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Perspectives on the Evolution of Hip-Hop Music through Themes of Race, Crime, and Violence

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This thesis examines the role or race, crime, and violence as major themes in hip-hop music through existing academic literature. Utilizing the three major themes, this paper discusses the inherent ties of race, crime, and violence to the production of hip-hop music which can reflect broader social issues existing in American society over the time period from 1970-present day. Furthermore, these themes will be assessed for their activist oriented ability to suggest change in society for the primary groups affected by the issues contained in hip-hop lyrics. Over time, hip-hop, much like any artistic form, has undergone an evolution, producing new sounds, subgenres, and content that may also reflect changes in American society. To explore the alterations that have occurred in the hip-hop genre, this thesis analyzes lyrics from the top 100 songs of the most recent decade of popular hip-hop music through a content analysis. Lastly, interviews with professionals in various fields relevant to the research are discussed to show connections between the empirical data resulting from the analysis and the professional knowledge available on the subject.

Keywords: Hip-hop, content analysis, race, crime, violence, music

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Historically, no artistic form has arguably been more socially impactful worldwide than music. From the grand symphonies of Beethoven during the classical period to the politically aimed eloquent lyricism of the renowned Johnny Cash, music has played a contributory role in every society's development. While both artists are comparable for creating music for the purpose of entertainment, each of their styles of music could not be more different. Consequently, Johnny Cash would have never been as successful in the classical period and the same is true for Beethoven in 1960's America. As social science researchers would suggest, music is the product of the time it is written, therefore music can change in accordance with societal shifts. While music is produced worldwide and may shift along with each society within which it is produced, the focus of this project aims to understand sociologically related musical paradigms in the USA.

In the USA specifically, rapid and robust societal changes have occurred over the course of its short 240-year existence because of the stark diversity in people's cultures, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings. As these shifts have transpired, musical creation has also followed suit. Each time a change has happened, i.e. industrialization, The Great Depression, the economical uprising during and after the World Wars, and the technological blast of modern day have all had an influence on altering the sound, style, lyricism, and production of music in America.

While musical styles of all types have resulted from such societal shifts, The Civil Rights Movement had one of the most prominent impacts on the use of media as a method of promotion. According to Watkins (2001), the amount of participation in part by the African-American community to push for equal rights during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a nationalistic approach that sought to bring together the black community in

order to exhaust efforts in many forms that would display their messages. Watkins states that during this era "as the temperature of black American politics reached a boil…the ways in which black Americans expressed themselves underwent dramatic change too" (Watkins, 2001, p. 374). As African-Americans sought to find ways to promote their cause, they were forced to take creative measures to advance their agenda which led to them turning to popular media outlets such as music. During the 1900s, black popular music was slightly agenda focused with genres emerging such as jazz, rock'n'roll, pop, soul, and blues, but many of these genres lost some of their significance in the black movement when the white majority overtook them in popular media, (Watkins, 2001, p. 375). In the 1970s, a shift occurred as the Civil Rights Movement brought about a need for more politicization of the African-American experience. From combinations of the many previous genres articulated in black culture came an emerging new sound and style, bursting from the urban, poor socioeconomic, black neighborhoods across the U.S., known as hip-hop.

The development of the hip-hop genre came at a time when politicization in popular media on a national scale met at a crossroads with the emergence of a cool, new, catchy sound produced by DJs located in the South Bronx of New York City. According to RM Hip-Hop Magazine (1986), “these DJs were combining the style of the old funk tunes and different types of percussion breaks such as those found in Jimmy Castor's 'It's Just Begun." The new sounds quickly grew in popularity for youth in urban areas where "up and coming DJs were playing to packed crowds of youngsters eager to hear the old funk tunes" (RM Hip-Hop Magazine, 1986). The same young black adults that were mixing these musical combinations, adding percussion beats, and performing their mixes

for the public also began pairing acrobatic styles of dancing known as "breaking" which brought even more attention to their underground movement. Finally, lyrics were fused to the sound in the "old, black tradition of rhyming slang to put down…enemies [as] a new way of…half speaking, half singing," (RM Hip-Hop Magazine, 1986). Once the genre began to solidify as a musical style, then the politicization of the music began around the early to middle 1980s due to the nature of the ongoing societal situations that the artists were experiencing. For the next 3 decades, hip-hop became a cultural crutch, tied together in a movement to combat and bring attention to the African-American experience post-Civil-Rights-Movement (RM Hip-Hop Magazine, 1986).

Similar to any genre of music, hip-hop has evolved over its period of existence in the last 40 years, taking on new sub-forms, focusing on new topics, and being produced by different types of musicians. Within each of its evolutionary periods, because the music is so politically and sociologically based, the production of hip-hop shifts in order to show what is going on in society. From a sociological standpoint, it is important to understand these shifts as products of each time period while also analyzing them in order to draw greater conclusions to the overall social and economic positions of racial relations here in the U.S.

In conjunction with the sociological perspective, crime is also of utter importance to the evolution of hip-hop music. It is well known that more crime persists in inner-city, poorer, and socially unstable areas which are mostly inhabited by African-American and other minority groups. Because of the lack of social mobility and opportunity in these areas, some inhabitants react criminally in order to survive. Over time, crime has become an inherent part of these urban areas, now seeming culturally acceptable for those who

grow up there. As hip-hop began to be produced, crime and violence became an inherent part of the musical lyricism as well. While discussing social issues in hip-hop music, artists have knowingly acknowledged that crime is naturally a part of urban city life. Altogether, hip-hop became a way to tie race, crime, and violence together as mechanisms of control in the lives of the African-American minority.

In each decade of hip-hop music, themes of race, crime, and violence stay true to the overall production of the genre. Within each theme, sub-categories of issue are discussed that point to greater social meanings. As many critics suggest, hip-hop music promotes an ideology of crime and violence. Contrastingly, little has been written on the deeper meaning within hip-hop music showing how it *explains* the violence and crime that is inherent to the racialized socio-economic position of African-Americans. A more in depth analysis will be completed in order to uncover explanations, suggestions, or even solutions to these still prominent issues.

The purpose of this proposed research project is to examine criminal, racial, and violent content within the evolving genre of hip-hop. Unlike the vast majority of hip-hop critics though, the purpose of this project is to explore the evolution of hip-hop music and look deeper at the development of these themes in hip-hop lyrics as potential products of societal conditions, not the causes. There are three basic components to this thesis that provide a purpose for this research. The first component is to show that hip-hop is more than just a popular music genre, rather it is written with encoded meanings to provide listeners with insight on real existing issues. The second component is that the genre consists of 3 major themes—race, crime, violence—that remain imperative to the overall understanding of social justice within the music. The last component is that hip-hop

music has evolved to reflect ongoing social conditions over the last 40 years. These three components can be evidenced by examining how hip-hop has changed through a review of academic literature and primary research of the gap in existing body of knowledge.

While it is impossible to prove that hip-hop music has effected social change, this research project will investigate what items appear in hip-hop music as well as social and criminal justice suggestions that are made that could beckon change within American politics. Additionally, an examination of modern day hip-hop, will show how social understandings of the music and the politicization have led to a potential demarcation of the popular, radio and commercially oriented style of music from the true political and socially aware ideological music.

Literature Review

The intent of this literature review is to provide a background understanding of the existing research on the evolution of the hip-hop genre. The review will include insight on the recurring themes appearing in the music, how specific artists have influenced hip-hop production, and what sociological and criminological references are made by artists in the genre that may suggest solutions for social change.

The first part of this literature review will discuss the racial background, implications, and content that works as a staple for the hip-hop genre. The next section will explore the criminal justice aspect of hip-hop as a reoccurring component of the music. This section will expand on the use of criminal language to explain real social circumstances and provide solutions to criminal justice issues. In the last section of the literature review, violence in hip-hop music lyrics will be discussed. Examining the violent aspect will provide further insight on the aggressive and hostile nature of

"gangsta" rap which links back to social circumstances that have induced a violent culture from the areas which the music originates.

Hip-Hop as a Racial Paradigm

The existing literature on the use of race as a theme in hip-hop music is the most abundant and, I will argue, the most important. The other two themes, crime and violence, are second to race because racial issues and tensions in America have led to the development of a violent and criminal culture for African-Americans living in inner city, impoverished conditions. The development of racial tensions after the Civil Rights Movement left many African-Americans without jobs, money, and social mobility opportunity which then led to criminality and, more specifically, violence. The combination of these three themes became the focus of hip-hop music as a way to express politically what was going on in the African-American experience.

According to Lamotte (2014), in a racial context, hip-hop has been an outlet for political recognition and retaliation against the dominant group's marginalization, isolation, and exclusion in society (p. 688). When power relations resulted in disparaging situations for racial minorities in the post-civil-rights era circa 1980-2000, hip-hop became a way of challenging "urban exclusion, violence and exploitation" by providing an unconventional sense of belonging and cohesion to the African-American communities (Lamotte, 2014, p. 688). The purpose of the hip-hop movement was not initially to make political statements. Rather, hip-hop started as a way for minority youth to engage in a type of activity unknown and unavailable to the dominant white culture in society, which gave them a sense of communal understanding about the nature of their communities. As hip-hop gained popularity in black urban communities, the political and

social context emerged in the lyrics simply because those experiences were inherent to the African-American experience. People were writing about real-life problems.

The political and social messages delivered through hip-hop music took on a style known as the hidden transcript (Lamotte, 2014, p. 689). In order to make the statements about ongoing societal issues, hip-hop artists had to conceal their notions through lyrical metaphors, similes, and other linguistic patterns. The purpose of using a hidden transcript is derived from the idea that this style of communication was going to be delivered across lines of power—to blacks and whites in society—which would affect the power differentials between those groups (Lamotte, 2014, p. 689). In this sense, African-Americans were using hip-hop music as an outlet of retaliation toward the dominant group by excluding them from understanding the messages encoded in their lyrics while reaching other African-Americans in the same positions as themselves. Additionally, a power shift occurred as African-Americans were able to exclude the dominant group from something which has rarely happened in U.S. history. At the same time of this progressive movement for the black community through hip-hop music as a communicative mechanism, a sense of Black Nationalism began to develop.

Black Nationalism.

As Watkins (2001) claims, mainstream media and culture were primarily controlled by whites during the time of hip-hop's development which contributed to a need to find new ways to express and promote black issues and rights (p. 374). Additionally, hip-hop came at a time when black coalitions were growing as a way to combat the white-supremacies pre-existing in America. Straight out of the 1960's, black popular and cultural production consisted of a disrespect of the power in place in the

United States. Resulting was the sense of "Black Nationalism" which became a way for blacks to create their own cultural expression differentiated from white America while also becoming more economically independent (Watkins 2001, p.376). The sense of nationalism described here eventually led to the placement of social and economic issues into lyrical expression by African-Americans (Watkins, 2001, p. 380). Watkins (2001) claims that the first type of hip-hop nationalism to emerge was focused on the "black power movements of the 1960s" while the next phase was a type of "Afrocentric hip hop nationalism" that focused specifically on Africa as the birthplace of all humans. Black empowerment was the key focus to the emerging hip-hop genre prior to the actual politicization of the music for social issues existing in America.

According to Wright (2004) hip-hop emerged as a political mechanism in the 1980s for dealing with hegemonic power by the dominant group and to express feelings of anguish and frustration with social circumstances. The collective culture of hip-hop, sometimes referred to as rap, was a response to the "conditions of poverty, joblessness, and disempowerment," which are still predominant issues that impact urban African-Americans today (Wright, 2004, p. 10). Despite insinuations in modern day social discourse that racism ceased to exist after the Civil-Rights Movement, social inequality based on race has persisted on into the 21st century in multiple different ways. One group in particular known as Public Enemy brought about the first rap act to "cross-over the racial, class, and national lines," by conveying messages about social issues within their hip-hop lyrics (Watkins, 2001, p. 380).

Public Enemy.

With songs like "Fight the Power" and "Black Steel In The Hour of Chaos,"

Public Enemy sheds light on subjects such as the lack of black's rights, the imprisonment of minorities, and the overall national disrespect for minorities. In the song "Black Steel In The Hour of Chaos," lyrics state:

> "I got a letter from the government the other day
> I opened and read it
> It said they were suckers
> They wanted me for their army or whatever
> Picture me given' a damn - I said never
> Here is a land that never gave a damn
> About a brother like me and myself
> Because they never did
> I wasn't wit' it, but just that very minute...
> It occurred to me
> The suckers had authority
> Cold sweatin' as I dwell in my cell
> How long has it been?
> They got me sittin' in the state pen."

Here, Public Enemy is referencing the lack of overall respect that blacks in America feel. They claim that the government has never truly cared for blacks therefore blacks should reject the idea that they should represent America in any way, including in the military. Additionally, Public Enemy ties in the skewed justice system which places disproportionate numbers of blacks in prison. These subjects are just a few of many represented in the early hyper-political campaign of Public Enemy lyrics.

Spatiality and Racial Politics in Hip-Hop.

Space is a primary mechanism for racial involvement in hip-hop culture (Forman, 2000, p. 65). The segregating of minorities in to poor, disparate, urban communities significantly contributed to the concept of race in hip-hop discourse. Forman (2000) claims that "rap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production" (p. 67). Urban areas create a close proximity for the African-American people living within them which leads to groups banding together for social

support. As this phenomenon occurred at the same time as the development of hip-hop, groups began using the music to convey messages about spatial awareness. Consequently, the hip-hop culture brought together groups of blacks who became digital jockeys, or DJ's, for hip-hop music, as well as break-dancers who danced to the beats of the music, and even artistic groups or gangs that represented their groups through graffiti art (Forman, 2000, p. 68).

As the culture came together, general discussion of space became an inherent part of hip-hop music. References to the "ghetto" and the "hood" emerged in the mid-1980s which were nicknames for the urban black communities where much of the music was being produced (Forman 2000, p. 68). As the genre developed, hip-hop artists began referring to their homes and environments to "represent" and bring attention to the places from which they came (Forman 2000, p. 68). Some of the most popular areas mentioned in hip-hop discourse include Compton, Detroit, St. Louis, Atlanta, New York City, Los Angeles, and (more broadly) the East Coast vs. West Coast discussion. These areas are all bustling urban locations where racial tensions and ghettoized communities dominate. Spatiality is important to the overall understanding of the development of race as a theme in hip-hop music.

Minority Youth.

While hip-hop became a popular social and political mechanism for minority culture in its totality, minority youth, primarily black youth, were heavily targeted by its production. Black teenagers sought to become DJs, break-dancers, and hip-hop artists themselves. If youth were not producing the music, many of them were listening to the messages conveyed which were very similar to the experiences of black youth in urban

areas. Youth felt a sense of empowerment that gave meaning and reason for the harsh conditions existing in their communities. According to Travis (2013) the development of the hip-hop genre brought on a realization of power and response to oppression through community activism, especially in youth (p.141). Instead of focusing solely on the individual black adolescence experience, the framework became collective—coming together for a common cause (Travis 2013, p. 141). Additionally, for black youth, hip-hop "is a familiar media where they feel valued and validated and most free to express themselves" (Delgado and Staples 2008, p. 169). Despite the growing black youth culture fostered by the hip-hop movement, some researchers expressed concern for the effects on black youth perceptions toward explicit racial issues.

Pulido (2009) produced research on the effects of the hip-hop genre to bring together racial minorities in a study known as "Music Fit for Minorities." Youth from the Chicago area were studied in order to understand how hip-hop provides minority groups with a sense of the way race plays a role in their daily lives (p. 68). The study produced outcomes relating to youth activating together culturally to critique social and educative institutions discriminating against their race. Pulido (2009) claims that research shows that minority youth “identities, cultures, and languages are marginalized in schools through American racialized beliefs,” which leads to a rendering of minority youth in schools feeling “invisible, deficient, or [seen] as criminals” (p. 69). Using critical race theory (CRT), which is a race focused framework, Pulido met with minority students in urban Chicago schools where she found that the youth she interviewed turned to hip-hop as a mechanism to provide “cohesion to their lives and experiences” (Pulido, 2009, p. 73). Youth are easily influenced because they are still in the stages of development

therefore the micro-aggressions dealt with by minority youth are crucial factors in their ability to become contributing members of society. Consequently, hip-hop as a pedagogical and interpretive framework can provide a different outlook and creative space for minority youth struggling with these issues.

Black Masculinity.

In addition to hip-hop becoming an outlet for black youth to understand their racial context in society, hip-hop music also developed a meaningful framework for the black males to empathize with each other over the discriminatory position they faced daily. This is not to say that the black female was not affected deeply and equally by the dominant discrimination in society. Rather, the black male specifically began to seek alternative embodiment for their position as the subordinate male in society (Randolph, 2006). This idea stemmed from the overarching understanding that the white male was, and still arguably is, the standard by which everything in society is organized. For black males, this gave them a disadvantage to power, money, societal positioning, social mobility, and providing for their families. Randolph (2006) argues that African-American men face a type of "double consciousness" which is the "way blacks constantly view themselves through their own eyes and through the eyes of the dominant culture" (p. 201). When black men began using music to exemplify their experiences, they had to appeal to two different contexts: the white audience which makes them commercially successful, and the black community of whom they are responsible for representing (Randolph, 2006, p. 201).

In a popularized sub-genre of hip-hop music, black masculine embodiment has contributed to an organized style of "black rage" that asserts the dominance of the

powerless black male who wants to revolt against the white male societal norm. This type of music emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s and became known as gangsta hip-hop.

Dominant White Emergence as Hip-Hop Artists.

Lastly, and most recently, is discourse regarding the introduction of white artists and audiences to hip-hop culture. Although hip-hop, or any other genre for that matter, is a constructive art form and can be produced by anyone of race, gender, or creed, the genre has an inherent connection to the African-American identity (Netcoh, 2013, p. 11). According to Best and Kellner (1999), "rap music…problematizes [the] system of difference whereby Blackness is marginalized…and Whiteness is assumed the norm" (p. 16). This being true, hip-hop audiences have reacted in different ways regarding the emergence of white rappers within a genre that has such a closely tied context to the African-American race. Some critics in the general media have lashed out at white artists who participate in the hip-hop culture because, as they claim, white artists cannot empathize with the same experiences that are so inherent to the genre. White hip-hop artists struggle specifically with being able to "keep it real" because of their lack of knowledge and understanding of those same experiences, which challenges their authenticity (Fraley, 2009, p. 43). Additionally, others have claimed that white artists are able to utilize their privilege to accrue more wealth, gain more popularity, and progress as an artist much more quickly than black artists. Hip-hop started as a way to assert and break up the power differentials between the dominant white group and the subordinated black group therefore whites participating in hip-hop, as many argue, defeats the purpose.

While the emergence of white hip-hop artists is predominantly new in the last 5-10 years, artists such as Eminem, a white rapper who has become one of the most successful people in the hip-hop industry, have been a part of hip-hop culture since the late 1980s (Fraley, 2009, p. 39). Eminem has been successful for multiple reasons, including his incredible ability to rap at quick speeds and on the spot without pre-written lyrics. Despite being a white artist in a dominantly black genre, Eminem "chooses not to deny his Whiteness but to be conspicuously white" (Fraley, 2009, p. 48). He recognizes his ability to be successful as a white rapper in a black industry which contributes to his respectability within the black community. Moreover, he pushes the boundaries of more complex subjects within his lyricism along with his claims of authenticity that have made him so famous (Armstrong, 2004, p. 336).

After the introduction of white artists and white audiences to hip-hop, a new subculture began to persist for white youth. As Scott (2004) states, the term "wigger" (meaning white nigger), established prominence among white audiences of hip-hop culture (p. 139). Whites began engaging not only with the music, but the entire culture—breakdancing, MCing, producing graffiti. Eminem contributed to this movement wholeheartedly by bringing his disadvantaged past of familial criminality and abuse, and empathizing with the same issues in black culture but still sublimating himself as a white artist (Scott, 2004, p. 144). His recognition of his privilege but continuity as a dominant white rap artist created a social crossroads almost unseen before. More interesting, though, is the development of white youth as hip-hop listeners and their understanding of the hip-hop culture based on the ideas shared in Eminem's lyrics. Despite the ability of

white audiences to connect with Eminem by racial politics, many listeners do not, however, connect to the African-American themes and origins.

According to Netcoh (2013), white hip-hop listeners "internalize and mobilize…racial politics and attitudes toward black people" based on the stereotypical descriptions of black people within hip-hop lyrics (p. 14). This uncritical understanding of black males and females then leads to white participants using those stereotypes as a way to construct discriminatory ideas toward the total black population. Hip-hop, as a politically and socially mobilizing genre, has the ability to expand awareness of racially just principles to white audiences. Many white listeners "internalize rap music's stereotypical portrayals of race while they remain ignorant of its more progressive racial discourses" (Netcoh, 2013, p. 14). In turn, whites take a superficial participation in the genre and are not able to think critically about the racial politics and background. This leads to white audiences and artists that delegitimize the purpose of the movement.

The totality of the literature on hip-hop and race is the most abundant and, I will argue, the most important to the overall evolutionary understanding of the genre. Race as a theme in hip-hop music has social, economic, political, and educational ideologies that have been inherent to the genre since its creation 40 years ago. Without the disparity among whites and blacks, hip-hop would not have developed as the most prominent politically and socially aware genre in musical history.

Crime in Hip-hop

While race is the overarching theme that has provided the blueprints for hip-hop cultural advancement, crime has become another essential theme to the way hip-hop music is produced. The inclusion of criminal content in hip-hop music can be traced to

the 1980s when gang violence and promotion gained prominence in impoverished urban neighborhoods (Peralta, 2009). In the Post-Civil-Rights era, gang violence, specifically between the Crips and the Bloods, two of the most well-known black gangs, started as groups fighting the white power that persisted to segregate, discriminate, and criminalize minority citizens, primarily in urban areas. Later, those groups began to target each other for supremacy as the most respected gangs as well as against other gangs that began developing. Gang violence paired with the high rates of minority incarceration in urban areas, especially for drug violations, created an abundance of issues for poor African-American communities. Issues of disproportionate incarceration, drug reform laws that unfairly target minority groups, lack of jobs, funding, and resources in urban communities have led to disastrous conditions for African-Americans.

Social Disorganization.

According to Sampson and Wilson (2005), a widely accepted interpretation of this phenomenon is provided by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay who constructed "social disorganization theory" to explain high crime rates in poor urban areas, (p. 178). Through the perspective of Shaw and McKay's theory, Sampson and Wilson (2005) state that there are "three structural factors—low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility—that led to the disruption of local community social organization" (p. 178). This research has been relied on heavily in the field of criminology to explain the ties between urban poverty, African-Americans who have lived in those areas due to persistent "unintentional" segregation, and crime. As hip-hop started as a way to bring disparate black community groups together, discussion of criminal activities eventually found its way into the lyrics because hip-hop artists were speaking about the oppressions

and daily issues they were experiencing within the neighborhoods where they were producing the music. Additionally, hip-hop's popularity began to increase dramatically during the 1980s, "in an era accompanied by Reaganism, cutbacks, and social welfare safety nets with gaping holes" (Lynch & Krzycki, 1998). These social issues of the 1980s were paired with the already poor conditions of urban, predominantly black neighborhoods and when combined, stimulated the hip-hop movement.

Gangsta Rap.

Lyricism about crime can be traced to the development of the "gangsta rap" subgenre of hip-hop. The gangster hip-hop genre originated when oppressed African-American groups began to revolt against inner-city community oppression while threatening criminal activity as a response, (Kubrin 2005). Kubrin (2005) argues that because of "bleak conditions, black youth in disadvantaged communities have created a local social order complete with its own code and rituals of authenticity," (as cited in Anderson, 1999). This "street code" is a prescribed set of norms that have grown within urban communities that are a way of acting and surviving for people in those areas. The development of the street code coincides directly with the production of gangs leading to actions as follows: using violence to represent power and authenticity; drug production, trafficking, and dealing under dangerous conditions; the use of guns as a representation of authority as well as to murder other competing gang members; robbery and burglary as a means to survive or just to perpetuate the street code of violent/criminal behavior; and generally revolting against police in these urban areas based on the overarching issues with over-policing of minority areas (Kubrin, 2005).

According to McCann (2013) gangsta rap developed out of the "Black Rage" movement of the 1970s and 1980s, consisting of aggressive, outraged sounds and dangerous calls to action against white men in political power positions. Black rage describes the position of African-Americans as frustrated with and oppressed by the white dominating society. McCann (2013) claims black rage is the essential element for hip-hop music because it emphasizes the "explosive anger residing in the crevices of America's most notorious urban sectors," which were the dominant places for hip-hop's creation (pg. 410). The ideology of black rage combined with the violent and criminal nature of urban areas grew into a type of gangster mentality that hip-hop musicians began to describe in their lyrics in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, the development of gangster hip-hop sought to incorporate angry undertones towards societal inequalities as well as threats of violent crime and the use of weapons as a mechanism to combat other hip-hop rivalries.

The issues contributing to the feelings of black rage that began to develop in urban neighborhoods throughout the 1980s and 1990s can also be traced to harsher sentencing laws including the war on drugs that transcribed in the last 20 years of the 20th century. Harsher sentencing, police brutality, the disproportionate criminalization targeting of minorities, and unfair drug laws led to many of the issues that developed in these areas. While gang violence, and poor urban crime are extreme problems in America, the discussion of criminal justice issues in hip-hop music has been heavily criticized as perpetuating the crime problem. The criminal nature of hip-hop music has remained embedded since the origination of gangsta rap with themes of gun violence, murder, sexual crime, drugs, theft, general violence, and more. Kubrin (2005) explains

that, instead of hip-hop lyrics promoting crime and violence, “rap lyrics instruct listeners in how to make sense of urban street violence and how to understand the identities of those who participate in (or avoid) it” (p.367). In this context, crime as a theme in hip-hop music is much deeper than just promoting criminal activity and violence, rather, crime is used as a lyrical mechanism for explaining and bringing attention to the existing issues in urban, minority neighborhoods.

McCann (2013) also discusses one of the most prominent hip-hop musicians of the 1990s known as Tupac Shakur who contributed greatly to the development of the gangster hip-hop genre. Shakur opened up about his troubled life as a child of a poor, working class, urban black family while also fueling his lyricism with anguish about his situation which mirrored millions of others like him. Furthermore, Shakur rapped about the pressures of poverty which included his mother's addiction to cocaine, his father's complete absence in his life, his constant confrontations with police, and the need to turn to a criminal lifestyle to survive. Most well-known is his "beef,” or confrontations, with opposing rap artist Notorious B.I.G. whom he lyrically argued with on many occasions. In his song "Hit 'Em Up," Shakur employs gang-like lyricism with references to abrupt violence towards B.I.G and his crew using descriptions of gun violence, murder, assault, and other criminal actions. Shakur raps:

> "Biggie Smalls and Junior M.A.F.I.A. some mark-ass bitches
> We keep on coming while we running for your jewels
> Steady gunning, keep on busting at them fools
> You know the rules/Lil' Caesar go ask you homie how I'll leave you
> Cut your young ass up, leave you in pieces
> Now be deceased"

Here, Shakur describes an actual shoot-out that occurred between both Shakur's gang and B.I.G.'s gang where his jewels were stolen. He then threatens to continue the

violence until B.I.G. is dead. The black rage and gangster ideology became a staple for the genre of music and still persists in hip-hop music today. While the issues existing between Shakur and B.I.G. were actually real, also thought to be the reason they were both eventually violently killed, many artists utilize gang-like behavior as lyrical strategies today to represent authenticity rather than true criminal actions. Shakur, B.I.G., and many other artists of the 1980's and 1990's were able to produce gangster rap while still describing social conditions that brought attention to the problems in predominantly African-American inhabited urban areas. Contrastingly, though, the usage of the gangster representation survived the turn of the 21st century while the societal issue focus began to fade.

Effects of Hip-Hop on Crime in Youth.

In an interesting study about the effect of hip-hop music on students of different race, Tanner, Asbridge, and Wortley (2009) examined the relationship between hip-hop music and students' likelihood to engage in cultures of crime and understand social injustices. The pool of 3, 393 students comes from a high school in Toronto, Canada. While this research did not take place in the U.S., Toronto is located on the Canadian and American border and the research conducted is relevant to similar phenomena here in the U.S. In the Tanner et al. (2009) study, nearly 3,400 students were given questionnaires about their sociodemographic, socioeconomic status, and school related measures (i.e. skipping school, getting straight A's, and participating in juvenile violent or property crimes) in relation to their being an "Urban Music Enthusiast." While there were many results to the study to indicate a relationship between race, juvenile crime, and hip-hop music, one of the results is particularly fascinating. At first, it seems like the claims of

many hip-hop critics that hip-hop music may be related to causing crime are true. Tanner et al. (2009) states that based on the experiment, individuals that commit property crime and violent crime are more likely to be hip-hop listeners. However, when coding for race specifically, committing violent crime or property crime is strongly correlated to an appreciation of hip-hop music by white and Asian youth only. For black youth, contrastingly, an appreciation for hip-hop music is most strongly correlated with feelings of social injustice (Tanner et al., 2009, p. 709).

The results from the Tanner et al. (2009) study are exemplary of the differing affects hip-hop music has on youth of multiple races and cultures. White youth may listen to hip-hop music and have an appreciation for it but, based on this study and I would argue in many other cases, do not have a true appreciation for the underlying meanings and social justice contexts. In this sense, when one does not associate with the true meanings of hip-hop, one may have a tendency to take the lyrics to be promoting a culture of crime which could, in turn, lead to more involvement in criminal activity. Black youth, alternatively, are raised in a culture where hip-hop has been a mechanism for understanding the social injustices that they have faced as a culture for decades. Additionally, black youth are able to critically think about the lyrics as representations of issues existing in their communities, not as promoting a criminal environment. The results that are provided in the Tanner et al. (2009) study cannot be understood to represent the entire population, but are extremely interesting from a sociological standpoint about the different potential racial and criminal contexts for hip-hop music.

In another study, Travis (2011) found that hip-hop is neither a fully depraved influence on youth behavior nor an agent for risky behavior. While crime appears in the music, hip-hop "interacts with other individual-level factors . . . potentially empowering . . . attitudes and behaviors" (Travis, 2011, p. 470). In this respect, Travis (2011) argues that youth select musical content that is relevant to their already existing ideas. Additionally hip-hop nurtures a pattern of socialization such as social activism, self-esteem, and forming individuality for youth (p. 470).

Hip-Hop Theory of Punishment.

Hip-hop not only discusses criminal activities, but also offers a perspective for fresh punitive reforms (Butler, 2004). Hip-hop is one of the most critical genres of the criminal justice system in America. As part of hip-hop culture, artists have discussed issues such as the societal stigmatization of criminals, overrepresentation of minorities in prison, and massive incarceration of the poor and underprivileged groups in urban areas. Such ideas promote bringing fairness to these injustices in the criminal justice system of the future. Butler (2004) argues that hip-hop has three core principles that form the basis for a theory of punishment (p. 999). First, those who commit harms, must be harmed somehow in return; second, criminals are still actual people who deserve love and respect despite their mistakes; third, criminal punishment can destroy communities, which is counterproductive to the purpose of punitive actions (Butler, 2004, p. 999). American culture focuses heavily on the committing of crimes and the punishment of those who commit such crimes, but offers little support for the reintegration of criminals to society and rebuilding of areas overrun by crime. Hip-hop offers a fresh perspective on these issues that suggests real changes for fixing the broken system.

Utilizing Violence in Hip-Hop Lyrics

While crime is a theme itself in hip-hop, literature on violent behavior in hip-hop music is so abundant that violence can be demarcated as a theme as well. Crime is a social construction meaning it can change depending on social norms at any time. Violence, however, is always an intentional and harmful human wrong. A focus on violent behavior and activities in hip-hop music can be attributed to the black rage discussed in McCann (2013) and the development of gangster rap in hip-hop culture. Violent lyrics have been used in hip-hop to create authenticity, threaten other competitive hip-hop artists, rebel against police oppression, and generally to express the types of violent behaviors that occur in poor, urban neighborhoods.

Many hip-hop listeners and critics have tended to focus on the genre's glorification of violent criminal activity, specifically in the gangster rap subgenre of hip-hop music. Richardson and Scott (2002) discuss how exposure to violent types of media, specifically hip-hop music, can potentially affect people's behavior. Additionally, Richardson and Scott (2002) argue that hip-hop music appeals to the masses so greatly that the violent lyrics appearing in the genre have "heightened politicians', parents', and scholars' concerns about the implications of the quality of entertainment images" consumed by American audiences, especially youth. While exposure to media violence alone has not been proven to cause antisocial behavior, researchers believe that children can be negatively influenced by references to violence in hip-hop music because they are still in the process of identity development. Moreover, American youth have been naturalized in a culture of violence which has contributed greatly to their social understanding of violence as an acceptable behavior.

Homicide.

As part of the violent culture that exists in America, homicide is more likely to occur in the U.S. than any other of the top 33 industrialized nations (Quandl, 2015). Statistics have also shown that American children are 12 times more likely to be killed with a gun than children in 25 other industrialized nations. Furthermore, African Americans aged 12-17 are most likely to be the victim of homicide (Richardson & Scott, 2002). Homicide, most often by use of firearm, is also one of the most popular concepts of rap music. Rappers have continuously produced lyrics with homicide as a central theme (Hunnicutt, 2009, p.620). The inclusion of homicide in hip-hop lyrics expresses the violent nature that everyday African-American citizens experience in a normalized way, (Hunnicutt, 2009).

In a content analysis of 103 songs, Hunnicutt (2009) coded for content in hip-hop songs relating to the glorification of murder, homicide as a context for social change, and hip-hop artists use of threatening murder as a confirmation of authenticity. The results of the lyrical analysis showed that, in many cases, homicide in hip-hop is representative of issues relating to the power differentials between classes in American society as well as costs to the community (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 620). Based on these results, violent representations in hip-hop can contribute to a negative impact on youth who do not understand the broader context of hip-hop music, but are intended to advocate for change to America's violent society. Otherwise, homicide is used to claim authenticity as a rapper who will “kill off” all of the other competition, metaphorically or even sometimes legitimately. In these cases, the use of homicide in hip-hop music is counter-intuitive to the purpose of the socio-political hip-hop movement towards change in American culture.

Nonetheless, the use of homicide to confirm authenticity has continued to grow in popularity as a hip-hop mechanism (Hunnicutt, 2009). As a result, critics have continued to claim that the use of violence in hip-hop music contributes to violent behaviors in its audiences.

Education.

Alternatively to the critics who claim that all violent hip-hop music influences listeners to react in the same ways, Richardson (2011) discusses how Kanye West has symbolically used violence in his compositions to represent broader issues within the education system in America. Richardson (2011) claims that West, among other artists such as Dead Prez, Jay-Z, and Boogie Down Production, "uses school and its imagery to talk about the ways dominant worldviews are imposed as universal truths that exclude [African-American youths] experiences" (p. 101). In his album *College Dropout*, West presents lyrics about issues such as the abuses by faculty and the growing amount of out-of-touch students that cannot connect with material. As a result of these instances, West would suggest, violence or outrage against the oppressive system may be acceptable in order to affect change. Kanye West has consistently been a hyper-socially aware artist that produces music relating to existing issues for African-Americans.

Changing Images of Violence.

While some artists have maintained a sociological and criminological perspective for their implementation of violence in hip-hop music, researchers have become aware that hip-hop itself has begun to change over the course of its existence. Therefore, images of violence have also changed within the production of the music. Another analytical study available in the literature is Herd (2009) whom discusses how violent images in

hip-hop lyrics have changed from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s (p. 395). The research included a content analysis of 340 songs over the course of 18 years. Herd (2009) research results indicate that there was a substantial increase in violent content in hip-hop music over this time period, specifically from 27%-60% (Herd, 2009, p. 399). More interesting though, is how the appearance of violent content changed over this period of time. At the start of the hip-hop genre, little content in hip-hop music existed about the use of violence as part of a gang culture. Gang violence increased significantly with the introduction of the gangster rap genre. Furthermore, references about drug violence also increased by almost 25% (Herd, 2009, p. 399). Lastly, the results showed that references to violence associated with social status more than tripled over this period of time (Herd, 2009, p. 400). These results are important to the theory of my thesis in particular by providing evidence that hip-hop music has actually evolved over the course of its existence as a reflection of the same changes occurring in American society.

Evolution of Hip-Hop Content

As addressed in Herd (2009), images of violence have begun to change in hip-hop music. Similarly, the other two themes—race and crime—have also undergone transformations as themes in the production of hip-hop music. (Butler, 2004) discusses these changes as described in the Washington Post which claimed that hip-hop took on two separate faces. The Washington Post stated that "one [is the] conscious side where political, social and cultural issues are hashed out in verse [while] the other side is 'the bling-bling," which references the glamor associated with rap culture, misogynistic attitudes towards women, and living a rich lifestyle (p. 991). Over time hip-hop has undergone a series of changes that may be the product of the industry, commercialization

of hip-hop music for profit, shifting societal expectations, artists' attitudes, or a combination of all of this. In order to assess how hip-hop has changed, the potential causes of any changes that may have occurred, and what any of these changes may reflect about our society, the evolutionary progression of hip-hop inspired me to complete my own research.

Methods

Upon analyzing the existing research available in academia, I found that a lapsed period of investigation remains for the most recent decade, 2005-2014. Previous studies have included examinations of musical content from the mid-1970s until the early 2000s. In order to know where hip-hop stands as a genre today, I completed a research study into the dynamics of the last 10 years of hip-hop music. The first part of this research consisted of a quantitative content analysis of popular hip-hop songs from each year using the three primary themes discussed in this paper: race, crime, and violence. The second part of this research entailed qualitative interviews with criminology professionals, sociology professionals, and an artist who produces hip-hop as one of his many artistic capacities.

Content Analysis

The data collection method for the songs used for the analysis entailed selecting the top 10 songs from each year in the decade 2005-2014 using the "Hot Rap Songs" chart archive located on www.billboard.com. The chart's top 10 songs of each year are selected using a method designed by the web-site creators where each year's most popular rap songs are ranked by radio airplay audience impressions as measured by Nielsen Music. For the years 2005-2012, this method was used to provide the top ten

songs. However, the method changed between the years 2012 and 2013 to more accurately choose the songs that deserved the top ten spots. Rather than depending solely on airplay statistics, the Billboard began combining statistics based on sales data, streaming data, and airplay data. From 2012 forward, popular rap songs are ranked by radio airplay audience impressions as measured by Nielsen Music, sales data as compiled by Nielsen Music SoundScan, and streaming activity data from online music sources tracked by Nielsen Music.

The content analysis performed was designed to code for content relating to this project's three primary themes—race, crime, and violence—within each song. Each theme was further split into categories in order to perform a more in depth analysis of each theme. Race was split into the following categories: urban poverty, segregation, racial slang, and discrimination. Crime was split into the following categories: prison/jail, drugs, theft, and police. Violence was split into the following categories: women, gang, gun, murder, and general (robbery or assault).

While hip-hop music is naturally created with metaphors, similes, and constant comparisons alike, it is imperative to understand the true meanings behind hip-hop lyrics in order to interpret the purpose of a song. When I performed the content analysis, I had to incorporate a research method to allow me to correctly code for the underlying meanings in all of the hip-hop lyrics I was analyzing. I read every song's lyrics and annotations found on Genius.com which is a website designed for creating informative explanations of the meanings behind song lyrics. The annotators on Genius.com look at intertextual connections, background information on artists, and any other information that might help audiences understand lyrics. While many annotations can be produced by

any general site goer on Genius.com, most of the annotations are verified by the site overseers to be correct in meaning. For any lyrical annotations that were not validated, I followed up with research of my own online to confirm the true meaning of the lyrics.

The songs were coded not only for the appearance of each subject, but also for how many times each subject appeared within individual songs. For example, if urban poverty was discussed in four separate instances, it was coded four times for that song. The only instance in which a category was not coded for multiple times was if it appeared in the hook of the song. I coded for subjects appearing in the hook the first time, but any later appearance of a hook was not coded for because it was the same exact lyrics repeated.

Once the content analysis was completed, the raw values were converted to percentages of 100 and placed into tables. I also selected relevant lyrics from multiple songs over the period of the decade to demonstrate some of the purposes of this research.

Interviews

The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the professional knowledge available on the evolving genre of hip-hop. The basis for the project was to find 3-5 interviewees, depending on availability. Interviewees were asked respective questions about their background areas of expertise, overall understanding of hip-hop as an academic, sociological, and criminological mechanism, and their perspectives regarding themes of race, violence, and crime in order to connect a deeper purpose to the music.

The interviewees selected for my project were found by reaching out to academic sources made available on university websites and by reference from Professor Kishonna

Gray of the College of Justice and Safety at Eastern Kentucky University. The interviewees include Kevin Steinmetz, a Criminologist with the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at Kansas State University; Earl Wright II, a Sociologist and Professor in the Department of Africana Studies and the Department of Sociology at the University of Cincinnati; Kishonna Gray who is a Critical Media Scholar with a background in activism and social justice at Eastern Kentucky University; Charis Kubrin, a Professor of Criminology, Law, and Society at the University of California, Irvine; and Jabril Power who is a Philosophy Major at Eastern Kentucky University, an artist of multiple capacities, and an underground hip-hop, electronic, and experimental music creator from Louisville, Kentucky.

Results & Analysis

As discussed in the methodology, the purpose of completing primary research of the most recent decade is to use empirical data to corroborate my notion that hip-hop has changed as a genre, specifically on the popularized scale. I theorize that hip-hop no longer brings attention to social issues or advocates for social change in urban minority communities in comparison to decades past. Using the content analysis and personal interviews with each of my candidates, I analyzed the subjects that are discussed in modern day hip-hop and compared my empirical data to the overall feelings towards hip-hop and my selected themes by my interviewees. The first results that will be discussed consist of the empirical data collected from the hip-hop lyrical analysis. When utilizing the themes of race, crime, and violence, I found the following results:

Table 1
Total Appearance of Each Theme in 100 Songs from 2005-2014

Theme	Percentage of Appearance
Race	72%
Crime	55%
Violence	52%

I calculated the complete appearance of each theme by counting any song that coded for at least one of the sub-categories of each overall theme. For example, if a song lyric coded for racial slang, but none of the other sub-themes of race, it was still coded as containing content related to race. Each theme appeared in more than 50% of all songs in the pool of 100. Therefore, I claim that these themes do still play a significant role in the production of hip-hop music. As I theorized, race has the most prominent appearance in hip-hop music most likely because of its cultural connection to the African-American race. Crime and violence show similar ratings, both appearing in slightly more than half of the lyrics. The most important factor that I think may contribute to this finding is that the songs selected are also the most popularized, radio-oriented songs. I conjecture that incorporating criminal and violent content in music may contribute to a lesser market value for songs therefore artists who are attempting to become popularized do not use them as much. Additionally, as shown in the tables below, there has been a shift in the subjects appearing in hip-hop music.

Table 2
Race Theme Sub-Categories' Appearance in 100 Songs from 2005-2014

Racial Category	Percentage of Appearance
Segregation	5%
Discrimination	7%
Urban Poverty	32%
Racial Slang	62%

Upon completing the content analysis, I expected references to segregation to be lower than the other categories because segregation is not discussed in general as a societal issue as much today is it was 30-40 years ago. Despite that, I wanted to include it because segregation still exists in a way, though it is not enforced by the nation itself. African-Americans among many other minorities are socially pressured into communities remote from integration with predominantly white inhabited areas. Additionally, much of the desegregation movement that occurred during the 1970s focused on restructuring laws rather than actually assisting the African-American communities. Consequently, many African-Americans still live in segregated, impoverished areas because they do not have opportunities to escape. Nonetheless, it seems that popularized hip-hop music does not tend to focus on this subject as much.

Much is the same in the case of discrimination. It seems that a focus on discrimination in popularized hip-hop music has also disappeared. This could be because deep social subjects do not sell commercially as well or that discrimination is just not thought of as an important issue among hip-hop audiences. Regardless, I expected to see

more references to discrimination as it is one of the most inherent issues to the African-American experience.

Urban poverty received a much greater inclusion in hip-hop lyrics because of its ties to gangster rap. As discussed in Kubrin (2005), the street code is used in gangster rap to exhibit the lifestyle lived by many of the people in urban poverty areas. Urban poverty appeared in 32% of the song lyrics which is about what I expected to occur. In the lyrics used to describe the street code, many hip-hop artists use words like "block," "hood," "ghetto," and "street." These descriptors emphasize the precarious conditions of urban poverty usually in conjunction with what it takes to survive there. In an example of this type of gangster rap reference, Young Jeezy and Akon rap in the song "Soul Survivor":

> "If you lookin' for me I'll be on the block
> With my thang cocked, possibly sittin' on a drop (Now)
> Cause I'm a rider (Yeah)
> I'm just a Soul Survivor"

Akon says "I'll be on the block," which refers to waiting on one of the street corners of his neighborhood. While he's there, he has a gun in case anyone wants to mess with him while he's "sittin' on a drop," or holding a bag of drugs to deal. Afterwards, he states "I'm a soul survivor," meaning this is the type of lifestyle he is forced to live due to the conditions of urban poverty that he was born into. This is a reoccurring theme in many of the gangster rap songs.

Lastly, the most heavily referenced category in the racial theme is the controversial use of racial slang. In this category, I most often coded for racial slang for the use of the word "nigga." While nigga carries a derogatory connotation, hip-hop artists have utilized the word in a massive way that actually confuses audiences. Many critics of hip-hop music have claimed that using the word nigga detracts from the movement to end

discrimination. Alternatively, the purpose of incorporating racially derogatory terminology as an African-American is to remove the connotation associated with the word which was created by the original oppressors, and then re-establish its meaning for the oppressed group to take the sting away. In this context, African-Americans took the original word "nigger," which embraced the negative discriminatory connotation associated with it since the start of racial conflicts in America, and repurposed it as "nigga" by using it to refer to friends, family, groups of people, gangs, and even other competitors in the hip-hop world. Now, in hip-hop lyrics artists will say things like "my niggas," or my group of friends, to diminish the underlying original meaning. This has become a popular phenomenon among hip-hop artists, as evidenced by the 62% of its appearance in the 100 songs of my content analysis. Next is the data regarding crime.

Table 3
Crime Theme Sub-Categories' Appearance in 100 Songs from 2005-2014

Crime Category	Percentage of Appearance
Theft	7%
Police	11%
Prison/Jail	18%
Drugs	50%

While crime overall appears in about half of the songs in this analysis, the majority of its appearance can be contributed to drugs. The first crime I coded for, theft, appears in only 7% of the songs, mostly because it does not account for violent theft

references like robberies. In the instances in which it did appear, artists usually described stealing drugs or money from other competitive artists.

References to police appear in slightly more songs at 11%. When artists discuss the police they most often describe them negatively. In some cases, artists express blatant disgust for the discriminatory policing tactics that have been used in their communities. In other cases, the artists openly discuss their techniques for committing crimes while under the pressure of avoiding police to finish whatever illegal activity in which they are participating. I expected police references to amount to slightly more than 11% because of the underlying issues that still exist between the African-American community and police. African-Americans statistically face a much higher rate of negative contact with the correctional system therefore I thought this would be discussed slightly more in their lyrics.

In even more instances, the song lyrics suggested that jail or prison is closely tied to the lives of black people living in these conditions. Prison or jail discussion occurred in 18% of the songs selected which seems to be a decent amount for a time in which criminal activity is starting to decrease, decriminalization is making waves in politics, and prison reform issues are being recognized. Some artists bring attention to the likelihood that blacks will end up in some type of correctional facility. Furthermore, some artists discuss how the lifestyle that poor blacks have to live to survive leads them to a culture of crime that engulfs their lives. In T.I. and Justin Timberlake's song "Dead and Gone," T.I. raps:

> "Situation coulda been dead lookin' back at it
> Most of that shit didn't even have to happen
> But you don't think about it when you out there trappin'
> In apartments, hangin', smokin', and rappin'

Niggas start shit, next thing ya know we cappin'
Get locked up then, didn't even get mad
Now think about, damn what a life I had."

T.I. is discussing actual life events here that took place leading up to him going to prison. As he reflects, he realizes the lifestyle he engaged in is what eventually led to the death of one of his friends. When he says the "situation coulda been dead lookin' back at it," he realizes it took his friend dying and a trip to prison for him to understand that the actions he took until that time were unnecessary. Furthermore, he points out that people have difficulty being level headed about those types of things when they grow up accustomed to "trappin', hangin', smokin', and rappin'." Thus, when a situation escalates for him, like many others, it is natural to resort to "cappin'" or shooting guns at one another. Afterwards, he spends time in prison, which is not unlikely for many young black men living in urban poverty. Luckily, he found success in the hip-hop industry allowing him to recover from his incidents and make a better life for himself, but for millions of others, the situation is not the same.

Nearly 2 million people here in the USA are affiliated with the correctional system in some shape or form. Additionally, African-American's are disproportionately in prison for crimes that are committed at the same rate by Caucasian citizens. The prison system has also been criticized for its inability to rehabilitate criminals which has caused an overwhelming amount of recidivism here in America. It’s no surprise that references to jail and prison in hip-hop music are prevalent, at least in comparison to other genres of music. Prison and jail, as described in T.I. songs, become unsurprising to people living in poor areas and hip-hop music is still bringing attention to that.

Lastly, affiliation with drugs accounts for the largest percentage of criminal content that appeared in the analysis at 50%. When coding for drugs initially, I naively only searched for the actual drug names. After a couple of songs into my analysis though, I quickly realized there are a variety of hidden encoded references to drugs of which I am not aware. Upon using Genius.com to break down the annotations of the lyrics, I learned about several street names for drugs that are not well known to the general radio audience. For instance, liquid codeine can be referred to as slizzard, sizzurp, drank, purple, pink, syrup, and multiple other nicknames. Codeine is probably the most popular drug discussed in the totality of the content. Other references are mostly to marijuana and crack/cocaine. When discussing drugs, artists usually mention using Codeine when they in the context of partying or going to a club. Crack, cocaine, and marijuana were most often discussed in terms of producing and dealing in the urban streets. Artists claim to stand on the "block" or street corners, usually equipped with guns and other gang members, to make drug deals with people in their neighborhood. Some artists discussed dealing marijuana, but in many songs marijuana is more of a drug associated with hanging out with friends or partying.

I believe there are multiple reasons for the insistent inclusion of drugs as part of the production of popularized hip-hop music within the last decade. One of the most important factors contributing to the overwhelming description of the production, dealing, and consumption of drugs is our nation's failing effort to wage the war on drugs 20-30 years ago. As a result of the war on drugs, drug use has not diminished and imprisonment of citizens has skyrocketed. Even as more drug users and producers have

gone to prison, once released, many resort to reusing because little to no rehabilitative processes exist to ensure that they are completely independent from their drug addiction.

Artists readily rap about drug use and production because drugs are a prevalent mechanism by which people living in urban areas make money. When few jobs, resources, or other activities exist, producing and selling drugs is a quick and relatively easy way to make money. Additionally, drugs have become so inherent to the function of poor urban communities that a culture of drug induced criminal activity persists that many people cannot escape. In the songs I assessed for my content analysis, artists most often discuss the dangerousness of dealing drugs in the urban streets, but they always treat the benefit of making money and growing their business to be more important than any of the risks associated with getting caught or harmed. They also rap about drugs in an almost nonchalant way, similar to how non-drug using people may refer to normal everyday activities. To me, this speaks volumes about the position our nation is in for the fight against drug use—regardless of what the system does, it will continue to happen and become more normalized. Last is the results on violence in hip-hop lyrics.

Table 4
Violence Theme Sub-Categories' Appearance in 100 Songs from 2005-2014

Violence Category	Percentage of Appearance
Women	7%
Gang	19%
Murder	23%
General (Assault/Robbery)	25%
Gun	42%

In this section, I will define violence as an intentional act of harm against a body or person for the purpose and intent of hurting that person. In my research I coded for multiple types of violence, shown in table 4. The first, and smallest, category is violence against women. Violence toward women only appeared rarely in some of the lyrics and usually pertained to the ending of an unhealthy relationship between the artist's persona in the song and some woman he previously dated. In only a very small 1-2% of the songs, artist's lyrics actually promoted general violence of women such as drugging and raping them or beating them for any reasons. I predicted that this number would be only slightly higher than what it is because popularized hip-hop tends to be classified as more misogynistic towards women but I was impressed to find however that it was not as common. I do think discussing violence against women on such an open platform as radio music would not pan over well with a growing feminist American audience but such a small percentage could be attributed to many other reasons as well.

Gang violence appears in 18% of the song lyrics which seems to make sense to me in comparison to the amount of gang violence that has occurred in America in the last decade. Gangs still persist as an issue today but do not seem to be as prominent as they were in the 1980s and 1990s when gang participation increased heavily. While statistics on the comparison of gang violence existing today and when it first emerged are difficult to find, we know that violent crime has been decreasing for close to 20 years. According to FBI crime statistics from the 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment report, "gangs are responsible for an average of 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions," (FBI, 2011). I would conjecture that based on the overall reduction in violence, then, gang violence has also reduced nationwide. This might be a potential reasoning why gang

violence only appears in 18% of the song lyrics in my analysis. Furthermore, I found less coding for gangs toward the end of the most recent decade, 2013-2014, than I did at the beginning. While I cannot prove causation, it is an interesting correlation nonetheless.

Murder is the next subcategory listed in table 4, appearing in 23% of the song lyrics. Murder is actually accounted for more than it probably should be in lyrics. It seems that hip-hop artists use murder as a tool to diminish their competition in the hip-hop world. Artists threaten to "kill" or "end" the competition, most often by means of guns. In other cases, artists discuss killing for the sake of their drug deal businesses, to build authenticity, and as a mechanism of gang life. In the song "Hate It or Love It" rapper Game discusses his rags to riches lifestyle where he was able to rise from the bottom of the socioeconomic totem pole and become rich against the odds. In the song he raps:

> "I'm from Compton, wear the wrong colors, be cautious
> One phone call I'll have your body dumped in Marcy
> I stay strapped like car seats, been banging
> Since my lil' nigga Rob got killed for his Barkleys."

Here, Game describes the conditions existing in Compton, his home city. He illustrates how predominant gangs are in his neighborhood, so much so that if you wear the wrong colors, you'll end up dead. Not only does he find it necessary to take precaution in his clothing choices, but he chooses to stay "strapped like car seats," meaning he possesses a gun on his person at all times. He claims that he has felt it necessary to do so since his friend was killed for a pair of shoes. In this context, murder may not account for a large percentage of crime in American society, but does not seem like a farfetched occurrence for those living in areas similar to the one described in Game's lyrics. Murder, for this reason, may be a more apparent feature of hip-hop music

lyrics because it is also a more apparent incidence in the poor city areas that are often portrayed in hip-hop songs.

General violence appears in the lyrics close to the same as murder, right at 25%. Robberies and assaults are used in much the same manner as murder is, which is to describe conditions relating to authenticity, cutting down the competition, and protecting drug activities. Lyrics detail violent assaults mostly of other hip-hop artists and rarely any random or non-hip-hop affiliated person. It seems that most general references to violence are artificial rather than actually a genuine violent attempt against another person.

Most frequently in the lyrics, artists refer to their usage of guns as mechanisms of protection and power. Guns for the purpose of violence appear in 42% of the songs in this analysis. The majority of songs include references to guns to also discuss drugs, murder, and gang violence. Similar to the situation for codeine, I naively believed I knew the proper terminology for coding guns which can be referred to in numerous ways of which are unheard of to me. Other names for guns may include glock, heat, nina, gat, AK, strap, chopper, piece, rosco, cap, and countless others. After using the annotations and some other common hip-hop lingo websites, I learned that a gun may be described in hundreds of ways. The variety of names, usages, and descriptors that exist for guns in hip-hop lyrics seems to attest to the importance of guns in urban lifestyle. Even more so, guns are intrinsic to American values, as per the second amendment, and have always represented masculine embodiment of power. It is not surprising then that gun violence appears in almost half of all the lyrics in my analysis.

Overall, based on the empirical data from the content analysis, it seems that the three themes of hip-hop music have stayed generally relevant to the creation of hip-hop music. Despite the perpetuation of the same types of themes though, I feel that the artists participating in the genre have taken a more artificial, non-critical avenue to producing their lyrics, at least on the popularized scale. The highest percentages of each theme were in the categories racial slang for race, drugs for crime, and guns for violence. Each of these is a more artificial subject which does little for the significance of promoting social change for the African-American situation of which hip-hop used to focus on much more. One of the greatest remaining questions now is how professionals in the fields relevant to this area feel and understand the changes, or lack thereof, that are occurring within the genre.

Interviews

After conducting interviews with multiple professionals in fields such as sociology, criminology, digital media, activism, social justice, music, art, and philosophy, I found that the perspectives on hip-hop as a sociological and criminological mechanism vary widely. Some of the professionals agreed wholeheartedly on certain aspects of hip-hop's evolutionary pathways, while others felt that the genre is in no form the same as it was previously.

My first interview took place with Kevin Steinmetz of Kansas State University and his perspective matched invariably to his background of study in sociology and criminology. At the start of the interview, I asked Dr. Steinmetz where his interest in hip-hop came from along with his feelings toward the music.

A: I've always had an appreciation for it as an art form but I've never really been a big fan. I'm more of a rock and roll kind of person. I started to respect it more during my study in 2011 as a doctoral student. Now, I don't listen to the radio music because I dislike the popularized versions of hip-hop. I mostly listen to Tupac, Common, and other Black Nationalist or Africanist focused music.

Dr. Steinmetz prefers the less commercialized forms of hip-hop because they tend to focus on more complex subjects. I later asked how he felt regarding the evolution of the genre as a whole since it originated. He explained to me that the inclusion of political and social messages was not the original thought process of the artists that produced the early blueprints of what became hip-hop music.

A. When it first emerged in the ghettos in New York, it was predominantly a form of music that combined Jamaican spoken word and the use of old sound equipment known as turntables. Later, it became its own type of music with political meaning which has been persistent. In the early 1990s it began coinciding with urban gentrification, the ghetto life, and the rise of the criminal justice system. After that, gangsta rap emerged which was confrontational…in your face type of music. It actually became almost two types of hip-hop music, one was the confrontational music and the other was still the political. Later, it was taken and sold to white suburban kids by talking about money, girls, drugs and the message started to change. It still had resistance tied to it, but it fed into the mainstream.

Dr. Steinmetz's point of view seems to tie well with the results found in both my review of existing academic knowledge and the data that resulted from my own empirical

studies. The music picked up the political purpose as societal issues grew in urban areas for minority people and hip-hop became a way of expressing those problems. Afterward, he thinks the commercialization and the production of high grossing companies that began to manufacture the music for profit influenced the shift in the genre.

It was Dr. Steinmetz's suggestion that there has been a potential separation of types of hip-hop music that inspired me to start researching those types of topics. I came across an article titled "The Damnation of Hip Hop: A Critique of Hip Hop through the Lens of W. E. B. Du Bois" of which one of the authors, Earl Wright II, is a professor at the University of Cincinnati. Upon reading through the piece, Wright, along with the other authors Clarence Gordon and Andonnia Maiben, argued that from the perspective of renowned sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, hip-hop music has completely demarcated from its counterpart: rap music. In the article, the authors claim "the intrusion of economic forces in the development of hip-hop has led to the creation of a new threat of art—rap music" (Clarence, Maiben, & Wright 2010, p. 66). I decided to ask Dr. Wright for an interview to understand his feelings toward hip-hop's purposes and evolution.

Q: Do you feel hip-hop has changed, if so in what ways? Better or Worse?

A: In general, there is a lack of diversity. Going back to my college years, you had comedic rap, militant rap like Public Enemy, gangsta rap, there was a greater level of diversity all around. I like the socially conscious style of music and there was greater diversity of that back then with MC Lyte, Queen Latifa, X Clan, Public Enemy, Dead Prez, Most Def, Talib Kweli, and Tupac. Now, you just have only one or two rap companies; it's a cookie cutter model just to make money.

Q: Is hip-hop "dead" as some have said?

A: I'll equate it to something from when I was younger—when you first had the missing children on milk cartons. I wouldn't say hip-hop is dead; I would say it's gone missing. You have to go searching for it. Rap music though, is just regurgitating what is already out there.

Afterwards, I spoke to Dr. Wright about the prevalence of my three themes, race, crime and violence, and how they have played a role in the lyricism of hip-hop music.

Q: Are these themes still as prominent today as they were when hip-hop emerged?

A: When it first started, those themes weren't prominent. They became prominent in the early 1990s, reaching a climax around the Tupac and Biggie era. The discussion of violence today isn't as heightened. Race was discussed more in an intelligent fashion earlier in the genre's creation. People now resort to claims like "white people are bad" whereas earlier the social structure was more prominent in the music.

Lastly Dr. Wright left me with what I feel was an important note.

A: Hip-hop artists are not allowing themselves to evolve as artists; they're not evolving at all at this point. If you don't evolve, you'll fade away quickly. The financial strain is so strong that they would rather stay where they are instead of going in to the deeper subjects.

I think much the same can be said about the genre. As the artists feed in to the same things that all other artists are focusing on, there is no room for development, no room for change, and no room to discuss the real, important issues that were previously so imperative to the genre.

After two interviews with professionals of mostly sociological background, I reached out to a local professor and activist at Eastern Kentucky University. Kishonna Gray, who has been a researcher on the subjects relevant to my project for 10 years as well as a lifelong fan and follower of hip-hop, spoke with me about her ability to see the broader connections between justice and hip-hop. She particularly enjoys hip-hop not only recreationally, but as a classroom tool for its means to empower people. While the first two interviews focused mostly on the deterioration of the hip-hop genre, Dr. Gray shed light on how conscious hip-hop artists still exist today and are still producing much the same creative, socially active music. She shows an appreciation for all types of hip-hop.

Q: Do you listen to hip-hop, if so what subgenres?

A: I listen mainly to conscious hip-hop, I am entertained by pop-hop (radio hip-hop), poetry slam stuff is cool. And I even try to write some myself. I hate applying the labels because these labels are not generated by the artists but rather the industry. But I love backpack rappers.

I think it is important that Dr. Gray brings up the industry here. While at the start of this project I felt that the content itself was to blame for changing, I have learned from Dr. Gray's interview, among the others, that the industry has been largely responsible for changing hip-hop's production.

Q: Has the production of the music changed or the actual content?

A: Of course production has changed. It's gone digital. It's easier to make beats. Easier to produce. Easier to get music out there. The content from the conscious stuff hasn't changed. NWA was singing about police violence and brutality in the

> early 90's, Kendrick Lamar and Cole are rapping about that now. So content hasn't changed because the conditions within the hood haven't changed. And just as you had Pop Hop of the 80's in Sugarhill gang you have Pop Hop in Fetty Wap, Soulja Boy, and others. While the lyrical content may not be there, there is still a place for them because hip hop reflects everyone in the community. They shouldn't be devalued or diminished just because they are rapping about conscious issues. The problem is that the industry doesn't value it and they get no radio play. They don't put that out there as something people should consume. They want people to consume the silly lyrics. I do think this is changing some. The success of J Cole and others made the industry realize that hey, this conscious stuff will sell. And J Cole has mastered it along with Kanye, Drake, and others. You blend it with other stuff and it's easier to consume.

I think the points Dr. Gray makes are important to the overall purpose hip-hop is still providing in music. Commercialization in the industry itself has forced a product that sells but may not be as conscious. Consequently, artists like Fetty Wap, Soulja Boy, and what she terms "pop-hop" creators are in demand for the hip-hop industry because of their ability to sell. Despite this occurrence though, Dr. Gray points out that there are many widely known and accepted artists that have creatively found a way to incorporate the socially conscious content that discusses the issues she says are still prevalent in the areas from which hip-hop started, while still packaging it in a way that sells to the popularized spectrum.

She also discussed the way in which the major themes have played a role in the development of the music and have contributed to the continuation of social justice discussion in hip-hop music.

Q: How do these themes play a role in hip-hop production?

A: I think these themes are vital to hip hop. As I stated earlier a major theme within hip hop is to talk about violence, crime, and race. Some of the first lyrics that a young person may write are about their hood and upbringing. Some artists retell the story of others that they know. Yes, you can talk about other things, but these are some of the main themes that get discussed.

Q: Does all hip-hop revolve around these themes?

A: No not at all. Hip-hop storytelling is vast, intricate, and diverse. Artists have the freedom to talk about what they want. Would I like to see a focus on critical issues within poor and marginalized communities? Absolutely. But that's not a requirement. A person's story is their story. I do think the topic of misogyny is problematic. The apparent dislike of women and sexual minorities must be challenged whenever possible.

As with any artistic form, Dr. Gray emphasizes that the creators have the ability to lyricize whatever they like which is why art is so diverse. She recognizes the importance of the major themes as part of hip-hop at its core, but also points out that many other things have become a part of hip-hop that are undeniably imperative to the diversification of the genre. I would also like to add to this that while artists do have the ability to create hip-hop in any form and with any content that they like, many have started regurgitating the same things, as Dr. Wright discussed earlier. Many artists in the mainstream repeat,

repackage, and resell the same things as other artists which has caused a decrease in the diversity of hip-hop as a genre. This is why I feel that Dr. Wright's point of view that hip-hop is lost, or has become separated from its rap counterpart, makes sense. Rap is hip-hop, but it is an evolved, *transforme*d version of hip-hop.

The last academic professional that I interviewed, Dr. Charis Kubrin, works as a professor of criminology, law, and society, in California. I find her interview to be of value to my personal research experience because of my connection to her as a white woman with interest in a topic predominantly produced and discussed by African-American men. As we were speaking, and when I read one of her pieces, we found that we shared the same experience and the same issues with being taken seriously when completing our research. Nevertheless, Dr. Kubrin overcame the doubts of her colleagues and completed a massive content analysis of more than 400 rap songs she selected in order to create empirical data on hip-hop as a social tool. She produced data on the discussion of the street code in gangster rap music that, at the time, was mostly non-existent in the academic literature. During our interview, she attested to the importance of using empirical data to produce legitimate conclusions.

Q: Do you feel hip-hop has changed, if so in what ways? Better or worse?

A: My impression is that it has. See this is why the research that you are doing is important. What does the empirical data tell us? Has it officially changed? My hypothesis is that it has, because of the commercialization. Even conscious artists like Jay-Z acknowledges that it's a business. Rappers aren't just doing rap anymore, they're in movies, selling headphones. It's a whole bigger industry.

A: Has the production of the music changed or the actual content?

Q: I think that it is all of it. What shapes the music is not just what the audience wants, but what's happening in society at the time and what the music industry wants.

Her point here is important to my overall theory that hip-hop has evolved to reflect what is going on in society. As hip-hop becomes superficial, greed-focused, commercialized, or as I would like to call it "cookie-cutter," this could be a mirror image of what has become of American society. We popularize the superficiality, the commercialization because it is what we are living in.

Later I started to discuss the appearance of the themes in the music and what her perspective was on their importance to the overall production of the music. At first she seemed to disagree that those were the most prominent focuses of hip-hop music, but she later discussed how rap and hip-hop probably should not be used interchangeably because of their different aspects. I brought up the conversation I held with Dr. Wright regarding the demarcation of the genres and she seemed to disagree to an extent.

Q: Does all hip-hop revolve around these themes?

A: Hip-hop is focused on race, violence, and crime, but focuses on other things such as tongue and cheek and fun music. We probably shouldn't use rap and hip-hop interchangeably. But I don't know that there is an exact method for differentiating between the two. I want to challenge the assumption that there is only one kind of rap. There are multiple. It's messiness, on what you call rap and hip-hop. I also think it's very challenging to separate all of these themes. I don't think there's a neat way of defining it all. Rap to me is what's being produced in most part right now. Hip-hop is more about the culture itself. Hip-hop is more of

an old term that captures the emergence of the breakdancing, the DJs, and the graffiti.

It seems that while Dr. Kubrin prefers not to draw lines between subgenres or to demarcate rap and hip-hop as two separate genres, she still agrees that something has changed over time. She also seems to recognize that rap and hip-hop are not interchangeable, but they are both still part of an overall entity. I appreciate and agree with her discussion of rap remaining a part of hip-hop because, regardless of how far rap may evolve from its hip-hop origins, it still has remnants and connections to hip-hop culture.

My final interview took place with an upcoming music artist from Louisville Kentucky. Jabril Power is a philosophy major at Eastern Kentucky University but has already delved into his artistic ability by becoming an author of a self-help book, a public speaker, an activist, a visionary, and a music creator. With a lifetime of experience in artistic creativity, Power started writing lyrics in 2nd grade. His father is a comic book artist and his mother sings, so his current aspirations to be involved in art are heavily influenced by his familial background.

I also spoke to Power about his musical influence. When asked what artists inspired his interest to get involved with music, he named off numerous surprising musicians such as Adele, Lorde, Rod Sterling, and, in his own words, anyone who is trying to be creative. While Power may not have the professional research understanding of hip-hop's origins, he provided ample knowledge on hip-hop's influence and impact on his life and on all lives culturally.

Q: What are your opinions about the music?

A: I love hip-hop. It's one of the most important art forms today. It incorporates everything that can be said and done about art. It's interesting because there are four distinct parts to it, the breakdancing, MC-ing, turn-tabling, and the graffiti art. Those elements cover all aspects of art. It's also impactful on my personal life. It came from struggle and hardship. But I don't connect as well with it today because it's commercialized; people are not solidified in the genre. I have my problems with it because it's become a superpower industry. People just want to rap because they don't have anything to do and that's not what it's supposed to be about.

Q: Do you listen to hip-hop now? If so, what subgenres?

A: Well there's only one genre and that's just hip-hop. Whether you are from Japan, New York, or Kentucky, it's still hip-hop. But I like stuff that is creative and that challenges what the norms are. I like Kanye West because he does that but also still kind of plays to the commercial Industry. I don't really think there is an underground hip-hop. There is either the commercial hip-hop, or the non-commercial stuff. That stuff is more technical, poetic, and just creative. The commercial stuff is so exploited; I can't relate to it.

It is fascinating to see the perspective of an up and coming musician who has interests in the hip-hop genre but does not connect with the commercial aspect. In my experience, I so often hear about the upcoming artists who want the money, the girls, the rich and famous lifestyle, that I forget hip-hop is still an art form. Power brought that perspective to my project. His discussion of hip-hop's ability to cover all aspects of art

when it is utilized the way it was intended to, describes flawlessly how hip-hop can serve as a powerful social tool.

Conclusions and Future Study

Hip-hop is one of the most influential social mechanisms in our nation's history. Though many critics have suggested that hip-hop inspires criminal behavior, racial tensions, and violence as an instrument of control, a deeper assessment of the genre and literature available shows that it has promising impacts. Hip-hop has brought attention to social issues such as the oppression of minority groups consistently in American history, the flawed criminal justice system that emerged from the war on drugs and prison industrial complex in the 1980s and 1990s, and the empowerment of youth to understand the past, present, and future of social politics in America. Though hip-hop has had a long track of focusing on these imperative social justice issues, it has undergone change over its short 40 years of existence.

At the start of this research project, I hypothesized that hip-hop has changed over time to reflect ongoing social issues of each time period since its origin. While it is senile to draw direct conclusions, it seems that hip-hop has undeniably transformed over the last 40 years. In the period of my research alone, hip-hop seems to have evolved in just the last 10 years. By evidence of both the content analysis of popular songs and the five professional interviews, hip-hop has transformed from the more socially and politically conscious genre that it was in the 1980s and 1990s, to a commercialized industry with superficial lyrics regarding money, fame, and the rich lifestyle.

I do not believe that the genre has completely changed from one or the other, nor do I truly know if we can deduce that hip-hop has demarcated from a separate entity-rap,

but the evidence that changes have occurred is clear. Despite these changes, there are still artists in the hip-hop discussion that are being creative, as Jabril Power suggested, and bringing justice to the political and social side of the movement. As Dr. Gray said, though, there is an appreciation and a place for all forms of hip-hop because they are derived from the broader context of hip-hop itself. All serve purposes socially, politically, and culturally to bring attention to the racial, criminal, and violent issues existing in American society.

In a future study, I would like to analyze the lyrics of underground artists' music in order to make comparisons to the content I previously assessed from the popularized music. I think this will assist in making stronger connections to the hip-hop versus rap argument that became so prominently a part of this research. While I feel that the results of this study are strong predictors of hip-hop's position as a musical genre right now, I think this further study would bring much more value to the results.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

The following interview guide was used to conduct the professional interviews, as approved by the IRB at Eastern Kentucky University.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of these interviews is to gain an understanding of the professional knowledge available on the evolving genre of hip-hop. Depending on the availability of interviewees, 3-5 people will participate. Interviewees will be asked respective questions regarding themes of race, violence, and crime in order to connect a deeper purpose to the music. The overall thesis of this project is that overarching themes of race, violence, and crime throughout the history of hip-hop music can provide societal implications of each subsequent time period since its origination in the 1970's. Additionally, research regarding the last 10 years, 2005-2015, has been fairly slim. Therefore, this project will also look to analyze the most recent decade of hip-hop music in order to make comparisons to previous decades of hip-hop music. In the process of investigation, I hope to find deeper meanings behind the hip-hop movement that may actually provide resolutions to social and criminal justice issues of modern day.

Potential Interviewees

- Professors
- Musicians
- Researchers of topic

Question Sections

The following question sections are for a general overview of the questions that will actually be asked in the interview.

A. Background information
    a. Name
    b. City/Area of origin
    c. Job Title
    d. Years of study/research
    e. Interest in topic
B. Professional experience
    a. How is their knowledge relevant to topic?
    b. What research have they done?
    c. Have they participated in any projects?
    d. Have they published any books, journals, magazines, etc.?
C. Topical questions
    a. General questions about hip-hop as a genre of music
        i. What are their opinions about the music?
        ii. Do they listen to it? If so, what subgenres?
        iii. Do they prefer older hip-hop or newer hip-hop?

b. Hip-hop evolution
    i. Do they feel hip-hop has changed, if so in what ways? Better or worse?
    ii. Has the production of the music changed or the actual content?
    iii. Do they feel like it was meant to accomplish something?
    iv. Did it ever accomplish anything, or is it still accomplishing something?
    v. What meanings do they think have been behind the production of hip-hop?
    vi. Is hip-hop "dead" as some have said?

c. Thematic questions: Race, violence, crime
    i. How do these themes play a role in hip-hop production?
    ii. Does all hip-hop revolve around these themes?
    iii. Of all 3 themes, which is the most prominent to them? Why?
    iv. Are these themes still as prominent in today's music as 30 years ago?
    v. Why these themes and not others?

D. Any additional comments