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Hip-Hop
Beyond Beats & Rhymes

Transcript

INTRODUCTION

BYRON HURT: One thing I really want to say, and I want to make this very clear to all my viewers out there. I love hip-hop. I grew up with Big Daddy Kane, The Jungle Brothers, Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, Kwame, whoever you want to talk about in hip hop. I listened to their music. I partied to their music. I listen to hip-hop to this day. I sometimes feel bad for criticizing hip-hop, but I guess what I'm trying to do is to get us men to just take a hard look at ourselves. We're like in this box. In order to be in that box, you have to be strong. You have to be tough. You have to have a lot of girls. You got to have money. You got to be a player or a pimp. You know, you got to be in control. You have to dominate other men, other people. If you aren't any of those things, then people call you soft, or weak, or pussy, or chump, or faggot. And nobody wants to be any of those things, so everybody stays inside the box. I heard Suge Knight say one time that hip-hop is a man's game. And it is.

PERSON #1: Before hip-hop, men were seeming in R&B, they was like very docile. You know what I mean? But when hip-hop came around, it brought masculinity back into the game. Now some of it is a little misguided.

PERSON #2: One second we're killing each other, and the next minute we're pimping hoes. We're doing everything wrong. That's bananas.

PERSON #3: Through rap music, I think there is an identification with some of the most stereotypical masculine standards.

CONRAD TILLARD: Every black man that goes in the studio, he's always got two people in his head: him, in terms of who he really is, and the thug that he feels he has to project. It's a prison for us. It's a prison that we're in.

BUSTA RHYMES: Yo, I'm this, I'm that, I'm totin' it. You know you ain't doing jack shit. But at the end of the day, you know you could make somebody believe that you are, it can be profitable.

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FEMALE: I jokingly say that I am in recovery from hip-hop. It's like being in a domestic violence situation. Your home is hip-hop and your man beats you.

BIZZAR (from D12): We ain't all about smacking bitches and smacking hoes, but we will smack a bitch and smack a ho. Yeah!

FAT JOE: We the kings. We the kings, man. We the kings of this.

BROADCASTER: Byron Hurt, the throw. He's under pressure. He's gonna run. He's gonna throw. In the end zone. Complete!

BYRON HURT: One of the best things I've ever been able to do in my life was to throw a football. I was nice with mine. Before games I would listen to hip-hop to get psyched up. LL Cool J's "Mama Said Knock You Out" usually got me ready to play. I grew up like a typical boy in America. I was a star high school and college quarterback, a ladies' man, and a cue dog who listened and partied to a whole lot of hip-hop, without really questioning the lyrics I was listening to. Rap music's lyrics and images fell right in line with my masculine identity. I was that guy. That's who I was. And then my whole life changed. When I graduated from college, I was hired by Northeastern University's Sport in Society to educate young men about men's violence against women. They figured boys and men would listen to an ex-jock like me.

[Byron to class] When I was your age, nobody came into my high school and talked to me about men's violence against women, especially men.

BYRON HURT: When I first started doing it, I didn't really know much about gender issues, anything like that. I was totally intimidated and totally unaware about what I could do as a man to change any of that stuff. But I started learning a whole lot about masculinity, and I became very introspective about my own self as a man. Every time I do a discussion or group, rap music always comes up. People say, what about hip-hop? Hip-hop is so violent. Hip-hop is so misogynistic. Hip-hop is always bashing gays and whatever. And I would always defend hip-hop. But the more I grew and the more I learned about sexism and violence and homophobia, the more those lyrics became unacceptable to me. And I began to become very conflicted about the music that I loved. One day I was sitting home at the crib watching music videos. And I was seeing video after video after video of rappers posing and posturing, throwing money at the camera, mad women around them dancing. And I was like yo, I need to do a film that breaks all of this stuff down. So I raised money, bought a video camera, hired a film crew, and began my journey to examine the representations of manhood in hip-hop culture.

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EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE HARD

BYRON HURT: My first stop was Daytona Beach, Florida at BET's annual "Spring Bling" weekend. Young hip-hop fans from all over the country were here to hang out and watch their favorite rap artists perform. I had a different agenda. I was here looking for young men and women to talk to about how the way manhood is displayed in hip-hop culture. I felt like I was in the middle of a real live music video. On my first day here, I ran into these aspiring rap artists.

ASPIRING RAPPER: Let me get next. Representing the All Stars out of Saint Louis, yo. [Rapping] When it's time to go to war I come equipped with the gauge and the tech infect flesh like a syphilis plague in case a Nicolas Cage wanna take it for granted try to face off get tooken off the face of the planet.

RAPPER 2: [Rapping] Look prick, you ain't never bust a nine before you dicks turn into pussies when it's time for war.

RAPPER 3: [Rapping] When the shells hit they body I show 'em who that bastard be ask my down as niggas will you blast for me.

RAPPER 4: Keep talkin' 'bout your guns how you kill dudes for practice. Lyin' only thing you ever popped was aspirins.

BYRON HURT: All they seemed to rhyme about was gunplay, killing other men, being tough and invulnerable, feminizing other men, and putting fear into another man's heart. Why are so many rappers preoccupied with violence and gunplay?

NAS: (singing) Woke up this morning. You got yourself a gun. Got yourself a gun.

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson: When you think about American society, the notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity. The preoccupation with Jesse James and the outlaw, the rebel, much of that is associated in the American mindset, the collective imagination of the nation, with the expansion of the frontier. In the history of American social imagination, the violent man using the gun to defend his family, his kip and kin, becomes a suitable metaphor for the notion of manhood.

Jessie James (film clip): Make it fast Slippery. This is your last draw.

NAS: (singing) I got mine. I hope you got yourself a gun. You from the hood. I hope you got yourself a gun.

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Dr. Michael Eric Dyson: Some of the young people in hip-hop are focusing on the very deployment of the gun as the paraphernalia of masculinity as the very symbol of what it means to be a real man.

Dr. James Paterson: There are components to masculinity for the people who live and breathe hip-hop culture. One of them is verbal ability, and the second piece is the ability to negotiate violence. It's not shoot 'em up, bang bang, but the ability to survive it like Pac and 50. They have that kind of cult status because they survived these violent instances that we all hear about, some of us experience, and so we can relate to that.

50 Cent (music video): We both came up on the gritty streets of Jamaica Queens. Two street kids, now men.

BYRON HURT: I thought about 50 Cent's music video, "Many Men." In this video, he reenacts the day he survived a drive-by shooting where he was shot 9 times.

50 CENT: [Rapping] Many men wish death upon me, blood in my eye dog and I can't see. I'm trying to be what I'm destined to be and niggas trying to take my life away.

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson: The political economy of the ghetto is so rife with arguments through the barrel of a gun. Their homeboys are getting shot. Their homeboys getting shot at. Their homeboys trying to shoot somebody. Their homeboys wanting to shoot somebody. So the gun becomes the outlet for the aggression and the rage that young black and brown men feel.

Dr. James Paterson: Just draw up the image of Public Enemy's logo, where you have a black male figure in a scope, in the sights of a gun. And there is a way in which that is what we are navigating as black men in the inner city.

Kevin Powell: People got to understand that hip-hop was really created in the ghettos. Poor black Americans, poor West Indians, and poor Puerto Ricans. Places like the South Bronx, you know the West Bronx where Bambaataa and Herc and these folks are throwing parties, they were considered like war zones.

BYRON HURT: Beginning in 1946 and ending in 1963, the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway ripped the Bronx in half. Urban planners and developers led by Robert Moses showed little concern for the people who lived in the borough and displaced thousands of residents and small business owners, leaving in its wake a poor, devastated community with little outside help from politicians.

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Kevin Powell: You talk about Iraq, but if you've never been to a hardcore black ghetto or Latino ghetto and seen the condition that people have to live in, the mainstream media would call it Fort Apache. You know what I'm saying? People were terrified of going to Bronx. Might go in, but you're not going to come out. They called it the Bronx Zoo. The Bronx Zoo literally became a metaphor for the whole borough. That's horrible because they were talking about black and Latino people. All of that fed into what was becoming hip-hop.

Dr. James Paterson: The culture and the energy that came from that was very improvisational energy, a very sort of reclaiming energy that young folks, through dance, through rapping and DJ, so on and so forth, that is how the culture took hold. It was a willed response to systematic violence in the community. And when I say violence, I mean like destroying homes. Imagine somebody putting a highway through your neighborhood, then you can understand hip-hop.

BYRON HURT: I decided to go to the Bronx, the birthplace of hip-hop. I talked to the reigning king of the boogie down, Fat Joe. I wanted to ask Fat Joe, why is it so important to be hard in hip-hop?

FAT JOE: It is to be hard. Everybody wants to be hard. This is one of the things I told you, one of the flaws in being from the hood. Everybody wants to be hard. You know what I'm saying? And it's like that. Forget Fat Joe, because you see other people just grab the mic, and they transform into a whole different person. And when they walking around the club, I'm wondering why we can't just walk around and smile at each other? We're all there to do the same thing, have a nice time partying, get drunk and enjoy the music, but we all looking at everybody like... And this be writers, journalists like you, you know. It would be good people working who be up in the club like... It's something. I don't even know. I can't answer that.

Dr. Jelanl Cobb: The reason why braggadocio and boast is so central to the history of hip-hop is because you're dealing with the history of black men in America. There's a whole lineage of black men wanting to deny their own frailty and so in some ways, you have to do that, like a psychic armor to walk out into the world everyday. But the other side of it is this running inside joke that everyone knows, you know, that is not the case.

BUSTA RHYMES: You do a motherfucking hardcore pose, homie. You know what I'm saying? Be tough.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Mos, lean in this way a little more.

BUSTA RHYMES: Gun position and everything. Because we gangsters, son. We hustlers and all of that shit. We duct tape families, dude.

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BYRON HURT: At a recording session in New York City, I met up with Busta Rhymes, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, and De La Soul. I told them about the young rappers I had met back in Daytona, and we discussed why so many rappers project an image of toughness and invulnerability in hip-hop.

MOS DEF: I think it's just a part of every man's life. Every male want respect, you know? You don't want nobody taking you for short. And that's what it be.

TALIB KWELL: Hip-hop is a very ego-driven thing. You know, it encourages you to assert yourself as a man. Especially a black man in this society, you have to learn how to do that.

MOS DEF: I was a nerd. I was a fucking bookworm around that way, but when shit got critical, you know you can't be no punk. I know how a lot of young black men is growing up, how I grew up. You got to be a limit. You got to let niggas know, like yo, I'm no pussy. And you will get tested.

BUSTA RHYMES: I was from East Flatbush, Brooklyn. I thought Long Island was soft. My mom told me we had to go. I was vexed. I ain't even gonna front. I got to Long Island, I saw flowerbeds and shit, the newspaper boy in the morning. I saw dew on the grass when I came outside. Shit I ain't ever seen in BK, nigga. You know what I'm saying? That type of shit was a lot more intimate than Brooklyn. So at the end of the day, I just felt like this would dilute my rough and tough edge and shit.

CONRAD TILLARD: We playing a role from the time we're seven years old. We walk down the street in the neighborhood and somebody calls us a sissy, a sucker, church boy. We start playing that role. When I see young fathers with their children, I'm always happy. But when I see them punch their child in the chest and say, nigga you got to be ready for this.

DMX: [Rapping] The streets, the cops, the system, harassment, the options get shot go to jail and get your ass kicked. The lawyers the part they're all of the puzzle, release, the warning, try not to get in trouble.

CHUCK CREEKMUR: I just think in general our society limits the range in which men can express their emotions. [Rapper in background] "I ain't neva scared. I ain't neva scared" We just have to have a game face on all the time, like you can't cry in front of your boy. You just can't do it.

JACKSON KATZ: If you're a young man growing up in this culture, and the culture is telling you that being a man means being powerful, being dominant, being in control, having the respect of your peers, but you don't have a lot of real

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power, one thing you do have access to is your body and your ability to present yourself physically as somebody who is worthy of respect. And I think that's one of the things that accounts for a lot of the hyper masculine posturing by a lot of young men of color and a lot of working class white guys as well. Men who have more power, men who have financial power and workplace authority and forms of abstract power like that don't have to be as physically powerful because they can exert their power in other ways.

KEVIN POWELL: The hardness that you're talking about was accelerated as the stuff that was happening during the Reagan-Bush era was taking place. The whole crack thing, proliferation of guns, a lot of us going to prison, and you got to be harder than the context of prison. A lot of the mentalities that you see come out of these forced environments; the gang environment, the prison environment. Sooner or later, all of the stuff that we saw happening on the streets was going to begin to be reflected in the music and the culture.

[MC Battle] ANNOUNCER: Link to Link Entertainment, straight from New York, Harlem.

[MC Battle] RAPPER 1: [Rapping] Yo. I'm livin' the life and I'm lovin' every bit of it. Y'all niggas started but we gonna finish it. Mack with extanded clips, clap at the innocent, clap at the bystanders, clap at the witnesses. You can always find me flippin' bricks in the kitchen and my connects to real I get it in prison. Told Money to fall back but the kid wouldn't listen and where that nigga at now…swimmin' wit fishes.

[MC Battle] RAPPER 2: [Rapping] Where you from, Harlem streets? Dog, I'm from the FL. I'll punch you in your fuckin' brain and make your whole shit swell. I'll spit you out like fuckin' white meat. Nigga, I run this street. Nigga, come on!

CHUCK D: The dominant image of black masculinity in hip-hop is the fact that somebody can be confrontational but confrontational with the wrong cat. It's like they're not ever confrontational with the cats that will claim I'll wipe your whole neighborhood out, because it's almost like they're trained not to even see them. It's like, my beef is with this cat right here that looks just like me. The rise of the culture of black animosity is something that adds to the street credibility factor. It's like almost to the point where 2Pac and Biggie were used as martyrs for this new endorsement of black animosity.

BYRON HURT: I asked rapper Jadakiss about his and other rappers' nonchalance about violent hip-hop lyrics. [To Jadakiss] Sometimes when I'm listening to you it seems like it doesn't matter. It sounds desensitized to violence. You talk about killing brothers like it ain't nothing. Not just you but a lot of brothers.

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JADAKISS: Do you watch movies? What kind of movies do you watch?

BYRON HURT: Good question. If you watch Hollywood movies, you see this same kind of violence, this same kind of hyper-masculine violence perpetuated in movie after movie after movie. In sports culture, video games, military culture. America is a very hyper-masculine and hyper-aggressive nation.

GEORGE BUSH: We're gonna smoke 'em out.

BYRON HURT: So it stands to reason that a rapper like 50 Cent can be commercially viable in a nation that supports a culture of violence.

KEVIN POWELL: We live in a society where manhood is all about conquering and violence all the time. What we don't realize, that kind of definition of manhood ultimately destroys you.

NOTORIUS B.I.G.: [Rapping] Niggaz in my fraction don't like askin questions, strictly gun testing coke measuring, given pleasure in the Benzino, hittin fanny's, spending chips at Manny's. Hope you creeps got receipts, my peeps get dirty like cleats, run up in your bed wrap you in your Polo sheets, Nigga decease, mwah may you rest in peace. Your nobody till somebody kills you. Your nobody till somebody kills you.

CONRAD TILLARD: We as a community have to challenge this notion that it's okay for black males to die early, that this is a natural part of life, killing, shooting, dying, wearing bulletproof vests, talking crazy as though your life doesn't really mean anything. This is sickness.

JADAKISS: Killing is always there since the beginning of time. A lot of it is exaggerated, but it's based on a true story I guess. I don't know what it is.

CHUCK D: The national story is black death. Whether it's through film, whether it's through recordings, whether it's just through news is the bottom line in the black, no pun intended, moneymaker. Black death has been pimped by corporations. Young people think that the street credibility is the thing that will ride them to some profitability in life.

SHUT UP AND GIVE ME YOUR BONE MARROW

BYRON HURT: This is Nelly. He's a multi-platinum rap artist and a successful businessman. A huge rap star who's also known for giving back to the community. His two nonprofit organizations promote literacy and locate bone

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marrow donors for leukemia patients. Oh, and by the way, did I forget to mention that he also owns a beverage called Pimp Juice? Well anyway, in the spring of 2004, Nelly wanted to go to Spelman College to help save some lives. Instead, he was met with resistance by the women of Spelman. I went down to Atlanta to find out what happened.

NEWS CASTER: News at 10, a controversy surrounding rap artist Nelly led to an emotional meeting at Spelman College tonight. The discussion focused on hip-hop videos and how they portray women.

NEWS CASTER #2: The Saint Louis based rapper decided not to appear at a bone marrow drive his foundation organized at Spelman after some students threatened to protest because of an explicit video called "Tip Drill." In the video, Nelly is seen swiping his credit card down a woman's back side.

ASHA JENNINGS: I was very, very bothered, to say the least, about the video. And I was in moral conflict on whether or not to cancel the drive, since I was the coordinator, if just to disinvite Nelly.

LAUREN CLARK: We decided that what we'll do is that we can have the bone marrow, and he can come for that. But then after the bone marrow, we need to have a forum that addresses these issues.

ASHA JENNINGS: We gave Nelly and his foundation the option to address both issues, saving lives physically and saving lives mentally, and they pulled out. So I was very disappointed.

DR. JELANL COBB: For them to say, we want to come to your campus and have a bone marrow drive, but we don't want to hear your opinions about the music that we produce and the image that we're proliferating is like the equivalent of saying, just shut up and give me your bone marrow.

NELLY: [Rapping] I said it must be your ass cuz it ain't your face. I need a Tip Drill. I need a Tip Drill.

DR. JELANL COBB: One of the disappointing things about "Tip Drill" and the whole genre of music videos is that they have taken a view of women of color that is not radically different from the views of 19th Century white slaveholders.

SARAH JONES: The image of scantily clad women is supposed to affirm some image of masculinity. The man as the "mack," as this sexually powerful, virile example of manhood. But in actuality, what they show themselves to be is incredibly insecure. The idea is, this man is so important and so powerful, and these women conversely are so dime a dozen, or I guess a dime for two dozen if

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there are 24 women standing around, that they don't matter. They're just eye candy. They're worthless.

MIKAEL MOORE: I'm torn to be honest, because I have to be real with the way that I've been socialized as a man and what my initial reaction is to "Tip Drill" or any other video. To look at these images, be excited by these images, be turned on by these images, et cetera.

SUT JHALLY: Hip-hop culture is not separate from the rest of American culture. Objectified female bodies, those images are everywhere as well. Those images are in advertising. Those images are in movies. Those images are in TV programs. The really negative thing about music videos and about advertising is that that is the only way in which women are presented. So the only way in which men are allowed to make a connection in the popular culture with women is through sexuality, and it's only through their own desires.

RAPPER: [Rapping] So cut the games, ma. Let's go in the back. Matter fact, turn your ass 'round, back a nigga down.

DR. BEVERLY GUY-SHEFTALL: I think black men have internalized the messages that this culture perpetuates, which is that women are primarily sex objects and people to be fucked. I think that it is that kind of message and those kind of images that we want to try to disrupt.

BYRON HURT: I caught up with hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons at this hip-hop summit in Detroit and asked him about the Spelman controversy. [To Russell] I went down to Spelman College when the women at Spelman were protesting against Nelly and his "Tip Drill" video.

RUSSELL SIMONS: I tried the Pimp Juice and I thought it tasted very good.

BYRON HURT: How do you respond to the women at Spelman who are speaking up and who are challenging the images in rap music videos where women are being sexually objectified and all those different things?

RUSSELL SIMONS: I think we have to challenge sexism the way it stands in the community, not the poetry as a reflection of it.

BYRON HURT: What are you doing personally as a political force?

RUSSELL SIMONS: I can only do as many things that God has given me great opportunity to do. I can't address every issue because I don't have the equipment. I am trying to figure out what special contributions I can make and make those.

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DR. BEVERLY GUY-SHEFTALL: Generally speaking, black people do not believe that misogyny and sexism and violence against women are urgent issues. We still think that racism, police brutality, black male incarceration, are the issues that we should be concerned about.

DR MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: If we have a glorified sense of our own victimization as black and brown men, what we must not miss and what we often do, is to understand that black and brown women themselves are so victimized, not only by white patriarchy but by black male supremacy and by the violence of masculinity that is directed toward them.

DR. BEVERLY GUY-SHEFTALL: It is true that these women appear not to be resistant. What I would hope however is that these women understand the extent of which they are participating in a culture which commodifies women sexually.

SISTERS AND BITCHES

BYRON HURT: Back at BET's Spring Bling in Daytona Beach, Florida, I ran into this young cat, 18-year-old Jay Hood.

JAY HOOD: My goal down here is to have fun and to get up on some of these girls.

BYRON HURT: Do you have any problem with rappers calling women bitches and hoes, stuff like that?

JAY HOOD: No, because to tell you the truth, some women is bitches. You got to realize that? You got your sisters but then the bitches.

BYRON HURT: Are you saying they're bitches? What makes them bitches?

JAY HOOD: They're bitches because you see how they dress. Just look how they dress. Sisters don't dress like that. Look at that ass. I might go over there and smack it!

BYRON HURT: I called the women over to see what they had to say about being called bitches and hoes because of what they were wearing.

WOMAN: We are some classy women. Just because we want to enjoy the weather and have on some nice shorts and a nice bra, it's just like a panty and bra set.

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BYRON HURT: Do you feel like men sexually objectify you?

WOMAN: That's a man for you, though.

BYRON HURT: So you don't have a problem with the men who objectify you at all?

WOMAN: That's a personal problem within themselves. That's their opinion. That's their problem.

BYRON HURT: The dude that we just interviewed said that those women that were walking around in their bathing suits or whatever, he was saying, those women are bitches. Those women are hoes. They deserve to be talked to like that. How do you feel about these women right here? You feel like they are presenting themselves like they hoes?

PERSON #4: No, because I'm just, you know. I don't know. I look at it as they're showing off their women features.

PERSON #5: You got on the uniform, what would be considered is loose. Could we bring them over here?

BYRON HURT: You want to bring them over here?

PERSON #5: Bring them over here.

BYRON HURT: Hey ladies! How do you all feel about the images of women in rap music and hip-hop?

WOMAN #2: Well, it's not really directed towards you personally. It's just what they say it is. Sex sells. If you don't take offense to it, then hey!

BYRON HURT: What about when they use terms like bitches and hoes?

WOMAN #2: But I know he's not talking to me. I know what I am.

NWA MUSIC VIDEO: Let's describe a certain female, however in the view of NWA, a bitch is a bitch.

BYRON HURT: Man, it was open season on these women. BET Spring Bling looked more like one of their music videos gone wild. The women bought into their roles as scantily clad sex kittens, and the men acted out their wildest fantasies, shooting and directing their own hip-hop videos. The guys saw Spring

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Break weekend as an opportunity to cross the line between flirtation and sexual assault. It's funny when I hear women say, these rappers are calling women bitches and hoes. They're not talking about me. But it's like, yo, they are talking about you. If George Bush was to get on national TV and make a speech and he started calling black people niggers, would you be like, I don't know who George Bush is talking about, but he ain't talking about me?

PERSON #6: When they coming out here with their ass showing, we're gonna slap them on the ass. That's just the way it is. Know what I'm saying?

PERSON #6: We represent all the niggas from Jay Real, Florida, trying to get up on these hoes, slap a nigga on the ass, because they representing that fine sotty ass. That's what I'm talking about.

BYRON HURT: I heard you saying you were going to hit somebody with your pocket book.

WOMAN #3: No, I was going to hit somebody with my fist. You were going to hit somebody with your fist?

BYRON HURT: Yes. Why? What's happening?

WOMAN #3: Well, I'm being touched, and it's unwarranted and unwelcomed.

BYRON HURT: Some people say it's just boys being boys, but I think it has a lot to do with boys figuring out early that girls are there for us to sexually objectify or to be our playthings.

WOMAN #4: Oh, Jesus! Oh, Lord! Get this motherfucker off me!

BYRON HURT: I've been doing a lot of walking around and videotaping and things like that, and a lot of the women are having a real hard time moving through the crowd.

POLICE OFFICER: Yeah, that's one of our biggest problems. As you can see, we're spread kind of thin. We can't be everywhere, so our concern is that somebody is going to be accosted out here. We don't want anybody to get hurt or raped or anything like that.

BYRON HURT: Have you made any arrests?

POLICE OFFICER: Not so far this weekend. It's been good.

WOMAN #4: They nasty! I've been molested.

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WOMAN #5: They nasty! The other guy tried to take my whole shirt off. What the fuck?

POLICE OFFICER #2: How you all doing?

JADAKISS: This shit is entertainment. If it was so bad like that, Snoop wouldn't have no fans or nothing like that. Snoop has been talking that "Bitches ain't Shit" shit since the beginning of time. They want to hear that. They the main ones out there.

NWA MUSIC VIDEO (voice over): There you have it. The description of a bitch. Now ask yourself, are they talking about you? Are you that funky, dirty, money-hungry, scandalous, stuck up, hairpiece, contact-wearing bitch? Yep, you probably are.

BYRON HURT; Being in Daytona really made me realize how desensitized we have become to the sexism and the misogyny and the sexual objectification of women in hip-hop culture.

PERSON #7: Hip-hop is about drugs and hoes.

PERSON #8: Where the hoes at?

VOICE OVER: Bitch!

BITCH NIGGAZ

BYRON HURT: You know what I think is deep? Just the fact that you hear so many brothers calling other brothers bitches, bitch ass niggas, hoes. You know, all these things that you hear all of the time in hip-hop. You hear it all the time, and it goes unrecognized and unchecked because it is so normalized. It's amazing that we haven't really talked about it more, because to me that's just as pervasive as the misogyny. At this Summer Jam concert, 50 Cent questioned Ja Rule's manhood in front of thousands.

ANNOUNCER [of 50 Cent's Public Service Announcement]: And now…a public service announcement for those who may be confused courtesy of the G-Unit.

50 CENT: Ladies and Gentleman. It has been brought to my attention that you guys don't know what bitch ass niggas look like. Take a look that this [image of Ja Rule crying appears] I know that's not Hip-Hop, you know that's not Hip-Hop.

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So there you have it Ladies and Gentlemen and the next time you're flipping through your radio or your TV you'll know how to identify a big ass nigga.

DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: When one looks at the contemporary landscape of hip-hop, one sees the feminizing assault on masculinity by other men so that the greatest insult that a man might imagine for another man is to assume that he is less than a man and to assign him the very derogatory terms that one usually associates with women.

SARAH JONES: In the rest of our culture, when men want to call other men something that is really going to degrade them, they call them a sissy. They call them a punk. They call them all these kinds of names. That's outside of hip-hop. That's everywhere.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER: And to those critics who are so pessimistic about our economy, I say don't be economic girly men.

DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: The insult is double. It's both an assault on women, but it's also a reinforcement of a negative and vicious form, a malicious form if you will, of masculine identity.

KEVIN POWELL: Man, unfortunately I was one of those cats that used to do that to brothers. You know what I mean? I'll just be real with you. It was a false sense of power, and it was a way of making someone else feel powerless.

DR. JELANL COBB: It's calling your manhood into question. It's calling your sexuality into question, saying if you're not this, you must therefore be gay. You must be a faggot, you know. You must be a bitch nigga. It's all those things.

BYRON HURT: What does that mean? What does that say about us? Could it really be saying that we may be insecure about our masculinity? I ran into these three hip-hop heads back in Daytona Beach. [To the cross dressers] Now let me just ask a question. This is out of curiosity and probably naivety and ignorance. What do you classify yourself as? Are you women? Are you men?

CROSSDRESSER: On a regular day to day, I'm just a regular guy, but every now and then I do dress up in women's clothes. I like to wear women's clothes, and besides I look good in them.

BYRON HURT: How do you feel about homophobia in rap lyrics? Does that bother you at all? Does that make you feel any particular way?

CROSSDRESSER #3: It turns me on.

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CROSSDRESSER #2: No not me.

BYRON HURT: You said it turns you on. Why does it turn you on?

CROSSDRESSER #2: They shouldn't be doing that. We are some of the people who support their music, buy their music, go to the concerts and everything. We do.

BYRON HURT: I'm dealing with homophobia in hip-hop, homophobic lyrics and things like that.

BUSTA RHYMES: I can't partake in that conversation, homes. That homo shit? Is that what you're talking about? I can't even talk to you about that.

BYRON HURT: Why not?

BUSTA RHYMES: I mean with all do respect, I'm not trying to offend nobody. It's my cultural, what I represent culturally doesn't condone it whatsoever.

BYRON HURT: Let me just ask you this, Busta. Do you think that a gay rapper would ever be accepted in hip-hop culture?

BUSTA RHYMES (singing): Say the word and we're gone.

KEVIN POWELL: I've never even seen straight black men in large numbers even try to have conversation with gay brothers. I know folks have done it one on one. I've done it one on one. But I don't really see that happening, man. Because I think part of the illness falls on straight men to really want to begin the process of how we define manhood.

RAPPER: [at a concert in San Francisco] It took a while for some of us to come out. We were in the corner being like "what's up guy? You know I'm cool but I'm not down with that. Then like 10 years later we're like, "Hey, I'm gay!"

TIM'M WEST: I started rhyming, and I came out like right around the same time. And it was in that situation that I became so much more aware of how homophobic hip-hop was. Here I am a black man trying to love myself, in spite of the fact that I've accepted myself as gay, or along with the fact that I've accepted myself as gay. And when you do that, there's not a lot of love for gays in hip-hop. I mean, we know that, from the beginning through now.

BYRON HURT: Tim'm talked about the irony between homophobia and a rarely discussed issue in hip-hop.

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TIM'M WEST: It's real ironic sort of thing in hip-hop that it is such a homophobic culture oftentimes and yet it's so completely homoerotic. You know, when LL Cool J has got his shirt off and he's licking his lips, it's not just women looking at that. You know, it's guys too. I'm looking for my 50 Cent picture. There is some awareness of the homoeroticism, but people aren't really willing to confront it.

BYRON HURT: I'm on my way to Vibe magazine to interview the editor of Vibe, and I'm gonna talk to him about homoeroticism in rap music and hip-hop culture. Not too many brothers talk about homoeroticism in rap music, so we'll see how it goes. [to Emil Wilbekin] Could you just elaborate a little bit about exactly what homoeroticism looks like?

EMIL WILBEKIN: Homoeroticism in media looks like LL Cool J with no shirt on in his music video with a Big 10 belt buckle standing there flexing all greased up staring at you. It is showing black men strong, naked, greased up, and as these really godlike objects. And they're everywhere. They're on magazine covers. You see Nelly on the cover of Vibe with no shirt. You see 50 Cent on the cover of Vibe with no shirt. And a lot of it is taken from the cultures in prison where everyone is tatted up. They don't have belts, so their pants are falling down. These are all the types of things that are very homoerotic, but they are also very masculine and considered very thug in our culture.

DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Whether exaggerated or not, men speak about their sexual conquests. Me and my boy hit it. Me and my boy did her. Me and my boy did this. So there's a lot of "me and my boy" up in there. Not much about the woman, but me and my boy.

NELLY: [Rapping] I said it ain't no fun unless we all get some. I need a Tip Drill. I need a Tip Drill.

DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Now they would deny, that is these heterosexual rappers, that there is any intent to form a union erotically, but one can't help but conclude that in the passionate pursuit of these women, only if my boys can have them. It ain't no fun if the homies can't have none, Snoop said. All of that is directed toward an erotic intensity that bonds men at the expense of their heterosexual allegiances with females. So to me, all those ways prove that there is deep and profound homoeroticism in hip-hop culture.

BYRON HURT: Now do you get a lot of attention from guys?

CROSSDRESSER #2: Yes, everyday.

BYRON HURT: How much attention from guys?

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CROSSDRESSER #1: A lot.

BYRON HURT: You've been getting a lot of attention?

CROSSDRESSER #1: Oh yeah. We stepped out of the car, he was like, whoa. You have guys that come and they be like, meet me around the corner and do it on the DL, and I love it.

MAN #9: Yo, faggots, man!

BYRON HURT: It's like a lot of hardcore thugged-out cats. Those are the types of dudes?

CROSSDRESSER #2: That's all we messed with. It's just a big front in front of their boys. That needs to be known worldwide.

MAN #10: Hey, get that shit off me, yo!

MAN #11: Yo, we ain't with that gay shit.

MANHOOD IN A BOTTLE

CHUCK D: Black manhood, by the structures and powers that be, the corporations, they've found a way that they think they can put soul in a bottle. If they can put soul in a bottle, then they could put manhood in a bottle. And then show the bottle in advertising. And we'll follow the crumbs to the big bad wolf.

BYRON HURT: I decided to follow the crumbs and ended up here at this hip-hop Power summit held in New York City. The summit was hosted by Power 105.1 FM, a radio station owned by media powerhouse Clear Channel Communications. There were hundreds of young black men and women here seeking pointers from hip-hop moguls like Russell Simmons, Irv Gotti, and BET executive Stephen Hill. Outside were dozens of aspiring rap artists handing out CDs and demos, hoping to get attention from anyone who would listen.

RAPPER [outside the Power summit]: [Rapping] These niggas don't know who I am. It's Crack, the drug dealer, car dealer. What's the deal? I'm the dealer man. I could deal your hand, milligrams to kilograms. Where I'm from, Cypress Hill, how I could just kill a man.

RAPPER 2 [outside the Power summit]: Call me nice when I'm smoothed out. Even without the dick how bitches lovin' the B. Bring Beef, got Mac 11s like the

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WB. Got thug rappers that can't get over they rhymes. Some niggas quit on their slugs my guns cockin' overtime.

RAPPER 3 [outside the Power summit]: I make hate songs, spit 'til your face gone. Life's a bitch and I'm trying to get my rape on. Man I ain't leaving the party until the cake gone. Get your balloon popped, nigga, I bang strong.

RAPPER 4 [outside the Power summit]: Niggas screamin' out agony 'cuz they chickens is after me. Stop with the cryin' see, I murder you like Master P. I pack big guns to hit all of y'all faggots. I ain't Nas but I'm known to bust off a stillmatic.

BYRON HURT: [to a crowd outside the Power summit] Everywhere I go, and I've been shooting this documentary for two years now, every time I have kids spit for me, it's all about the same thing. It's all about how you're gonna kill somebody, how you gonna rape somebody.

PERSON #12: I could walk up to you right now and say [rapping] "Yo I coulda been a doctor or I coulda been a pops. Wonder what woulda happened had I woulda been a cop. Would I help the block? Protect the good from the bad? Or just be killin' niggas 'cuz the power of my badge?" That's nice, but nobody wants to hear that right now. They don't accept that shit.

BYRON HURT: Who is they?

PERSON #13: The industry.

PERSON #14: They usually don't give us deals when we speak righteously and things of that nature. They think we don't want to hear that.

BYRON HURT: How many cats just stood here in front of me right now and started talking about how much drugs they sold, know what I'm saying? How did we kill you? Why did we shoot you?

PERSON #15: They said that, but how many MC's do you see in the industry or on TV now talking something positive? How many? None. They're doing it because they say, I want to get there. They're going to do whatever we can do to get there. That's what it is.

DR. MARK ANTHONY NEAL: I think that when you talk to a lot of these young rappers, the most important thing is for them to get a record deal. They want to hear from the record companies that there are only certain examples of blackness that we're gonna let flow through this space. And when it comes to hip-hop, there are certain conventions in which we want to see. We want to see the hardcore thug performing hip-hop. We want to see booty shaking in the

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background. And when hip-hop videos don't fit into those conventions, they don't get played.

KEVIN POWELL: What I think about what we call the Golden Era, from '87 to '92, you had LL Cool J, you had NWA, you had Public Enemy, but you had De La Soul, you had Kwame. You know what I'm saying? So you had a diversity of black male expression. So if you wasn't with Chuck D, you could get with De La Soul if you were bohemian. If it wasn't with them, you could get with Kwame. You can get with Tribe Called Quest. You could get with Jungle Brothers. There were so many different types.

BYRON HURT: The current images out there of black and Latino men in hip-hop, do you feel like you want your sons to be like that?

RAPPER: No.

BYRON HURT: I mean, maybe some aspects, like the business.

PERSON #16: You don't see that aspect on TV. They don't see 50 Cent working out a deal with a person at a company. They see 50 Cent on TV with his vest on. They see him with his gat on his waste. That's what they see. The media doesn't want to portray us, I mean minority people, they don't want you to see that we good fathers. They don't want you to see that we good businessmen. We don't just sell drugs. I sold water last summer. Holla!

DR. MARK ANTHONY NEAL: So you see the kind of schizophrenia that emerges among these young men, and you get this kind of notion of keep it real, and of course they have to keep it real to sell records. But at the same time, when somebody actually pulls their coat and is like, this isn't really you. What's this about? It's an admission that that's a performance.

PERSON #15: When "Self-Destruction" by KRS-One came out, we was all pumping it and loving it. You know what I'm saying? Loving it, loving it. But now you can't go to a label with "Self-Destruction." Why? Because you're gonna self destruct. The label is not going to put you out there. They not gonna do it.

KRS ONE: [Rapping] Self-destruction, you're headed for self-destruction.

JADAKISS: Nobody want to hear that shit no more. It's only 50, come ten, he's killing and shit. He's selling out the roof. He's not got one kind of soothing, educational song. None of that. All of that, that's violence. It's good music, but it's got a lot of violent content, and it's selling like motherfucking hot flowers.

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KEVIN POWELL: The misery that was beginning to really accelerate itself in the Reagan-Bush era in the 80s has been manipulated and commodified by this white male power structure that controls the record labels, that control urban radio. Because every city you go to in American there's a Power this, a Jam'n that, or a Hot something playing the same 10 to 12 songs over and over again. So what it does is perpetuate the mindset that the only way you can be a man, a black man, a Latino man, is to be hard, to denigrate women, to denigrate homosexuals, to denigrate each other, to kill each other. There's something wrong with that.

BYRON HURT: [to Talib Kwelli] I talked to some young, some up and coming cats. Cats that are trying to make it as a rapper. And they say that they're not really thugs, but they know that in order for them to be successful in this game, that they got to be thuggish. What do you think about that?

TALIB KWALI: Those are the same cats who are just listening to the radio and just watching TV. They're confused. They don't know. We have trusted the media and the corporations to define what hip-hop is. Back in the days when it first came out, and ABC did a story on rap, you'd be like, I know that's bullshit. I know it's not true. But now you see it on the news. You see it on BET. Because they call themselves hip-hop now. Now Hot 97 is the station where hip-hop lives, so we hear that, but we don't understand that it's some corporation owned by people who have nothing to do with hip-hop. They're just trying to cash in. It's like, hip-hop lives there. So they must know. That must be what rap is. No, we had never let the media define us, so why are we doing that now?

BYRON HURT: I went to talk to former Def Jam president Carmen Ashurst-Watson about the shift in lyrical content in rap music.

CARMEN ASHURS-WATSON: The time when we switched to gangster music was the same time that majors bought up all the labels. And I don't think that's a coincidence. At the time that we were able to get a bigger place in the record stores and a bigger presence because of this major marketing capacity, the music became less and less conscience. We went to Columbia, and then the next thing I know, our producers of Public Enemy were over producing an Ice Cube album, and then the next thing I know we're pushing a group called Bitches With Problems, BWP.

CHUCK D: Once that perpetuated into one thing and corporations get involved, yes you'll sell two million NWA's as opposed to one million PE. You're gonna go from "Fight the Power" to "Gin and Juice."

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DR. JAMES PATTERSON: Now once the market forces have helped that shift come along, that's when you get sixty, seventy percent of the buying community now is a white community.

JADAKISS: After 700,000 it's all white people. After you scan past the 700,000 it's all white people, and he's well past 700,000. The white people want to hear that killing and everything.

BYRON HURT: I was on the Daytona strip when I saw this white guy in his SUV blasting Fabulous' "Keepin' it Gangsta." How you doing, man?

WHITE KID: Pretty good.

BYRON HURT: Hey listen, man. Where are you from?

WHITE KID: I'm from Columbus, Ohio.

BYRON HURT: Born and raised?

WHITE KID: Hell yeah.

BYRON HURT: Is this your car?

WHITE KID: I wish it was. I'm fronting like it's my car, but no it's my dad's.

BYRON HURT: How long you been listening to hip-hop, man?

WHITE KID: Seven or eight years, since it started to come out in '91 and '92, ever since then.

BYRON HURT: What is it that draws you to hip-hop?

WHITE KID: Just the pure emotion in the beats. I love the beats. I love every lyric that they spit. Everything about it is my style. You guys, colored people, could say that it's their music, but I can get down to it just as much as they can.

BYRON HURT: Did you just say colored people?

WHITE KID: I don't know, what term do you want me to use? I'm not a racist at all. That's why I feel like I can come down here and just roll in and I can have no problem. No one is going to try to do anything. I'm just trying to have a good time down here.

BYRON HURT: I hear you, man.

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M-1 (DEAD PREZ): It is something that is as put on as baggy jeans for white boys. It is as put on as a fitted baseball cap and a doorag. That's all they gonna be able to get and identify with, and I know you. I know you white boys. I seen you. You are the guys who ask me why I am the way I am, and if you don't understand, there ain't way I can tell you. It comes with this.

MOLINE: I have never been to the hood. I've never been to a ghetto. I grew up in upper middle class white suburbia. We had a very small minority in our town, and that was it. And to listen to stuff like that is a way of us to see a completely different culture. It's something that most of us have never had the opportunity to experience. I've never had to worry about drive-by shootings and the stuff in the music. It appeals to our sense of learning about other cultures and wanting to know more about something that we'll never probably experience.

BYRON HURT: Does it reinforce stereotypes?

MOLINE: Yes, it does. Especially if they talk about growing up poor and never having all this money, and then they comes on MTV or VH1 with their large chains and their nice cars, and they sing a song about busting caps in people.

SARAH JONES: If you really want to know where this kind of predatory black man comes from, look back at films like Birth of a Nation.

BYRON HURT: Birth of a Nation is hailed by critics as a cinematic breakthrough and a great American movie, but D.W. Griffith's blockbuster, made in 1915, spread fear and paranoia about black masculinity with its mean-spirited stereotypes of black men as lazy, untrustworthy, oversexed, and dangerous, particularly to white women and gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan.

JACKSON KATZ: If the KKK was smart enough, they would have created gangsta rap because it's such a caricature of black masculinity, yet young people of color are being presented with this idea that somehow these people represent us. They're cool, and they're gonna stand in for us against the white power structure. While they're completely subservient to that white power structure. It's really an ironic, sad reality.

BYRON HURT: I asked BET executive Stephen Hill about reinforcing stereotypes, but he just passed a buck.

STEPHEN HILL: Probably what should happen is you should look at the people who are actually making the videos. We are, in some ways, partly a video channel and play videos that are given to us.

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BYRON HURT: [to Stephen Hill] As an African-American man, how do you feel about what you see?

BYRON HURT: He just walked away without answering my question.

CHUCK D: BET is the cancer of black manhood in the world. They have one-dinemsionalized us and commodified us into being a one-trick image. We're throwing money at the camera. We're flashing jewelry that can actually give a town in Africa water. We got 160 million dollar contracts because we got happy niggas.

BYRON HURT: What do you think about that as artists, the ones who participate, do you feel like you're reinforcing any stereotypes? Do you all talk about that?

CHUCK D: They couldn't even look you in the eye. Fuck that. We can really get to the nuts and nails of this. They couldn't even look you in the eye. Number one, cats can't even look a man in the eye. If they look a man in the eye, they think it's confrontation. Why? Because they can't answer. They can't answer to it. And it's almost like now, and it ain't their fault. This is all systematic. It's all part of genocidally breaking things down to the point where people are gonna follow a program that gets played out for them. This is the play. This is the playbook. Y'all gonna follow through. Crank robots up, they gonna do what robots do, what you told them to do.

BYRON HURT: Do you ever feel as an artist that you're doing what they want you to do?

JADAKISS: I'm doing what I want to do. They compensating me for it, and by me doing that, I'm gonna help my people out. You know what I'm saying? I'm gonna help my people out. Niggas that's eating the most off me and 50 and all them, you're never gonna see. They're in Kalamazoo somewhere with a bent-up hat on. You know what I'm saying?

BYRON HURT: Like who?

JADAKISS: Everybody. The real people that's eating out of the industry.

BYRON HURT: You talking about the corporate guy?

JADAKISS: Yeah, the corporate guy. The big man that at the end of the day stamps the check.

BYRON HURT: So white or black?

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JADAKISS: All scratch white. There's nothing black about the head niggas that's running the industry. They're not even niggas.

JACKSON KATZ: So the question becomes, who's making the decisions about what people see? Who's making the decisions about what gets the multi-million dollar contracts? And overwhelmingly, and this is no great secret, it is white men in suits who are making those decisions. And they're deciding, this makes money. I'm gonna sell it. I don't care if it's hurting people. It's a business decision, right?

DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: If that's the case then, of course white record executives are not going to want to hear social critiques of white patriarchy or white supremacy and the like. And it may be the job of these black record executives to speak up articulately.

JADAKISS: It's only at the end of the day, it's only entertainment. Nobody's going out and shooting up shit, so be it. Dice Clay, all of them niggas get up there and say incredible shit. The Jerky Boys, they making millions. I'm just trying to feed my daughter.

CHUCK D: The only thing that can turn the tide is black men. Before anybody says, I'm a rapper, I tell them first of all, I'm a man. A man tells his business situation, we can't do that. We won't go there. We can't. It's a slap in the face to me and my constituency, my family, where I come from and all. That's a man. And that's what has been lacking in the music business and film business. We haven't had men represent black people.

BYRON HURT: Chuck D and I wrapped up our interview, but our conversation about the representations of masculinity in hip-hop continued. I headed back home to New York, thinking about an American culture that mythologizes and mass-produces hyper-masculinity, teaching its boys that real men are tough, violent, control women, and cannot under any circumstances show weakness. Hip-hop, in that regard, is pure Americana. Hip-hop is trapped in a box.

KEVIN POWELL: How many of us are willing to step to the plate and say, this definition of manhood might not be the way to go anymore? We need something different, something new.

BYRON HURT: As I drove up the highway, I listened to 50 Cent's "The Massacre," a testosterone-filled highly anticipated follow-up to his multi-platinum CD, "Get Rich or Die Tryin." I thought about the millions of boys and men across race, class, and culture who will undoubtedly connect with the hyper-masculine themes on his CD, those limited and ultimately self-defeating ideas about

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manhood that hurt men as well as women. I longed for a broader vision of manhood in the music I grew up with, the music that I love.

[END]

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