and capitalize on the connection between listeners who liked both rap and heavy metal.[168] As Gabriel Rossman notes, Americans began spending less time listening to the radio in the 1990s, with male listeners aged 12-24 leading this decline.[169] It's entirely possible that these male listeners switched allegiances to MTV, where rap and other genres were programmed according to masculine-coded AOR practices. For example, MTV was often hesitant to play R&B songs on the channel, fearing that this genre would alienate their white rock audience. On

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[165] Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, 244. For an anecdote about an AOR radio programmer's racial categorization of his station's music, see Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 62.

[166] Forman claims that rap crossed over when "the images and aesthetic codes of urban black culture were carefully merged with the outlaw stances of white rockers." Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 150.

[167] Jarman-Ivens and Biddle, "Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music," 12.

[168] Steven Dupler, "Metalheads Rock to Rap as Crossover Idiom Grows," *Billboard*, July 15, 1989, 1. Also see Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 104.

[169] Rossman, *Climbing the Charts*, 92.

MTV, R&B songs only were programmed if they sounded enough like what little rap the station played.[170]

Top 40 radio, on the other hand, programmed rap according to its stylistic proximity to R&B, pop, and dance. Top 40 radio didn't want to cater to MTV's hard rock listeners because these demographics didn't attract the advertising accounts that Top 40 stations wanted. Murray Forman argues that rock-rap artists such as Run-D.M.C. were responsible for rap crossing over, in a "discursive process in which the socially invested values of rock and rap were articulated toward each other in such a way that they suddenly made sense to white teen listeners."[171] But most audiences hearing rap on Top 40 radio were hearing songs that were heavily influenced by the dance-pop or R&B music on Top 40 radio. By emulating pop, rather than rock, rappers were able to create a style that listeners and music executives who were not interested in something noisy, rebellious and antagonistic found appealing.[172] Rap on the radio didn't cross over into rock, which Eric Weisbard writes "prized opting out"; it crossed over into pop, the format composed of "outsiders opting in."[173] Interestingly, this meant that the rap played on Top 40 wasn't necessarily coded as *white*. Instead, aimed at a coalition audience of those who liked R&B, dance, and pop, it was played because of its multiracial appeal. Rap didn't just go mainstream because it was the new rock, because of artists like Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys. It also went mainstream because it was the new pop.

[170] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, August 8, 1989, 20.

[171] Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 153.

[172] Forman writes that for live shows, promoters booked rap and non-rap acts together to appeal to a broader audience and mitigate potential worries by owners of the venues. See Ibid., 141. He discusses the sound of radio-friendly rap very briefly, see Ibid., 279.

[173] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 22.

This pop sound should not be thought of as oppositional to the spirit and roots of rap, despite Rick Rubin's claim that rap was the "antithesis of disco."[174] Rap emerged out dance music, sampling or copying disco and funk beats.[175] It wasn't until the mid-1980s that a large contingent of rappers rejected this aesthetic.[176] Select rappers rejected a disco or pop aesthetic—Kaleefah Saneh claims that Run-D.M.C. dissolved the relationship between rap and disco, thereby inventing rap "as we know it"—but in the music of many rap artists, especially those played on the radio, the influence of disco was still strong.[177]

VI. Implications of Crossover Radio

Crossover stations were responsible for crossing rap over to a mainstream radio audience.[178] These stations, which are now referred to as "Rhythmic," still influence rap's programming to this day. They still occupy the same format space between Top 40 and Urban radio and still act as testing grounds which determine what music is best suited for crossing over between black and white audiences. But in the 1980s, the impact of this format was much greater. Through their influence on Top 40 stations, they transformed rap from an underground musical genre heard only regionally on late-night mix shows to

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[174] Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 69.

[175] Alex Ogg and David Upshal argue that rap appropriated disco music because the physical spaces of disco were unavailable to urban youths. Ogg and Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years*, 18.

[176] See Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 42–55; Schloss, *Making Beats*, 47; and Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 153.

[177] Sanneh, "Rapping about Rapping," 225.

[178] Intercom Record's Steve Barman makes almost the inverse of this claim, claiming that hip hop was so successful that radio "had to grow these other formats." My research shares his sentiment that Crossover radio and rap were mutually beneficial to each other's success, but it reveals that Crossover radio emerged before rap was played one these stations. Barman is quoted in Stoute, *The Tanning of America*, 85.

something heard on almost every Top 40 station across the country. They made rap into mainstream music, turning rap into pop. They also consciously created a multiracial public in an industry that segregated audiences by race, and gave African-American artists a new platform on which their music could be heard.[179] Like progressive politics more generally in the 1980s and 1990s, Crossover stations embraced multiculturalism.[180]

But in doing so, these stations didn't just change the sound of the music and its audience. They also changed the relationship between black music and African-American communities. Jared Sexton critiques multiracial political movements of the 1990s, demonstrating that although these movements claimed to be the "logical extension of the civil rights movement," they had profound anti-black effects.[181] He writes that multiracialism acted as a "rationalizing discourse for the continued and increasing social, political, and economic isolation of blacks," as the coalition politics of these movements decentered black interests.[182] Similarly, many Crossover stations subordinated the interests of their black audience. Most Crossover stations, despite playing a large percentage of music by African Americans and Hispanics and creating multiracial publics through the sounds they played, strived to present themselves as white. Most were owned and operated by whites who hired DJs, program directors, and sales staff who had experience at Top 40 stations, most of whom were also white.[183] Crossover stations

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[179] Dan Charnas describes one crossover station, KMEL as "basically end[ing] the cultural segregation that had reigned in American radio since its inception in the early twentieth century." Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 351.

[180] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 43.

[181] Ibid., 49.

[182] Ibid., 35. Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders show that many Americans held progressive ideals about racial equality side by side with negative views of African Americans. See Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*, 294.

[183] Walt Love, "Mixed Blessings," *Radio & Records*, December 2, 1986, 111; and Mark Gunn, "Racism in Radio," *Radio & Records*, April 10, 1992, 13.

almost never played advertisements from identifiably black businesses and denied their closeness to the Urban format because many advertisers were prejudiced against black audiences.[184] Many also encouraged white-sounding DJ patter, giving their stations a white "stationality." When confronted and asked how an African-American DJ could get a job at a Crossover station, Joel Salkowitz of WQHT New York replied that any DJ he would consider hiring needed to sound like they fit on his radio station.[185] These stations fought to be labeled as Top 40 in the trade magazines, knowing that an Urban designation would mean a decline in revenue.[186] For example, Jeff Wyatt of KPWR told *Billboard* that his station was "not defined in color but [instead] defined in sound."[187] This idealistic colorblind sentiment meant that, by definition, KPWR and other Crossover stations like it had little commitment to their listeners of color.

Some stations, like KMEL in San Francisco, embraced their minority audience while still fighting to be labeled as a Top 40 station, but the format in general was criticized for, in the words of Urban programmer Michelle Santosuosso, "playing [black] music but not educating or going into the [black] community."[188] Norfolk, Virginia programmer Steve Crumbley complained that Crossover stations weren't "going into the projects. They [weren't] going into black neighborhoods—not even affluent black

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[184] Walt Love and Sean Ross, "The Return of the Zebra," *Radio & Records*, January 2, 1987, 44; and Sean Ross, "Top 40s Let Black Audience Slip to Urbans," *Billboard*, March 9, 1991, 1, 17, 22.

[185] Sean Ross, "'Why' Questions Rule Radio Panels," *Billboard*, July 30, 1988, 10.

[186] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 320.

[187] Joel Denver, "Power 106 Closes in on KIIS," *Radio & Records*, August 14, 1987, 43.

[188] Phyllis Stark and Carrie Borzillo, "Gavin Attendees Playful & Serious," *Billboard*, March 5, 1994, 75.

neighborhoods—because they [didn't] want to 'damage their image.'"[189] The rise of Crossover stations led Pittsburgh Program Director Keith Clark to sadly conclude that "White people like black music, but they're not into the black experience."[190]

Those stations that *were* into the black experience, Urban stations, weren't doing much to distinguish their sound from Top 40 and Crossover formats. Because of their reluctance to program rap, most Urban stations were unwilling to take chances on new records. Urban station programmers, like those at Top 40 stations, needed to appeal to young listeners while not irritating their older audience, and they often did this by following the lead of Top 40 stations and playing the rap records that were chosen by Crossover stations for their mass appeal sound.[191] In 1988, five out of the top ten rap songs played on black radio were played on pop radio and appeared on the "Hot 100," including songs by pop rappers DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. The other five were either laid-back mellow raps, ballads, or songs by Kool Moe Dee, whose music utilized

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[189] Walt Love, "Facing the Churban Challenge," *Radio & Records*, July 19, 1991, 46.

[190] Phyllis Stark and Carrie Borzillo, "Gavin Attendees Playful & Serious," *Billboard*, March 5, 1994, 75.

[191] For more on what Urban stations were willing to play, see Walt Love, "Rap's Role in Mainstream Radio," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 56. Critic Mark Reynolds writes that older Urban station audiences "hated rap…and preferred the softer R&B sounds of the Luther Vandrosses and Patti LaBelles of the world," meaning that, moving forward, the African-American audience was split between those who foregrounded rap and those who would be "oblivious to any and all of hip-hop's style and brashness and proud of it, thank you very much." See Reynolds, "Gerald Levert and the Black Pop Nobody Knows, but Should." In the late 1980s, many Urban stations, looking to attract adult audiences, played no rap and instead played, in the example of KATZ St. Louis, current non-rap hits, oldies, and jazz crossover songs. Throughout the late 1980s, this sub-format, named Black AC by the industry, expanded. See "KATZ-FM Taps Vance as PD," *Radio & Records*, March 16, 1990, 6. Sean Ross notes an increase in Urban station fragmentation in late 1986, but stations don't overtly state this until a few years later. See Sean Ross, "The Mellowing of B/U Radio," *Radio & Records*, October 10, 1986, 52.

the same crossover techniques as Milli Vanilli—recognizable backgrounds and legible rhymes.[192] Out of the twenty-eight rap songs that appeared in the top forty positions on the "Hot Black Singles" chart during that year, the chart which measured sales and airplay of songs aimed at African-American audiences, only sixteen ever appeared on the airplay charts, indicating that Urban programmers were being selective in their rap programming despite the genre's demonstrated popularity. *Billboard* columnist Dan Stuart calculated at the end of that year that programmers would have to play at least three times as much rap in order for the percentage of rap on Urban stations to match the percentage of rap on the sales charts.[193] Top 40 and Crossover stations noticed this reticence; one Top 40 programmer, Paul Christy of Houston, remarked in June 1988 that he was "elated" to pick up the slack from these stations, noting that he would "get their numbers…and they'll pay the price in their ratings."[194]

Able to downplay their multicultural audiences, Crossover stations had a distinct advantage over Urban stations. With white-owned stations playing much of the same music as black-owned and operated ones, Urban radio started having an even harder time getting advertisers, who could advertise at the local Crossover station without many of the stigmas associated with advertising at an Urban station. Walt Love and Sean Ross pointed out in early 1987 that this situation was inequitable for Urban stations. Crossover stations, they write, raised the specter of "two separate but not very equal drinking fountains dispensing similar music": one with industry connections and advertiser

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[192] Dan Stuart, "The Rap Against Rap at Black Radio," *Billboard*, December 24, 1988, R-8, R-21.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Yvonne Olson, "As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio is Missing Out," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 68.

backing and the other fighting for financial stability.[195] More tangibly, within the first year of its existence, the Crossover format grew faster than the Urban format.[196]

Crossover stations changed the way in which African-American artists gained mainstream radio exposure. Previously, airplay on Top 40 radio was dependent on successful airplay at Urban stations, which were typically managed by, sometimes owned by, and certainly intended for African Americans. This meant that these stations, which typically moved faster on new black music than Top 40 stations, had editorial control over what African-American music crossed over to the mostly white audiences at Top 40 stations.[197] But as the Crossover format grew, Top 40 programmers had an easier way to determine which Urban songs had mass appeal. Instead of looking at playlists at Urban stations, they began watching Crossover stations' tighter playlists which, according to Baltimore Top 40 programmer Chuck Morgan, were often better indicators than Urban playlists of what new songs the Top 40 audience might embrace.[198] As more industry members came to agree with Morgan, Crossover stations began monopolizing the crossover process. Top 40 programmers stopped looking as closely at Urban playlists and, as a result, most songs by African-American artists needed Crossover station support in order to gain a Top 40 audience.[199]

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[195] Walt Love and Sean Ross, "The Return of the Zebra," *Radio & Records*, January 2, 1987, 44.

[196] Sean Ross, "B/U Fall Wars '86," *Radio & Records*, November 14, 1986, 64.

[197] Garofalo, "Culture Versus Commerce"; Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, March 18, 1989, 27; and Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, December 2, 1989, 67.

[198] Sean Ross, "PDs Struggle with Crossover Logic," *Billboard*, January 28, 1989, 1, 12.

[199] Ibid.

The declining relevancy of Urban radio changed the relationship between record companies and radio stations.[200] In 1990, Kenny Ortis, director of A&R, black music for MCA revealed to *Billboard* that labels no longer waited to see how black acts did on Urban stations before crossing them over. They instead marketed them towards Urban and Top 40 stations at the same time, meaning that the labels "almost don't really need [Urban] radio."[201] And it increasingly seemed that labels didn't even need African-American staff. As African-American music became more and more mainstream in the 1990s, thanks to the influence of Crossover stations, several major labels reduced the size of their black music divisions without finding the mostly African-American staff in these divisions other jobs.[202]

Crossover stations took the editorial control of black music out of the hands of Urban stations. These multiracial stations became the new gatekeepers of African-American music, promoting whatever style of music tested well with their audience regardless of the impact on their local community. To briefly preview what this meant, in the mid-1990s, these stations played a considerable amount of gangsta rap. As the newest controversial subgenre of hip hop became more popular, many in the African-American community protested the violent, misogynistic, and inappropriate content of some of these songs. Organizations such as the Stop The Violence Increase the Peace Foundation asked radio stations to stop airing the more "violent, sexist, and racially demeaning"

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[200] Sean Ross and Yvonne Olson, "Vox Jox," *Billboard*, September 17, 1988, 10; Kim Freeman, "Crossover Outlets Prove their Power," *Billboard*, September 5, 1987, 1, 80; and Sean Ross, "PDs Struggle with Crossover Logic," *Billboard*, January 28, 1989, 1, 12.

[201] Ortis is quoted in Janine McAdams, "Competitive R&B Climate Poses A&R Challenge," *Billboard*, September 8, 1990, 24.

[202] See Walt Love, "Top-of-Mind Issues Facing UC PDs," *Radio & Records*, April 28, 1995, 37.

songs.[203] Urban stations across the nation responded to these requests, editing out certain profanities and deleting the more offensive songs from their playlists.[204] But Crossover and mainstream Top 40 stations, according to Sincere Thompson, director of rap promotions at Polydor Records, "didn't have to deal that much with community pressures and the advertising concerns" that Urban stations did, meaning that stations like KPWR often continued playing songs with objectionable content, like Onyx's "Throw Ya Gunz," or Dr. Dre's "Dre Day," regardless of community pressure.[205] KPWR only changed their music policy after a successful boycott of the station and its advertisers by the Los Angeles African-American community.[206]

Crossover stations proved to be a bit of a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they challenged the racially segregated radio industry, creating multiracial publics. They also crossed rap over to the mainstream, turning it into one of the most influential musical sounds of the 1990s. But in doing so, they severed the connection between black communities and African-American music. Because Crossover artists no longer had to prove themselves at Urban radio before crossing over, these artists had little responsibility to the black community.[207] Furthermore, in many cities, play at Crossover, *not* Urban stations became the standard of radio success for many rap groups, meaning that white programmers, white station owners and white DJs looking out for the interests

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[203] "Street Talk," *Radio & Records*, December 3, 1993, 16.

[204] Phyllis Stark et al., "Gangsta Rap Under the Gun," *Billboard*, December 18, 1993, 1, 141.

[205] Havelock Nelson, "Rapping Up '93," *Billboard*, November 27, 1993, 31.

[206] Phyllis Stark et al., "Vox Jox," *Billboard*, December 11, 1993, 135.

[207] This is one of Reebee Garofalo's criticisms of crossovers, that it places an unequal burden on black performers because they have to make it on Urban radio before they are allowed to cross over. See Garofalo, "Culture Versus Commerce," 277. Also see "Street Talk," *Radio & Records*, November 11, 1994, 16 for an example of how Power 106's lack of commitment to minorities played out.

of a multicultural, rather than black, audience controlled the radio play of this style of music. As Crossover stations became the go-to place for Top 40 to find black music, the influence and importance of Urban stations decreased.

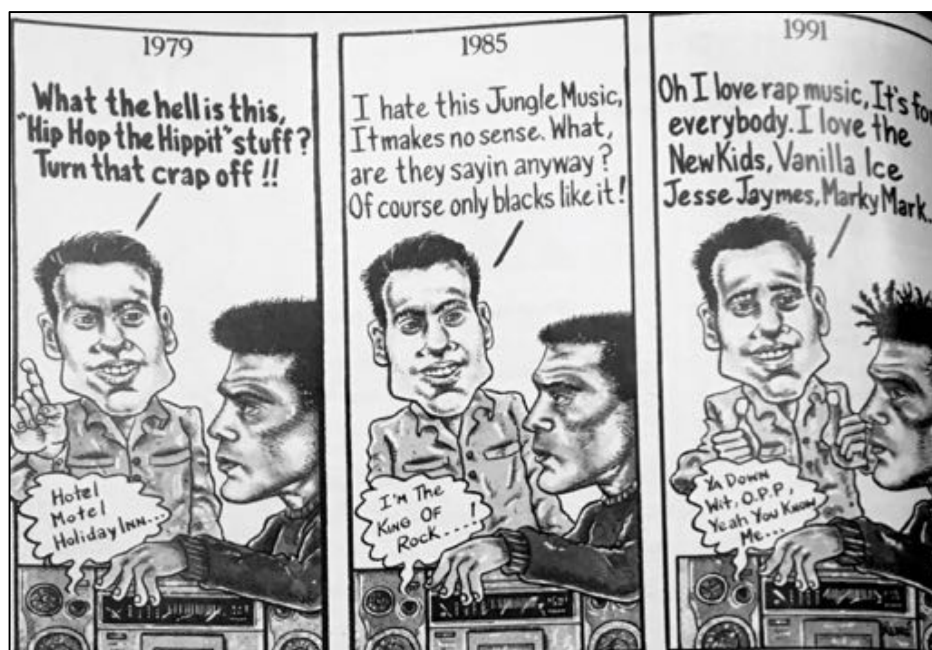

Fig. 5. "The Last Word," *The Source*, November 1991, 64.

Now anyone, regardless of race, could claim hip hop as their own, as "The Last Word" cartoon in the back of the November 1991 issue of *The Source* contemptuously pointed out.[208] The mass popularization of rap was out of the hands of black consumers, black record labels and black DJs, and was now controlled and consumed by a white population eager for new sounds and white corporations eager for profits.

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[208] Here I'm influenced by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, who write that "multicultural understandings of hip hop often fail to deal with the legacy of black people as property and what this means might mean for who can claim ownership of hip hop." See Saucier and Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 272.

Chapter Three: Pop is not Rap

Around noon on Sunday, July 5, 1992, Shadoe Stevens' voice boomed out of radios across the United States, proclaiming via his nationally syndicated radio program *American Top 40* that the number one song in the country was Mariah Carey's slow and gentle cover of the Jackson 5's "I'll Be There." But this wasn't true. That week, the song topping *Billboard*'s "Hot 100," the chart used by the music industry to measure song popularity, was the rapped ode to women of a certain shape, Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back."[1] From Stevens' countdown, it wasn't evident that rap was popular: "Baby Got Back" was downgraded to number twenty, and Stevens played no rap songs in his top ten, even though four of the ten best-selling singles in the nation that week were by rappers.[2]

Stevens downplayed the popularity of rap on his show because many of the Top 40 stations who broadcast his countdown, despite belonging to a format defined by playing all of the national hits, would not play hip hop regardless of the genre's popularity. This was a recent decision; only a few years earlier, Top 40 stations across the nation embraced the genre and programmed more rap than any other major radio format.[3] But something had changed. In the beginning of the 1990s, stations reversed these programming decisions, concerned about pushback from white adult audiences who they feared disapproved of rap's associations with young, urban African Americans.

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[1] "Hot 100 Singles," *Billboard*, July 4, 1992, 77-78.

[2] "Top Single Sales," *Billboard*, July 4, 1992, 79.

[3] Walt Love, "1990—The Year in Music," *Radio & Records*, December 14, 1990, 58.

In this chapter, I examine the social significance of the emergence of two new versions of the Top 40 format which did not play rap. Historically, Top 40 was an inclusive format that claimed to play almost everything that was popular enough. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this changed. Crossover radio was the first commercially successful subformat to challenge this definition with their emphasis on dance and rap, but it was not the only Top 40 subformat to skew its playlist to attract a certain type of listener.[4] Programmers at other Top 40 stations, in response to media-influenced concerns about urban black culture, shifted their playlists in the other direction by not playing rap even though it was charting on the "Hot 100."

I argue that these stations segregated Top 40 radio, reimagining America's increasingly diverse mainstream. If Top 40 was a format made up of "social outsiders looking to become symbolic insiders," as Eric Weisbard has argued, these new stations fashioned their version of the format into one defined by exclusion.[5] Designing stations that protected white audiences from the sounds of rap in an attempt to pacify fears about violence and crime was not simply a musical decision. By excising rap from their playlists, these stations created segregated publics, separating white audiences from rap and not giving these audiences the opportunity to encounter and get acquainted with the sound or culture of rap. Audiences at these stations were, at best, left with their negative impressions of the music. At worst, the stations perpetuated and encouraged a heightened sense of panic about the music and the people associated with it. These stations' retooling

[4] The "Hot Crossover 30" chart was created to provide an alternate space for these stations to keep track of what they were playing rather than being included on the "Hot 100" chart, which was reserved for stations that played most of the songs in the top of the "Hot 100."

[5] Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 27.

of their playlists to attract a certain audience mirrored contemporaneous efforts by politicians, television networks, and community planners to separate white middle-class consumers from poor, urban African Americans. These attempts at segregating the public were not overtly about skin color. Instead, each was predicated on a marketing strategy that divided American consumers according to perceived social differences, a strategy that while rhetorically colorblind, affirmed and reinforced distinctions between black and non-black Americans.

Seeing Black America

On April 30, 1992, 44 million television viewers across the country watched as *The Cosby Show* signed off the air, with a sweet husband and wife dance.[6] Three minutes later, these same viewers were thrust back into reality, as many stations turned to news reports of the looting and violent rioting that had been occurring in Los Angeles all day, including as the episode had been airing.[7] The differences between *The Cosby Show* and the news coverage of the riot occurring in response to the acquittal of the four police officers who brutally beat Rodney King were striking, but there was at least one similarity: the people on both broadcasts were almost all black. These two broadcasts presented two vastly different images of black America. *The Cosby Show,* arguably the most popular television show of the six years prior, displayed safe middle-class propriety, while the streets in Los Angeles were shown full of angry, unruly protesters. And while

[6] Starr, "52 Million Said Bye to Their Best 'Friends'"; O'Connor, "Review/Television: Last 'Cosby' Episode Brings the Huxtables a Happy Ending."
[7] Gray, *Watching Race*, 82.

the Los Angeles riots stand out in historical memory as a striking moment of civil unrest, in terms of the representation of black Americans on television, *The Cosby Show* was a more likely outlier.

Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, television stations began focusing more attention on crime in urban areas, largely in African-American communities. National politicians during these years emphasized the severity of inner city problems, constructing a sense of panic about increasing drug use, crime, and violence among young residents of poor urban communities.[8] By the end of the 1980s, Steve Macek writes, "hysteria about urban violence and degeneracy became a defining feature of every level of American politics."[9] Newspapers and television shows, influenced by this political rhetoric, increased their coverage of urban criminal activity.

These reports portrayed violence, drug use, theft, and other criminal behavior as acts committed mostly by African Americans.[10] In a 1990 study of the major network news, Robert Entman found that news reports of crime almost always featured African Americans.[11] This style of reporting emphasized the difference between poor urban communities and a stereotypical suburban middle class, most often representing those in the inner cities as black and those in the suburbs as white. Dirk De Meyer writes that, purposefully or not, the daily repetition of images of African Americans committing

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[8] See Hawdon, "The Role of Presidential Rhetoric in the Creation of a Moral Panic."

[9] Macek, *Urban Nightmares*.

[10] See Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 19; Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang*, 71; Entman and Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind*; Nunn, "Race, Crime and the Pool of Surplus Criminality," 384. The increase in representation of black criminality aligned with an increase in incarceration. In 1989, over a million people were imprisoned, half of them black males, and these numbers increased over the next decade. See Serrianne, *America in the Nineties*, 184.

[11] Entman in Jones, *Fear of a Hip-Hop Planet*, 62.

crimes encoded criminal behavior as black.[12] In addition, targeted policing in black neighborhoods and race-based judgments and sentencing policies linked blackness with criminality. As African Americans increasingly became the target of these policies and the face of these illegal behaviors, "race," Kenneth B. Nunn writes, "help[ed] to define crime and crime help[ed] to define race."[13]

One of the most famous examples of the media implicitly linking race with criminality occurred in 1988, when a political action committee supporting presidential candidate George Bush released an advertisement attacking rival Michael Dukakis. The advertisement warned that Dukakis was soft on crime, linking his policies to the rape of a woman by a felon on a weekly furlough. The advertisement's image of felon Willie Horton frightened audiences because he looked like the stereotypically racialized criminals that they had seen on the news.[14] Dan T. Carter argues that the efficacy of these advertisements revealed the extent to which the media had been successful in encouraging the impression that blackness was a defining feature of criminality.[15] In a focus group surveyed after the advertisements aired, nearly all of the participants, when asked about Horton, noted both his and his victim's race; a third of the participants mentioned his race twice.[16] By associating Dukakis with black criminality, the

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[12] De Meyer is quoted in ibid., 61. Also see Boyd, *Young*, *Black*, *Rich and Famous*, 74.

[13] Nunn, "Race, Crime and the Pool of Surplus Criminality," 432. Also see Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*; Elwood, *Rhetoric in the War on Drugs*. David J. Leonard notes an interesting correspondence between how black athletes and black bodies more generally were criminalized and portrayed as needing supervision. The exception, writes Sanford Richmond, was Michael Jordan. See Leonard, "African American and Sports Television: Symbols," 81–83; Richmond, "To Be—Or Not to Be—Like Mike," 99.

[14] Simon, "How a Murderer and Rapist Became the Bush Campaign's Most Valuable Player."

[15] Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 79.

[16] Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 305.

advertisement capitalized on panicked suburban fears about how unsafe the country was becoming, fears which Steve Macek proposes became a full-on moral panic by the end of the decade whose terms were defined and disseminated by politicians and the media.[17]

Coverage of other African-American identities was not similarly emphasized, meaning that viewers of *The Cosby Show* caught one of the rare positive portrayals of African Americans on national television. This uneven media representation created the perception of an increasingly discontent black urban populace that could turn violent at any minute.[18] Conservative rhetoric during these years focused not on the underlying historical reasons for inner city poverty but instead on the burden these communities placed on national resources as well as the failure of these communities to rise above their material conditions.[19] Rather than critiquing politicians' negative portrayals of poor African Americans, the news reinforced political rhetoric by focusing on violence, crime, and drug use, as these stories proved to be popular.[20] *The Cosby Show* too did little to challenge these narratives, as the upper-middle class family seemed impervious to the structural racism that conservatives were attempting to disprove. The show helped to sustain the impression that "racism is no longer a problem," meaning that the problems among poor African Americans that were visible on the news were of their own making.[21]

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[17] Macek, *Urban Nightmares*.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 100; and Jones, *Fear of a Hip-Hop Planet*, 159.

[20] Cooper, "Urban Nightmares," 343. The news' focus on crimes by minorities also perhaps influenced white Americans' conception of the size of their demographic group; in 1996, white respondents estimated that whites were a minority in in the United States, whereas they actually made up 74 percent of the population. See Roediger, *Colored White*, 10.

[21] Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*, 71. Steele argues that *The Cosby Show* assured white audiences that they would never encounter situations which made them feel racial guilt. See Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, 11. Mark Anthony Neal reviews the show more generously, writing that while it "eschewed any real engagement with the

As the media focused on urban crime and discontent, the news became a real-life version of a violent action movie, providing white suburbanites across the country with what Mike Davis describes as "voyeuristic titillation."[22] Viewers far away from the violence and systemic racism in these neighborhoods watched with horror, fascination, and certainly some level of interest and enjoyment, so long as the action did not get too close.[23] This entertainment was not limited to the news. In films such as *Colors*, *New Jack City,* and *Menace II Society,* black males became the default image of predators and criminals.[24] These films turned the serious problems in urban communities into afternoon diversions while reinforcing the connection between blackness and criminality.

Hearing Black America

These same films added an aural dimension to this representation, one that had long been connected to urban black males. In each of these movies, rap, which by the late 1980s was commonly associated with young African Americans, makes up a majority of the soundtrack. As noted in Chapter One, early accounts of rap described the music as performed by male youths in black urban spaces, and major press accounts throughout the 1980s continued to stress the racial associations of the musical style.[25] By the early

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political realities of race in America during the show's run (1984-1992), [Cosby's] responsibility may have been just the presentation of a black middle-class alternative to the negative stereotypical images of black life that littered television programing." See Neal, *Soul Babies*, 54.

[22] Davis, *City of Quartz*, 270.

[23] See ibid., 276–277; and McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality," 367.

[24] Schuman et al., *Racial Attitudes in America*, 42. Schuman here is referencing Anderson, *Streetwise*.

[25] See Appelrouth and Kelly, "Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries," 302.

1990s, the music was for many, in Dan Charnas's estimation, "synonymous with black and young."[26] The blackness of rap was part of how the music was understood; Mark Fenster writes that in the mainstream press, "the black ghetto functioned as a spiritual essence that could explain rap as musical Other."[27] Rappers too added to this characterization, as many artists explicitly articulated the political and social concerns of young urban black males who were typically underrepresented in traditional forms of cultural and political expression. The music consciously tried to "[transmit] the new black youth culture" to audiences across the nation, as Bakari Kitwana writes.[28]

Throughout the late 1980s, the media carefully shaped Americans' understanding of rap, linking rap with blackness and blackness with criminality. For example, in a 1986 CBS special report about the troubles of black families, a sociologist claimed that rap had a negative influence on young African-American males, saying it "encouraged irresponsible behavior."[29] Monica Griffin argues that rap "emphasize[d] an image of African-American experiences that are distinctly urban, masculine, and impoverished"—the very same intersection of identities that the media had so thoroughly connected to crime.[30] Because many Americans saw few other media representations of African-American males beyond criminals, rappers, on the basis of their skin color, age, and style, looked to some, according to journalist Robert Hilburn, "like the gang members seen on TV news being handcuffed by police after a drive-by shooting."[31] Not all African-American males, of course, looked like rappers. The cast of *The Cosby Show* had a "nice"

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[26] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 328.
[27] Fenster, "Understanding and Incorporating Rap," 226.
[28] Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation*, 201.
[29] Nelson George, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, February 8, 1986, 56.
[30] Griffin, "The Rap on Rap Music," 4.
[31] Hilburn, "Getting a Bad Rap."

black identity, according to a white audience member interviewed by Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis.[32] Rappers, on the other hand, were "threatening," embodying an identity that many viewers had only seen on television or in a movie.[33] And as rap became coded as criminal and violent, violent and criminal behavior also was associated with rap. The music, writes Tricia Rose, became a "means for defining poor, young, black people and thus for interpreting the context and reasons for their clearly disadvantaged lives."[34]

The emerging genre of gangsta rap did little to challenge these associations, as many gangsta rappers embraced the "mark of criminality" as Bryan J. McCann describes it.[35] McCann argues that the release of N.W.A's *Straight Outta Compton* in 1988 changed the way in which mainstream America understood rap. He writes that the group embodied America's "racial nightmare" and the album was seen as a "genuine threat to the social order."[36] The media, Peter McClaren notices, "went ballistic" after the album's release and subsequent popularity, cultivating public panic about black urban crime by publishing articles devoted to the possible criminal activity of gangsta rappers.[37] Musician Michelle Shocked and author Bart Bull, in an editorial in *Billboard*, argued that gangsta rappers only made connections between rap, race and crime stronger by

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[32] Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*, 47.

[33] Hilburn, "Getting a Bad Rap."

[34] Rose, *Black Noise*, 5. She also writes that rap is yet another example of the criminalization of black culture. See ibid., 130.

[35] McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality," 368. For more on gangsta rap, see Bowser, *Gangster Rap and Its Social Cost*; Brennan, "Off the Gangsta Tip"; Kelley, *Race Rebels*; Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang*; and Ro, *Gangsta*.

[36] LaGrone quoted in McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality," 380. Also see ibid., 369.

[37] McClaren, "Gangsta Pedagogy and Ghettocentricity," 29. Bryan McCann writes that "the political and cultural mainstream of the 1980s regarded gangsta rap as a genuine threat to the social order, rather than a playful destabilization of the periods' law and order discourses." See McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality," 369.

providing the American public with more examples of black criminality. They write, "What white folks have always believed about black men is just what the work of Ice Cube, N.W.A, and other gangster rappers confirms today….As [gangsta rappers] come to represent black America to their white audience, that same audience will eventually feel justified in all manner of acts of racism."[38] Shocked and Bull's editorial was widely panned, but they weren't incorrect about people using rap to further their political agendas; less than a week earlier, president Bill Clinton had denounced a statement by Sister Souljah in an effort to distance himself from Jesse Jackson and black voters more generally.[39] And when gangsta rappers were called upon to help explain the Los Angeles riots in 1992, the associations between gangsta rap and violent unrest wound even tighter as these interviews reinforced the veracity of gangsta rap lyrics portraying violent crime.[40]

Gangsta rap certainly provided new opportunities to link rap with race and race with crime, but *all* rap, from MC Hammer to N.W.A, shared these connotations. In a nationally syndicated column, journalist Joseph Sobren declared that lots of rap songs were "pitched to what the Victorians called the criminal classes," meaning that "the mission of shocking the bourgeoise has passed from the avant-gatekeeper to the common thugs."[41] Disregarding Sobran's self-proclaimed "stodgy" dislike for the music, it's the genre as a whole, not just gangsta rap, that conjures "common thug" associations. Often the links between rap and black criminality were less explicit. In a 1990 *Newsweek* cover

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[38] Michelle Shocked and Bart Bull, "L.A. Riots: Cartoons Vs. Reality," *Billboard*, June 20, 1992, 6.

[39] See Robert A. George, "Voices Carry," *Billboard*, July 4, 1992, 4; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 395.

[40] Rule, "Rappers Say the Riots Were No Surprise to Their Listeners."

[41] Sobran is quoted in Brennan, "Off the Gangsta Tip," 670.

story on rap, "The Rap Attitude," it takes the authors almost two full paragraphs before they mention the race of the performers of the music they are discussing.[42] But they left enough clues to make the editor of *Rock & Roll Confidential*, Dave Marsh, complain about their language. He writes that their emphasis on the "attitude" of rap is a "code word" that allows the authors to hint that rappers are "barbarians in our midst," without saying as much. Journalism such as this, Marsh argues, helps to "perpetuat[e] the stereotype of rappers as dangerous black youth."[43]

Rap Comes to Top 40 Radio

As discussed in the first half of this dissertation, Top 40 stations considerably increased the number of rap songs that they programmed throughout the late 1980s.[44] But as radio industry personnel knew all too well, many audience members did not want to hear hip hop. Top 40 DJs had been fielding negative reactions from audience members for as long as stations had been playing rap. While a large segment of their audience loved rap, an almost equally sized segment despised it. Most detractors were older; a Soundata study done in 1989 found that nearly seventy five percent of 12- to 15-year-old audiences liked rap, but that almost an equal percentage of those over age twenty hated the music.[45] The likelihood of adults liking rap was so low that a station in Eugene,

[42] Adler and Foote, "The Rap Attitude."
[43] Marsh is quoted in Goldstein, "Rappers Don't Have Time for Newsweek's Attitude."
[44] Also see Appendix One.
[45] Mike Shalett, "Rap, Heavy Metal Attract Same Demo," *Radio & Records*, May 19, 1989, 40.

Oregon offered to give away tickets to a Beastie Boys concert to anyone over 55 who agreed to go, knowing that older rap fans would be difficult, if not impossible, to find.[46]

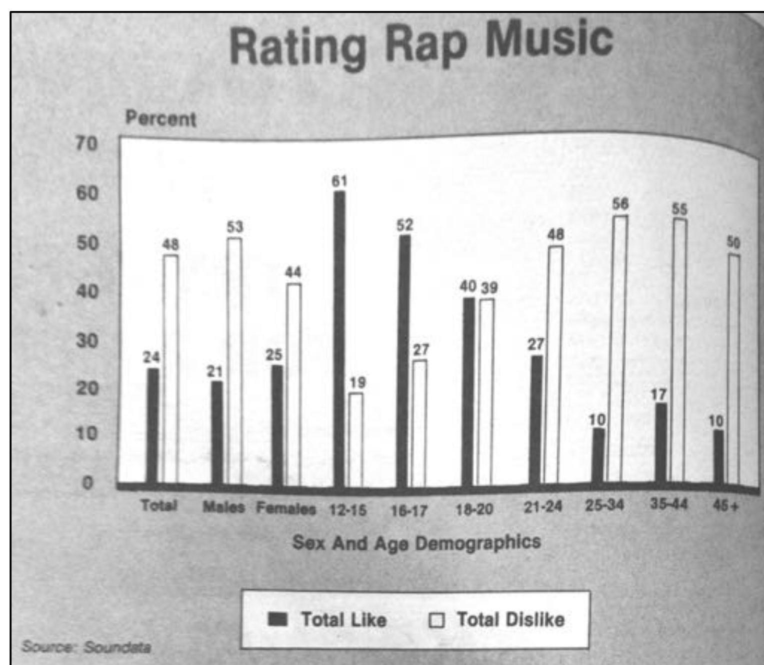

Fig. 8. "Rating Rap Music," *Radio & Records*, May 19, 1989, 40.

But programmers were confident that they had found a compromise between their listeners who didn't like rap and the ones who did. After a couple years experimenting with playing rap, programmers believed that they had figured out what style appealed to the broadest audience. As noted in Chapter One, one of the major problems programmers encountered with rap was that it didn't sound like the other music on Top 40 radio.[47] Some listeners didn't think that rap required the same level of musical talent that other music did, and claimed rap was inferior to the music that stations might otherwise

[46] "Bits," *Radio & Records*, July 3, 1987, 36.
[47] Yvonne Olson, "As Rap Goes Pop, Some Say Black Radio Is Missing Out," *Billboard*, June 18, 1988, 1, 68.

program. For example, in a 1991 editorial accusing rap as "imperil[ing]" music in general because rappers didn't play instruments or sing, funk musician Otis Stokes wrote that MC Hammer "destroy[ed] the artistic integrity" of the 1971 original version of "Have You Seen Her" by the Chi-Lites by "replacing the lovely singing melody with 'talking.'"[48]

In order to address these concerns, programmers limited the rap on their stations to songs that had strong melodic components, a programming decision discussed in depth in Chapter One. Rap songs with melodies, programmers believed, sounded close enough to the rest of the music programmed on the stations to please rap-averse audiences. Otis Stokes's criticisms aside, programmers thought that songs like "Have You Seen Her" appealed broadly, because they had sung vocals and melodies already familiar to Top 40 audiences.[49] By combining rapping with sounds that were traditionally heard on pop radio stations, rappers like MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice created hip hop that program directors thought would appeal to most of their audience. Through their carefully curated playlists, Top 40 programmers prudently introduced the sounds of rap to listeners across the country.

Programmers believed that this style of rap had moved the genre into the mainstream, and their judgments were corroborated by the record sales of these artists.[50] Music director at San Diego's Top 40 station, Michelle Santosuosso, reported in 1990 that rap was so popular, it tested better with her audience than any other style of music.[51]

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[48] Otis Stokes, "Rap/Dance Imperils Talent Pool," *Billboard*, August 3, 1991, 6. It's an odd example for Stokes to choose, since the original song featured quite a bit of talking in it.

[49] Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, "Rap Rates With Adults, Say Radio, Retail," *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 1, 91.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Phyllis Stark, "Lively Talk Highlights NMS '90 Radio Panels," *Billboard*, July 28, 1990, 10, 14.

Perhaps by selectively programming rap, radio stations had found a way to make all Top 40 audiences at least put up the with music, if not enjoy it.[52] This boded well for the future of Top 40, because the format depended on the nation's top songs not offending large audiences.

More broadly, the growth in rap's popularity over the late 1980s was perhaps a progressive step forward in race relations at a time in which the media largely demonized young black males. Because rap was associated with black, male, urban youths who were associated with criminality, acceptance of rap by Top 40 stations indicated that programmers believed listeners could look beyond these negative connotations. Many in the music industry shared this optimism. Rapper Ice-T told *Billboard* in 1991 that his prediction for the decade to come was for rap to become even more mainstream because "white kids will continue to get hipper to black culture," with "everybody chillin' together."[53]

Negative Reactions to Rap

In the fall of 1990, Taco Bell started using rap in their commercials, a choice inspired by the company's impression that, in the words of their spokesman, "rap [had] become very much a part of mainstream America."[54] One commercial featured Young MC rapping about the merits of a free collectible soft drink cup, and in another, MC

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[52] Janine McAdams and Deborah Russell, "Rap Rates With Adults, Say Radio, Retail," *Billboard*, September 21, 1991, 1, 91.

[53] Ice-T, "My Prediction for the '90s," *Billboard*, May 4, 1991, 92.

[54] Harvey Kojan, "Taco Bell's Rap Attack," *Radio & Records*, September 14, 1990, 108.

Hammer used his parachute pants to rescue himself from a free fall in order to get to the restaurant. Despite the company's endorsement of the musical style, these commercials caused listeners to complain at many radio stations across the country. For some listeners, rap's negative connotations were still perceivable regardless of the melodic style of rap that Young MC and MC Hammer performed. Everyone, seemingly, wasn't interested in "chillin' together." Program Director Richard Reed at Rock radio station KOMP in Las Vegas recounted one especially virulent caller who castigated the DJ, saying, "We deal with these people with their ghetto blasters every damn day. We sure don't need to hear that on our favorite station."[55] This listener wasn't complaining about the music itself; instead, rap represented a specific type of person that irritated the listener, one that the listener would rather not associate, or come into contact, with. Rap meant "deal[ing]" with "these people," a group that the caller differentiated himself from.

Just as rap was becoming a regular addition to radio station playlists across the country, Top 40 programmers began to worry that, despite their efforts, they hadn't convinced all of their listeners to embrace rap. This was a problem for Top 40 radio programmers because they needed to accommodate both the part of their audience who hated the music and the portion who liked the style of music in spite of, or maybe because of, its negative connotations. In the fall of 1990, radio stations received their Arbitron ratings for the previous quarter, which reported the percentage of the metro area's total audience who had listened to each radio station during the summer months. Summer was usually friendly to Top 40 stations because teens, who made up over half of the Top 40 audience, were out of school and could listen to the radio all day as opposed to

[55] Ibid.

just before or after school. But in the summer of 1990, a summer in which MC Hammer's album topped the charts for all but one week, Top 40 stations across the nation saw their ratings fall, as listeners of nearly every demographic stopped listening to these stations.[56] The negative ratings trend continued; between the spring of 1990 and the spring of 1991, Top 40 stations lost over four percent of the total national audience, as the percentage of listeners tuning in to Top 40 stations decreased from 17.9 percent nationwide in the spring of 1990 to a little less than 13.8 percent a year later.[57]

Many explanations were posited for why listeners were forsaking Top 40 stations, but one of the most common was that some of the national hits did not appeal to the entire Top 40 audience.[58] Since the format's beginnings in the 1950s, most Top 40 stations played a majority of the national hits, believing that their local audience shared musical tastes with the nation as a whole.[59] The Top 40 format depended on the songs on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" being mainstream hits that most people in the Top 40 audience would enjoy or at least tolerate.

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[56] Sean Ross, "National Arbs: Top 40 Down, AC Up Even With Teens," *Billboard*, November 17, 1990, 1; and Sean Ross, "AC Is No. 1 In New Format Ratings," *Billboard*, September 16, 1989, 1, 12, 28-29.

[57] See "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1990, 4; and "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1991, 4.

[58] See, for example, Sean Ross, "Teens, Adults Split on Top 40 Hits," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 12, 18; Mike Shalett, "Dance Music's Current Popularity," *Radio & Records*, August 10, 1990, 42; and Joel Denver, "PD Forum: State Of The Format," *Radio & Records*, September 7, 1990, 66;

Joel Denver, "What the Hell's Wrong With CHR," *Radio & Records*, December 7, 1990, 35.

[59] For a contemporary read on the selectivity of programming, see Joel Denver, "Are CHRs Too Selective?," *Radio & Records*, March 23, 1990, 58. For more on the format's origins in the 1950s, see Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 4–5.

Rap, programmers noticed, changed all of this. They had tried to remedy the problems with the sound of rap by carefully selecting only the songs that sounded enough like the other music they played on their stations, but due to publicized listener responses like the one about the Taco Bell advertisement, it was becoming clear to programmers that their cautiously chosen rap selections had done little to change listeners' perceptions of rap. Chris Bailey of WNVZ Norfolk, Virginia, for example, claimed that even a song like Naughty By Nature's 1991 hit "O.P.P.," which many programmers agreed had pop appeal because it sampled The Jackson 5, had become "suicide in the daytime."[60] He told *Billboard* that Top 40 needed to be extremely careful with playing rap because his station's research had shown that, "if [you play] rap, you're dead."[61] Despite selling millions of records, rap still hadn't become part of conventional Top 40 music; according to Al Ries, a marketing group chairman, in 1990, there was "no guarantee that it will totally move into the mainstream."[62]

Programmers worried about rap's negative associations.[63] Gail Woldu writes that by 1992, gangsta rap had become "a catch phrase for all species of rap," one that "became an agent for national debates on race, crime, and urban violence."[64] But gangsta rap wasn't the problem for radio. Regardless of the hysteria surrounding this style, Top 40 stations would have been unlikely to play it in the early 1990s because many gangsta rap

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[60] Janine McAdams and Phyllis Stark, "'O.P.P.' Rap Finds a Home on Pop-Radio Playlists," *Billboard*, November 2, 1991, 92.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Foltz, "Madison Ave. Turns an Ear to Rap Music."

[63] Robert A. George writes that programmers worried that listeners thought all rap was as lewd and controversial as group 2 Live Crew. See Robert A. George, "'No Rap' Slogans Reflect Radio's Poverty," *Billboard*, January 12, 1991, 12.

[64] Woldu, "The Kaleidoscope of Writing on Hip-Hop Culture," 11.

songs didn't sound like pop and because programmers were concerned about profanity.[65] Rap, despite programmers' efforts, hadn't become pop; as an article in the conservative magazine *Commentary* theorized, "For the average middle-class listener, whether black or white, rap music is a landscape too alien for anything but discomfort."[66] Hip hop's popularization via Top 40 radio may have not mollified worries about the genre but instead may have turned listeners against the genre; bell hooks writes, more broadly, that the white mainstream doesn't become concerned about the content of African-American culture until white consumers gain interest in the culture "to disrupt bourgeois values."[67]

Rap was not the only music that was causing problems at Top 40 stations because of its popularity with only a select segment of the audience. Many of the same older listeners who objected to rap also disliked heavy metal.[68] Teens, programmers noticed, seemed to delight in older audiences' distaste of their music, and some *only* wanted to listen to the music that adults didn't want to hear.[69] For radio programmers, who made a living off of linking songs and genres with specific types of consumers, it was becoming harder to imagine how a given group of songs on the "Hot 100"—for example R&B singer Michel'le's rap-tinged (and penned and produced by rap producer Dr. Dre) song "No More Lies," Motley Crue's metal thrasher "Kickstart My Heart," and balding British gravely-voiced singer Joe Cocker's "When The Night Comes," which appeared on the

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[65] It's interesting to note that a few years later, Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* was one of the first gangsta rap albums to get considerable radio airplay, largely because of its "gangsta pop formula" of "danceable grooves and hummable hooks." See Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 93; Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 50.

[66] Teachout, "Rap and Racism."

[67] hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 122.

[68] Mike Shalett, "Rap, Heavy Metal Attract Same Demo," *Radio & Records*, May 19, 1989, 40.

[69] Joel Denver, "Conquering Demographic Polarization," *Radio & Records*, March 11, 1994, 24.

"Hot 100" side by side in February 1990—might appeal to a single person, much less an entire segment of a given city's population.[70]

Perhaps the "Hot 100" chart was no longer a good indicator of music appropriate for Top 40 audiences. Top 40 was often conceptualized as a station for mothers and teenagers, but with the recent split in tastes between younger and older audiences, Top 40, which needed an age-varied audience, could not operate by playing all the hits because all the hits no longer appealed to the entire Top 40 audience.[71] Popularity, it seemed, no longer guaranteed mass appeal.[72] Perhaps sales of rap songs had pushed these singles up the chart, making the songs look more broadly appealing than they really were. Or maybe it was more a matter of timing; Boston Program Director Steve Rivers held programmers accountable for the format's downturn because he believed they should have been more careful to only play rap at times of day when adults didn't listen.[73]

By 1991, most Top 40 program directors blamed their format's change in success on their own inability to notice that audiences were unwilling to listen to rap as often they had programmed it.[74] As ratings continued to decline, Top 40 radio station personnel

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[70] It is even harder to imagine someone liking the above three songs as well as Jive Bunny & the Mixmasters' rollicking remix medley of jazz tunes and early rock and roll hits atop a rockabilly beat, "Swing the Mood," which also appeared in the top forty on the same chart. See "Hot 100," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 80.

[71] Alan Burns, "Maturing Generation Seeks New Formats," *Radio & Records*, March 29, 1991, 24. For another example of Top 40 imagined as a format that both mothers and teenagers enjoyed, see Sean Ross, "More Teens Bopping to Country," *Billboard*, April 4, 1992, 54.

[72] Sean Ross, "Teens, Adults Split on Top 40 Hits," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 12.

[73] Joel Denver, "Exploring Major Market Mindsets," *Radio & Records*, March 15, 1991, 37.

[74] See Joel Denver, "Shining Up The Crystal Ball," *Radio & Records*, January 11, 1991, 52, 54; Joel Denver, "What the Hell's Wrong with CHR," *Radio & Records*, December 7, 1990, 35; Joel Denver, "Exploring Major Market Mindsets," *Radio &*

became increasingly pessimistic about the place of rap on their stations' playlists. By the middle of 1991, Garett Michaels, music director at WZPL Indianapolis, declared that rap "doesn't have a real place in mainstream [Top 40]."[75] Tom Polean, assistant program director in New Haven agreed, saying that his Top 40 station could not attract a mass audience if they played as much rap as they once did.[76] Even rap-friendly programmer Kevin Weatherly confessed that his listeners were quickly reversing their interest in rap and that older audience members, seeking "comfort," were leaving his station.[77] Most surprisingly, teens across the country, including those who had listened to Weatherly's station, were switching from Top 40 stations to Adult Contemporary and Country stations, where rap was rarely heard. Weatherly blamed Top 40's decline on programmers getting "too hip" and playing too much rap for their audiences.[78]

Deleting Rap from Top 40 Radio: Part I

At the same time that many Top 40 programmers tried to find a musical middle ground that would appeal to their audience who liked rap but wouldn't offend their listeners who didn't, other programmers took a different approach. In the late 1980s, stations began to capitalize on what they imagined was a large number of disgruntled Top 40 listeners who were tired of hearing rap on their stations. Two new Top 40 subformats

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Records, March 15, 1991, 37; Joel Denver, "The Sounds of Change," *Radio & Records*, June 28, 1991, 58; and Shane, "Modern Radio Formats," 5.

[75] Joel Denver, "The Sounds of Change," *Radio & Records*, June 28, 1991, 58.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Joel Denver, "Q106 Eases off Dance, Rap," *Radio & Records*, August 6, 1991, 34.

[78] Ibid.

emerged at the end of the decade in response to the rise of rap on Top 40 stations. These formats, Rock 40 and Adult 40, were inspired by the success of the first subformat to spin off from Top 40, the Crossover format. The first successful Crossover station, Power 106, began broadcasting in 1986 in response to the growing popularity of upbeat R&B and dance music among Top 40 audiences.[79] Attracting a multiracial audience, Crossover stations played a variety of songs off of the Top 40, Urban, and dance charts, a mix that often included rap.[80] The popularity of these stations influenced Top 40 programmers to mimic their playlists, and the rise of rap on Top 40 radio was facilitated by Crossover stations.[81] Just as Crossover stations took advantage of the growing interest in R&B and dance by Top 40 audiences a few years earlier, Rock 40s and Adult 40s capitalized on the growing disinterest in rap at the end of the decade.

In 1989, radio listeners in Los Angeles were invited to turn their dial to KQLZ Pirate Radio to escape the dance and rap music that was being played on Power 106.[82] Pirate Radio played a mix of rock hits from the current Top 40 charts as well as other songs from Rock station playlists that were not popular enough to make it onto standard Top 40 stations. The music at Pirate Radio, along with a strong "stationality" – a carefully

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[79] Kim Freeman, "'Pop' Waves Burst Barriers," *Billboard*, January 25, 1986, 72; and Paul Grein, "Chart Recap: Whitney Is Top Artist," *Billboard*, December 27, 1986, 93.

[80] Lee Michaels, "Crossover Begins at Urban Radio," *Billboard*, October 4, 1986, 9; and Kim Freeman, "Wyatt Gets PD Nod at L.A.'s KPWR," *Billboard*, February 22, 1986, 14. Few Crossover stations played rap initially, but they soon began adding it to their playlists. See Sean Ross, "More Dance Stations Are Now Stepping to an Urban Beat," *Billboard*, October 6, 1990, 1, 13; Sean Ross and Yvonne Olson, "Vox Jox," *Billboard*, September 17, 1988, 10; Kim Freeman, "Crossover Outlets Prove Their Power," *Billboard*, September 5, 1987, 1, 80; and Sean Ross, "PDs Struggle With Crossover Logic," *Billboard*, January 28, 1989, 1, 12.

[81] For more on this, see Chapter Two.

[82] Sean Ross, "A Decade After Disco: Some Rock, Some Dance," *Billboard*, April 22, 1989, 10, 12, 20.

chosen personality for the station's DJs and pre-recorded filler messages—was a hit. Pirate Radio wasn't the first rock-heavy Top 40 station; it was one of many that grew in prominence during 1989 to form a format known as Rock 40, Rock CHR, Male CHR, or CHR-for-boys.[83] In September 1989, *Billboard* acknowledged the presence of this subformat with its own chart, which demonstrated the extent to which Top 40, Crossover, and Rock 40 playlists differed. On the first Rock 40 chart published, the top five songs were Warrant's "Heaven" (#4 on the "Hot 100"), Skid Row's "18 And Life" (#10 on the "Hot 100"), Richard Marx's "Right Here Waiting" (#5 on the "Hot 100"), Tom Petty's "Running Down a Dream" (#30 on the "Hot 100"), and The Jeff Healey Band's "Angel Eyes" (#8 on "Hot 100"); the top five songs at Crossover stations that week were Paula Abdul's "Cold Hearted" (#2 on the "Hot 100"), Milli Vanilli's "Girl I'm Gonna Miss You" (#7 on the "Hot 100"), Surface's "Shower Me With Your Love" (#6 on the "Hot 100"), New Kids on the Block's "Hangin' Tough" (#1 on the "Hot 100"), and Gloria Estefan's "Don't Wanna Lose You" (#3 on the "Hot 100").Together, these subformats played almost the entirety of the top ten of the "Hot 100," but had no songs in common in their top five.[84]

In contrast to mainstream Top 40 stations which played a majority of the same hits, playlists weren't consistent across the Rock 40 format. Instead, these stations maintained their identity through exclusion. Rock 40s rarely, if ever, programmed rap or dance. This put them in direct opposition with the playlists at other Top 40 stations. For

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[83] Harvey Kojan, "Coming to Terms With Rock CHR," *Radio & Records*, March 24, 1989, 46.

[84] The one exception was Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time." See "Top 40/Rock," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 8; "Top 40/Dance," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 87; and "Hot 100," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 82.

example, in an early indication of this format's potential, when Arista Records released Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," only 90% of Top 40 radio stations reported playing the title; the other 10%, what *Billboard* described as "so-called heavy rockers," did not put it on their playlists.[85] Two years later, the format's reticence to play rap was likely responsible for denying Tone Loc's 1989 single "Wild Thing," which samples a Van Halen song, the number one spot on the "Hot 100" despite mammoth sales and Top 40 airplay, as Rock 40 playlists were counted on the pop charts despite hardly ever playing the rap that was programmed on other pop stations.[86] Interestingly, rock stations three years earlier had willingly programmed a similarly rock-influenced rap song, Run-D.M.C.'s "Walk This Way," revealing that perhaps as rap had become more commonplace on Top 40 playlists, rock-based stations became less supportive of the music.

By excising most black music from their stations, Rock 40s resegregated Top 40 radio. These stations were created during a peak of racial integration on Top 40 stations, when even rap, a genre firmly coded as black, was widely programmed, and when Crossover stations, which were created to attract a multiracial public, were extremely popular. Defined by playlists that did not include rap or dance, two styles of music associated with minority audiences, the format represented a shift in what programmers thought their listeners wanted to hear, and what communities these programmers wanted to attract. These stations were most successful in the Midwest; Programmer Brian Burns

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[85] Tom Noonan, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, May 16, 1987, 75.

[86] Sean Ross and Ken Terry, "Labels Praise Rockin' Top 40s," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 1, 90.

noted that in regions with more racial diversity, the format had limited potential, likely because the programming actively excluded music by people of color.[87]

Rock 40s were hardly the first stations to not play black music in an attempt to attract a white audience. Since the late 1960s, Rock radio stations have played music by mostly white artists for a majority white audience. The format began when progressive Rock stations broke away from Top 40 stations, creating an alternative space for mostly white "masculine identity experimentation," as Kim Simpson writes.[88] In the early 1980s, backlash against disco inspired a similar programming philosophy as many Top 40 stations programmed a rock-heavy playlist at the expense of songs by African-American dance artists. By the mid-1980s, however, most stations had returned to programming a balanced mix of most of the music from the upper reaches of the "Hot 100."[89] The creation of Rock 40 stations in the late 1980s was another iteration of attempting to attract white listeners by excising music by African Americans from Top 40 playlists. While the rationale used for not playing certain songs was genre categorization, the end result was that music by African Americans was rarely played on these stations.

Formats, again, are more than collections of music; through the "targeted deployment of music," formats construct chosen communities and imaginary ideal publics.[90] In creating a format based on the exclusion of African-American performers, programmers fostered the development of the audience that desired this musical

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[87] Joel Denver, "KXXR Rocks Competition," *Radio & Records*, February 10, 1989, 10.

[88] Simpson, *Early '70s Radio*, 92.

[89] Sean Ross, "A Decade After Disco: Some Rock, Some Dance," *Billboard*, April 22, 1989, 10, 12, 20; and Sean Ross, "Rock 40: Born to Fill a Niche," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 10, 18.

[90] Fairchild, "Alan Freed Still Casts a Long Shadow," 329.

segregation. They emphasized the difference between music made by and for white Americans, and music made by or for others. As officially part of the Top 40 format, these stations reimagined what the mainstream was, casting rap and dance music as a peripheral other.

For almost a year, Rock 40 stations blossomed across the country, encouraged by programmers who believed that these stations offered an attractive alternative for listeners repelled by playlists inundated with dance and rap songs.[91] Record companies warmly welcomed Rock 40 stations, noticing that the format gave their already-signed rock groups an opportunity to sell records to a different audience.[92] But advertisers were less enamored with the young white male audience that Rock 40 stations attracted, and the new format floundered rapidly. Furthermore, many listeners weren't all that taken with the Rock and Top 40 hybrid, likely because there weren't enough people who wanted to listen to a poppier Rock station. Rock 40 stations proved to be, according to consultant Lee Abrams, "too wimpy for the real rockers and too hard for mainstream people."[93] By the end of 1990, few of these stations remained.[94]

Deleting Rap from Top 40 Radio: Part II

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[91] Harvey Kojan, "Whatever Happened to Rock 40?," *Radio & Records*, July 20, 1990, 60.

[92] Sean Ross and Ken Terry, "Labels Praise Rockin' Top 40s," *Billboard*, May 6, 1989, 1, 90.

[93] Harvey Kojan, "Whatever Happened to Rock 40?," *Radio & Records*, July 20, 1990, 60.

[94] See "Billboard Drops Crossover Radio Airplay Charts," *Billboard*, December 8, 1990, 84. A few months later, even pioneer Rock 40 station Pirate Radio gave up on the format and switched to being a straight-ahead Rock station. See Joel Denver, "Shannon Speaks," *Radio & Records*, March 1, 1991, 36.

Despite its quick demise, the Rock 40 format inspired a far more successful format similarly designed to attract people who did not want to listen to rap. In the early 1990s, listeners of all demographics tuned out from Top 40 stations, but station management believed that most of those departing were adults because adults had the strongest recorded dislike for the rap and hard rock that management presumed was causing listeners to leave.[95] Consultant Alan Burns estimated that the general audience's "preference for rap generally falls off around age 18-19," and Sean Ross of *Billboard* noted that there was a "sociological rift" between younger and older Top 40 audiences that continued to spread apart due to the popularity of rap among exclusively younger listeners.[96] Unfortunately for stations that played rap, the American public was aging; by the year 2000, the number of people age 46-54 was projected to increase by 46 percent, and the number of people age 35-44 was to increase by 16 percent.[97] In order to address what Joel Denver of *Radio & Records* described as the "graying of America," Top 40 stations would need to reformulate their playlists to appeal to adults.[98]

If rap and hard rock had made many adults stop listening to Top 40 stations, as Victoria, Texas Program Director Tony Davis firmly believed, perhaps these disenfranchised listeners could be brought back into the format if stations stopped playing the offending genres.[99] In response to their concern that adults did not like rap and hard

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[95] Alan Burns, "Maturing Generation Seeks New Formats," *Radio & Records*, March 29, 1991, 24.

[96] Ibid., and Sean Ross, "Why Mom Hates Rap, Why It Doesn't Matter (And Other Notes on the Top 40 Crisis)," *Billboard*, November 3, 1990, 12.

[97] Gary Wall, "Radio on Radio," *Radio & Records*, June 5, 1992, 34.

[98] Joel Denver, "What the Hell's Wrong With CHR," *Radio & Records*, December 7, 1990, 35.

[99] Mike Kinosian, "Victoria Adult CHR's Dayparting Factor," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 51. Also see Dave Elliott, "Adjusting for the Future," *Radio & Records*, November 1, 1991, 46.

rock, programmers created a new format just for these discontented adults. Adult 40s, as they came to be called, eliminated the "extreme" music from Top 40 playlists, because, in the words of Davis, "adults won't tolerate it."[100] Programmers at Adult 40s excised rap and hard rock from their playlists and replaced these songs with either Top 40 oldies or songs from Adult Contemporary station playlists. These stations were a direct response to Rock 40 and Crossover stations; Sean Ross of *Billboard* described the birth of Adult 40 stations as "inevitable" because the existence of so many dance- and rock-oriented stations meant that there were sure to be listeners who weren't served by these stations.[101]

What Adult 40 programmers thought their listeners might tolerate was quite subjective. Some stations, like WKQX Chicago, thought that their audiences didn't want to hear anything too dancey, meaning that the station drew the line at Janet Jackson's "Miss You Much" or Paula Abdul's "It's Just The Way That You Love Me."[102] Nearly all of the stations avoided rap and hard rock, but they would often play edits of popular songs that eliminated these unwanted sounds. For example, WRQZ in Washington, D.C. was willing to play Roxette's "Joyride" without the blistering guitar line and Maxi Priest's "Close To You" sans rap.[103] Robin Jones, programmer for Satellite Music Network's Adult 40 format, related that her company's affiliated stations would play most of the Top 40, except for the music that was "too young, too rock, or too urban" for the

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[100] Mike Kinosian, "Victoria Adult CHR's Dayparting Factor," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 51. Another name for the format was Hot AC, indicating its proximity to the Adult Contemporary format and its increased hipness, or hotness, because of its closeness to the Top 40 format. I refer to this format as Adult 40, to stress its relationship with Top 40. Stations themselves never agreed on what the format should be called; for a programmer's take on the difference between Adult 40 and Hot AC, see Ibid.

[101] Sean Ross, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, October 28, 1989, 26.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Sean Ross, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, May 25, 1991, 14.

ears of her imagined audience, who, in her estimation, "think CHRs are a little too rough and traditional ACs are a little too boring."[104] Jones provided some examples of recent songs that were not played on her affiliated stations, naming six artists: Ugly Kid Joe, Mary J. Blige, Snow, Shai, Silk, and Joey Lawrence.[105] Despite naming three criteria for not playing certain songs on her stations, one of the criteria, in at least this instance, made the greatest difference in determining whether or not the stations would play a song. Out of the six artists, only one was a rock band; five of the six had hip-hop influenced singles.

At Adult 40s, listeners could rest assured that they would never be bombarded with the "extreme" sounds of rap.[106] Even after three years of steady Top 40 radio airplay, Janine McAdams wrote in 1990 about rap that "There are many who perceive the burgeoning crossover acceptance of the African-American art form as a threat to the values of mainstream America."[107] Radio consultant Jerry Clifton claimed that many in

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[104] Phyllis Stark, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, May 1, 1993, 67.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Rap also inspired many Urban stations to change their programming. Black radio stations had long been thought of as conservative, aimed more at adults than youths, but in the late 1980s their leaning towards adults became more noticeable with the creation of Black Adult Contemporary stations (Black ACs), which, in the example of KATZ St. Louis, played non-rap current hits as well as oldies and jazz crossover songs. Throughout the late 1980s, Black ACs grew in number. By 1990, Terri Rossi noted in *Billboard* that over 20% of stations reporting to the "Hot Black Singles" chart considered themselves not Urban stations, but Black AC stations. Sean Ross noted an increase in urban station fragmentation in late 1986, but stations didn't overtly state this until a few years later. Like an Adult 40, Black ACs played everything in their home genre except for the styles of music that adults didn't like, in this case, rap, because hard rock rarely charted on the Urban charts. In his 1989 overview of popular radio formats, Kurt Hanson noted the similarity between Black AC and Adult 40, saying that it "looks like older blacks have no more desire to listen to a loud, current-based music format than older whites do." See "KATZ-FM Taps Vance as PD," *Radio & Records*, March 16, 1990, 6; Sean Ross, "The Mellowing Of B/U Radio," *Radio & Records*, October 10, 1986, 52; Janine McAdams and Sean Ross, "AC Issue Charges 'Rapper' Confab," *Billboard*, September 1, 1990, 4, 82; and Kurt Hanson, "Charting Radio's Course," *Radio & Records*, September 15, 1989, 22.

[107] Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, April 7, 1990, 24.

the radio industry were "scared to death" of rap, because it "threaten[ed] to take over the planet."[108] By not playing rap on their stations, radio owners were helping to keep this "threatening" new black trend under control. These stations were designed to be refuges from standard Top 40 stations, where adults might be bothered, disgusted, or even frightened by rap. They were safe spaces, free from these unwanted sounds and the identities that the sounds were associated with.[109] Orlando Program Director Adam Cook described recent changes at his station, which included cautiously controlling rap's airplay, as making it "safer to listen to the radio station."[110]

As programmers created stations that kept audiences safe from the sounds and associations of rap, developers and contractors all over the country built physical spaces that aimed to keep middle-class Americans safe from what the media had led them to believe was a rise in urban crime and unrest. Mike Davis argues that during the 1990s, the American public became obsessed with their physical safety, writing that this preoccupation was the "master narrative" of the decade.[111] Gated communities, physically set apart from supposedly more dangerous areas by walls and policed by guards, separated upper- and middle-class Americans from the impression of unlawful

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[108] Clifton is quoted in Rochelle Levy, "Urban Panel Studies State of Black/AC," *Billboard*, February 22, 1992, 69. Clifton likens radio's reaction to rap to societal fears of rock and roll thirty-five years earlier.

[109] Although I focus on rap in this essay, the same was true for heavy metal and hard rock. But the terms of heavy metal's demonization by these stations was entirely different; Ann Binder argues that the mainstream press characterized heavy metal and rap very differently during this era. In the case of hard rock, programmers' decisions to not play the music did not create a racial divide, but it similarly segmented the audience into acceptable and not acceptable identities, largely reflecting class identities. See Binder, "Constructing Racial Rhetoric," 765.

[110] Phyllis Stark, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, July 25, 1992, 61.

[111] Davis, *City of Quartz*, 224.

activity on the streets and soothed "anxiety about the spread of urban lawlessness."[112] Like Adult 40 stations, these neighborhoods offered spaces that were regarded as safe, in this case for Americans who developers believed were fearful of inner city criminality.

Fears over safety were reinforced by advertisements for protective products, which copied the imagery that Americans saw nightly on the news. Analyzing the advertising techniques of home security companies, Steve Macek writes that security was sold as a way to both capitalize on and stoke white fears about the unruly urban city and its inhabitants. Radio Shack, for example, ran an advertisement in 1994 promoting its stores' selection of home security products not by showing pictures or descriptions of these products but instead by walking the viewer through an eerily-lit, first-person account of robbing a house, followed by a graphic describing the company, along with several community organizations, as "United Against Crime."[113] Guns, writes Macek, were similarly marketed to women in the late 1980s by simultaneously playing on and feeding into fears of criminals.[114] One particularly insidious advertisement ran by the National Rifle Association in 1989 proposed this terrifying scenario: "He's followed you for two weeks. He'll rape you in two minutes." Below this text ran an explanation that protection was possible, with a compact handgun.[115]

From its beginnings, rap allowed inner city youth to occupy physical spaces, as DJs stole power from street lights to fuel their parties.[116] Boomboxes and other loud sound systems similarly took control over public places, asserting the presence and sound

[112] Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, ix.
[113] Ibid., 264.
[114] Ibid., 271.
[115] Brady, "Marketing Handguns to Women."
[116] Robin D.G. Kelley makes this point, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 206. Also see Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation*, 87.

of African-American youth in spaces where they were often silenced. Builders of gated communities took these spaces back, creating neighborhoods designed to attract an ideal public, just as programmers at rap-free radio filled the spaces that rap had claimed on Top 40 station playlists with music that would attract their vision of an ideal audience.[117]

Rap's sounds, even divorced from an MC's body, often intruded on physical space. *Billboard* writer Sean Ross wrote that his mom, like many other people her age, disliked rap in part because she never heard it by choice—instead the "invariably noisy, hostile, and dirty" music was forced upon her by young people walking around with boomboxes or driving by blaring rap with their windows down.[118] Robin D.G. Kelley writes that rap songs in Los Angeles "literally [became] weapons in a battle over the right to occupy public space. Frequently employing high decibel car stereos and boom boxes, black youth not only 'pump[ed] up the volume' for their own listening pleasure, but also as part of an indirect, ad hoc war of position."[119] Gated communities reasserted control over these physical spaces, just as rap-free stations reasserted control over auditory spaces, making sure that middle-class citizens were not bothered by unwanted people or sounds.[120] And because the media had linked rap with blackness and blackness with criminality, the imagined perpetrators these spaces protected against looked similar, whether they were breaking windows or breaking beats.

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[117] Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 2.

[118] Mike Shalett, "Rap, Heavy Metal Attract Same Demo," *Radio & Records*, May 19, 1989, 40. Programming consultant Guy Zapoleon said that he knew of no place in the country "where rap is not perceived poorly with adults." See Sean Ross, "Teens, Adults Split on Top 40 Hits," *Billboard*, February 3, 1990, 18.

[119] Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 305.

[120] For more on the racial disciplining of space, see Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*.

Advertising Exclusion

Adult 40 stations were not quiet about the lack of rap on their stations. Instead, these and other formats that decided not to play rap advertised the absence quite loudly, commissioning new jingles and advertisements celebrating the stations as rap-free zones. In 1990, Baltimore's Top 40 station WBSB began using a "no rap and no hard rock" slogan, and KZZP Phoenix employed a similar description the year before. KHMX Houston during these years used "No [New] Kids, no rap, no crap" and "No rap and no heavy metal" to advertise the music mix on their station.[121] "On-air rap bashing," wrote Sean Ross, was becoming more prominent at stations of all formats.[122] Programmer Mike McVay explained his rationale for using these slogans, telling *Billboard* that he was "just looking for the most descriptive terms that touch on what the adult hates to hear."[123] But the slogans did more than describe music. Programmer Steve Perun revealed that vocal no-rap stances "sen[t] a message" to certain segments of the audience that the station is "for them," and by extension, not for other people.[124] Through these slogans and through their playlists, Adult 40 stations separated their audiences from the sounds of rap, but also from the people—the African-American youth—associated with rap.

While some stations implicitly "sen[t] a message" about who their playlists excluded, other stations were more explicit. In 1991, Boston Hot AC station WBMX advertised on television with a commercial in which gold chains were pulled out of a

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[121] Sean Ross, "'No Rap' Slogan Rings Loud & Clear," *Billboard*, October 13, 1990, 12.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

radio as a voiceover advertised the station as rap-free.[125] Rap, in these commercials, represented something more than just a musical genre—it was a fashion, a lifestyle, and perhaps even a type of person. These advertisements advertised WBMX's unwillingness to be associated with rap's identity, making clear their desired audience. By using gold chains to symbolize an undesirable identity that was to be connected with rap, WBMX relied on its audience's familiarity with these images, and also its willingness to make an association between rap, gold chains, and something or somebody. This something or somebody, due to the repetitive iconography that these television viewers saw on the nightly news, was likely black, urban and male. And like the viewers who saw the advertisement featuring Willie Horton and associated his race with criminality, viewers seeing the gold chains advertisement were primed by the media to connect rap with blackness and blackness with undesirability.

Worry over safety, both physical and on the airwaves, was self-reinforcing; as William Whyte writes, "fear proves itself"[126] because safety is only a concern if a threat exists. The existence of gated communities fed into the fears of already panicky suburbanites by raising the possibility that such communities were even necessary. Promoting rap-free Top 40 stations as safer and more desirable than more traditional Top 40 stations, similarly, reinforced that rap was something to be worried about; like the advertisements for security systems and guns, advertising stations as rap-free both took advantage of and fueled concerns about rap. Furthermore, rap-free stations reinforced criticism of rap. Individual dislikes transformed into group condemnations as these

[125] Phyllis Stark, "NMS Panel Fights AC Radio's Bum-'Rap' Slogans," *Billboard*, July 27, 1991, 9.

[126] Whyte is quoted in Davis, *City of Quartz*, 224.

stations created communities that were made of listeners and critics who found the music, and its associations, unwelcome.

Rap-free stations encouraged a musical separation between rap and other popular music and also fostered an audience division between people willing to listen to rap and those who were against rap of any sort. Because rap was so closely linked with blackness, radio stations promoted discrimination against music by African Americans by advertising their lack of rap. In an editorial in *Billboard*, Robert A. George wrote that programmers at these stations “shore up prejudices” because they weren't encouraging listeners to try out new music.[127] Rapper Queen Latifah found rap-free stations offensive, as they advertised rap as “some kind of disease.”[128] At an industry panel in 1991, she stated that no-rap stances were “disrespectful” because stations “have to keep in mind that rap appeals to youth but it is also a form of black music."[129]

In comparison with Rock 40s, which segregated their playlists by not playing music from genres that were traditionally performed by African Americans, Adult 40s played a considerable amount of music by black musicians. While Rock 40s used the language of genre to select their ideal white audience by playing only genres that were closely connected to white audiences, Adult 40s nuanced this rhetoric, making it even more color-blind. African-American singers such as Mariah Carey, Luther Vandross, and Whitney Houston were some of Adult 40’s most successful artists. In their musical selections, Adult 40s were racially ambivalent, allowing any music onto their playlist that

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[127] Robert A. George, “‘No Rap’ Slogans Reflect Radio’s Poverty,” *Billboard*, January 12, 1991, 12.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Phyllis Stark, “NMS Panel Fights AC Radio's Bum-‘Rap' Slogans,” *Billboard*, July 27, 1991, 9.

fit the sound of the station. They maintained exclusion not by race but by casting rap as undesirable because of its character; it was too "rough," too "extreme."[130]

Steve Macek writes that a similar process occurred more broadly in the 1980s and 1990s as the media characterized urban poverty as something that occurred far away from middle-class life, helping to reinforce a divide between the poor and the middle class, between cities and suburbs, and between African Americans and whites.[131] By othering poor urban minorities, the media helped to unify those not in the inner city, which, as Linda Gordon writes, had the "the further effect of suggesting a fictive unity among the non-'underclass,' among what in the 1990s U.S. is called the 'mainstream,' as if there were no heterogeneity, immorality, and irresponsibility among the 'us.'"[132] Gordon is not referring here to the musical mainstream, but her point easily extends to music: through their refusal to play rap, these stations insisted that rap was outside the musical tastes of mainstream America, regardless of the concrete evidence of its record sales and popularity with audiences already in the mainstream.

The lines of affiliation the media drew in their coverage of black urban life reflected a shift in American racial attitudes from what George Yancey describes as the "the white/nonwhite dichotomy" to a "black/nonblack dichotomy." This shift expanded the white or nonblack category in ways that reflected America's growing racial diversity;

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[130] These adjectives were used by programmers Robin Jones and Tony Davis. See Phyllis Stark, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, May 1, 1993, 67; and Mike Kinosian, "Victoria Adult CHR's Dayparting Factor," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 51.

[131] Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, 2.

[132] Gordon, "The 'Underclass' and the US Welfare State," 166. Also see Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, 135. D. Marvin Jones writes about this distancing of the urban poor that "What is different about the new racism is the way it is different yet *the same*: it is now urban culture versus mainstream culture and urban space versus suburban space." Jones, *Fear of a Hip-Hop Planet*, 159.

he writes that "Instead of evaluating the social acceptance of a group by how 'white' they are," in a black/nonblack dichotomy, "social rejection of a group [is assessed] by how 'black' they are."[133] Adult 40s' discourse of exclusion reflected this same shift; these stations played a certain style of black music, indicating the acceptability of certain types of black identity. *The Cosby Show*'s Cliff and Clair Huxtable, had they been making music, would likely have been welcomed on these stations. But rap, and its specific black identity, were not tolerated by programmers.[134]

The shift to a black/nonblack dichotomy was contingent on the diversification of the American public and the multiculturalism of the nonblack population, which protected the nonblack population against charges of racism.[135] Albuquerque station owner John Sebastian noted the importance of racial diversity at Adult 40s, telling *Billboard* that the musical selections at these stations weren't defined by race, because "people who are racist today don't necessarily carry it into their musical tastes."[136] Instead, the musical choices on his station were influenced by "a lack of melody and musicianship springing forth from top 40, not just rap."[137] But James Sexton, thinking through the sexual politics of multiracial discourse, argues that morality too plays a part in the distinction between black and nonblack because multiracial acceptance is based on heterosexual familial normativity; he writes, "There is no interracial sexual relationship:

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[133] Yancey, *Who Is White?*, 15.

[134] Rapping was not often welcome on *The Cosby Show*; the Huxtables preferred jazz, and hip hop only made a few appearances. Those few were rather noteworthy; in particular, Questlove writes that Stevie Wonder's appearance in the second season of the show "changed hip-hop forever" because it introduced millions of budding hip hop fans to the sampler. See Thompson and Greenman, *Mo' Meta Blues*, 66.

[135] See Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 43.

[136] Sean Ross, "'No Rap' Slogan Rings Loud & Clear," *Billboard*, October 13, 1990, 15.

[137] Ibid.

in its quest for a sanitized circuit of interracial reproduction, multiracialism elides interracial sexuality, a conceptual quarantine promoted in moral register. Sexual practices are barred from consideration, desire as an element of the interracial relation is disavowed, and the complex interplay of race and sexuality is disciplined."[138] Rap, as the sonic black other, was excluded for the same reason: because of its character.[139]

Given the problem of white responses to media-influenced fears of urban black degeneracy, programmers at Adult 40s and architects of gated communities proposed similar solutions, promising safe segregated spaces through colorblind rhetoric that emphasized the differences between white middle-class America and a racialized other.[140] Susan Douglas writes that stations defined by not playing rap created a "musical apartheid," that in a "corrosive, subterranean fashion legitimate[d] geographic apartheid as well."[141] Like gated communities, these stations conceptualized an American public that did not want to live with a feared black other. Casting African Americans and their latest music as violent and unsafe, a caricature that was validated as Americans across the

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[138] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 154.

[139] Certainly, character in this case meant "roughness," as noted before. But it almost definitely also had to do with the explicit content of some rap music. At an adult-leaning Top 40 in Atlanta, Program Director Lee Chesnut told *Billboard* that he tried not to play Urban records that were "'love-makin' jams." See Phyllis Stark, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, June 19, 1993, 84. Rap, for the entirety of the 1980s and 1990s was almost constantly in the news because of accusations of its sexual explicitness. See Chastagner, "The Parents' Music Resource Center"; Serrianne, *America in the Nineties*; Smith, "2 Live Crew Sparked Controversy Five Years Ago"; and Rimer, "Obscenity or Art?" for just a few examples of these debates.

[140] Murray Forman writes that "'othering' of funk and rap parallels the cultural and geographical ghettoization of black communities in American cities and thus can be reimagined in terms of a cultural geography of the radio bandwidth and, by extension, of the entire contemporary music industry." My interpretation here is slightly different, in theorizing these segregated spaces as answers to fearful rhetoric. See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, xvi.

[141] Douglas, *Listening In*, 356.

country watched the beautiful fiction of *The Cosby Show*'s last episode devolve into real-life violence and chaos on the streets of Los Angeles, these stations encouraged white Americans to retreat from a black other, creating a segregated vision of mainstream America.

Without standard Top 40 stations' teenage and minority audiences lowering their advertising rates, Adult 40s proved to be very successful.[142] In the spring of 1990, most of the new stations launched in large cities were Adult 40 stations; a year later, a *Radio & Records* columnist claimed that Adult 40 was "one of the industry's leading 'buzz' formats."[143] In 1993, *Billboard* formally recognized the format's national prominence with its own chart.[144] The magazine also began adding Adult 40 stations' play counts to their "Hot 100" chart, acknowledging it as a Top 40 subformat despite not playing a certain popular genre of music.[145] In doing so, they publicly recognized both the strength of the format and also this format's reimagined fictional mainstream that did not include rap. This idealized white audience held clout too, when it came to control over the charts. At the end of that year, out of 190 Top 40 stations that *Billboard* monitored for chart purposes including the "Hot 100," 60 were Adult 40 stations, compared to 74 mainstream Top 40 stations and 32 Crossover stations.[146]

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[142] Joel Denver, "Where the Bucks Are," *Radio & Records*, July 26, 1991, 36.

[143] Sean Ross, "Some Labels See Virtue in Adult Top 40," *Billboard*, August 18, 1990, 1, 15; Mike Kinosian, "CHR Lite's All Right in Motown," *Radio & Records*, October 18, 1991, 51. Kinosian, in this quotation, is actually referring to Hot AC, which I combine into a single format in this chapter.

[144] Kevin McCabe, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, June 12, 1993, 77.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Kevin McCabe, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, December 4, 1993, 85.

A Divided Mainstream

In September of 1989, *Billboard* noticed that the Top 40 format was fragmenting because many stations no longer played all of the top forty songs in the country. As the magazine decided that it was necessary to print two separate charts for Rock 40 and Crossover stations, chart editor Michael Ellis mused that once upon a time, "Top 40 stations were formally defined by *Billboard* as those stations that play all the hits in their local market, regardless of sound."[147] Now, this was "no longer a useful or accurate definition," because, as he noticed a month later, across the United States, "the total number of 'pure' top 40 stations—those that play all the hits—is under 100."[148] "The days of the true mass appeal [Top 40]," proclaimed Olympia radio group's Vice President Tim Roberts earlier that year, "are over."[149] In response to this fragmentation, *Billboard* altered their chart methodology, classifying stations as Top 40 as long as they played some variety of contemporary hit music aimed at a younger audience.[150]

Fragmentation continued, and throughout the early 1990s, more and more Top 40 stations switched to playing only a selection of songs from the "Hot 100." By the end of 1990, programmers had already adopted a word for the phenomenon they were seeing: "demassification," the disappearance of mass appeal media due to fragmentation.[151] During the late 1980s, playlist consensus among Top 40 stations declined to the extent

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[147] Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 84.

[148] Ibid, and Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, October 14, 1989, 89.

[149] Joel Denver, "KXXR Rocks Competition," *Radio & Records*, February 10, 1989, 36.

[150] Michael Ellis, "Hot 100 Singles Spotlight," *Billboard*, September 9, 1989, 84.

[151] See Joel Denver, "The Sounds of Change," *Radio & Records*, June 28, 1991, 58.

that by 1991, not a single song was played by all of the Top 40 stations surveyed in *Radio & Records,* a trend that the magazine reported for the next two years as well.[152] By the end of 1992, new subformats of Top 40 had become so popular that *Radio & Records* sarcastically noted that their competitor *Billboard* needed five different Top 40 charts to keep up with all of the different subformats.[153] The following year, Washington, D.C. station manager Jay Stevens told *Radio & Records* that "traditional mainstream tastes don't exist anymore."[154] Demonstrating the level of fragmentation that the industry had reached, *Radio & Records* began offering an online service in 1995 where stations could create custom Top 40 charts for their station based on their local market and their desired subformat.[155]

While some programmers were just starting to notice demassification, the ideology behind this phenomenon had been around since the early 1980s, if not before. In the 1980s, legendary programmer Lee Abrams began programming stations based on psychographic research, a refined version of demographic research which more closely connected lifestyle choices to consumer choices.[156] Abrams advocated for more "horizontal" music which could appeal to multiple psychographic groups; like Lionel

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[152] See Ken Barnes, "Tracking the Trends in CHR Add Patterns," *Radio & Records*, May 11, 1990, 72, 74; Joel Denver, "Music Notes from 1991," *Radio & Records*, December 13, 1991, 41; Joel Denver, "Music 1992: Hitting the High Notes," *Radio & Records*, December 11, 1992, 43; and Joel Denver, "1993's Significant Action: The Music," *Radio & Records*, December 10, 1993, 36.

[153] "Street Talk," *Radio & Records*, October 2, 1992, 25.

[154] Joel Denver, "Programmers' Round Table (Part One)," *Radio & Records*, October 8, 1993, 33.

[155] Tony Novia, "R&R Introduces First Custom Format Charts," *Radio & Records*, June 16, 1995, 27.

[156] Martin, "Would You Buy the Future of Radio from This Man?" In this article, Richard Martin describes how Abrams believed he could classify all of his Sirius XM stations as points on a two-dimensional plane with the axes defined by audience age and level of sophistication.

Richie's country-R&B-pop synthesis in "Deep River Woman," the broader a song's psychographic spread, the more listeners you could attract.[157] Psychographics could also be used to create narrowcasted stations, like Adult 40s, that were marketed towards a very specific group.[158]

Mass-appeal stations were necessary when the number of stations in a given area were limited. But in the early 1990s, narrowcasting became more common in urban areas as radio station operators started buying stations outside of urban areas and moving the transmitter closer to the city, which, in effect, increased the number of possible radio stations in a large city.[159] With more stations, audiences could be divided into finer segments, but an individual station's rating, which was calculated based on the percentage of an area's total audience that listened to the station, would necessarily suffer. Jeff Wyatt, who had created the pioneering crossover station Power 106 in Los Angeles, forecasted in 1990 that the days of getting high numerical ratings were over and that in the future, many stations would all receive equally good but minute ratings.[160] Programming at MTV also reflected the demassification of media; in 1991, they began showing videos in 3-4 song blocks designated by genre and separated by commercials so that audiences could tune in for longer when their favorite genre was playing without other styles interrupting.[161]

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[157] See Eddy, *Rock and Roll Always Forgets*, 297.

[158] Martin, "Would You Buy the Future of Radio from This Man?"

[159] Jeff Pollack, "Format Search: The Seven Deadly Sins," *Radio & Records*, August 10, 1990, 40.

[160] Joel Denver, "Power 106 Feels the Fragmentation," *Radio & Records*, August 3, 1990, 48.

[161] Genres were labeled as Rock, Club, Hit, Street, or Hard. See Melinda Newman, "TV Making a Splash with New Block Programming," *Billboard*, June 22, 1991, 32.

New computer models in the 1980s which enabled radio stations and radio consulting agencies to finely differentiate audiences only reinforced this fragmentation.[162] As computing power increased, so did demand for more intricate models that more accurately predicted consumer habits.[163] For radio, this meant shifting from bluntly dividing an area's population by age and race, hoping that the time-tested homology between an audience's demographic profile and a performer's race would apply, to programming music informed by detailed, data-driven research that demonstrated a correspondence between individual songs or styles and specific audiences. Narrowcasting allowed programmers to target exactly who they wanted; one programmer interviewed in Jarl Ahlkvist's 1995 dissertation jokingly claimed that these methods were so refined that he could almost target just "men between the ages of 25 and 29, with vasectomies, who are left handed and have red hair."[164]

A 300-page study published by Coleman Research represented one such form of market segmentation research. *The Music Clustering of America,* published in 1995, was the first study to "[examine] the various bodies of tastes within the American radio listening audience."[165] This study employed cluster analysis methods, the same methods that the PRIZM modeling system had used in the 1970s to map consumer preferences onto zip codes.[166] Michael Weiss describes the potential of such modeling systems for businesses, writing:

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[162] Philip Napoli argues, similarly, that the increased specificity and accuracy of radio ratings agencies led to increased fragmentation. See Napoli, *Audience Economics*, 93.

[163] Weiss, *The Clustered World*, 33.

[164] Ahlkvist, "Around the Dial," 148.

[165] Coleman Research, "The Music Clustering of America."

[166] Weiss, *Latitudes and Attitudes*, 6–7.

> Today, with the click of a computer mouse, businesses can pinpoint the one neighborhood within three miles of a store where they'll find the highest number of college-educated, Toyota-owning camera buffs between the ages of 25 and 34 who live in $175,000 homes. Increasingly, consumer maps and market profiles are helping marketers in their tireless efforts to give consumers what they want even before they know they want it. Calico Corners, the fabric retail chain, uses consumer maps to decide the best locations for opening new stores. The Postal Service has developed maps of consumer types to decide which commemorative stamps to stock in its 400 philatelic centers around the country.[167]

According to Weiss, cluster modeling does not just make selling things easier, but also benefits consumers; he writes:

> Every year, Americans are confronted with 25,000 new products. Each day, we're bombarded with an estimated 1,500 messages. Target-marketing attempts not only to steer selected products toward selected people—say, baby formula toward expectant families in suburban homes—but to keep the same products away from those who aren't interested, such as childless couples living in urban apartments. The goal, say marketers, is to eliminate waste for businesses and reduce information clutter for consumers.[168]

Coleman Research's cluster modeling of musical taste revealed that what programmers had been worrying about all along was true, that musical taste was age-dependent. One graphic in their findings, entitled "Music Map of American Tastes" shows a giant cleave between listeners who like Grunge and Pop Alternative radio formats, those who like Churban (another name for Crossover) and Pop Urban (another similar Top 40 subformat likely to play rap), and those who like all other formats: Adult Contemporary, Country, New Soft Adult Contemporary, Jazz, Classical, Urban Adult Contemporary, Motown, Classical, Oldies, Soft 70's, 70's, Classic Rock, and AOR.[169] Radio station preference, in this survey, is almost entirely dictated by age. The "Music Map" also shows just how incompatible rap-friendly formats are with all other formats,

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[167] Ibid., 7.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Coleman Research, "The Music Clustering of America," 57.

demarcating the difference between people who like rap and everyone else with a huge white space. This model reinforced radio programmers' impression that rap was not capable of being mainstream, affecting their willingness to include rap on stations that wanted to attract older audiences. Another 1994 study, this one by research firm Odyssey, led Marilyn A. Gillen to question in *Billboard* whether or not a mainstream still existed, or whether there were "just a lot of little streams running independently."[170]

Fig. 9. "Music Map of American Tastes" from Coleman Research's "The Music Clustering of America"

[170] Marilyn A. Gillen, "Tracking Multimedia's Fragmented Audience," *Billboard*, March 5, 1994, 60.

The Death of Top 40

Once Top 40 subformats had separated listeners into niche categories, it was difficult to put them back together because programmers imagined them to have disparate tastes, and also because these narrowcasted stations didn't expose listeners to new styles.[171] In early 1990, Steve Perun, program director at WBSB Baltimore, noted that the 18-24-year-old demographic was becoming increasingly segmented in their tastes in a way that older listeners were not; he stated that "You'll find 10% of the demo that likes hardcore dance, 10% that likes rap, 10% that likes modern rock, 10% that likes hard rock, and so forth," as opposed to 50% of the 25-34-year-old demographic who shared the same mainstream tastes.[172] Demassification reinforced segmentation, as listeners were not exposed to new styles on hyper-fragmented stations. In early 1992, recording studio president Paul Wickliffe, in an editorial in *Billboard*, pessimistically noted that "Slicing the mainstream record-buying public into narrow 'demographically correct' formats has all but killed off pop radio and will never produce a mega-hit." But the problem, for Wickliffe, was more pressing than simply record companies not being able to sell music that appealed to everyone or radio stations not attracting large enough audiences to make money. He writes, "Music has always been able to rally this country during hard times, and it has been one of our strongest exports. Now, when we need it most, it's broken up into little pieces."[173] The music mainstream in this instance serves a greater purpose than just representing popularity—it brings people together. Radio, at its most idealistic, plays

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[171] Sean Ross, "If You Build It, They Will Cume," *Billboard*, March 28, 1992, 61, 63.

[172] Quoted in Sean Ross, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, February 24, 1990, 26.

[173] Paul Wickliffe, "Great Music Still Exists," *Billboard*, January 25, 1992, 8.

this music, broadcasting solidarity and unity. By fragmenting this mainstream, by including some and excluding others, Adult 40s and Rock 40s destroyed this alliance, troubling the cohesion of the American mainstream.[174]

More pragmatically, the lack of consensus among Top 40 programmers and increasing playlist fragmentation was indicative of a more disconcerting trend. The format, as it lost consensus, was also losing stations. As programmers encouraged listeners away from mainstream Top 40 stations, many listeners left the format altogether. Between 1989 and 1990, a little less than fifteen percent of Top 40 stations changed formats, and the following year an even greater percentage of stations abandoned the format.[175] Between 1989 and 1993, the format lost over 38 percent of its national audience.[176]

Other stations gladly accepted the listeners. Country experienced a burst in popularity in the early 1990s, understood by many in the industry as a manifestation of listeners' distaste for rap.[177] The popularity of grunge and other rock-influenced styles also brought about a resurgence in the popularity of Rock stations as well as a new Rock

[174] Bill Adler once called Lee Abrams, a forefather of narrowcasting, "the greatest cultural criminal of the twentieth century." Adler is quoted in Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 297.

[175] Tony Novia, "Is CHR an Endangered Species?," *Radio & Records*, May 10, 1996, 28.

[176] Phyllis Stark, "Labels Rethink Radio as Top 40 Slips," *Billboard*, June 19, 1993, 1, 130.

[177] Jimmy Bowen, head of Liberty Records, noted this trend, saying that "Every morning, I get up and thank God for rap music, 'cause it runs people to country." Country Program Director Bob Moody noticed a similar trend, remarking that "every time the Red Hot Chili Peppers appear on national TV, we pick up audience, because they can't relate to it anymore." Bowen is quoted in Newsweek Staff, "Rap And Race." Moody is quoted in Carrie Borzillo, "Teens Are on Country's Wavelength," *Billboard*, August 21, 1993, 69. Also see Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, July 11, 1992, 78.

subformat, Alternative.[178] By 1994, there were only 358 Top 40 stations in the country, down from 931 in 1989, making it the ninth most popular format.[179] In comparison, that year there were over 2600 Country stations and almost 1800 Adult Contemporary stations across the nation.[180] Top 40, in the words of Cleveland Program Director Kevin Clark, had "faded into a mere shadow of its former self."[181]

Format	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
CHR	951	824	675	578	441	358	318
Country	2448	2452	2457	2552	2612	2642	2613
AC	2058	2135	2088	1963	1895	1784	1655
Rock (AR, Alt, CR)	365	419	529	592	643	721	828
Spanish & Ethnic	313	342	370	385	421	470	494
Urban, Urban AC	284	294	311	313	321	328	347

Fig. 10. Number of National Stations Per Format from "Is CHR An Endangered Species?," *Radio & Records*, May 10, 1996, 28.

Rap, many programmers thought, was to blame, because it was incompatible with most other pop music.[182] According to Dallas Program Director Sean Phillips, a Top 40

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[178] Shane, "Modern Radio Formats," 4. Radio consultant Ed Shane writes that despite the erosion of mass culture in the 1980 and 1990s—with cable, computers, targeted advertising, and niche media—radio strengthened. See Ibid., 9.

[179] Phyllis Stark, "Format Trends Confirm Top 40's Slide," *Billboard*, November 12, 1994, 101; and Tony Novia, "Is CHR an Endangered Species?," *Radio & Records*, May 10, 1996, 28.

[180] How the numerical difference between format station count relates to audience size is complicated, as Country and Adult Contemporary stations were more numerous in less populated areas. For national audience numbers, see "Format Reach Charts," *Radio & Records Ratings Report & Directory*, Fall 1994, 6.

[181] Joel Denver, "CHR in the '90s: The New World Order," *Billboard*, September 25, 1992, 36.

[182] Jeff Chang also argues that rap was responsible for fragmenting mass culture, but sees it more idealistically. He writes, referring here to the fragmentation that SoundScan had revealed that "The center had given way, and the pop field looked like a jumble of fragments. With the rise of the niche model, the singular underdog idea that the

station just couldn't play Michael Bolton, the Breeders *and* Snoop Dogg.[183] "Top 40," Phillips postulated, "made a big mistake when it so heartily embraced extreme music and left most of the audience behind."[184] In 1993, radio consultant Alan Burns noted that his interviews with former Top 40 listeners revealed that most had switched to other stations to avoid rap.[185] Mobile disco jockey Paul Beardmore related the same year that as he traveled around the country, he noticed that "the mainstream audience of top 40 has become completely turned off by a disproportionate number of rap groups hitting the top 40."[186] It wasn't, of course, just the musuci that was the problem—its associated listeners were. People of color were blamed for Top 40's fragmentation. In a prescient 1988 article about the Top 40 format, programmer Bill Tanner wrote that the "presence of ethnic minorities" caused the format to splinter.[187] Polly Anthony of Epic Records agreed, saying that based on the ethnic makeup of the audience, "certain stations are able to support a type of music that others can't touch."[188]

Bronx b-boys and b-girls had advanced—like politics, all cool is local—could be triumphant. " See Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 417.

[183] Phyllis Stark, "PD of the Week," *Billboard*, February 5, 1994, 90.

[184] Ibid. Another new programming aid published in *Radio & Records* in the mid-1990s, which showed the results of a weekly survey of the popularity of the top 30 songs on *Radio & Records*' singles chart, also likely didn't help programmers think of their audience as unified in taste. See, for example, "Callout America," *Radio & Records*, June 2, 1995, 19.

[185] Alan Burns, "Changing Music and Radio Tastes," *Radio & Records*, January 29, 1993, 31.

[186] Paul Beardmore, "Mainstream Malady," *Billboard*, July 10, 1993, 5.

[187] Tanner forecasted that "The numbers are on the side of the stations that understand how to court the ethnic people within the city and make the station palatable enough to be acceptable to the non-ethnics who live in the suburbs." Tanner is quoted in Dave Sholin, "Ten Years of Top 40: 1978 to 1988," *The Gavin Report*, December 2, 1988, 17.

[188] Ibid., 16. For more on the relationship between rap and the decline of Top 40, see Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 184.

But programmer Kevin Clark believed that the attitudes of programmers like Phillips and Tanner were far more culpable than the tastes of the Top 40 audience for the demise of Top 40 radio. The glory days of Top 40 were over, he lamented, and "fragmentation [was] to blame."[189] According to programmer David MacFarland in 1995, Top 40 was no longer *"the* Top 40"—it was "*a* Top 40."[190] This wasn't simply a change in semantics. As Top 40 stations fragmented, Robert A. George complained that what "used to be a coming together place…[is now] a segregating place," noting that he meant segregating in "all senses of the word."[191] By promoting stations where listeners were not encouraged to listen to different types of music, an audience's "patience for the other shrivels," writes Susan Douglas, meaning that narrow radio formats only reinforced polarizing tastes.[192] Fragmentation, stemming from radio programmers' reactions to rap, segregated Top 40 radio. It separated white middle-class Americans from a black other. It

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[189] Joel Denver, "CHR in the '90s: The New World Order," *Billboard*, September 25, 1992, 36. David T. MacFarland writes that increasing the specificity of formats may not serve certain audiences, in particular, "Those who listen to multiple radio formats rather than to a single favorite station to achieve the variety they desire, and those who are aware of the vast variety of available music that is never given radio airplay, who listen to cassettes and CDs that they program for themselves." As the 1990s wore on, of course, the second type of audience increased with the ubiquitization of private listening practices (the Walkman, filesharing, etc.). See MacFarland, "Rethinking the Hits," 33; also see Lacey, "Listening in the Digital Age," 19.

[190] MacFarland, "Rethinking the Hits," 39. MacFarland's claim here is similar to Eric Weisbard's argument that each format operates by the similar rules and has its own mainstream. See Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 18.

[191] Robert A. George, "'No Rap' Slogans Reflect Radio's Poverty," *Billboard*, January 12, 1991, 12.

[192] Douglas, *Listening In*, 354. David T. MacFarland makes this point, writing that "Format differentiation begat audience segmentation." See MacFarland, "Rethinking the Hits," 33. More broadly, an increase in TV media options correlates with an increase in the polarization of viewpoints. See Hmielowski, Beam, and Hutchens, "Structural Changes in Media and Attitude Polarization."

closed listeners' minds, strengthening negative perceptions of African Americans. And most insidious of all, it did so under the guise that this was what listeners wanted.

In 1992, Rick Dees, successful Los Angeles DJ and nationally syndicated Top 40 countdown host, took out a prominently placed advertisement on the second page of radio trade magazine *Radio & Records.* The fun was good while it lasted, Dees declared. But now, Top 40 "has stopped rapping and resumed entertaining." The only image on the page besides the countdown's logo is a gravestone, reading "R.I.P. RAP, 1988-1992." According to Dees, the "fad" of rap is over, as Top 40 needs to move in a different direction, to "mainstream hits."[193]

[193] "CHR Has Stopped Rapping and Resumed Entertaining," *Radio & Records*, October 30, 1992, 2.

CHR HAS STOPPED
RAPPING
AND RESUMED
ENTERTAINING

It was fun while it lasted. Most fads are. Hit Radio, though, is always in evolution. The mix shows and the rap music were alright, but CHR is now in another place.

Rick Dees Weekly Top 40

- CHR is Mainstream Hits
- CHR is Personality
- CHR is "Rick Dees Weekly Top 40"

"Rick Dees Weekly Top 40" is the weekend winner for the '90s and beyond. 1993 will be the year of Change. Get ready for it now.

Call Tom Shovan at CD Media (212) 856-4435 to lock in with "Rick Dees Weekly Top 40."

R.I.P.
RAP
1988 — 1992

RAP AND STATS
DON'T CUT IT NO MORE!

CD MEDIA
Los Angeles • New York

Fig. 11. "CHR Has Stopped Rapping and Resumed Entertaining,"
Radio & Records, October 30, 1992, 2.

The mainstream, according to Dees, did not include rap, the musical style that Vito Bruno of *Billboard* wrote in 1986 was "one of the few positive forces" combatting the lack of opportunity, and, I'll add, negative media representation, that young African Americans experienced during the 1980s.[194] Dees celebrated what he hoped was the

[194] Vito Bruno, "Rap: A Positive Force for Social Change," *Billboard*, November 8, 1986, 9. By 1993, *Billboard* capitulated to Dees's concern about rap and started creating two different charts for *American Top 40* to use, a "mainstream" one, and a hip hop one. See Durkee, *American Top 40*, 211.

demise of rap on radio, as it made it easier for him to sell his countdown to advertisers and stations that did not want to be associated with rap's identity.[195] But by excising rap from Top 40 playlists, programmers denied young African Americans the chance to reassert control over their representation. They also denied white Americans the opportunity to change their opinions about young blacks. By creating safe spaces not threatened by the sounds or imagined sights of rap, programmers reinforced media-created negative impressions of rap and African Americans. These radio stations created segregated spaces, teaching the media industry that a multiracial mainstream no longer existed, a lesson that reinforced itself over and over again as the media accepted fragmentation as the new normal.

[195] For example, when approached to add Dee's countdown to their programming, one Texas station program director replied that he would "have to look at the music" before playing the countdown, noting that "if there are one or two songs that we may not play, I'm not going to play it." See Fong-Torres, *The Hits Just Keep on Coming*, 250.

Chapter Four: Rap is Not Pop

A Tribe Called Quest begins their 1991 song "Check the Rhime" with a whimsical look back to before they got famous, when the group would practice their rhymes for anyone who would listen in their Queens neighborhood. But as Q-Tip turns his attention to the increasing influence of the music industry on rap in the song's last verse, whimsy turns to anger. In the final moments of the verse, he addresses MC Hammer, one of the best-selling artists of the previous year, drawing a distinction between A Tribe Called Quest's masterful rap and Hammer's commercialized music. He abruptly ends his verse, summarily declaring that "rap is not pop, if you call it that then stop."

The problem with Q-Tip's statement was that, by 1991, rap *was* pop. That year, over one-fifth of all songs on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" chart had rapped vocals in them.[1] Many more utilized sampling, looping techniques, and record scratching. In the week that A Tribe Called Quest released the album containing "Check the Rhime," all but three of the twenty largest Top 40 radio stations in the country listed at least one rap song in their top five singles for the week, and all but four of the 41 Top 40 stations monitored by *Billboard* had a rap song on their weekly playlist.[2]

Q-Tip's verse is just one example of what was becoming a common theme in the beginning of the 1990s in rap music and hip hop journalism, a concern with setting boundaries for what rap was and what rap wasn't. While in 1985, Rappin' John Hood had

[1] See Appendix One
[2] "Power Playlists," *Billboard*, September 28, 1991, 24-25.

to teach his neighbors about rap, six years later, it wasn't just fictional characters walking down the street in *Rappin*' that were trying to rhyme. By the beginning of the 1990s, teenagers everywhere could stroll into the Sam Goody at their local mall, buy Fab Five Freddy's book *Fresh Fly Flavor* to learn how to use hip hop slang, and rap along to the "low down rap beat" emanating from the miniature microphone included with their recently-purchased Vanilla Ice action figure. The mainstreaming of hip hop unnerved rappers and critics, who worried about the durability of their art form when it was so quickly becoming part of the mainstream. As hip hop grew from *The Arsenio Hall Show* to *Saturday Night Live*, from 12-inch singles released on independent labels to multi-platinum CDs released on major labels, and from black urban block parties to white suburban family rooms, rappers and journalists publicly debated the genre's identity.

In this chapter, I examine how critics, rappers, and academics reacted to the increasing mainstream acceptance of hip hop. Rap's crossover into the mainstream, its becoming pop, prompted many in the emergent hip hop community to reinforce the boundaries that defined the genre. I argue that in the early 1990s, these authors and musicians defined rap's authenticity in opposition to Top 40 radio, by claiming rap was very much not pop. Authenticity is one of the most important aesthetic parameters in hip hop; authenticity uniquely dominates the content, sound, and image of rap music.[3] Rap's success on Top 40 radio created something that the hip hop community could set their genre in opposition to, a fluid enemy that gave hip hop definition.[4]

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[3] Jeffries, *Thug Life*, 120.

[4] Throughout this chapter I use the term "hip hop community" to describe self-identified dedicated fans and critics of hip hop, the type of person that would subscribe to or read *The Source*, that Jon Shecter described in *Billboard* as a "serious rap fan." For more on this type of audience, see Jon Shecter, "Talkin' Talent: In Search of the Fountain

In the first part of this chapter, I compare two distinct moments of hip hop historiography, the first books published about the genre in 1984-5, and the first academic monograph published about rap in 1994, to illuminate how attitudes towards the mainstreaming of rap changed in just ten years. To explain how and why hip hop's relationship with the mainstream changed over this period, I analyze how writers in *The Source* in the early 1990s dealt with the commercial success of hip hop and the growing similarity in sound between rap and pop. I argue that these changes resulted from hip hop's reformulation of its authenticity, which was defined against Top 40 audiences and Top 40 sounds in the face of its mainstreaming. I conclude by examining the ramifications of these changing standards of authenticity on the developing field of hip hop studies.

Defining Hip Hop: The Difference Ten Years Makes

The most obvious indication that rap had become pop occurred in the beginning of November 1990, when Vanilla Ice hit number one on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" with his song "Ice Ice Baby," the "first rap artist," as *Billboard*'s Paul Grein noted, to do so.[5] But "Ice Ice Baby" wasn't the first number-one record with rapping in it; that honor belongs to Blondie's "Rapture," which rose to the top of the charts in early 1981. These songs don't have much in common besides their chart achievements and the racial identity of the rappers: "Rapture" is a funky disco jam featuring breathy slow singing about clubbing

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of Hip-Hop and the Ultimate Lyrical Experience," *Billboard*, November 24, 1990, R-3, R-24.

[5] Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, November 3, 1990, 8.

and a rather silly rap; "Ice Ice Baby" alternates self-serious rapped verses with whispered choruses over a bass line lifted from an early-1980s rock song.

In the years following these two clear indications of hip hop's mainstream appeal, several books were published about the genre. Between 1984 and 1985, three popular press books about hip hop were published, responding to the growing popularity of hip hop. One, David Toop's 1984 book *The Rap Attack*, discusses the history and aesthetics of rap. The other two, Steven Hager's 1984 book *Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti* and the 1985 book *Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop,* written by Nelson George, Patty Romanowski, Susan Flinker and Sally Barnes, are about hip hop culture more generally, and contain chapters about rap. In 1994, after rap's second number-one record, Tricia Rose published *Black Noise*, the first academic monograph about rap.

These four texts present rap as it is typically thought of today; they agree on what it is, who its first important figures are, and what its musical influences were. Hager begins his book by situating hip hop in the Bronx as Afrika Bambaataa spins records at a party of young black males at a neighborhood community center. In this opening, he proposes hip hop's standard definition, writing that hip hop is an "inner city subculture that has created its own graphic art, dance, fashion, and musical styles."[6] Rose, Toop and George characterize hip hop similarly, as a multi-dimensional culture.[7] All four authors center their narratives around three major figures: DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa. Both Hager and Toop note that many hip hop artists don't know the

[6] Hager, *Hip Hop*, x.

[7] Both George and Toop include fashion as a key element in this culture, adding a fifth element to the standard four of hip hop. See Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 15; and George, "Introduction," xvii.

historical background of their music, but rap's musical and cultural influences make up substantial parts of all four books. Hager writes that rapping follows in the tradition of many African-American musical and artistic traditions, noting its connection to toasting, black radio DJ patter, James Brown's music, and the 1973 album *Hustler's Convention*.[8] Toop expands Hager's range of influence to include multi-genre artist Jimmy Castor, Muhammed Ali, jazz and bebop musicians, comedians, street harmony groups, and preachers.[9] George also includes the Last Poets, Muhammed Ali, and blues artists, and Rose adds Gil Scott Heron, Malcolm X, Millie Jackson, and the Black Panthers to these other influences.[10]

While their books were published almost the same number of years after rap's first two number-one records, Rose and the earlier set of authors approach rap's move into the mainstream differently. In the early 1980s, graffiti artist Fab Five Freddy introduced hip hop artists to New York's downtown art scene, initiating several years of interaction between downtown punk/new-wave/art-pop artists and uptown hip hop artists.[11] This interaction resulted not just in Blondie's number-one hit, but also less successful songs from Tom Tom Club, including "Woody Rappinghood" and "Genius of Love" (both from 1981), and Malcolm McLaren's "Buffalo Gals" (1982).

Both Hager and Toop present these recordings as distinct from the first commercially released rap singles, the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" and the Fatback Band's "King Tim III." Toop and Hager both portray "Rapper's Delight" and "King Tim III" as shocking the Bronx hip hop community, characterizing "Rapper's

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[8] Hager, *Hip Hop*, 44–7.
[9] Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 17–9.
[10] Rose, *Black Noise*, 55; and George, "Rapping," 9, 13, 26.
[11] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 147–151.

Delight," in particular, as an imitation of contemporary hip hop sounds.[12] Toop writes that the rapping on the record, which was "recycled" from other groups, was "weak and unimaginative by Bronx standards," and Hager notes that the song "stole" rapping and "appropriated the idea" of using a version of Chic's "Good Times" as the backing track.[13] Hager and Toop also don't like "King Tim III," criticizing the track for its regressive rapping style.[14]

Hager and Toop's assessments of Blondie and Top Tom Club's rap songs were more encouraging. They both characterize this moment as a meeting of the minds, as creative artists of different genres, racial identities, and geographic origins partook in a largely equal exchange of ideas.[15] Toop characterizes Tom Tom Club's songs as participating in a musical exchange with African-American rappers. Tom Tom Club, according to Toop, borrowed rapping while Grandmaster Flash sampled the music of Blondie and Tom Tom Club in return.[16] Unlike rock and roll covers by Pat Boone and

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[12] Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 15; and Hager, *Hip Hop*, 50.

[13] Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 81, 50; and Hager, *Hip Hop*, 6.

[14] Hager, *Hip Hop*, 6; and Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 81–2.

[15] "Rapture," in particular, has often been received poorly. Reebee Garofalo refers to the song as a "so-called rap song," see Garofalo, *Rockin Out*, 412. Elsewhere, he writes "Even though lead singer (rapper?) Debbie Harry is credited in some circles with being respectful of the style, it would be difficult to trace her musical roots back to the Last Poets let alone the Yoruba." See Garofalo, "Review," 265. While Nelson George doesn't mention white rap artists of the early 1980s (although the chapter on graffiti in *Fresh* does discuss uptown/downtown connections), Dick Hebdige, in his short chapter on hip hop in *Cut 'n' Mix* published in 1987, celebrates one instance of white artists borrowing hip hop. He writes that the combination of musical elements in Malcolm McLaren's hip hop influenced album "share[s] a lot of common ground musically" with Afrika Bambaataa's musical mix because they "both wage war on people's prejudices about popular music," specifically the radical identity of those styles of music. He writes that because of rap, "we shouldn't be so concerned about where a sound comes from. It's there for everyone to use. And every time a new connection is made between different kinds of music, a new channel of communication opens up." See Hebdige, *Cut 'N' Mix*, 145–6.

[16] Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 110.

Paul Young, these rap songs "usually threw a completely new light on the originals" because both artists influenced each other. Toop claims that rap was easy for white musicians to borrow, because "the major problem with playing black music—the vocals—was largely sidestepped as almost anybody could be coached into talking their way through a rhythm."[17] It's not clear how Toop interprets rap being so easy to perform although his lack of criticism is likely telling; he's usually more explicit about music he disdains. When discussing Malcolm McLaren's "Buffalo Gals" taking influence from The Disco Four's "Country Rock and Rap," he offers his harshest critique of this uptown/downtown interaction, sarcastically noting that "naturally, it took a white person to take the idea to the top of the charts." However, he quickly qualifies this statement, writing that "Buffalo Gals" was "undeniably more commercial" then The Disco Four's banjo-filled call to "party people" who want to do-si-do, stomp their feet, and clap their hands.[18] Racial appropriation isn't Toop's issue with "Buffalo Gals"; instead, he is more concerned about "opportunists, white or black," because he fears artistic misrepresentation will occur as the style moves further away from its original black audience.[19]

Hager also describes rap's uptown/downtown moment with a neutral tone, discussing only instances where groups collaborated, such as when The Clash hired Futura 2000 to paint on stage during their performances and to perform his own, Clash-produced, song at the end of the show. Hager does not mention Blondie, but his description of Tom Tom Club is similar to that of Toop's, depicting Tom Tom Club and

[17] Ibid., 134.
[18] Ibid., 113.
[19] Ibid., 113, 140.

hip hop artists as influencing each other.[20] Hager is more forceful than Toop in stressing the African-American identity of the music, writing towards the beginning of the book that no matter how far it goes towards influencing other styles, hip hop's roots are "still the deepest in all contemporary Afro-American music."[21]

In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose argues for the political and social importance of hip hop by "describ[ing], theoriz[ing], and critiqu[ing] elements of rap," an intervention that was an important corrective to academics and journalists alike in the late 1980s and early 1990s who downplayed the importance of the genre.[22] Rose explicitly narrows her focus to what she believes are "some of the most narratively compelling elements that have emerged inside rap music."[23] Largely, this means that she focuses on music other than the artists that are central to this dissertation, and gives rap's early 1990s crossover less attention than Toop or Hager did in their books published a decade prior.

Rose only briefly mentions rap's recent mainstreaming. In the first few pages of her book, Rose outlines a very short history of the genre, which includes rap's crossover and the "multi-million unit rap sales by the Beastie Boys, Tone Loc, M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice."[24] While she acknowledges rap's white audience, placing hip hop in a historical tradition of white audiences listening to black music, she argues that rap's

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[20] Hager, *Hip Hop*, 91.
[21] Ibid., 19.
[22] Rose, *Black Noise*, xiii.
[23] Ibid., xiii.
[24] Rose, *Black Noise*, 4. Aside from his appearance in this list, Rose only mentions Hammer one other time. Rose gives Vanilla Ice more attention, arguing that his meager attempts to authenticate himself by lying about his background revealed the extent to which "ghetto-blackness is a critical code in rap music." See ibid., 12.

relationship to the music industry makes the production of rap culture uniquely black.[25] Later, in her most explicit description of how hip hop has become mainstream, she writes, “Dominating the black music charts, rap music and rap music cousins…have been trendsetters for popular music in the U.S. and around the word. Rap’s musical and visual style have had a profound impact on all contemporary popular music.”[26] But rather than expanding on rap’s relationship with a mainstream audience, she returns to theorizing rap’s important role as a hidden transcript.[27]

Rose's focus on the political importance of hip hop rather than its mainstream success is representative of hip hop criticism in the early 1990s, which influenced the newly ascendant academic field of hip hop studies. In response to hip hop’s move to the mainstream in the late 1980s and early 1990s, critics and academics divided the rich and diverse sounds of hip hop into real hip hop and hit pop, focusing on the social importance of the former. The development of this genre split is visible in the early 1990s issues of *The Source,* one of the most important hip hop magazines which was started by Harvard student David Mays in August 1988. In 1990, *The Source* transformed into a full-color magazine promoted as “the voice of the rap music industry,” which in 1991 transitioned into “the magazine of hip-hop music, culture and politics.”[28] During the early 1990s, *The Source* attempted to make sense of rap’s increasingly obvious crossover, struggling with how to negotiate their desire to expand rap’s audience, which was as financially important for *The Source* as it was for the recording industry, without sacrificing hip hop’s underground identity. These struggles, visible on the pages of *The Source*, detail the

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[25] See ibid., 6–20.
[26] Ibid., 17.
[27] Ibid., 18.
[28] “Hip-Hop History, *The Source*, November 1993.

genre coming to terms with its rise into the mainstream and offer insight into how hip hop's relationship with the mainstream changed between Blondie and Vanilla Ice's crossovers. These conversations in *The Source*, the most important hip hop magazine of the early 1990s, didn't create the constitutive terms of hip hop's authenticity that came to dominate the genre throughout the 1990s, but they solidified the discourse through which rap artists would be judged because, as Jack Hamilton writes, music criticism "instructs us on how to hear [music], how to think about [music], how to categorize [music]."[29]

Defining Hip Hop: Our Worst Nightmare

Within the pages of *The Source*, Vanilla Ice was widely panned. In January 1991, *The Source* published an article written prior to the revelations that Ice had falsified his background. Author Dan Charnas begins the article by writing that "Many of us die-hard New York hip-hop heads have been having a lot of sleepless nights recently," thanks to the success of not just MC Hammer, but also "our worst fucking nightmare," Vanilla Ice, whose single sounded "like rap's death knell" to "those folks who think of themselves as guardians of the 'real' hip-hop culture."[30] Charnas details exactly how this nightmare plays out; he writes, "in the mass media, hip-hop now *becomes* Hammer, Vanilla Ice and Young MC. It's a world wherein Kid-n-Play are nothing but cartoons of themselves, Public Enemy pals around with Rick Dees and an entire generation of cultural genius is smothered in an avalanche of mediocrity." Phife Dawg of A Tribe Called Quest

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[29] Hamilton here is elaborating on Frith. See Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 217.

[30] Dan Charnas, "Vanilla Ice: Our Worst Nightmare?," *The Source*, January 1991, 19.

articulated similar fears that same year, saying that he was worried about "a little white boy named Bobby in, say, Indiana or Montana, and he sees the number one act is Vanilla Ice, and he says, 'Oh, that's hip-hop.'"[31] And Phife and Charnas weren't alone in their concern; that year at the New Music Seminar, nearly every panel on rap devolved into a discussion about how to keep rap "pure," as journalists Cameron Barr and Amy Duncan reported.[32]

Charnas's fear about hip hop losing its identity and becoming nothing but a light hip caricature was corroborated in the real world, as rappers rhymed in silly advertisements aimed at young audiences and MC Hammer appeared as superhero Hammerman on ABC every Saturday morning. In one of the more laughable versions of this style of hip hop, a scene in the 1989 box office failure *Teen Witch* features a white teenage girl, Polly, swooning over a white male classmate, Rhet, as he is rapping the original song "Top That."[33] The scene locates itself in the world of hip hop by starting with a close-up on a boombox while a loud drum-machine rhythm plays. But as the camera zooms out, it reveals Charnas's dystopia. Rhet and two of his friends, one of which is geekily wearing a button-down shirt tucked into slacks with suspenders, begin dancing. The three guys awkwardly swing their arms while pushing out their chests, in some sort of heavy-handed hip hop dance approximation that strikingly resembles the gauche moves of Vanilla Ice. As Rhet finishes a short rapped verse, attention turns back to Polly and her friend Louise, who have been watching with rapt attention. Louise urges

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[31] Phife is quoted in Moira McCormick, "Mainstream vs. Mean Streets," *Billboard*, November 23, 1991, R-20.

[32] See Barr and Duncan, "Black, White & Rap All Over." A year earlier at the same conference, Ice-T described MC Hammer as "cool, but he's not hip-hop!" See Krulik, *M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice*, 30.

[33] Walker, *Teen Witch*.

Polly to go talk to Rhet, but she shies away, saying in response to his rapping, "Look how funky he is. I will never be hip." The scene ends with Polly, aided by Louise's titular magical powers, engaging in a rap battle with Rhet, but it's the middle of the scene that hip hop fans likely found problematic. Her adoration of Rhet's "hip" and "funky" caricature of rap, which is strikingly prescient of Vanilla Ice's rise to success a little more than a year later, is exactly what Charnas was worried about: real hip hop gets replaced with a brightened facsimile, one which deletes the interesting details of rap and replaces them with a less complex, safer, and perhaps whiter face.

In his article about Vanilla Ice, Charnas attempts to balance critiquing Ice while acknowledging the situational factors which make the hip hop community target Ice in particular. He describes Ice's rapping as "simplistic," his songs as "mediocre," and sarcastically notes that "the only way Ice comes off is when he comes off beat, which is often," but he also argues that Ice is a convenient target for broader fears about the growing commercialization of rap and that "we need to give Vanilla Ice the respect and dignity he deserves."[34]

But after Vanilla Ice's lies about his white suburban origins were revealed, criticism in *The Source* grew harsher. A few months later, Kim Green centers racial identity in her review of a Vanilla Ice concert, writing that his show "reaffirmed the pain and frustration that I can only imagine minstrel shows brought my grandparents. The gross over-exaggeration of every effect, the over-practiced dance steps reeked of a humiliating backhanded stab."[35] But by the end of her review, she comes to the

[34] Dan Charnas, "Vanilla Ice: Our Worst Nightmare?," *The Source*, January 1991, 19.

[35] Kim Green, "The Iceman Cometh," *The Source*, May 1991, 17.

conclusion that Vanilla Ice has nothing to do with what *The Source* is concerned with. She writes that Ice has created an audience from people who "don't listen to, understand, or like rap," an audience who likes the "white joke[s]" that Ice tells.[36]

Her conclusion that Ice's audience is different than hip hop's audience is echoed a few months later in Reginald C. Dennis's article about major labels signing a large number of white rappers following the success of Vanilla Ice. He writes that "although these records technically could be considered rap music, it was clear that they were made for an audience other than the Hip-Hop Nation," a nation he centers in New York.[37] Dennis, in the beginning of his article, focuses his critique of white rappers on their sound, rather than racial identity, writing that the recent wave of white rappers were making music that is "a definite slap in the face to all of the legitimate rap artists—of all races and creeds" because these albums couldn't pass the ultimate test of good hip hop, whether it was "made for 'fronting' in your ride."[38] But it's hard for him to separate race from sound throughout this article, likely because record labels, who marketed music based on the racial identity of performers, had the same trouble. He ends the piece by writing "As long as America fails to live up to its potential, white artists who produce a version of Black music that both panders and is palatable to the mass audience (read: white people) will have an unspoken advantage over those who don't."[39]

For white rapper MC Serch of 3rd Bass, whose music Dennis characterizes as "real rap," the presence of white rappers inspired by rap's rise into the mainstream was

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Reginald C. Dennis, "The Great White Hoax," *The Source*, October 1991, 53.
[38] Ibid., 54, 53.
[39] Ibid., 55.

cause for concern.[40] Presented with some tapes of white rappers by Dennis, Serch destroys them, "repeatedly smash[ing] his fists into them," "shattering the cases," and "flinging the remains to the floor."[41] He explains his issue with these rappers, despairing that "it's every horror that I ever contemplated or imagined" because "now it's like any white boy can rhyme and make a rap record. Any Caucasian kid who grew up in the demographics between 15-25 can make a funky rap record; it's all bullshit."[42]

In hip hop scholarship, Vanilla Ice's rise is often considered to be a turning point in hip hop history, where the genre was forced to reckon with its identity. Mark Anthony Neal writes that "ultimately all concerns about authenticity in hip-hop begin and end with the fear of the proverbial white rapper."[43] Vanilla Ice became a white other against which real rap could be defined, as was evidenced by *The Source* using him as a stand-in for inauthentic posturing; a review of the book *Signifying Rappers,* for example, describes it as "the Vanilla Ice of rap scholarship."[44]

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[40] Ibid., 55, 53.

[41] Ibid., 54.

[42] Ibid. Serch notes that part of the problem is that there's just no vetting process for new rap acts, saying that he "would love to see anyone of these people go to a real hip-hop spot and kick any of the bullshit that they kick on these records." This complaint isn't necessarily about the racial identity of the rappers; instead it's problem of scale; as hip hop has expanded beyond its urban roots, the physical spaces in which hip hop acts became authenticated in the past have been replaced by records contracts. See ibid.

[43] Also see Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*; Fraley, "I Got a Natural Skill...: Hip-Hop, Authenticity, and Whiteness"; and Kajikawa, "Eminem's 'My Name Is'"; who argue that Ice's downfall changed how white performers marketed themselves. Loren Kajikawa also argues that Ice changed black rappers' identities, because "the policing of hip hop's racial boundaries helped African Americans maintain a prominent public outlet for their voices and direct financial profits toward black performers." See ibid., 347.

[44] Dan Charnas, "Hip-Hop Book Review," *The Source*, February 1991, 14.

But other scholars have noticed that while race is important to hip hop realness, other elements contribute to hip hop authenticity. The relationship between race and hip hop authenticity Michael Barnes writes, "is largely taken as self-evident because of the culture's connections to other African-American cultural and musical forms."[45] Paul J. Olson and Bennie Shobe, Jr. argue that realness in hip hop is a quality that extends beyond race, claiming that "without being 'legit' or 'authentic' and without the ability to 'keep it real,' rappers, regardless of their race, have been unable to become very successful."[46] Kembrew McLeod posits that hip hop authenticity by the late 1990s was multi-dimensional, composed of six "semantic dimensions," including five dimensions not explicitly tied to race; these six dimensions are social-psychological, racial, political-economical, gender-sexual, social locational, and cultural. He writes,

> Being authentic, or keepin' it real, means staying true to yourself (by identifying oneself as both hard and Black), representing the underground and the street, and remembering hip-hop's cultural legacy, which is the old school. To be inauthentic, or fake, means being soft, following mass trends by listening to commercial rap music, and identifying oneself with White, mainstream culture that is geographically located in the suburbs.[47]

Hip hop authenticity wasn't just defined against whiteness, as many black rappers were also derided for their lack of credibility. Instead, hip hop realness was more specific. Examining the reception of MC Hammer in *The Source* reveals that authenticity centered around two major elements in addition to race: audience and sound.

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[45] Barnes, "Redefining the Real," 7.

[46] Olson and Shobe, "White Rappers and Black Epistemology," 1008.

[47] McLeod, "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," 145.

Defining Hip Hop: Why Hammer Matters

The cover of the January 1991 issue of *The Source* asks what should be a simple question, "Who's the Most Popular Rap Artist of 1990??" Judging from albums sales alone, it easily should have been MC Hammer, whose album *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* spent 21 non-consecutive weeks atop the "Billboard 200" album chart and sold over 10 million copies. But upon opening the magazine, it's clear that the answer was a little more complicated. In *The Source*'s reader poll, which they sent out to record stores and magazine subscribers, Public Enemy won in the favorite artist category, and Ice Cube's *Amerikkka's Most Wanted* won in the favorite album category; Hammer didn't receive enough votes to even be listed as a candidate in either of these categories.[48] Readers of *The Source,* the magazine reported, didn't own Hammer's album; feigning confusion, they questioned, "this is the largest selling rap album of all time and 2/3 of the rap fans responding don't own it? Who's buying it?"[49]

Throughout the issue, it's clear that Hammer's popularity was a complicated topic worth wrestling with: Hammer not only inspired a three-page article entitled "Why Hammer Matters" but he also was the topic of two of the twelve quantitative and two of the four short-answer questions in the survey.[50] Readers, responding to the question "How do you feel about Hammer?" had varied opinions about the star; Patricia Manning of Montgomery, Alabama, praised him, saying, "The brother is bad. He kicks ass!," but

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[48] "Hip Hop Survey," *The Source*, January 1991, 32-33.

[49] Ibid., 32.

[50] Ibid., 32-34; and Dave Cook, "Why Hammer Matters," *The Source*, January 1991, 17-19.

Julio Rodriguez of San Francisco wrote, echoing a recent song by 3rd Bass, that Hammer "gets the Gas Face."[51]

Discussions about MC Hammer's relationship to hip hop were prevalent in *The Source*. Initially, the magazine attempted to broaden the tastes of their audience, insisting on the cultural relevance and aesthetic merit of Hammer and other artists who were successful with mainstream audiences. In his article "Why Hammer Matters," Dave "Davey D" Cook defends Hammer against criticism from the hip hop community. He writes that "Hammer's successful penetration into territory usually foreign to rap should inspire celebration in the Hip-Hop Nation" and argues that other rappers should build on his work expanding hip hop's audience.[52] While Davey D focuses on record sales as the marker of Hammer's commercial success, he also defines Hammer's unique popularity by his radio airplay. He writes that some rappers are the type that disregard radio success while at the same time "secretly want the same type of exposure."[53] Continuing, he criticizes these rappers for not making an "attempt to help bring about some change" and just complaining about the lack of rap on the radio.[54]

A month later, journalist Chris Wilder expanded on the relationship between mainstream success and the radio. In an interview with EPMD, he claims that Hammer and Ice fill up spots that might otherwise be offered to more credible rappers, because radio stations can use their airplay of Hammer and Ice to counter critics who say they aren't playing rap.[55] EPMD's Parrish Smith agrees, saying that "Hammer and Vanilla Ice

[51] "Hip Hop Survey," *The Source*, January 1991, 34.
[52] Dave Cook, "Why Hammer Matters," *The Source*, January 1991, 18.
[53] Ibid., 19.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Chris Wilder, "Taking Care of Business," *The Source*, February 1991, 53.

had the airwaves set up for their projects" and there's "nothing we can do."[56] Radio airplay, here, seems unavailable at any costs, but that's not exactly what Smith means. Wilder pushes him on this, suggesting that if the group courted mainstream radio, they "might lose [their] core audience." Smith agrees again, noting that previously, the group had made a crossover song after pressure from their label, but this time around "nobody could tell us what kind of music to make."[57] Commercial success comes at an artistic price for Smith—it's only possible through sonic manipulation.

A letter to the editor responding to Davey D's editorial clarifies this issue; Stephanie Gardner writes, "hip-hop is an art and a business; that's obvious. And crossover means bigger sales, but it also means dilution of the music."[58] Agreeing with Smith, her letter links two important components of rap's identity: its audience and its sound. Audience and sound, as noted in the introduction, are the two defining elements of a genre. As rap crossed over, many critics linked these two elements, assuming that the changing profile of rap's audience would necessarily change rap's sound. In response to rap's crossover, the hip hop community defined itself against both of these changes, creating standards of authenticity for hip hop that were dependent on audience and sound.

Defining Hip Hop: Audience

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Stephanie Gardner, "Put Hammer in the Mix," *The Source*, March/April 1991, 11.

Since the 1980s, hip hop has been characterized as isolated from the mainstream.[59] This isolation, writes Nelson George in *Fresh*, wasn't a deliberate decision by hip hop musicians but instead occurred because the genre was "surrounded and often rejected by the mainstream culture."[60] This was in part due to rap's physical origins in the Bronx; David Toop writes, "Since nobody in New York City, America or the rest of the world wanted to know about the black so-called ghettoes," rapping was able to develop as "a private affair – truly underground."[61] This isolation extended to its relationship with the music industry; according to Toop, "The lack of industry connections in the Bronx, the young age group involved in hip hop and the radical primitivism of the music itself conspired to produce an island of relatively undisturbed invention."[62]

Both Steven Hager and Toop classify hip hop as a subculture, setting it up in an oppositional relationship with the mainstream. Hager writes,

> Subcultures play an important role in society, since they provide the experimental laboratory where new cultural concepts can be tested free from restrictions…. Like the counterculture of the sixties, it has the potential to infiltrate and subvert the mass media, energizing them with a fresh supply of symbols, myths, and values. Unfortunately, this is a two-way process, and the effects of the media on hip hop can be as profound as the effects of hip hop on the media.[63]

This interpretation of subculture follows in the intellectual tradition of the Birmingham School, which theorized subcultures as developing via power struggles against mainstream hegemony.[64] Theorists of the Birmingham School were interested in the ways subcultures express their identity and their politics; they argued that members of

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[59] Hager, *Hip Hop*, 49.
[60] George, "Introduction," xvii.
[61] Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 14.
[62] Ibid., 78.
[63] Hager, *Hip Hop*, 102.
[64] See Clarke et al., "Subcultures, Cultures and Class," 49.

subcultures define their identities by repurposing existing cultural objects, changing or negating the meaning of said objects. Just as punks in Britain recontextualized commodities, as Dick Hebdige claims, to create a style that dramatized and responded to the economic and social decline in the 1970s, rap repurposed the musical materials of old records and turntables to create a subversive style.[65] Hebdige contends that the mainstream reacts to subcultural resistance in consistent ways. While at first the mainstream responds with shock, fear and anxiety, it quickly contains the subculture by converting the subcultural signs into mass-produced commodities and relabeling the deviant behavior as part of the mainstream. This negates the subculture's political and resistant potential.[66]

A letter in the August 1991 issue of *The Source* makes this link between punk and hip hop subcultures explicit; Helen Wisconsin writes, "When I was a kid in the early '80's Punk Rock was the only subculture that wasn't afraid to look society in the eye and speak the truth about the world—not the sanitized mainstream media version of the things that so many people want us to believe." She writes that as punk became commodified, it gained an audience that didn't really understand the genre, what she describes as "the retarded, middle-class, suburban kids who, to this day, think of it as some kind of fashion statement." She ends her letter with a warning to the hip hop community to not allow "slimy music & fashion industry executives dilute your culture in to meaningless drivel." "It happened to us," she warns, "and it could happen to you."[67]

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[65] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 87, 102.

[66] Ibid., 94.

[67] Helen Wisconsin, "Mainstream Madness," *The Source*, August 1991, 10. Hank Shocklee of Public Enemy also likened their style of hip hop to punk, saying that "I wanted to throw everything that was against the rules at everyone and say, 'Here—take this!' so to speak. And I wanted to annoy, I wanted to offend, I wanted to be rebellious,

But as rap records began selling well, it grew harder to preserve this opposition to the mainstream. Rap, as the 1990s progressed, couldn't maintain its underground, isolated identity because it was simply too popular; instead of understanding a lack of commercial success as a clear-cut distinguishing quality of rap, hip hop fans had to negotiate a "web of blurred distinctions," as Jon Shecter wrote in *Billboard.*[68] Many scholars have argued that hip hop's crossover shifted the discourse of hip hop to focus on, as Mickey Hess writes, "concerns of crossing over, selling out, and keeping hip hop pure."[69] As rap moved into the mainstream, "Real, underground hip-hop," Kembrew McLeod argues, came to be defined against "mainstream or commercialized artists whose music is played on television or the radio—those who make 'hits.'"[70]

In Shecter's article in *The Source* about N.W.A's number-one album, *Efil4Zaggin*, this reformulation of hip hop's relationship with commercial success is apparent. While Reginald C. Dennis insisted on the difference between pop audiences and the hip hop nation in his piece on white rappers, Shecter celebrates the crossover appeal of N.W.A's record.[71] "For every Black hip-hop fanatic" enjoying the album, Shecter giddily observes, "there's a group of baseball-cap wearing white kids" and "the Madonna/Vanilla Ice crowd, which is too broad…to even stereotype" listening as well. Shecter ends the article by working through how to differentiate between inauthentic and authentic hip hop, if

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and I wanted it to have a lot of energy. I wanted Public Enemy to be a rap version of one of those punk groups." Shocklee is quoted in Janine McAdams, "The Rhythm and the Blues," *Billboard*, August 25, 1990, 21, 25.

[68] Jon Shecter, "Talkin' Talent: In Search of the Fountain of Hip-Hop and the Ultimate Lyrical Experience," *Billboard*, November 24, 1990, R-3.

[69] Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 77.

[70] McLeod, "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," 142.

[71] Jon Shecter, "Real Niggaz Don't Die," *The Source*, September 1991, 24.

commercial success is not what differentiates them anymore. He writes that this album is *"real* hip-hop. Not Hammer, not Ice, this is the sound of rap music from the streets, created and performer by talented artists who refuse to sell out."[72]

Real hip hop, here, has to do with physical origins and staying true to those roots, first-person authenticity, as Allan Moore classifies it, where a performer relates personal experiences.[73] The valuation of this type of authenticity contributed to the rise of gangsta rap in the early 1990s; Mickey Hess writes that as a result of the critiques leveled at Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer, "rap artists found it necessary to assert that their own stories of the ghetto were not far removed from their experience or their musical performance," a type of performance that Murray Forman describes as "expressive ghettocentricity."[74] This move towards ghettocentricity, Anthony Kwame Harrison argues, led to the prominence of "images of violence, drugs and sexuality associated with "'gangsta' lifestyles," and Tara Morrisey writes that gangsta rap realness was based on conforming to a certain performative identity, one based on class, race, and background.[75]

But as Shecter continues, it becomes clear that realness is not just dependent on a *performer*'s identity; N.W.A is not characterized as real just because they represent their origins. As hip hop became mainstream, the hip hop community defined hip hop realness as both dependent on a performer's identity and on their audience's identity. Realness wasn't just distinguished by its difference from mainstream artists; instead, it was defined by its distance from as Helen Wisconsin put it, those "middle-class, suburban kids" who

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Moore, "Authenticity as Authentication," 214.
[74] Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 16; and Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 61.
[75] Harrison, "Hip Hop and Race," 192; and Morrissey, "The New Real: Iggy Azalea and the Reality Performance," 2.

liked rap. "Real niggaz," Shecter writes, "know what their fans want, and their fans respond. With real dollarz." Here, realness is determined by hip hop performers making music for *their* fans, meaning that authenticity entails catering to a certain type of audience. The hip hop nation, thus, became the arbiters of hip hop authenticity simply through their consumption of certain artists, and certain artists lost claims to realness simply by attracting a more mainstream audience. But as noted earlier, this audience was linked to a particular sound, that of mainstream pop. As rap went pop, rap was also defined against the sounds of Top 40.

Defining Hip Hop: *Billboard* Steps into the Fray

As the popularity of rap grew and other styles of music began incorporating rap into their musical language—as pop began sounding more like rap—it became harder to distinguish between rap and other genres. In March 1989, this issue came to a head as *Billboard* premiered a new chart, "Hot Rap Singles," which tracked how rap singles were selling at seventy-seven record stores across the country.[76] Because songs needed radio play to appear on the "Hot 100" and the "Hot Black Singles" charts, rap singles rarely charted well despite their strong sales. The new chart, which indicated and celebrated the growing popularity of the genre, was designed to counter this imbalance.[77] Record stores reported which rap singles they sold, and the staff at these stores were responsible for determining what songs belonged on this chart.

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[76] See Terri Rossi, "Hot Rap Chart Debuts," *Billboard*, March 11, 1989, 3.
[77] Ibid.

The chart immediately caused controversy. On the first rap chart, *Billboard* reported Milli Vanilli's "Girl You Know It's True" at number five, ahead of songs by Eric B. and Rakim, Ice-T and N.W.A.[78] A letter to the editor two weeks later complained about Milli Vanilli appearing on the same chart as these well-esteemed rap artists; Tom Phillips of Delaware argued that "Girl You Know It's True," despite having rapped vocals and using a common rap beat, was "not rap." The song was "nothing but a pop tune." Phillips suggested that *Billboard* "reconsider what [they] call rap" and proposed that *Billboard* should base inclusion on this chart on "what the inner-city kids call rap."[79]

Terri Rossi responded to his letter, claiming that the line between rap and pop "is a subjective matter."[80] Rap, for Rossi, was not easily characterized; the issue centered around whether the presence of rapping defines a rap song. She asks, "Is a rap record a record in which the vocal performance is spoken rhythmically"? Or does rap music have a specific quality other than rapping—is a rap song "a record that contains a rap-style performance?" To give an example, does the song in the final scene of *Rappin',* where characters rap along to culturally-specific instrumental textures, count as rap or does rap demand a certain type of instrumentation or musical texture?[81] In a delightfully prescient moment, she adds to these questions, "Musicologists may now add this topic to their academic food for thought."[82]

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[78] "Hot Rap Singles," *Billboard*, March 11, 1989, 27

[79] Tom Phillips, "Interloper on Rap Chart," *Billboard*, March 25, 1989, 9.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Daddy-O of Stetsasonic believed the former, claiming that as rap "has diversified, grown, and changed over the years…we could rap to anything. We could rap to polka music if that's what we wanted to do." Daddy-O is quoted in Eure and Spady, *Nation Conscious Rap*, 141.

[82] Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, March 25, 1989, 27. Vanilla Ice echoes Rossi's question of whether rap is something more than rapped vocals, saying "to really rap you need to know how to rap, not just bust words that rhyme. I mean

Rossi wasn't the only member of the music industry that couldn't get a handle on what made rap unique. At least one record executive didn't have any sense what rap was; according to Gene Griffith of EMI that same year, "Hip-hop means a lot of different things. It has sort of a go-go groove. In the early days a lot of rappers had a hip-hop feel to what they did, and many still do."[83] In the fall 1987 new music preview in *Radio and Records*, Priority Records advertised their new release, *Rap vs. Rap (the Answer Album)*, which contained, according to Priority, major rap hits and response songs to them. On this album were some songs with rapped vocals, including UTFO's "Roxanne Roxanne" and "A Fly Girl" by The Boogie Boys, but there were also dance hits that didn't have rapped vocals on them, such as Timex Social Club's "Rumors" and Club Nouveau's response song "Jealousy."[84] *Billboard* also occasionally labeled songs without clearly rapped vocals such as "Rumors," Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust," and New Kids on the Block's "No More Games' as "rap-tinged," "rap-accented" or "rappish," respectively.[85]

Even into the 1990s, Top 40 programmers weren't sure that their audience knew what rap was. Programmers disagreed on the extent of their audience's confusion, but their differing observations revealed how unclear rap's boundaries were. One radio consultant claimed that adults believed En Vogue's "Hold On," a song which has no

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sing street terminology, stuff people on the street can understand." See Krulik, *M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice*, 70.

[83] Walt Love, "From Rap to Hip-Hop," *Radio & Records*, June 16, 1989, 46. Writers differentiate between hip hop and go-go as two distinct styles of music, see Hopkinson, *Go-Go Live*; and Wartofsky, "What Go-Goes Around..."

[84] See "Rap vs. Rap," *Radio & Records*, New Music Fall, 1987, 83.

[85] Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, August 9, 1986, 6; Paul Grein, "Chart Beat," *Billboard*, November 3, 1990, 7; and Paul Grein, "Music Awards a Rapper's Delight," *Billboard*, February 9, 1991, 10.

spoken vocals in it, was rap.[86] Denver Program Director Mark Bolke complained that some of his listeners thought Bobby Brown, Madonna and New Kids on the Block were rap.[87] Denver listeners weren't the only ones confused about the classification of New Kids on the Block; *Radio & Records* reported in 1990 that in a study of how audiences categorize artists, five percent of their survey participants classified the boy band as a rap group.[88]

In response to the letter complaining about Milli Vanilli's presence on the rap chart, *Billboard* decided to keep the determination of musical genre boundaries in their record store reporters' hands because, according to chart editor Terri Rossi, they were "expected to know the music and to know how their customers regard the music they buy."[89] Rap was defined by audience—whatever customers at these stores regarded as rap counted as rap. A couple of months later, however, *Billboard* changed their policy in response to the increasing presence of rap influenced R&B artists on the chart. Because the chart was supposed to measure the popularity of rap songs that didn't have the radio airplay to appear on other charts, it didn't make sense to include what Rossi referred to as "R&B records that include rap," as their "mainstream exposure…would prevent a real rap record from charting."[90] In the beginning of June, *Billboard* began manually removing songs they didn't think were "all-rap records" from the chart so that it would

[86] Sean Ross, "'No Rap' Slogan Rings Loud & Clear," *Billboard*, October 13, 1990, 12, 15.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Mike Shalett, "How Music Consumers Categorize Artists," *Radio & Records*, September 28, 1990, 34.
[89] Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, March 25, 1989, 27.
[90] Ibid.

"represent [a] pure musical [genre]," a decision that changed the definition of rap on this chart from one based on audience to one based on musical sound.[91]

In the first iteration of this new chart, Rossi not only removed the Milli Vanilli song that Tom Philips had complained about, but also removed "Buffalo Stance" by Neneh Cherry and "Mr. D.J." by Joyce "Fenderella" Irby. Throughout the next few months, many more songs which contained rapping were barred from the rap chart, including "Friends" by Jody Watley featuring Eric B. and Rakim, "Baby Don't Forget My Number" by Milli Vanilli, "On Our Own" by Bobby Brown, "Talk To Myself" by Christopher Williams, "If You Were Mine" by U-Krew, "Got To Get" by Leila K and Rob N Raz, Bell Biv Devoe's "Poison" and "BBD I Thought It Was Me," "She Ain't Worth It" by Glenn Medieros, "Feels Good" by Toni Tone Toni, and 2 in a Room's "Wiggle It."

In manually removing certain songs containing rapped vocals from their rap singles chart, *Billboard* waded into Rossi's subjective territory. Many of these songs are clearly influenced by R&B, as most are by new jack swing artists who were primarily singers. All of the deleted songs, in fact, include singing, indicating that singing was a criterion by which something wouldn't be "real rap." But the exclusion of some songs was rather surprising. "Mr. D.J.," in particular, featured a well-known and well-respected rapper, Doug E. Fresh; furthermore, the song is about a DJ, explicitly referencing its connection to hip-hop culture. The song also doesn't have a lot of singing; the sung portion of this song is less prominent than melodic portions of songs that remained on the charts. Irby sings for a smaller percentage of the song than, for example, Kid 'n Play does in their song "Rollin' With Kid 'n Play" that was allowed on the June 3rd chart that Irby's

[91] Terri Rossi, "Terri Rossi's Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, June 3, 1989, 29.

song was removed from. Perhaps Irby's singing of original material makes a difference, as Kid 'n Play sing a riff from the 1973 funk song "I Don't Know What It Is, But It Sure Is Funky" by Ripple. Sampling sung melodies also seemed to be fine, as Rob Base and D.J. E-Z Rock's "Joy and Pain" was included on the June 3rd chart, even though the melodic samples take up more time on this song than they do on Irby's song.

Defining Hip Hop: Sound

Just like *Billboard, The Source* struggled with where to draw the line between pop and rap, and like *Billboard*, the hip hop magazine eventually differentiated between the styles by casting sung vocals, R&B, and pop as separate from hip hop. In a sprawling editorial on "hip-hop with a 'pop feel appeal'" in the January 1991 issue of *The Source*, Bill Stephney expands on what realness in hip-hop sounds like.[92] Throughout this article, Stephney aims to articulate the differences between pop, R&B, hip-hop and rap, as he understands the hip-hop "attitude and feel" as distinct from commercial pop music.[93] Part of the difference has to do with what he terms "racial politics," but he doesn't elaborate on this in nearly as much detail as he does the distinctive sound and feel of hip-hop.[94] However, he's rarely clear about exactly where the lines between these genres fall.

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[92] Bill Stephney, "Funda-Mental Hip-Hop," *The Source*, January 1991, 36. Stephney differentiates between "hip-hop" and "rap" in this article; I will use the same differentiation and hyphenated term while discussing his article.

[93] Ibid., 38.

[94] Ibid., 40.

He begins by thinking through the relationship between hip-hop in early 1991 and the culture as it originated, writing, "if hip-hop/rap music was developed as an anti-sentiment to the glossy disco and bleached-out, dried up rock 'n' roll of the 70's, have today's pop rappers turned this music into what it initially despised?"[95] Summing up the problem he sees, he asks *"Is rap now too commercial for longtime fans of hip-hop?"*[96]

As Stephney continues, it becomes clear that he isn't concerned with record sales, record contracts, or radio airplay. Instead, commercial is a musical quality. Stephney writes that often hip-hop fans disagree on the definition of "hip-hop music."[97] Until recently, he writes "hip-hop was the most liberal musical format," because it combined the sounds of multiple genres.[98] But now, because R&B, rock, and pop artists have begun rapping, the lines between hip-hop and the genres rappers and DJs were plundering from have blurred. Stephney defines hip-hop as something related to "attitude and feel," and classifies a few contemporary artists: En Vogue's song "Hold On," "qualifies accurately as hip-hop," but doesn't count as rap, because there isn't a rapper on the track. Tribe

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[95] Stephney's description here matches those in Toop, Hager and George's books, which describe rap as a distinctive sound, contrasted with the music that would be heard on the radio, disco. According to Toop, rapping developed out of a style of DJing that was distinct from that of disco DJs, whose smooth techniques of moving from one record to the other had the potential to "turn the night into one endless and inevitably boring song." See Toop, *The Rap Attack*, 12. However, despite their insistence that rap had a certain hard sound that was in opposition to disco, these books compellingly demonstrate that early hip hop was composed from a variety of source material. Likely due to the central presence of Africa Bambaataa in their work, who claimed to try to broaden audience's musical tastes, Toop's and Hager's narratives stress the diversity of sounds which formed the musical background of hip hop, including songs by The Jackson Five, theme music from The Andy Griffith show, and, least surprisingly, James Brown. Also see Hager, *Hip Hop*, 33–4.

[96] Bill Stephney, "Funda-Mental Hip-Hop," *The Source*, January 1991, 36.

[97] Ibid., 38.

[98] Ibid.

Called Quest, Poor Righteous Teachers, and Kool G Rap are all artists who "embody a hip-hop feel."[99]

Stephney struggles with how to classify Hammer. Considering that there's rapping on "U Can't Touch This," he decides that he can label it as a rap song, even though Hammer's rhyming style is "closer to an epileptic seizure than, let say, a flowing rapper like LL or Rakim."[100] But it doesn't count as hip-hop. Turning his attention towards Hammer's video for "Turn This Mutha Out," Stephney writes that the video's energy moved Hammer "out of the classification 'rapper' and put him into the category of 'major entertainer.'"[101] Stephney blames Top 40 radio and MTV for promoting artists that "are often alien in attitude and feel to the great artists developed throughout the history of hip-hop." But all is not lost, since artists like Hammer, Ice, and Snap of "Rhythm is a Dancer" fame won't impact the music of those who do have the "hip-hop flair because they aren't hip-hop."[102] This distinction between hip-hop and rap doesn't totally solve Stepheny's problem, as he is still confused about the relationship between the styles and R&B, concluding his discussion of Hammer by proposing that perhaps "Hammer is just a non-singing R&B artist?"[103]

This assessment, unfortunately doesn't clarify the issue, as there are "too many 'R&B' stars these days that many would consider 'rappers' anyway." Stephney continues, lauding the work of other R&B singers, beginning with Bell Biv Devoe, who he writes are the latest step in "the Dismantling of Rap Domination," a movement that was

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[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid, 40.
[103] Ibid.

spearheaded by Bobby Brown, continued by Soul II Soul, the "Rent-A-Rapper" music of Stetsasonic, and Milli Vanilli.[104] He claims there is one major difference between these R&B artists and their hip-hop influences, stating that "By co-opting the rapper's areas of dominant influence…R&B/rock/pop artists have left no hip-hop stone uncovered, but perhaps racial politics."[105] Stephney warns that it's time to take stock of the direction hip-hop is going and to try to get rappers to "regain their hip-hop feel." Otherwise, he writes, "with idiot record label execs still throwing money at a music they will never understand, we will see even more artists that continue to mean nothing, and continue to push rap/hip-hop closer to the 'disco purgatory' that seems to be its destiny."[106]

Many readers of *The Source* were more critical than Stephney about the combination of hip-hop and R&B, writing letters where the difference between these genres was a given. Helen Wisconsin of Madison, WI, wrote complaining that "record companies and clothing designers" "think of Vanilla Ice (and other R&B bullshit…) as rap music!"[107] A few saw R&B as dangerous; Johnathan Cox of Durham, NC, wrote in response to *The Source'*s question "What is the biggest problem facing rap music" that the "new R&B mixture with hip-hop is threatening hardcore rap on the whole."[108] A letter published in February 1992 was even more emphatic on this point; MC Felony of Oakland, CA, wrote that it wasn't white involvement in hip hop that was "destroying rap"; instead it was Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Heavy D who "have hurt rap worse than Vanilla Ice ever could with their sappy R&B songs; for the simple fact that these

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Helen Wisconsin, "Mainstream Madness," *The Source*, August 1991, 10.
[108] "Hip-Hop Survey," *The Source*, January 1991, 34.

groups once represented that hardcore, no-sellout attitude that keeps rap alive, and decided to experiment in R&B to 'expand their audience' and 'increase their sales.'"[109]

As indicated by the presence of Stephney's article, *The Source* didn't ignore pop or R&B. In its coverage of Hammer and other rap-influenced R&B and pop artists, the magazine made space for discussions about the grey areas these artists inhabited while simultaneously reinforcing the genre's differences. For example, in January 1992, *The Source* published an article entitled "Hidden Hip-Hop" about the recent success of hip-hop influenced groups, including Color Me Badd, Boyz II Men, Bel Biv Devoe, and C+C Music Factory. These groups, according to author K$, "are concrete examples of how hip-hop can be used with soulful vocals, harmonies and dance music, and still not forget from whence it came." This statement implicitly outlines the difference between hip hop and these groups: their harmonies, dance music, and vocals make them something other than hip hop, regardless of rapped vocals. He postulates that "the key to (commercial) success is balance," a balance between accessibly "packaging"—good looking men, sharp fashion decisions, and melodies— and "music often as powerful and dope as rap."[110]

While recognition of "Hidden Hip-Hop" might indicate *The Source's* open-mindedness, reader DJ Chuck O from Austin, TX, thought differently. He wrote that separately recognizing the existence of "commercial rap artists, R&B influenced rap artists, booty-rhyming artists, etc." would allow the hip hop community to create permanent spaces for them outside of what he describes as "the talented pool of hardcore

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[109] MC Felony, "Who's the Real Sell-Out?," *The Source*, February 1992, 12.
[110] K$, "Hidden Hip-Hop," *The Source*, January 1992, 44.

hip-hoppers."[111] Discussing the problem created the standards by which hip hop-influenced music could be separated into different categories.

A recurring column in 1991 in *The Source* called "Crossover" did just this. Featuring artists who created "Non-Rap Sounds with a Hip-Hop Appeal," including Guy, James Brown, Crystal Waters, Definitions of Sound, and Keith Sweat, the column provided a space where rappish artists could be acknowledged without including them in the canon of rap artists that appeared in the feature articles in the magazine.[112] Separating songs into a column proclaiming their "non-rap" status helped determine boundaries, especially if the songs had rap in them, as C+C Music Factory's "Gonna Make You Sweat," which appeared in the May 1991 column, did.[113] Just as in *Billboard*, the line between rap and non-rap had something to do with sung vocals, as all of the artists featured in the column sang.

Over the course of the year, this column decreased in visibility and lost its tagline about the "hip-hop appeal" of "non-rap sounds," and by 1992, it was largely phased out. This was perhaps a product of new jack swing's quickly decreasing popularity, but it also represented a shift in *The Source*'s focus on rap at the expense of "hip-hop appeal" styles. In March 1992, a feature on Keith Sweat illustrates the shift from K$'s idea of "balance"

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[111] DJ Chuck O, "Hip-Hop's Deconstruction," *The Source*, May 1991, 10.

[112] See, for example, "Scott Paulson-Bryant, "Crossover," *The Source*, May 1991, 62; and Scott Paulson-Bryant, "Crossover," *The Source*, July 1991, 62. The column's open-minded attitude rarely caused the published letters from readers that other features and columns inspired. In fact, the only response to the existence of a column about music that wasn't rapped came from Waters, who in her interview asked why she was being chosen to be interviewed for a "rap magazine." See Waters in Kim Green, "Still Waters Runs Deep," *The Source*, August 1991, 30.

[113] This column also mentioned C+C Music Factory's "Things That Make You Go Hmmm"; author Scott Poulson-Bryant describes the rapping by Freedom Williams on these songs as "fun in and of itself." See Scott Poulson-Bryant, "Crossover," *The Source*, May 1991, 62.

between hip hop and other genres to something more biased towards hip hop. In the article, author Kim Green writes that Teddy Riley rescued Keith Sweat's music, bringing him "out of the rainy realm of the R&B weak-and-desperate into hip-hop sunshine." R&B, in this article, serves a certain utility; Green writes that while the "Hip-Hop Nation works hard to disclaim R&B sentimentalism and predictability, even the hardest brother can't deny that once in a while, a few soothing words can get you where you're going a lot quicker than anything else."[114] R&B has its purpose, but it's separate from the music that hip hop audiences value.

Defining Hip Hop: Gender

There's a gendered assumption in Green's article, both that the "Hip-Hop Nation" is largely composed of men, and that R&B will help these men attract women, which she assumes to be the target audience of R&B. Kendrick McLeod writes that hip hop's opposition to mainstream success rendered itself in gendered and raced terms, where authenticity came to mean hardened black masculinity and inauthenticity came to mean soft white femininity. Femininity, here, isn't just a human quality about artists and audiences; rather, it extended to sound. McLeod lists six descriptions of the fake: following mass trends, white, commercial, soft, the suburbs, and the mainstream.[115] The first five of these traits almost perfectly define the audience that Top 40 radio wanted; white, suburban females interested in consuming mass-market goods. Just as rap came to

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[114] Kim Green, "Sweatin' Ya Wet," *The Source*, March 1992, 43.

[115] See Table 1 in McLeod, "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," 139.

Top 40, the hip hop community redefined rap as the opposite of Top 40; its authenticity was defined against the move to the mainstream described in the first half of this dissertation. Hip hop didn't just define itself against the girls like Polly of *Teen Witch,* female mainstream audiences, but also against the songs they listened to on the radio, feminized mainstream music.[116]

Women, as Rose writes in *Black Noise*, were not given equal access to the tools to make hip hop, and when they did make hip hop, critics often dismissed it. The music industry understood rap as a masculine space. Barry Weiss of Jive Records noted in 1993 that "in terms of who buys the records and dictates the tastes, rap is male- dominated. There's a place for female rappers, but for them to happen they've almost got to be twice as good a male."[117] This almost certainly had to do with radio programmers believing in

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[116] Rappers valued hardness as a way to avoid sounding like they were associated Top 40 radio. But the music industry quickly took up this label as a way to market hip hop. In their reviews of rap songs, *Billboard* stressed the importance of balancing between rap and pop appeal, a configuration which reinforced the boundaries hip hop had set for itself. Often these reviews were for songs recommended for pop radio, rather than Urban radio, meaning that *Billboard* used pop as opposed to R&B to describe the music in opposition to rap, but the emphasis on pop and pure hip hop, in these reviews, were categorized as two separate entities whose tastes occasionally overlapped; *Billboard* wrote that Mysterme's "Unsolved Mystery" was a contagious jam" that would "likely benefit from its capacity to sate street purists, while flirting with discerning pop radio programmers." Songs which combined raps with more melodic elements were often praised by *Billboard* for their ability to appeal across these distinctions. Top 40 appeal, in these reviews, often meant catchy melodies, for example *Billboard* claimed that the hook of Volume 10's "Pistolgrip-Pimp" "is so deep that it could easily kick down doors at top 40 and urban radio." In order to satisfy rap fans, the song needed something harder, which often in these reviews came from the rappers' lyrics. In this case, "Pistolgrip-Pimp" also "has a hard lyrical edge that will get props on the street from purists." Realness in the form of hardness is framed as essential; a review of Naughty By Nature's "It's On," for example, claimed that the "Chanted chorus could open deserved doors at top 40 formats, though track is hard enough to keep that all-important street cred in check." See "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, March 12, 1994, 53; "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, October 16, 1993, 61; and "Single Reviews," *Billboard*, May 22, 1993, 110.

[117] Havelock Nelson, "New Female Rappers Play for Keeps," *Billboard*, July 10, 1993, 77.

the superiority of male rappers; influential programmer Guy Napoleon, five years earlier, claimed that "the female rap songs are novelties. Some of them, like 'Push It,' are a little more of a song, while the others are a little more novelty." He continues, noting that there's a cap on the number of female performers he's interested in seeing, saying that he's hopeful that "the trend continues, but I don't want to see a glut of product."[118] David Toop argues that the record industry advised female rappers to perform "softer, more commercially oriented hip hop, thus confirming the prejudices of their male counterparts."[119] These factors combined to create a musical economy in which female rappers' voices were not valued.

But even more than this, young female audiences were undesirable. Polly, in *Teen Witch*, was easily captivated by Rhet's "hip" fake rap. Her lack of discernment and knowledge about real rap made her a less than ideal member of the hip hop community, who defined themselves against such inconsequential music. In her review of the Vanilla Ice concert, writer Kim Green makes this clear. She reassures herself, and the hip hop fans reading the review, that Vanilla Ice's success is "not an issue of rap." She continues, claiming that "Vanilla Ice in his star-spangled glory is not a rapper. He's a 'dancer' and an entertainer and a crowd pleaser."[120] The reason she cites for him not being a rapper doesn't have to do with sales or with sound; instead, it's because "he is a teen idol for God's sake," with fans that she describes as "screaming white children," "little girls," and "begging teenagers." His audience isn't real rap fans; instead it is "people [who] don't listen to, understand, or like rap…They are they, and we are we." Here, hip hop is

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[118] Zapoleon is quoted in Bill Coleman, "Female Rappers Give Males Run for the Money," *Billboard*, May 21, 1988, 29.

[119] Toop, *Rap Attack 2*, 200.

[120] Kim Green, "The Iceman Cometh," *The Source*, May 1991, 17.

characterized as distinct from the music that these people, white teenage women, listen to.[121] And that insipid music, by nature of its female fanship, became gendered as well; Nelson George describes the commercialization of hip hop as "cultural emasculation,"— literally, the demasculinization of hip hop.[122]

Likely inspired by similar criticisms, MC Hammer made a concerted effort to appeal to a different audience than white teenage women following the crossover success of "U Can't Touch This." Just as *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* was sitting atop the *Billboard* charts, Capitol Records sent out 100,000 mailings consisting of a cassette of his latest single and a pseudo-handwritten letter from Hammer imploring the recipient to give his single a shot. The specifics of the intended recipients reveal how important cultivating a real hip hop audience distinct from white teenage women was; "to focus on Hammer's core audience," seventy percent of the mailings went to teenage males in black or Hispanic households.[123]

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[121] Chuck D also criticized Vanilla Ice because of his female audience, saying that "Vanilla Ice sells 7 million to 13-year-old white girls who wear braces and hang his poster on the wall. That's his thing. It has nothing to do with me, with rap." See Janine McAdams, "The Icing on Rap: 'It's a Black Thing,'" *Billboard*, September 28, 1991, 89.

[122] George, *Buppies*, *B-Boys*, *Baps*, *And Bohos*, 94. Tricia Rose makes this critique, see Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile," 110. The merging of codes to equate pop and femininity with inauthenticity is clear in Michael Jeffries 2011 ethnographic study of self-identified male hip hop fans, who define bad hip hop as not only "characterized by commercialism [and] mainstream appeal," but also by its female audience. In his interviews, respondents revealed "slick and occasionally subconscious connections between disgraceful inauthentic commercialism and femininity." One respondent noted the discrepancy between "teenage white girls" fanship and the actual meaning of hip hop, and another described the disparity between what he likes and what women want to hear. In response to the question "Is there a type of hip-hop that you think women can relate to like you relate to it," one respondent flat out responded "no," and described that he has resorted to bringing an iPod with him when he hangs out with his girlfriend so that they can both listen to their non-overlapping tastes. See Jeffries, *Thug Life*, 191, 162, 160.

[123] Craig Rosen, "Direct -Mail Campaign Scores a Hit with Youthful Fans of Rapper M.C. Hammer," *Billboard*, June 9, 1990, 96.

In 1992, *Billboard* rap columnist Havelock Nelson shed a little light on how the magazine determined what songs they allowed on the rap singles chart. Nelson writes that the genre is so diverse in sound that it's hard to determine when "a track with a rhyme stop[s] being rap." He claims that rap's identity is "intangible" yet dependent on a "cultural code." Suzanne Baptiste, the chart manager, more concretely reveals that just like the magazine did in 1989, it differentiates rap from other genres by its sound and audience. In order to chart, according to Baptiste, songs had to have certain musical characteristics; the "verses have to be rap, and the music has to be hip-hop." But beyond that, it was up to the hip hop community, the "hardcore enthusiasts" to decide whether they considered something hip hop.[124]

Defining Hip Hop Studies

And as the field of hip hop studies came into existence, it replicated these same determinations of what counted as hip hop, reducing the diversity of hip hop's sound and audience. The gendered nature of Top 40 music likely contributed to academic neglect of pop rap. Separating hip hop from pop and its female audiences was an important step in legitimizing hip hop studies because, as Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens write, "feminine genres" are "widely perceived as being devoid of significant meaning."[125] Diane Railton writes that rock became serious music through "masculinising itself, and

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[124] Havelock Nelson, "The Rap Column," *Billboard*, April 25, 1992, 22.

[125] Jarman-Ivens and Biddle, "Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music," 3. Later, they use the example of contemporary hip hop/R&B, which they note has consisted of women singing and men rapping roles that "[reinscribe] a longstanding (and unhelpfully binaristic) stereotyping of music as feminine, concerned with senses, and of language as masculine, a rational structure. See ibid., 10

by introducing a particular way of enjoying music that eschewed the feminine, emotional and physical response of early 1960s pop fans."[126] Hip hop did this too, transitioning into a genre worthy of serious magazines and critical academic study by intellectualizing the genre and claiming its political importance, taming and separating its "feminine body" from the politically resistant music worthy of study.[127]

By separating itself from feminized pop, hip hop scholarship has discounted the political potential of hip hop moving into the mainstream. Many hip hop scholars follow in the tradition of subcultural theory by recognizing hip hop's oppositional relationship to the mainstream. For example, in *Black Noise,* Tricia Rose writes that rap is a decodable message for those in the know, one which is often "engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress African Americans."[128] Not all rap "directly critique[s] all form of domination," according to Rose, but an important part of rap's identity is its role in critiquing dominant power structures.[129] But Angela McRobbie argues that subcultural understandings of resistance often overlook girls because "girls negotiate a different leisure space and different personal spaces from those inhabited by boys. These in turn offer them different possibilities for 'resistance', if indeed that is the right word to use."[130] Acknowledging the political potential of girls' actions as more complex than resistance, McRobbie also argues that girls' behavior in the bedroom creates a subcultural network fostered not by

[126] Railton, "The Gendered Carnival of Pop," 324.
[127] Ibid., 326.
[128] Rose, *Black Noise*, 101.
[129] Ibid., 100.
[130] McRobbie, "Girls and Subcultures," 209; McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 14.

shared space but by shared texts and shared conversations about these texts. Radio, of course, is one such text.

Radio-friendly hip hop did political work. Influenced by the Birmingham School's insistence on the political potential of personal actions and on listeners' ability to independently create meaning out of the products of commodified mass culture, popular music scholars, including Rose, have often theorized that music is political through expressing resistance and giving voice to marginalized populations.[131] As Barry Shank has aptly noted, this version of musical politics assumes that music is only a "vehicle, conveying already shared political sentiments back and forth among singers and listeners."[132] When music is more explicitly taken into account, he argues, it often serves as stand-in for an often essentialized stable group identity.[133] Hip hop scholars have done just this, approaching hip hop as both lyrically voicing personal political beliefs, and as musically expressing some form of black masculinity.[134]

Shank proposes that music can do a different sort of political work, which "establishes the sensibility within which social associations or political positions can be perceptible and, therefore, become a matter for debate."[135] Although he frames this political work in terms of musical beauty—a concept that raises concerns about musical valuation—Shank's ideas about musical politics do fit the idealized goals of Top 40 radio. Shank writes that "musical listening requires listeners, socially located listeners with their

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[131] Eithne Quinn makes this critique; see Quinn, *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang*, 70.

[132] Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*, 1.

[133] Ibid., 14.

[134] For two good examples of these two fields of thought, see Rose, *Black Noise*; and Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*. For a critique of this, see Jeffries, *Thug Life*, 15.

[135] Shank, "The Political Agency of Musical Beauty," 843.

own specific aural imaginaries, to shift the resonance of the tonalities they hear."[136] Top 40 radio does just this, incorporating new sounds and asking listeners with their particular musical tastes to accept those sounds as a legible part of their community.[137] Top 40 radio doesn't ask everyone to like the music stations play, but it asks for a certain amount of open-mindedness. Hip hop's move to the mainstream on Top 40 radio changed American racial politics, regrouping the American population into different demographic groups than had previously existed. Top 40 radio asked their listeners to, as Shank puts it, "[lean] towards others," to be part of a community with people who listened to rap.[138] It asked the white mainstream to listen to black culture and black voices, one rap song at a time.

Hearing underground hip hop as the political speech of marginalized youth and hearing commodified rap on the radio as transforming American racial identity are in no way mutually exclusive ways of understanding hip hop. These two types of hip hop informed the musical practices of the other; producers and rappers intentionally made certain styles of hip hop to appeal to these different audiences and mediums.[139] And ultimately, these two styles of rap have much in common. Ever since "Rapper's Delight," rap artists have sold hip hop culture to make a profit, whether at a live show, on record, or

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[136] Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*, 9.

[137] Ben Malbon writes that resistance isn't always the motive of subcultures or youth cultures; he claims that "the practices of youth cultures can be as much about *expression* as about resistance; as much about *belonging* as excluding; as much about temporarily *forgetting* who you are as about consolidating an identity; as much about gaining *strength* to go on as about showing defiance in the face of subordination and as much about *blurring* boundaries between people and cultures as affirming or reinforcing those reflected in the literatures and debates." See Malbon, *Clubbing*, 19.

[138] Shank, "The Political Agency of Musical Beauty," 840.

[139] See Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*, 294; Fernando Jr., *The New Beats*, 287, 289; Clover, *1989*, 41; Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?*, 160; and Schloss, *Making Beats*, 160.

in commercials.[140] All rappers are engaged in some form of commodification, regardless of whether they are Public Enemy making "politics seem cool," or Young MC selling tacos.[141]

Acknowledging both of these types of hip hop more accurately represents the field of hip hop, for commercialized, radio-friendly rap existed side by side its less-mainstream brethren. For example, when gangsta rap group N.W.A's second album reached number-one on *Billboard*'s album chart, after the incorporation of SoundScan measurements, many saw this as evidence proving the mainstream popularity of underground politically explicit rap.[142] But it wasn't as though SoundScan brought to light the popularity of underground rap at the expense of pop rap. A few spots below N.W.A on that week's chart was kid-led pop rap group Another Bad Creation's *Coolin' At The Playground, Ya Know!,* whose lead single was in the top thirty songs on Top 40 radio that week.[143] The number-two album on the chart that week, which N.W.A had pushed out of the top slot, was the dance-pop album *Spellbound* by Paula Abdul, a singer whose previous single had featured a rapping cartoon cat, and whose fourth single off of the new album would feature a drum beat commonly sampled in rap songs.

Understanding radio-friendly hip hop as doing political work, as influencing racial identity, runs the risk of forgetting, as Saucier and Woods write more broadly about hip hop studies, "the legacy of black people as property and what this might mean for

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[140] See Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 39; Diehl, "Pop Rap," 122; and Rose, "Contracting Rap: An Interview with Carmen Ashhurst-Watson," 82.

[141] George, *Hip Hop America*, 155.

[142] See Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 416; Quinn, *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang*, 83; and Samuels, "The Rap on Rap," 147.

[143] See "Hot 100 Singles," *Billboard*, June 22, 1991, 74.

who can claim ownership of hip hop."[144] But perhaps, done judiciously, this is a more accurate idea of what political work music can do. Music on the radio isn't always resistant, nor do audiences experience it that way. But it is persistent; radio incrementally normalizes unfamiliar sounds and experiences, making what was once foreign and unacceptable into something conventional. It broadens the field of inclusion, changing the way in which the media conceives of the American public and how the American public conceives of itself.

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[144] Saucier and Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 272.

Conclusion: Rap on the Radio at the Close of the Twentieth Century

For two weeks in the late spring of 1997, a trio of young, blonde, longhaired brothers topped the *Billboard* singles chart with their undeniably catchy debut single, "Mmmbop." With almost indecipherable three-part vocals atop a cool guitar riff and a shuffling funky beat, the song is sunny pop perfection. And yet there is something different about this song, a noise that comes in during the chorus, rhythmically filling in the ends of each eight-measure phrase as a drum fill might in another pop song. But this is not a drum, percussive as it may be—it's the sound of a DJ scratching a record, a "burst of high pitched *wicki wicki wickis*" as Mark Katz describes it.[1] Unlike the primary musical material of the song, these scratches were not an inspired idea from the young Hanson brothers. Instead, they were added into the song by trendy producers The Dust Brothers for the group's first release on a major label, in the hopes that these musical characteristics, along with others on the album, would "lend [the band] a certain credibility with [radio] programmers."[2] Credible or not, the song was a huge success; programmers at Top 40 stations added the song to their playlists before the label began promoting it and before the single was available at stores.[3]

The addition of the record scratch acts as a musical signifier of rap, a genre that had taken over pop's sonic landscape by the late 1990s. By using this sound, Hanson attempted to tap into the social cache of rap, using the sonic signifier to give their pop-

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[1] Katz, *Groove Music*, 181.

[2] Melinda Newman, "Mercury Makes Way for Hanson," *Billboard*, April 5, 1997, 15.

[3] See Larry Flick, "Singles," *Billboard*, April 5, 1997, 72.

rock sound an updated hip twist for Top 40 audiences. Ten years earlier, such a sonic inclusion would have likely produced the opposite effect; most Top 40 programmers in 1987 would have thrown the record away upon hearing such a sound. But in just ten years, pop had thoroughly accepted rap, as the sounds of hip hop had become ubiquitous on pop songs. Just a few months earlier, the Spice Girls had topped the charts with their first hit, "Wannabe," which featured a rapped verse about the individual members that preteen girls across the country memorized as they scoured the CD booklet, trying to figure out which Spice Girl they most resembled.

During the months between these two song's perches atop the chart, two songs released on Bad Boy Records rose to the top of the chart. The first of these songs, Notorious B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize," was released a week before the rapper was killed in a drive-by shooting. The second, "I'll Be Missing You" was a tribute to the fallen rapper which featured rapped verses by Puff Daddy and sung choruses by Notorious B.I.G.'s widow Faith Evans and R&B group 112. Puff Daddy raps two verses total; the majority of the song is made up of the sung choruses, which cover the Police's pop-rock hit "Every Breath You Take" and sound virtually indistinguishable from a non-rap ballad. Just as pop had incorporated rap into its musical language, rap had incorporated pop vocals. Like "Mmmbop" and "Wannabe," "I'll Be Missing You" was a tremendous success, topping *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" for eleven weeks and selling over three million copies.[4] This song was only one of many extremely successful rap songs of the late 1990s. Rap sales between 1997 and 1998 increased by 31 percent such that by 1998, rap was the best-selling genre in the United States.[5] Pop had become rap, and rap had become

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[4] "Best Selling Records of 1997," *Billboard*, January 31, 1998, 76.
[5] Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation*, 9.

pop, in a radio-driven process which took little more than a decade.[6] By programming songs which combined the sounds of rap with the sounds of pop in the late 1980s, radio had not only brought rap to the mainstream but had also changed the sound of rap and of pop. Hip hop had not just become hit pop; hit pop had become hip hop.

The popification of hip hop brought the black urban youth associated with the music out of the margins and into the spotlight of the mainstream media. As Bakari Kitwana wrote in 2002, "largely because of rap music, one can tune in to the voices and find the faces of America's black youth at any point in the day," a drastic change from the end of the 1980s.[7] For Jeff Chang, writing about the end of the previous decade, thanks to hip hop, it was "hard to remember a time when youths of color had not been represented in the media, whether as consumers or producers."[8] Rap turning into pop changed the racial character of the mainstream. And it wasn't just rap; R&B had a huge surge in popularity as well. During the 1990s, Urban and Top 40 radio played so many of the same songs that more than a third of all songs on the "Hot 100" also charted on the "Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs" chart from 1994 through the end of the decade.[9]

Radio programmers responded to the increased importance of black music to the mainstream; a column in *Radio & Records* published in 1994 questioned whether Urban stations and Top 40 stations could "coexist" when recently, as programmer Cullen DuBose of Lansing, MI put it, "pop and R&B music have pretty much been synonymous."[10] The premise of the article would have been virtually unimaginable a

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[6] See Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 39; and Tanz, *Other People's Property*, 76.
[7] Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation*, 197.
[8] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 445.
[9] See Appendix Two.
[10] Walt Love, "Can Urbans & CHRs Coexist?," *Radio & Records*, April 22, 1994, 31.

little more than a decade earlier; in 1982, *Radio & Records* reported Top 40 programmers' unwillingness to program records by African Americans at "an all-time high."[11] In Greensboro, North Carolina, Urban station Program Director Brian Wallace reported that the change had been even quicker; in as little as five years, many formats had begun "playing bits and pieces of what once was perceived as *our* music."[12]

The next wave of pop hits coming out of Sweden in the late 1990s demonstrated the multiracial character of pop music, as producer Max Martin combined pop melodies with hip hop beats and bass lines into number-one hits, just as new jack swing had in the late 1980s. But it was Martin's detachment from, not his intimacy with, these styles that made his combination distinctive; his distance from the racial politics associated with genre in America gave him the space to recombine these racialized sounds into deracinated pop which poured out of the mouths of white performers.[13] Hip hop for Martin was no different than hip hop had been for Milli Vanilli; it had become a musical sound, completely separated from its origins.

But in many ways, it didn't matter that the mainstream had become multiracial, for there no longer *was* an American mainstream. Yes, Martin's hits sold tens of millions of singles and albums, indicating their mainstream status. The problem was that many other styles of music sold just as many albums: country singers the Dixie Chicks sold ten million copies of two separate albums in less than two years, hard-rock-inspired groups Creed and Kid Rock both sold over eleven million of their albums in the last year of the

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[11] See Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy*, 181. In 1982, 16.5 percent of songs on the "Hot 100" also charted on the "Hot Black Singles" chart, less than half of the percentage in 1994. See Appendix Two.

[12] Walt Love, "Can Urbans & CHRs Coexist?," *Radio & Records*, April 22, 1994, 31.

[13] See Seabrook, *The Song Machine*, 16–7.

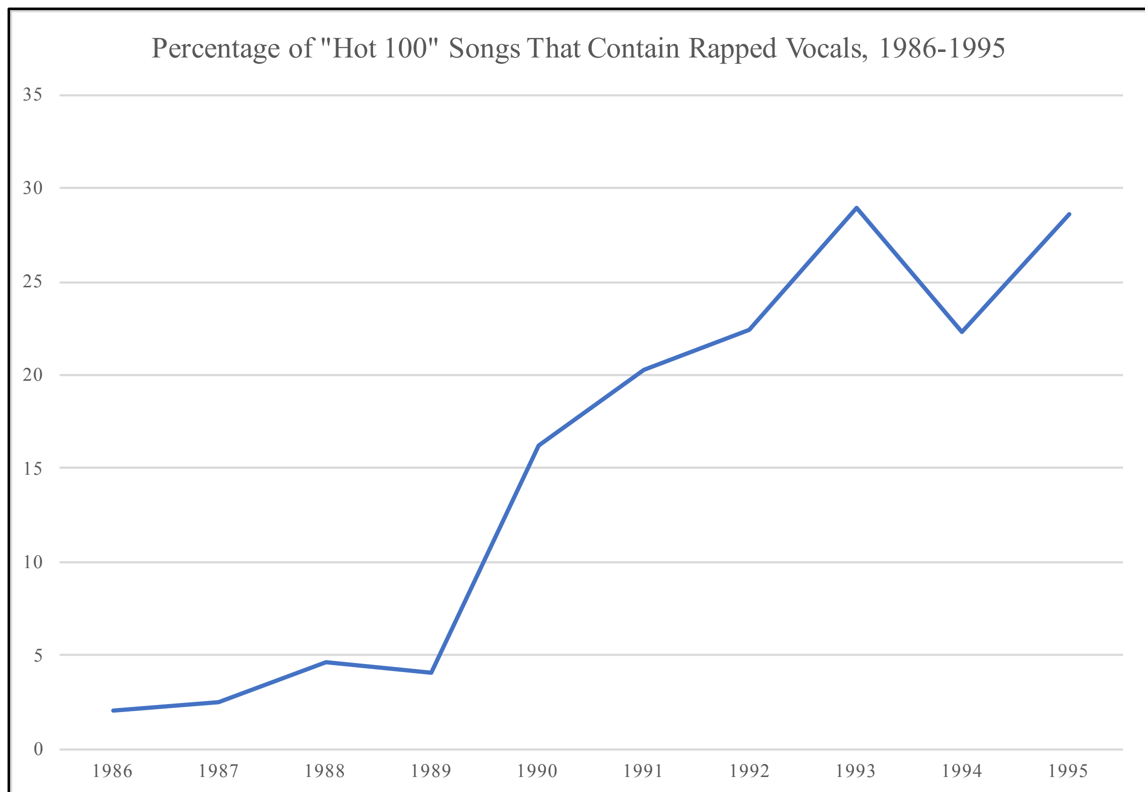
decade, aging rocker Santana sold fifteen million albums, and Celine Dion's immaculate vocals were responsible for the sales of thirty-two million albums in the second half of the decade. Eric Weisbard, summing up the decade, writes that "factionalization freed certain strands of hit music to mutate in ways that a single Top 40 could never accommodate," creating one of the more exciting decades of popular music, but also one of the most confusing. "There was so much music," he writes, "that most of us were too bewildered to remember to feel excited."[14]

All of these options, with niche radio formats to accommodate them, made the idea of a single mainstream utterly laughable, a conceit that had only been imaginable before hip hop's rise to popularity ruptured Top 40's consensus. The rise of the internet and other more specialized media did nothing to help this, as consumers split off into segmented spaces created just for them, spaces which reinforced preexisting beliefs and identities without asking audiences to reach across what were rising boundaries between the various segments of America's multicultural population. Just as mainstream American culture diversified, radio divided this multicultural mainstream into increasingly narrow slices. Radio may have raised rap out of the shadows and into the mainstream, but in the process, it thoroughly razed that same mainstream.

[14] Weisbard, "Music; Pop in the 90's."

Appendix One:
Songs on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" Which Include Rapped Vocals (More Than Two Seconds), 1986-1995

The following chart displays the percentage of *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" that consisted of songs containing rapped vocals. The lists that appear after are the songs, organized by year, which have rapped vocals. The percentage these songs made up of the "Hot 100" is noted by the year.



1986: 2.01%

The Chicago Bears Shufflin' Crew	Super Bowl Shuffle
Falco	Vienna Calling (The New '86 Edit)
Falco	Rock Me Amadeus
Janet Jackson	Ready For the World
Midnight Star	Headlines
Run-D.M.C.	You Be Illin
Run-D.M.C.	Walk This way
Trans-x	Living on Video

1987: 2.51%

Beastie Boys	Brass Monkey
Beastie Boys	(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right (To Party!)
Fat Boys & Beach Boys	Wipeout
Georgio	Tina Cherry
Kool Moe Dee	Go See The Doctor
LL Cool J	I'm Bad
LL Cool J	I Need Love
Nocera	Summertime, Summertime
Ron & The D.C. Crew	Ronnie's Rapp
Run DMC	It's Tricky

1988: 4.65%

Bardeux	When We Kiss
Bobby Brown	Don't Be Cruel
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	Girls Ain't Nothing But Trouble
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	A Nightmare On My Street
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	Parents Just Don't Understand
E.U.	Da' Butt
Fat Boys	Louie, Louie
Fat Boys & Chubby Checker	The Twist (Yo Twist)
Ice-T	Colors
J.J. Fad	Is It Love
J.J. Fad	Way Out
J.J. Fad	Supersonic
Kool Moe Dee	Wild, Wild West
L'Trimm	Cars With The Boom
LL Cool J	Going Back To Cali
Rob Base & D.J. E-Z Rock	It Takes Two
Run DMC	Mary, Mary
Salt 'N Pepa	Push It

1989: 4.08%

2 Live Crew	Me So Horny
Bobby Brown	On Our Own
Bobby Brown	Every Little Step
De La Soul	Me Myself And I
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	I Think I Can Beat Mike Tyson
Eighth Wonder	Baby Baby
Jody Watley with Eric B. & Rakim	Friends
LL Cool J	I'm That Type Of Guy

Milli Vanilli	Girl You Know It's True
Milli Vanilli	Girl I'm Gonna Miss You
Milli Vanilli	Baby Don't Forget My Number
Rob Base & D.J. E-Z Rock	Joy And Pain
Sir Mix-A-Lot	Posse On Broadway
Tone Loc	Funky Cold Medina
Tone Loc	Wild Thing
Young M.C.	Bust A Move

1990: 16.22%

2 In A Room	Wiggle It
Beats International	Won't Talk About It
Beats International	Dub Be Good To Me
Bell Biv DeVoe	B.B.D. (I Thought It Was Me)?
Bell Biv DeVoe	Poison
Bell Biv DeVoe	Do Me!
Betty Boo	Doin' The Do
Biz Markie	Just A Friend
Candyman	Knockin' Boots
D Mob (with Cathy Dennis)	That's The Way Of The World
D Mob Introducing Cathy Dennis	C'mon And Get My Love
Deee-Lite	Groove Is In The Heart
Digital Underground	The Humpty Dance
Dino	Romeo
Doc Box & B. Fresh	Slow Love
En Vogue	Lies
Glenn Medeiros & Bobby Brown	She Ain't Worth It
Guy	I Wanna Get With U
Hi Tek 3 Featuring Ya Kid K	Spin That Wheel
Johnny Gill	Rub You The Right Way
Kid Frost	La Raza
Kyper	Tic-Tac-Toe
Leila K & Rob 'n Raz	Got To Get
LL Cool J	The Boomin' System
Luke Featuring The 2 Live Crew	Banned In The U.S.A.
M.C. Hammer	U Can't Touch This
M.C. Hammer	Have You Seen Her
M.C. Hammer	Pray
Madonna	Vogue
Mantronix Featuring Wondress	Got To Have Your Love

Mellow Man Ace	Mentirosa
Michel'le	Nicety
Milli Vanilli	All Or Nothing
Ms. Adventures	Undeniable
Neneh Cherry	Heart
Partners In Kryme	Turtle Power
The Party	I Found Love
The Party	Summer Vacation
Paula Abdul	Opposites Attract
Perfect Gentlemen	Ooh La La (I Can't Get Over You)
Salt 'N Pepa	Expression
Seduction	Breakdown
Seduction	Breakdown
Snap!	Ooops Up
Snap!	The Power
Soul II Soul	Get A Life
Stevie V	Dirty Cash
Technotronic	Rockin' Over The Beat
Technotronic	Get Up! (Before The Night Is Over)
Technotronic Featuring Felly	Pump Up The Jam
The Time	Jerk Out
TKA	I Won't Give Up On You
TKA Featuring Michelle Visage	Crash (Have Some Fun)
Tony! Toni! Toné!	Feels Good
The U-Krew	Let Me Be Your Lover
The U-Krew	If U Were Mine
Vanilla Ice	Ice Ice Baby
The West Coast Rap All-Stars	We're All In The Same Gang
Young & Restless	B Girls
Young M.C.	I Come Off
Young M.C.	Principal's Office

1991: 20.26%

2 Live Crew	Pop That Coochie
2NU	This Is Ponderous
A Lighter Shade of Brown Featuring Teardrop & Shiro	Latin Active
Adventures Of Stevie V	Jealousy
Another Bad Creation	Playground
B.G. Prince Of Rap	This Beat Is Hot

Bingoboys Featuring Princess	How To Dance
Black Box	Strike It Up
Boyz II Men	Motownphilly
C & C Music Factory Featuring Freedom Williams	Gonna Make You Sweat
C & C Music Factory Featuring Freedom Williams	Things That Make You Go Hmmmm
C & C Music Factory Presents Freedom Williams & Zelma Davis	Here We Go
Candyman	Nightgown
Candyman	Melt In Your Mouth
Chubb Rock	Treat 'Em Right
Daisy Dee	Crazy
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	Ring My Bell
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	Summertime
DJ Quik	Tonite
Elisa Fiorillo	On The Way Up
Enigma	Sadeness
The Escape Club	Call It Poison
Father MC	I'll Do 4 U
Fred Schneider	Monster
Gerardo	When The Lights Go Out
Gerardo	We Want The Funk
Gerardo	Rico Suave
Grandmaster Slice	Thinking Of You
Heavy D & The Boyz	Now That We Found Love
Hi-C	I'm Not Your Puppet
Ice-T	New Jack Hustler (Nino's Theme)
Icy Blu	Pump It (Nice An' Hard)
Jellybean Featuring Niki Haris	What's It Gonna Be
Jermaine Jackson	Word To The Badd!!
Jesse Jaymes	Shake It (Like A White Girl)
Joey B. Ellis & Tynetta Hare	Go For It (Heart And Fire)
K.M.C. Kru	The Devil Came Up To Michigan
The KLF	What Time Is Love?
The KLF	3 A.M. Eternal
Latin Alliance Featuring War	Low Rider (On The Boulevard)
LL Cool J	6 Minutes Of Pleasure
LL Cool J	Mama Said Knock You Out
LL Cool J	Around The Way Girl
M.C. Hammer	Here Comes The Hammer
Marky Mark & The Funky Bunch	Wildside

Marky Mark & The Funky Bunch Featuring Loleatta Holloway	Good Vibrations
Natural Selection	Do Anything
Naughty By Nature	O.P.P.
Oaktown's 3.5.7	Turn It Up
The Party	Summer Vacation
The Party	That's Why
Pebbles With Salt 'N Pepa	Backyard
PM Dawn	Set Adrift On Memory Bliss
Public Enemy	Can't Truss It
Rythm Syndicate	P.A.S.S.I.O.N.
Salt 'N Pepa	Do You Want Me
Salt 'N Pepa	Let's Talk About Sex
Sandee	Love Desire
Sheena Easton	What Comes Naturally
The Simpsons	Deep, Deep Trouble
Skat & The Stray Mob	Skat Strut
Stereo MC's	Elevate My Mind
Stevie B	Forever More
Tara Kemp	Piece Of My Heart
Tevin Campbell	Just Ask Me To
Tevin Campbell	Round And Round
Titiyo	My Body Says Yes
Tone Loc	All Through The Night
Too Short	The Ghetto
Tracie Spencer	This Time Make It Funky
Trilogy	Love Me Forever Or Love Me Not
Urban Dance Squad	Deeper Shade Of Soul
Vanilla Ice	Cool As Ice (Everybody Get Loose)
Vanilla Ice	I Love You
Vanilla Ice	Play That Funky Music
Yasmin	Wanna Dance
Yo-Yo	You Can't Play With My Yo-Yo
Young M.C.	That's The Way Love Goes

1992: 22.37%

2 Hyped Brothers & A Dog	Doo Doo Brown
2 Unlimited	Get Ready For This
2 Unlimited	Twilight Zone
2nd II None	Be True To Yourself

2nd II None	If You Want It
A Lighter Shade Of Brown	On A Sunday Afternoon
A.L.T. & Lost Civilization	Tequila
AB Logic	The Hitman
Arrested Development	People Everyday
Arrested Development	Tennessee
Beastie Boys	So What 'Cha Want
Big Audio Dynamite II	The Globe
Black Sheep	Strobelite Honey
Black Sheep	The Choice Is Yours
Bobby Brown	Humpin' Around
Brotherhood Creed	Helluva
C & C Music Factory Featuring Q-Unique & Deborah Cooper	Keep It Comin' (Dance Till You Can't Dance No More!)
Charm	Butt Naked
Chris Walker	Take Time
The College Boyz	Victim Of The Ghetto
Cypress Hill	The Phuncky Feel One
Cypress Hill	How I Could Just Kill A Man
Das EFX	They Want EFX
Digital Underground	Kiss You Back
DJ Quik	Jus Lyke Compton
East Coast Family	1-4-All-4-1
EPMD	Crossover
Eric B. & Rakim	Juice (Know The Ledge)
The Geto Boys	Mind Playing Tricks On Me
Giggles	What Goes Around Comes Around
Good 2 Go	Never Satisfied
Grand Puba	360 Degrees (What Goes Around)
Heavy D & The Boyz	Is It Good To You
Home Team	Pick It Up
House Of Pain	Jump Around
Ice Cube	Wicked
Icy Blu	I Wanna Be Your Girl
Joe Public	Do You Everynite
Joe Public	I Miss You
Joe Public	Live And Learn
Kid 'N Play	Ain't Gonna Hurt Nobody
Kid Frost	No Sunshine
The KLF Featuring Tammy Wynette	Justified And Ancient
Kris Kross	I Missed The Bus

Kris Kross	Warm It Up
Kris Kross	Jump
Lidell Townsell & M.T.F.	Nu Nu
M.C. Brains	Brainstorming
M.C. Brains	Oochie Coochie
M.C. Breed & D.F.C.	Ain't No Future In Yo' Frontin'
M.C. Hammer	This Is The Way We Roll
M.C. Hammer	Do Not Pass Me By
M.C. Hammer	Addams Groove
M.C. Hammer	2 Legit 2 Quit
M.C. Luscious	Boom! I Got Your Boyfriend
Marky Mark & The Funky Bunch	I Need Money
Marky Mark & The Funky Bunch	You Gotta Believe
MC Lyte	Poor Georgie
MC Nas-D & DJ Fred	It's My Cadillac (Got That Bass)
MC Serch	Here It Comes
Me Phi Me	Sad New Day
Monie Love	Full Term Love
Naughty By Nature	Everything's Gonna Be Alright
Nice & Smooth	Sometimes I Rhyme Slow
Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth	They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)
PM Dawn	Paper Doll
PM Dawn	I'd Die Without You
R. Kelly & The Public Announcement	She's Got That Vibe
Red Hot Chili Peppers	Give It Away
Redhead Kingpin & The F.B.I.	3-2-1 Pump
Riff	White Men Can't Jump
Right Said Fred	I'm Too Sexy
Salt 'N Pepa	You Showed Me
The Shamen	Move Any Mountain
Shanice	I Love Your Smile
Sir Mix-A-Lot	Baby Got Back
Sofia Shinas	The Message
Technotronic Featuring Ya Kid K	Move This
TLC	What About Your Friends
TLC	Ain't 2 Proud To Beg
A Tribe Called Quest	Scenario
Vanessa Williams	Work To Do
Wreckx-N-Effect	Rump Shaker

1993: 28.94%

1 Of The Girls	Do Da What
2 Pac	I Get Around
95 South	Whoot, There It Is
AB Logic	Get Up (Move Boy Move)
Apache	Gangsta Bitch
Arrested Development	Revolution
Arrested Development	Mr. Wendal
Bell Biv DeVoe	Gangsta
Big Daddy Kane	Very Special
Black Moon	Who Got The Props
Bobby Brown	That's The Way Love Is
Bobby Brown	Get Away
Boss	Deeper
Brand Nubian	Love Me Or Leave Me Alone
Brand Nubian	Punks Jump Up To Get Beat Down
Captain Hollywood Project	More And More
Cypress Hill	Insane In The Brain
Das EFX	Freakit
De La Soul	Breakadawn
Digable Planets	Rebirth Of Slick (Cool Like Dat)
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	I'm Looking For The One (To Be With Me)
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince	Boom! Shake The Room
Dr. Alban	It's My Life
Dr. Dre	Let Me Ride
Dr. Dre Featuring Snoop Doggy Dogg	Dre Day
Dr. Dre Featuring Snoop Doggy Dogg	Nuthin' But A "G" Thang
Duice	Dazzey Duks
Erick Sermon	Stay Real
Fat Joe	Flow Joe
Father MC	Everything's Gonna Be Alright
The Flavor Unit MCs	Roll Wit Tha Flava
Freedom Williams	Voice Of Freedom
Fu-Schnickens & Shaquille O'Neal	What's Up Doc? (Can We Rock?)
Funkdoobiest	Bow Wow Wow
G-Wiz	Teddy Bear
The Geto Boys	Six Feet Deep
Green Jelly	Three Little Pigs
House Of Pain	Who's The Man?
House Of Pain	Shamrocks And Shenanigans (Boom Shalock Lock Boom)

Ice Cube	Really Doe
Ice Cube Featuring Das EFX	Check Yo Self
Ice Cube Featuring Mr. Short Khop	It Was A Good Day
Illegal	We Getz Buzy
Jeremy Jordan	The Right Kind Of Love
Jodeci	Let's Go Through The Motions
Jordy	Dur Dur D'Etre BeBe (It's Tough To Be A Baby)
K7	Come Baby Come
Kris Kross	I'm Real
Kris Kross	Alright
Levert	Good Ol' Days
A Lighter Shade Of Brown	Homies
LL Cool J	Pink Cookies In A Plastic Bag
LL Cool J	How I'm Comin'
LL Cool J	Back Seat (Of My Jeep)
Lo-Key?	Sweet On U
Lo-Key?	I Got A Thang 4 Ya!
Lords Of The Underground	Here Come The Lords
Lords Of The Underground	Funky Child
Lords Of The Underground	Chief Rocka
M.C. Breed	Gotta Get Mine
MC Eiht	Streiht Up Menace
MC Lyte	RuffNeck
MC Nas-D & DJ Freaky Fred	Gold Diggin' Girls
MC Ren	Same Ol' Shit
Mista Grimm	Indo Smoke
Monie Love	Born 2 B.R.E.E.D.
N2Deep	Toss-Up
N2Deep	Back To The Hotel
Naughty By Nature	Written On Ya Kitten
Naughty By Nature	It's On
Naughty By Nature	Hip Hop Hooray
New Born	Falling In Love
The Nightcrawlers	Push The Feeling On
Nuttin' Nyce	In My Nature
Onyx	Shifftee
Onyx	Throw Ya Gunz
Onyx	Slam
Paperboy	Ditty
The Pharcyde	Passin' Me By

PM Dawn	The Ways Of The Wind
PM Dawn	Looking Through Patient Eyes
Portrait	Here We Go Again
Positive K	I Got A Man
Prince Markie Dee & Soul Convention	Typical Reasons (Swing My Way)
Raven-Symone	That's What Little Girls Are Made Of
Rodney -O- & Joe Cooley	U Don't Hear Me Tho'
Rodney -O- & Joe Cooley	Humps For The Blvd.
Run DMC	Down With The King
The S.O.U.L. S.Y.S.T.E.M.	It's Gonna Be A Lovely Day
Salt 'N Pepa	Shoop
Scarface	Let Me Roll
Shaquille O'Neal	(I Know I Got) Skillz
Souls Of Mischief	93 'Til Infinity
Tag Team	Whoomp! There It Is
TLC	Get It Up
TLC	Hat 2 Da Back
Too Short	I'm A Player
Wreckx-N-Effect	Knock-N-Boots
Wu-Tang Clan	Method Man
Young Black Teenagers	Tap The Bottle
Zhane	Hey Mr. D.J.

1994: 22.32%

12 Gauge	Dunkie Butt
2 In A Room	El Trago (The Drink)
2 Pac	Keep Ya Head Up
2 Pac & Mopreme	Papa'z Song
Aaliyah	Back And Forth
Ahmad	Back In The Day
Beck	Loser
Blackgirl	90's Girl
BLACKstreet	Booti Call
Bone Thugs N Harmony	Thuggish Ruggish Bone
Bone Thugs N Harmony	Thuggish Ruggish Bone
Brand Nubian	Word Is Bond
C & C Music Factory	Do You Wanna Get Funky
The Conscious Daughters	Something To Ride To (Fonky Expedition)
Coolio	Fantastic Voyage
Cracker	Low

Craig Mack	Flava In Ya Ear
The Crooklyn Dodgers Featuring Special Ed	Crooklyn
Digable Planets	9th Wonder (Blackitolism)
Doctor Dre & Ed Lover	Back Up Off Me!
Domino	Sweet Potatoe Pie
E-40	Captain Save A Hoe
Eazy-E	Real Muthaphuckkin G's
Fu-Schnickens	Breakdown
Fugees (Tranzlator Crew)	Nappy Heads
Gang Starr	Mass Appeal
Gravediggaz	Diary Of A Madman
Heavy D & The Boyz	Nuttin' But Love
Heavy D & The Boyz	Got Me Waiting
Heavy D & The Boyz	Nuttin' But Love
Heavy D & The Boyz	Got Me Waiting
House Of Pain	On Point
House Of Pain	On Point
Jeru The Damaja	Come Clean
K7	Zunga Zeng
K7	Body Rock
Keith Murray	The Most Beautifullest Thing In This World
Keith Sweat	How Do You Like It?
KRS-One	Sound Of Da Police
The Lady Of Rage	Afro Puffs
A Lighter Shade Of Brown	Hey D.J.
Lisette Melendez	Goody Goody
M.C. Hammer	It's All Good
M.C. Hammer	Pumps And A Bump
Mad Lion	Take It Easy
Masta Ace Incorporated	Born To Roll
Me'Shell Ndegeocello	If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)
Method Man	Bring The Pain
Nas	It Ain't Hard To Tell
New Kids On The Block	Dirty Dawg
Nice & Smooth	Old To The New
The Notorious B.I.G.	Juicy
The Notorious B.I.G.	Unbelievable
OutKast	Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik
OutKast	Player's Ball
PMD	I Saw It Cummin'

Public Enemy	Give It Up
The Puppies	Funky Y-2-C
Queen Latifah	Just Another Day
Queen Latifah	U.N.I.T.Y.
R. Kelly	Summer Bunnies
Rappin' 4-Tay	Playaz Club
Rayvon	No Guns, No Murder
Real McCoy	Another Night
Reel 2 Real Featuring Mad Stuntman	I Like To Move It
Salt 'N Pepa	None Of Your Business
Salt 'N Pepa	Heaven 'N Hell
Salt 'N Pepa Featuring En Vogue	Whatta Man
Shaquille O'Neal	I'm Outstanding
Shyheim	On And On
Tag Team	Addams Family (Whoomp!)
To Be Continued..	One On One
Too Short	Money In The Ghetto
A Tribe Called Quest	Electric Relaxation (Relax Yourself Girl)
A Tribe Called Quest	Award Tour
Warren G	This DJ
Warren G & Nate Dogg	Regulate

1995: 28.57%

2 Pac	Old School
2 Pac	Temptations
2 Pac	So Many Tears
2 Pac	Dear Mama
69 Boyz	Kitty Kitty
69 Boyz	Tootsee Roll
95 South	Rodeo
AZ	Sugar Hill
Blahzay Blahzay	Danger
Bone Thugs N Harmony	1st Of Tha Month
Bone Thugs N Harmony Featuring Eazy-E	Foe Tha Love Of $
Capleton Featuring Method Man	Wings Of The Morning
Channel Live	Mad Izm
Chef Raekwon	Ice Cream
The Click	Hurricane
Coolio Featuring L.V.	Gangsta's Paradise

Craig Mack	Get Down
The Crooklyn Dodgers '95	Return Of The Crooklyn Dodgers
Cypress Hill	Throw Your Set In The Air
Da Brat	Give It 2 You
Das EFX	Real Hip-Hop
Dis N' Dat Featuring 95 South, 69 Boyz & K-Nock	Freak Me Baby
DJ Quik	Safe + Sound
Dove Shack	Summertime In The LBC
Dr. Dre	Keep Their Heads Ringin'
Dru Down	Pimp Of The Year
E-40 Featuring Leviti	1-Luv
E-40 Featuring Suga T	Sprinkle Me
Erick Sermon	Bomdigi
Frost	East Side Rendezvous
Fun Factory	Close To You
Fun Factory	I Wanna B With U
Genius/GZA	Liquid Swords
Genius/GZA Featuring Inspektah Deck a.k.a. Rollie Fingers	Cold World
Goodie Mob	Cell Therapy
Grand Puba	I Like It (I Wanna Be Where You Are)
Group Home	Supa Star
Heavy D & The Boyz	Black Coffee
Immature	Feel The Funk
Junior M.A.F.I.A.	Player's Anthem
Keith Murray	Get Lifted
Kool G Rap	Fast Life
KRS-One	MC's Act Like They Don't Know
LL Cool J	Hey Lover
Lords Of The Underground	Tic Toc
Lost Boyz	Lifestyles Of The Rich And Shameless
Lost Boyz	Jeeps, Lex Coups, Bimaz & Benz
Luniz	I Got 5 On It
Mack 10	Foe Life
Masta Ace Incorporated	Sittin' On Chrome
Masta Ace Incorporated	The INC Ride
Method Man	Release Yo' Delf
Method Man	The Riddler
Method Man Mary J. Blige	I'll Be There For You/You're All I Need To Get By
Mobb Deep	Survival Of The Fittest

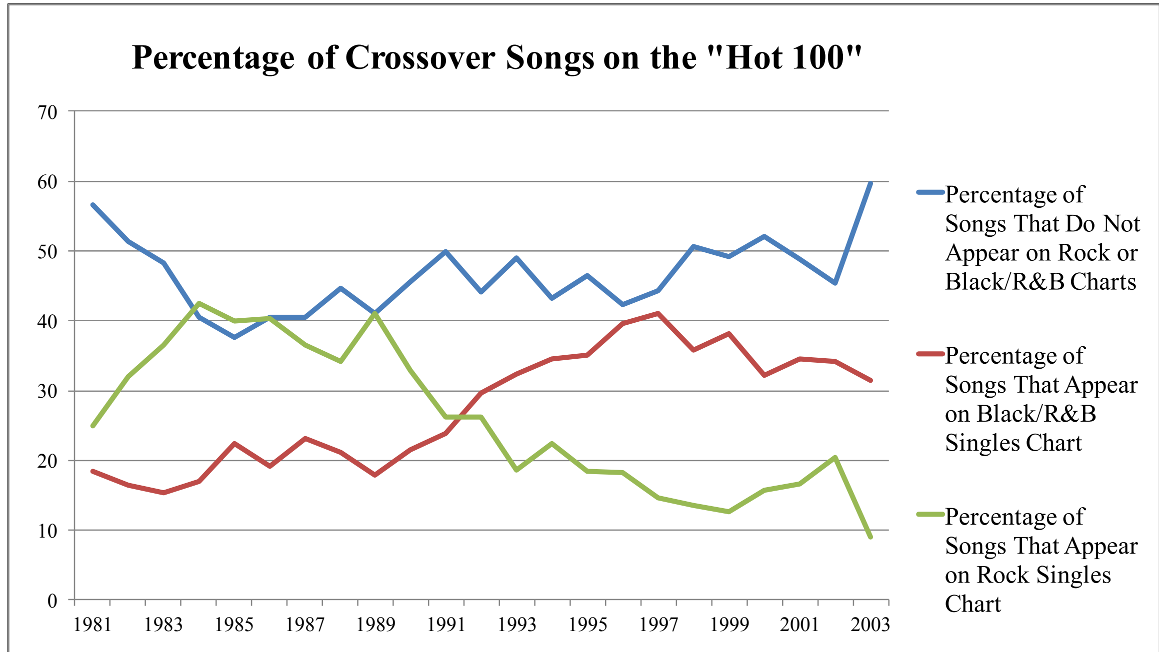
Mobb Deep	Shook Ones Part II
Monica	Like This And Like That
Montell Jordan	Somethin' 4 Da Honeyz
Montell Jordan	This Is How We Do It
Naughty By Nature	Craziest
Naughty By Nature	Feel Me Flow
Nine	Whutcha Want?
The Notorious B.I.G.	Warning
The Notorious B.I.G.	Big Poppa
The Notorious B.I.G.	One More Chance-Stay With Me
The Notorious B.I.G. And Method Man	The What
Nuttin' Nyce	Down 4 Whateva
Nuttin' Nyce	Froggy Style
Ol' Dirty Bastard	Shimmy Shimmy Ya
Ol' Dirty Bastard	Brooklyn Zoo
Onyx	Last Dayz
Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth	Take You There
The Pharcyde	Runnin'
PM Dawn	Sometimes I Miss You So Much (Dedicated To The Christ Consciousness)
Raekwon	Glaciers Of Ice
Raekwon	Criminology
Rappin' 4-Tay Featuring The Spinners	I'll Be Around
Real McCoy	Automatic Lover (Call For Love)
Real McCoy	Come And Get Your Love
Real McCoy	Run Away
Redman	Can't Wait
Redman / Method Man	How High
Salt 'N Pepa	Ain't Nuthin' But A She Thing
Scarface	I Never Seen A Man Cry (aka I Seen A Man Die)
Scarface Featuring Ice Cube	People Don't Believe
Shaquille O'Neal	Biological Didn't Bother
Shaquille O'Neal	Biological Didn't Bother
Smooth	Mind Blowin'
Soul For Real	Every Little Thing I Do
Soul For Real	Candy Rain
Tag Team, Mickey, Minnie & Goofy	Whoomp! (There It Went)
Technotronic Featuring Ya Kid K	Move It To The Rhythm
TLC	Waterfalls
Too Short	Cocktales

Total Featuring The Notorious B.I.G.	Can't You See
Twinz	Round & Round
Various Artists	Freedom (Theme from Panther)
Vicious	Nika
Vybe	Warm Summer Daze
Warren G	Do You See
WC & the MAAD Circle	West Up! 90
Xscape	Feels So Good

Appendix Two:
Crossover Music on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100," 1981-2003

I. Percentage of Crossover Songs on the "Hot 100"

The following chart and data set display the percentage of songs on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" which also appeared on either the Rock or Black/R&B singles charts, indicating their crossover appeal.

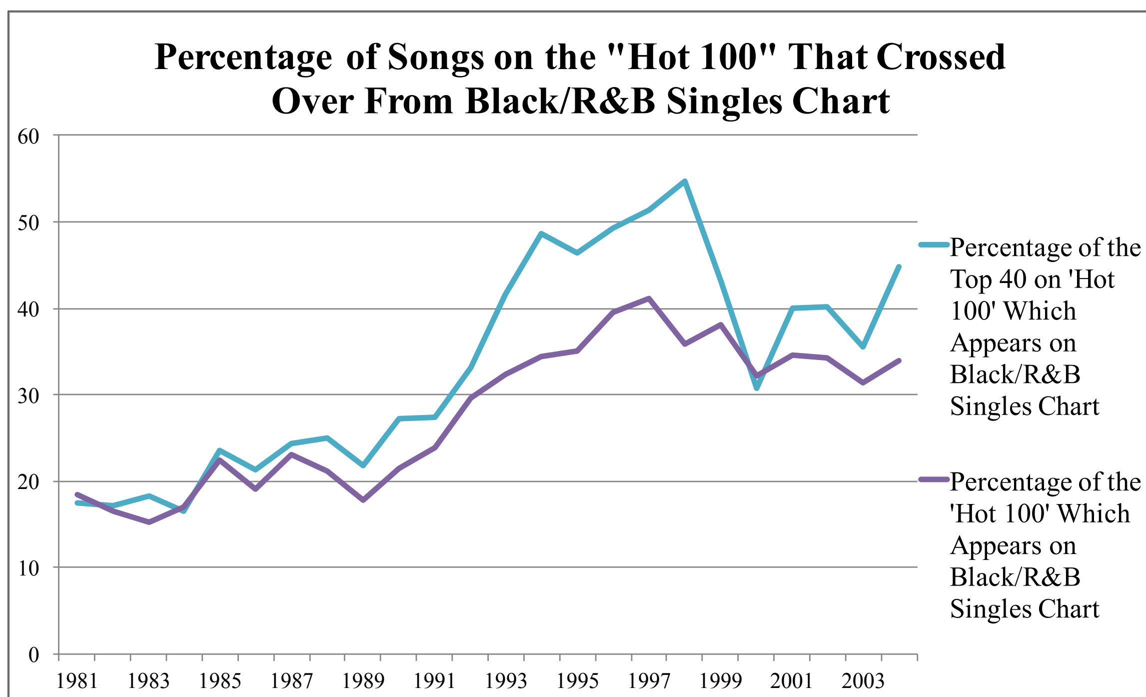


Year	Percentage of Songs in the "Hot 100" That Appear on the Rock Singles Chart	Percentage of Songs in the "Hot 100" That Appear on the Black/R&B Singles Chart
1981	25.0	18.4
1982	32.1	16.5
1983	36.5	15.3
1984	42.5	17.0
1985	40.0	22.5
1986	40.3	19.1
1987	36.4	23.1
1988	34.1	21.2
1989	41.1	17.9
1990	33.0	21.5
1991	26.2	23.9
1992	26.1	29.6
1993	18.6	32.4
1994	22.3	34.5

1995	18.5	35.0
1996	18.2	39.5
1997	14.7	41.1
1998	13.6	35.8
1999	12.7	38.1
2000	15.8	32.2
2001	16.6	34.6
2002	20.3	34.2
2003	9.0	31.4

II. Percentage of Black/R&B Crossover Songs on the "Hot 100"

The following chart and data set display the percentage of songs in the top 40 of *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" which also appeared on the Black/R&B singles charts, and the percentage of songs that charted anywhere on *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" which also appeared on the Black/R&B singles charts.



Year	Percentage of Songs in the Top 40 of the "Hot 100" That Crossed Over from the Black/R&B Singles Chart	Percentage of Songs in the "Hot 100" That Crossed Over from the Black/R&B Singles Chart
1981	17.5	18.4
1982	17.1	16.5
1983	18.3	15.3

1984	16.5	17.0
1985	23.6	22.5
1986	21.3	19.1
1987	24.3	23.1
1988	25.0	21.2
1989	21.8	17.9
1990	27.2	21.5
1991	27.4	23.9
1992	33.1	29.6
1993	41.6	32.4
1994	48.6	34.5
1995	46.4	35.0
1996	49.3	39.5
1997	51.4	41.1
1998	54.8	35.8
1999	43.3	38.1
2000	30.8	32.2
2001	40.0	34.6
2002	40.1	34.2
2003	35.5	31.4

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