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THE HIP-HOP TAKEOVER: HOW FEMALE ASIAN-AMERICAN ARTISTS MADE A  
POLITICALLY CHARGED GENRE THEIR OWN

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## ABSTRACT

The formation of the musical genre of hip-hop came about with the help of a variety of influences. Since its birth in the 1970s, hip-hop has continued evolving, becoming the music we are used to hearing everyday on the radio. However, as a result of the turn the genre has taken – towards a focus on the acquisition of money and the representation of women as disembodied sexualized beings – new forms of the genre have arisen. This paper explores the history behind the genre, from a political movement about race, to one that is now raising awareness about sexism and gender equality. The new trend of “hip hop feminism” has addressed such lyrical objectification, particularly those directed towards Asian American women, in responses done by Asian American women through hip hop and spoken word.

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## Introduction

Regardless of ones' daily activities, it is hard to avoid being exposed to the ever-pervasive aspects of pop culture – advertisements are always highly visible, magazines are readily within reach at supermarkets, TVs constantly run trailers for new shows and new movies, and music is frequently blaring, be it in a car or a store or even restaurants. Long referred to as the “melting pot,” America has been lauded for its diversity that it was founded upon. With a rich past brimming over with cultural and social differences, we have been exposed to a long and wonderful history of creating new dynamics through the meshing together of lifestyles. Therefore, it is practically impossible to escape having at least a general knowledge of the trends in music; musical genres that were created as a result of America's diversity. Hip-hop and rap has all but taken over the music scene. However, due to the transitive nature of both the public's taste in music and the artist's vision, hip-hop as a genre has frequently transformed, changed, and updated its style and purpose. From its naissance to modern times, hip-hop has undergone several musical makeovers, moving into a style almost unrecognizable from its start, to lyrics that objectify women and idolize money. In fact, another shift in hip hop is upon us – the reaction of those who have been diminished by male rappers' rhymes – the age of hip hop feminism has begun, and has, in turn, been adopted by a group who had experienced such sexist and racial reductions through rap, Asian American women.

Because of its popularity, hip-hop is a prime example of what language is being used regarding races and genders. It has the power to create and reinforce stereotypes, ideals, or beliefs about different groups of people, whether it is in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, or any number of identifiers. Because of hip-hop's race-driven roots, it is productive to look at the statements several artists can make about not only their race, but also the race of the Other. In the case of this work, the Other refers to both gender and race – in particular, Asian American women. Asian American female hip hop artists are a

prime example of how hip hop is constantly evolving – they are a group constantly objectified in hip hop, for both their race and their gender, and are also turning that stigma around by creating their own music that makes positive and eye-opening statements about their experiences with race and gender in their genre. Objectification of women and the appropriation of cultures and races is constantly debated in regards to musical groups. A focus on the work of Asian American women highlights an issue that often goes undocumented, even in the midst of this race-, gender-, and sex- obsessed culture, but also takes initiative to redirect the way pop culture consumers think about their race and their gender, as two mutually exclusive traits, and together. By acknowledging the issue of both race and gender in several different ways, the lyrics and music of female Asian American hip-hop artists presents the new frontier for hip-hop. The start of hip-hop was steeped in political statements about race by African American community members – now hip-hop is redefining what can be said about race, but additionally, introducing a discussion of gender politics. The following explores a history of the genre, as well as the history of stereotypes placed on Asian-American women, to highlight a pattern I noticed just being aware of pop culture around me.

## Chapter 1

### The Birth of Hip Hop

The presence of hip-hop and rap in our society is one that younger generations view as constant and unwavering – an unvarying presence that just *is*. To them, there is very little reason to even consider the history of the musical genre, simply because it has always been around, as far as they can remember. However, the emergence of hip-hop has a richly unique political and cultural past. In fact, it can even be pinned down to an exact moment in time: on August 11, 1973, hip-hop was born on 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx by DJ Kool Herc, who, playing at a party for his sister in a community room of the apartment building, decided to publicly try out a technique he had experimented with. “He extended an instrumental beat (breaking or scratching) to let people dance longer (break dancing) and began MC’ing (rapping) during the extended breakdancing” (PBS). 1520 Sedgwick Ave is now recognized as a historic landmark.

Of course, it is hard to actually declare that this exact moment was the beginning of it all. Rather, it was a culminating moment, almost a catalyst for the establishment of the movement. In fact, in a simple Google search of “hip hop history” will leave the casual researcher and the generally curious rather unsatisfied. Hip-hop itself is the response of a variety of social and cultural situations, all occurring throughout the 1970s.

If you start in the recent past and work backward, the history of hip-hop spreads out in every direction: toward the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, who declaimed poems over beats and grooves in the early seventies; toward Jamaica, where U-Roy pioneered the art of chatting and toasting over reggae records; toward the fifties radio d.j.s who used rhyming patter to seal spaces between songs; toward jazz and jive and the talking blues; toward preachers and politicians and street-corner bullshitters. (Sanneh, *The New Yorker*, “Word.”)

With something as complex as the diverse and varied genre of hip hop, it can appear that one must choose one particular facet to explore, to choose one aspect responsible for the formation of hip hop, and stick to that in order to gain a deeper understanding; or to accept an unsatisfying generalization like the one above, and assume the real hip hop started in the '70s as a result of this *mélange*. This isn't untrue: the emergence and evolution of hip-hop was influenced and formed by a variety of styles and people.

Additionally, this rich history surrounding the formation of hip-hop has led to a continually changing genre. It is constantly being influenced and manipulated, created by new groups of people, of different races, socioeconomic classes, and backgrounds. As a pervasive force in media, hip-hop has long been used as a means of expression regarding social and political issues, particularly to express the reality of what life can be like for both African American men and women, regarding issues like sexism, racism, violence, and economic struggles (Peoples, 20). It has been a quick and effective way to spread a message to a large group of people at an almost unheard of speed.

All genders and all races have embraced hip-hop. Though race is, and historically has been, the defining driving political stance the genre takes, hip-hop is versatile. Artists have most commonly used their talent to discuss their experiences as a non-white minority, but even in the formative years of hip-hop, gender found its way into the lyrics. Black female artists were coming onto the scene, but men were speaking about women in hip-hop since its beginning, though in ever changing ways. Typically, female rappers had to fight for their place in hip-hop history, but Asian-American women are transcending two boundaries, in aspect of both race and gender.

### **Tupac as Evidence of Gender Politics in Hip-Hop**

One of the most famous hip-hop prodigies, Tupac Shakur (stage name "2Pac"), was and still is known not only for his untimely death in an infamous drive-by shooting on September 7, 1996, but his



influential, politically charged and socially aware lyrics. His rhymes not only embraced the power of words but also the popularity of hip-hop to spread powerful messages. His mother, Afeni Shakur, one-time Harlem Black Panther leader, raised her son to be aware of the world around him, and growing up in the East Harlem section of Manhattan, he witnessed firsthand the struggles of African Americans, which he responded to through his lyrics. Several times he focused upon the hardships African American women faced, in songs like “Brenda’s Got a Baby.” “Brenda’s Got a Baby” highlighted the story of a 12-year-old girl, Brenda, who became pregnant by her boyfriend (who was also her cousin) and had to leave her son in a “trash heap:”

Well let me show ya how it affects the whole community/ Now Brenda never really knew her  
moms and her dad was a junky/ Went in death to his arms, it’s sad/ Cause I bet Brenda doesn’t  
even know/ Just cause you’re in the ghetto doesn’t mean ya can’t grow/ But oh, that’s a thought,  
my own revelation/ Do whatever it takes to resist the temptation/ . . . Momma can’t help her, but it  
hurts to hear her calling/ Brenda wants to run away/ Momma say, you makin’ me lose pay, the  
social workers here everyday/ Now Brenda’s gotta make her own way/ Can’t go to her family,  
they won’t let her stay/ No money no babysitter, she couldn’t keep a job/ She tried to sell crack,  
but end up getting robbed/ So now what’s next, there ain’t nothing left to sell/ So she sees sex as  
a way of leaving hell/ It’s paying the rent, so she really can’t complain/ Prostitute, found slain,  
and Brenda’s her name, she’s got a baby.

Tupac draws attention to the familial and social situations that causes situations like Brenda’s (which, according to the 1991 Interscope Record official music video, is based on a true story). By emphasizing the tragic reality of how young girls in the ghetto are forced to handle their teenage pregnancy, Tupac was able to grab the public’s attention, and perhaps spark social reform regarding contraceptives and safe sex, drug abuse, and prostitution. On the other hand, he portrays the women around him in a positive light with “Dear Mama.” “Dear Mama,” perhaps one of the musician’s most famous raps, is an ode to his

mother – he writes of the hard times they had in the past, but how he has grown up and learned how much respect she deserves:

And even as a crack fiend, mama/ You was a black queen, mama/ I finally understand/ for a woman it ain't easy tryin' to raise a man/ You always was committed/ A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how ya did it/ There's no way I can pay you back/ But the plan is to show you that I understand/ You are appreciated... Lady/ Don't cha know we love ya? Sweet lady/ Dear mama/ Place no one above ya, sweet lady/ You are appreciated/ Don't cha know we love ya?

Shakur takes his lyrics beyond just admiration and love for the women in his family that raised him and extends it to advocating for women's rights in his lyrics. A prime example of this is in "Keep Ya Head Up."

Tupac cares, if don't nobody else care/ And uhh, I know they like to beat ya down a lot/ But please don't cry, dry your eyes, never let up/ Forgive up don't forget, girl keep your head up... And since we all came from a woman/ Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman/ Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?/ I think it's time to kill for our women/ Time to heal our women, be real to our women/ And if we don't we'll have a race of babies/ That will hate the ladies, that make the babies/ And since a man can't make one/ He has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one/ So will the real men get up/ I know you're fed up ladies, but you gotta keep your head up. (1993)

### **A Switch in Language**

However, being able to pinpoint an exact moment in history, that one single party in the South Bronx, set a precedent that the genre of hip-hop has been able to manipulate and work around, but not completely change. The political roots that took hip-hop beyond a musical genre and rose it into a social movement are still important in its production and presentation today – race relations will always color

the genre, and if it doesn't, artists might find criticism. In order to be accepted as a legitimate artist you don't have to, of course, be a minority (many white hip-hop artists are extremely mainstream, successful, but also accepted in the hip-hop community), but there has to be a sense of Otherness in one's work, in order to fully respect the power and the importance of the genre. Asian-American women have been objectified by patriarchal sense that hip-hop has struggled with since its arrival: "Like other forms of cultural expression, black men have created a palpable celebration of their masculinity in the form of hip-hop discourse and style. This style is rooted in the historical, social, cultural, and economic experiences of black men. In a patriarchal society in which most black men of any age were called "boys" and denied the right to vote, the right to obtain adequate employment, or even basic human rights, many black men by the mid-twentieth century compensated for their powerlessness by creating the hypermale (Ogbar, 76)." The image of the "badman" was created – a cool, sexually charismatic man who could achieve what he wanted and have sex with whomever he wanted – where, in hip hop, the ideal and the pinnacle of manhood became the young, black, working class man. "The badman trope, which dominates hip-hop, has emerged as a central expression of hip-hop authenticity that demands gendered and racialized coding... Women, therefore, must find a space in what is often hostile territory" (Ogbar, 102). Though Tupac drew attention to the negative treatment of women, a shift in the language of hip-hop regarding women occurred. In order to conform to the coolness expected of black manhood, women in general are objectified in another grasp for control and power, additional marginalizing done by an already marginalized group.

## Chapter 2

### Misogyny in Regards to Asian-American Women

In one of his most popular hit singles, Tupac addresses issues that are still very relevant today – he unpacks the rape culture he has experienced, and further makes an argument for every women’s reproductive rights. This can only be considered a feminist anthem, and because of his fame, it was a powerful aid for an agenda for equality. Additionally, the presentation of the message – in a mainstream, easily accessible song, got the message across far more productively and efficiently than almost any other means. Tupac Shakur’s work discussed here was eye opening, life-affirming, and positive; this is not to say all of his lyrics were as progressive and proactive, but they are still a far cry from the lyrics that blare into our ears and our consciousness today. Women, of varying ages and races, are frequently degraded in modern hip-hop, not only in music videos, but in the lyrics as well. It is not uncommon to be switching between television channels, and to land on the image of scantily clad women dancing provocatively behind the more prominent figure of the (usually) male rap star. The focus is placed on their bodies – and in this hypercritical body conscious society, this isn’t considered unusual. We have been desensitized to the reality of these portrayals because of their aggressive and intrusive presence in everyday life.

Misogyny in hip-hop began almost startlingly soon after hip hop itself emerged as a genre, first showing up in the 1980s and continuing on until... right now. 2 Live Crew is infamous for their 1989 album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, still remembered for the opening song “Me So Horny” from 1989. It is worth mentioning that the album cover features the group members lying on a beach (fully clothed), each straddled by mostly naked women. In particular, 2 Live Crew samples the lines of British-born actress and model Papillon Soo Soo from Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, and continues on with sexually explicit lyrics like “Fuckie suckie. Me fuckie suckie.” Not only are women portrayed exclusively as objects for sex, but it also plays upon sexualized categorization and misconceptions of Asian women.

The objectification of women in hip-hop music is common enough that any given person has undoubtedly heard evidence of it in several popular songs, at the very least, or even read countless think pieces on popular artists' transgressions against the respectful treatment of women. However, for whatever reason, the topic of how this language is often aimed particularly towards Asian American women is often ignored. Perhaps because these views have been presented so frequently – which, of course, is to not justify it – but explains how it can be easily dismissed as normal and fine and inoffensive. Asian Americans are often touted to be the “forgotten minority.” For years, “the relentless stereotyping of Asian women in popular culture through such sexually racialized figures as the China doll, the geisha, and the lotus blossom” (Thoma, 146) has not only occurred in movies and literature, but in music as well. However, a brief history, as provided in the notoriously feminist *Bitch* magazine article “The Madame Butterfly Effect: Tracing the History of a Fetish” by Patricia Park:

In the 1840s, following the end of the First Opium War, the treaty port cities in China, Japan, and Korea were the site of a feeding frenzy for the United States and other Western powers – all desiring a piece of the profitable trade-route action. This led to a rise in the Western bourgeois desire for Oriental art and collectibles: decorative fans, postcards (more often than not bearing sexualized images of geishas), and other bric-a-brac... the geisha became a highly sexualized image for the Western male. (30)

From this point on, the idea of the “china doll” was further popularized by French author Pierre Loti's diary-style novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, which relates the tale of a French naval officer in Japan who marries for amusement during his time in Japan, and then leaves her. The novel frequently refers to his wife and other women as doll-like, and in a variety of other ways references their small stature – reinforcing the offensive and obviously false idea that Asian women are more akin to ornaments than to human women. Overall, this was a result of colonization, the taking over of land and bodies. “Although it is apparent that Asians, like people of color in general, are marginalized and rendered invisible in the mass media, Asian women are, through representation, “embodied” in a distinctive and at times literalized

way ... the bodies of Asian women are palpably present in the mass media in the most physicalized and sexualized terms ... For Asian women especially, ideologies of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality place their bodies under the burden of erasure while also marking them as receptacles of projected cultural meanings” (Heung).

A trend in popular culture for centuries, the fetishization (defined as, according to 19<sup>th</sup> century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, “the association of lust with the idea of certain portions of the female person, or with certain articles of female attire... in pathological eroticism the fetish itself (rather than the person associated with it) becomes the exclusive object of sexual desire”) and objectification of Asian American women has leaked into one of the main forms of pop culture today: hip-hop. From the mainstream to the underground and the up-and-coming, this offensive trend frequently presents itself. Let’s start with someone most everyone is familiar with for his various infamous actions and self-obsession: Kanye West. Frequently touted as one of the best artists in modern hip hop since his 2004 breakout album *The College Dropout*, his widespread fame ensures that his lyrics are constantly played and heard by large amounts of the population. His most recent album, *Yeezus*, which also includes a song with the title and statement of “I Am a God,” lists the song “I’m In It” as number six on the track list. Depicting rough and graphic sex, Kanye West slips in the lyric “Eatin’ Asian pussy, all I need was sweet and sour sauce” in the first stanza. Besides the blatant objectification that runs throughout the song, this line draws attention to the issue of cultural appropriation. I’m aware that this is a term that can be carelessly thrown out to call attention to a problem but not address it to a deep enough extent. By associating only several aspects of a culture with that culture again and again, it results in a reduction of that culture to those aspects only. The act of appreciating a culture in its entirety is extremely different from only recognizing aspects of it that are viewed as desirable, good, or trendy. In this particular example, not only is a woman reduced to a body part only useful for sex, but also her entire culture is reduced to sweet and sour sauce, which is not even traditionally from an Asian culture. On the other hand, rapper, writer, actor and comedian Donald Glover also known as Childish Gambino, is well-known not

only for his role on the television comedy *Community*, but also for speaking out about race issues, both in his lyrics, interviews, and social media. In August 2014, he wrote a poem on Twitter, sending it out a line at a time. The following is reproduced exactly as it was first published on social media; no capitalization or punctuation was added, except for the asterisks:

i am a n\*\*\*a./ “childish gambino is a white rapper”/ i wanna be a white rapper./ i wanna be so white im the biggest rapper of all time./ i wanna be so white i can have a number one song with cursing and parents are fine with it./ i wanna be so white and so big i get eat dinner with the koch brothers./ i hope I’m so big and white i can go to clippers games and it not be a statement./ i hope I’m so white they let my friend out of jail sooner./ i hope I’m so big and white my cousin wasn’t shot and stabbed twice in the neck twice last month./ i wanna be so big. so white./ i wanna be so big and so white that white dads feel comfortable sending their daughters./ who are home for the summer from Stanford, to my show./ and after the performance they come hang with me on my bus and we smoke and then we fuck to young dro/ and she holds my face in her hands and her eyes roll back in her head./ then she goes home and her dad says “how was the show?” and she says “it was fun. they had lasers.”/ i hope i become so big and so white that G-Eazy will say “damn, this nigga is white” and everyone will agree and nod./ i want to be so big and white that people are scared. “what if this spreads?”/ what if everyone starts to get big and white? what if this works for everyone and everyone can experience this whiteness and this bigness?”/ i hope i become too big and too white./ but i am just a black male. i am a nigga./ twitter activism is wack. marches don’t work anymore. police should be forced to wear recording devices.

And then: “i want people to understand i wasn’t under any influence last night./ after hearing a friend sobbing and after talking with my mom, i wrote that poem./ I’ve been threatened by police twice this year, hand on holster. “and i’m childish gambino”./ “when ur turn comes, please listen” – my mom on the police. i don’t think it’s fair she has to feel that way./ so when someone calls me a “white rapper”, i wanna make sure they understand i don’t have all the benefits./ this is not an apology./ twitter isn’t wack.

activism isn't wack. twitter activism is wack to me. it's only half of activism." He spoke to the inequality between races in an extremely powerful and accessible way, yet does not offer such respect towards Asian American women in all of his music. Glover is extremely intelligent and talented, yet falls back into what is now considered "conventional" ways of representing women in his music. He frequently mentions Asian women in his songs. In "You See Me" listeners hear "Forget these white girls/ I need some variation/ Especially if she very Asian." And then, in "Backpackers," he raps "I got a girl on my arm dude, show respect/ Something crazy, an Asian, Virginia Tech." These two examples highlight the rapper's apparent sexual preference for Asian women, but this groups all women into categories dependent upon race. And finally, though this is not the last example of such lyrics, in "Kids," his second verse includes "Finding you is like finding Asians I hate/ But they say I got a fetish, nah I'm skipping all of it/ Black or white girls always come with a set of politics/ That's all I was saying/ I'm a proud man." As if to explain his penchant for referencing Asian American women as one and the same and relatively disposable when it comes to sex, he explains this not as a fetish, but as politically neutral behavior, because as a black man that is often referred to as "not black cause he has a dad" (according to his song "Hold You Down"), he is criticized for dating both black and white women. By implying that dating an Asian woman is more accepted, he perpetuates the false idea that, somehow, Asian American women have less agency, political or otherwise, than other women. Further, it goes back to the centuries-old racist and sexist assumption that Asian women will be submissive and meek, not drawing any extra attention to themselves or their companions. Childish Gambino is known for his comedy acts and often attempts to draw attention to issues in ways that shock, but misogyny and fetishization aren't helping any feminist causes. *Hyphen: Asian American Unabridged* magazine author Victoria Yue states in her article, "Does Childish Gambino Have an Asian Problem?":

He's tired of feeling powerless, tired of trying to gain acceptance – and yet, he can't seem to help himself. He can't seem to stop trying. Rather than celebrate what makes him different from other artists, he falls back on run-of-the-mill hip-hop posturing and lazy rhymes. Perhaps objectifying



Asians, women and Asian women in his lyrics is the only way he can feel the measure of power and control that he believes he should have but doesn't receive in his real life. What makes Asians and Asian women such a casual punchline for him when he's clearly distraught over black/white racial dynamics?

This presents the modernized version of the "badman" trope. Instead of placing insecurities about being a black man onto just women in general, several male hip-hop artists, including Childish Gambino, have chosen to specifically place these gendered and racialized labels on Asian American women. The acceptance of gendered stereotypes about Asian American women has led them to be presented not just as objects alone, but objects in relation to the African American male. On top of being stripped of an identity besides that of a sexualized being, Asian American women exist in these hip-hop lyrics only when the protagonist chooses to include them. Their objectified Otherness is an identity that does not stand alone, but exists only within the male gaze (and the lyrics he writes).

However, male African American rappers and hip-hop artists are certainly not the only pop culture offenders when it comes to objectification towards Asian American women. Gwen Stefani, lead singer of the band No Doubt, went solo and released an album entitled *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.* that both reinforced and perpetuated harmful stereotypes of Asian and Asian American women. The album included the song "Harajuku Girls," which resulted in a music video and concert performances featuring four backup dancers, who, according to *Time* magazine, were allowed to only speak Japanese in public, followed Stefani around constantly, were depicted as puppets in the music video, and were even renamed "as if they were pets," "Love," "Angel," "Music," and "Baby." With her song, Stefani crossed the line from cultural appreciation to cultural appropriation. She used human women as if they were props, and profited from it.

A history of colonization and fetishization has stripped Asian American women of their individuality in mass media. Hip-hop and other genres of music has been no exception – they portray

Asian American women as objects only when in relation to the owners of a different identity – the African American badman or the white pop star.

## Chapter 3

### Responses by Female Asian-American Hip Hop Artists

Beyond these examples of misogyny and objectification, modern hip-hop musicians have sought inspiration from Asian cultures since the 1990s. “This acceptance – which often rides a dimly discernible line between appropriation and appreciation – appears heavily in hip hop culture: in the lyrics and styles of groups as diverse as the Wu Tang Clan, Common, Dead Prez, the Beastie Boys, and DMX” (Park, 298). Appropriation of people of colors’ (POC) cultural artifacts has been a buzzword in the media lately, and is often thrown around by “keyboard warriors” without fully exploring the issue at hand, which “cheapens the phrase.” Women interest blog *Jezebel* writer katmelon gives some simple rules for how to appropriately appreciate, not appropriate:

1. Social awareness. Have a basic understanding of the oppression that various races have gone through. Acknowledge that POC still experience racism on a daily basis.
2. Wear the accessory or garment in its original state. Don't mutilate it by producing a monster love child like Katy Perry did. It's a bonus if you get it directly from the culture itself, eg. buying a kimono from Japan, but it might be hard knowing where it comes from exactly.
3. Don't treat it like a joke, don't turn POC cultures into something else. Don't portray POC the way they are stereotyped, and definitely don't wear a cheap tribal costume at Halloween. Don't use accessories meant only for certain occasions and people, for instance, Native American headdresses, which are only bestowed unto certain people. Accept the POC as they are. A white person with a bindi is not cooler than an Indian person with a bindi.
4. Don't be racist. This is pretty self-explanatory.

However, this influence has been instrumental in paving the way for Asian and Asian American female hip-hop artists and bands to be able to gain success and have their messages heard. Yoko Ono broke ground for female artists with her performance art, her work as an activist in the women's

movement, later on with her own band IMA, and the way she handled the media's blame for the infamous break-up of the Beatles: "I think the image of the Asian woman up until me was Madam Butterfly.... I was touching a sacred cow, but I also didn't seem to be that vulnerable woman who is going to commit suicide. I was coming right at your face." These influences and trends in hip-hop resulted in several hip-hop feminist groups. Conventionally, (though that word can hardly be used, as the very core nature of hip-hop is that it is ever changing and not only able to change, but open to the possibility of new influences), hip-hop artists are viewed as African American men. However, a new branch of hip-hop is currently on the rise, and is referred to as "hip hop feminism."

As a result of hip-hop culture's relevant depiction of black life in America, Joan Morgan and others argue that hip-hop culture and rap music hold radical and liberating potential. This potential, they argue (Davis 1995; Morgan 1999; Pough 2004b) should be tapped by the contemporary feminist movement to speak to younger feminists, particularly those of color. To this end, writers such as Joan Morgan (1999), shani jamila (2002), and Gwendolyn Pough (2003) have coined and begun to circulate the term "hip-hop feminist." In response to what they perceive as an out-of-touch feminism, hip-hop feminists seek to pick up where they believe second-wave feminists left off... Moreover, hip-hop feminists contend that hip-hop is also a site where young black women begin to build or further develop their own gender critique and feminist industry, which they can then turn toward the misogyny of rap music (Keyes 2000; Pough 2002; Byrd 2004). (Peoples, 20-21)

Of course, as explored thus far, hip-hop is far from being limited to one race or gender. *Cibo Matto*, an independent hip hop/alternative pop band formed by Japanese born journalist Yuka Honda and student Miho Hatori in New York City. *Cibo Matto* engaged with the stereotype of Japanese schoolgirls and Japanese female musicians as "kawaii," or cute, to challenge such representations. Just as the schoolgirl trend was popular in Japan, the United States saw a reinterpretation of the look with white, female bubblegum pop stars like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. However, instead of fully

conforming to and fitting in with assumptions about their musical talent and style (due to their gender and race), Honda and Hatori juxtaposed it with clever lyrics, their performances, and a new style of hip-hop that used vocals and sound manipulation. Cibo Matto explored questions of “female objectification, subjectivity, and agency raised by this image of infantilized female sexuality” (Park, 298). Ironically, though this group was able to shatter their stereotypes by embracing them and exposing them, this ultimately still fit them into the category of “Other,” as both women and Asian Americans.

What is significant here is not so much that these bands self-consciously perform Oriental tropes but that critics and fans have been so quick to conflate these performances with the musicians’ racial and gender identities. To a large extent, this kind of reception can be seen as the outcome of the “Japanese chic” trend that began in the early 1980s – a new kind of consumer Orientalism which exploded in the late nineties due to the rising popularity of East Asian aesthetic forms in Hong Kong action cinema, Japanese animation, video games, and fashion. While this kind of crossover brings visibility to Japanese and East Asian peoples and cultures in the West, it often tends to mark them as permanently foreign, since their salability depends on their difference from the perceived norm. (Park, 297)

Modern male hip hop artists like Kanye West and Childish Gambino objectify Asian American women, following a recent trend that doesn’t reflect the roots of hip-hop, but is still not just accepted, but almost expected. Childish Gambino struggled with his own Otherness, and though he generally addresses this head on, he attempts to come to terms with his genre and fitting into it by making remarks about women, Asian and Asian American women in particular. “Asianness” is marketable in consumer capitalism, as are other cultures, as evident by the need to discuss cultural appropriation whose lines are so frequently crossed by celebrities, so is, unfortunately, objectifying and fetishizing women.

However, Cibo Matto is far from the only group to address issues of gender and race in their art. Ruby Ibarra, a female rapper and spoken word artist born in the Philippines and raised in the Bay Area of California, writes and performs lyrics that are often politically charged, and does not shy away from race

relations. In an interview with Ozy, an online news source, she discusses how when she first performed, her classmates were surprised by the talent of a “typical Asian” student: “I don’t look or sound like your average rapper. But I have to prove myself a lot more also.” When she does receive racist or sexist comments online, where most of her work is available for free, she says, “I just have to ignore it. At the end of the day, this is what I love to do.” Ibarra might ignore the comments online, but her works boldly and unapologetically present her stance on how she feels as a woman, both in regards to sexism and racism. In her powerful spoken word project “Hate,” she makes statements about the impact of the “four letter, one syllable, simple word: HATE” that “carries so much historical, political, emotional weight.” Her 5 year old niece does not yet know the meaning of hate, but asks what it is. To her, hate has “made men call women bitches who in turn call other women bitches,” “it’s made men boost their masculinity by exploiting another’s femininity/ It’s built glass ceilings, internment camps, nooses, and “not allowed” signs,” “Its written Jim Crow Laws, Indian Removal, and Asian Exclusion Acts,” “It’s literacy prevention, no Filipino Veterano pension/ It’s stereotypes and 1-dimension, character inventions/ All being fucked by White Supremacy’s erection.” She draws examples from her own experiences, as a woman, as a Filipino, and as a Filipino woman. Throughout the performance she is blunt, harsh; she sugarcoats nothing. Spoken word has a history of ties with hip-hop, and is now often associated with the feminist movement. And then there’s Awkwafina – real name Nora Lum – now known from MTV’s “Girl Code.” Born in Queens, New York, she is the daughter of a Chinese father and South Korean mother. Featured on the documentary *Bad Rap*, about Asian Americans in hip hop, her lyrics have gained a certain notoriety, with several of her songs going viral on YouTube. Take “My Vag” as an example; released in 2014, it is a response to Micky Avalon’s 2006 hidden track entitled “My Dick.” Awkwafina spits: “Awkwafina’s a genius/ and her vagina is 50 times better than a penis.” In an interview with online news site The Daily Beast, she said “It’s a celebration of women. There aren’t a lot of songs out there talking about vaginas in an in-your-face kind of way.” Picked up as a feminist anthem, though not explicitly written to be one, it quickly received 400,000 views. Another hit, “Yellow Ranger,” declares

her stance on being an Asian American rapper: “I bring that yellow to the rap game/... Proficient in spitting, turning red when I’m drinking.” According to Lum, “The song embraces an identity that is not about Asian culture. It’s about me being Asian and my experience being Asian. I’m not trying to unite Asian people with my music.” And the reason that is not her goal is because she has bigger aspirations beyond the Asian-American community. The creators and cast of *Bad Rap* had a radio interview on Hot 97 that was taped and put on YouTube. In it, Awkwafina is clear that, “Like this is who I am. Like, more so than like an Asian girl like I’m from New York City and I’m an American kid... We’re American kids, you know, and I think that’s what this documentary is about is for American kids who happen to be Asian.” Director and producer Salima Koroma jumps in here and starts a new discussion:

“This is one reason why I really wanted to do this is because when you think about what hip-hop is typically supposed to be, it’s a black male-dominated sport, it’s not not for females but it’s a black male dominated sport. And you think what blackness is and what is Asianness.”

Co-producer Jaeki Cho: “It’s a complete antithesis of what Asian males are being represented in mainstream media like. A dominant Asian male figure who has all that swag and who has that strong figure was like Bruce Lee and a motherfucker die like forty-one years ago. We haven’t had a figure like that forever. We didn’t really have a dominant male figure. In mainstream America where at least a hip-hop audience in general could see like Asian people look like that and they could do shit like that. So I feel like when they see Asian American male rappers or even female rappers is like a complete opposite of what they kinda perceived to be.”

Koroma: “Yet even female rappers, even Asian women in hip-hop are exoticized. Like in the music videos they are the exotic women, they’re not supposed to be fucking rapping. They’re not supposed to be doing that, so Awkwafina herself is like an enigma, you know, because you just don’t see it.”

Awkwafina: “Yeah, because I’m not... Yeah like I wanna... I just want to like, not be sexual.

Like, I’m just not sexual, at all, like right now.

Rekstizzy: You are to me.

Awkwafina: That’s awkward.

Rekstizzy: Oh my bad? You done?

Even during a discussion of race and gender and hip-hop, Awkwafina is still seen and treated as a sexual object, by *Bad Rap* cast member Rekstizzy, a (male) Korean-American rapper. But she brushes it off.

Rajiv Narayan, a curator at Upworthy, sums up the issues raised when New York Magazine interviewed Awkwafina and called the article, “Can an Asian Woman be Taken Seriously in Rap?”:

In other words, the path taken by many to Awkwafina’s emergence on the scene is to celebrate her ability to emerge on the scene. When enough Asian female rappers join her such that we stop primarily identifying them as Asian female rappers, then it might be appropriate to judge them.

That sounds contradictory, hypocritical even. Why is it okay to celebrate a female Asian rapper for her Asian-femaleness when it’s not okay to judge her based on her Asian-femaleness?

Because race and ethnicity are complicated.

However, by very act of creating and performing their music, these female Asian-American hip-hop artists (and others) are battling gendered stereotypes. Of course, their lyrics speak wonders on their own.

But, refusing to be silent is a message in itself, shattering the image of The Dragon Lady and the Lotus Blossom baby: “Their appealing bodies are often complemented by what Tajima calls their ‘non-

language’ or ‘uninterpretable chattering, pidgin English, giggling or silence’” (Kang, 72). Instead of performing and conforming to the racialized and gendered roles stereotypically given to them, Asian

American female hip-hop stars are crossing boundaries in their genre, and making a statement about their identity in general.



## Chapter 4

### Commodification of Hip Hop (and How that Changed the Political Power of the Genre)

Though hip-hop was not invented for the purpose of political statements, it has been politically charged from its start. Just like any other creative form of expression, hip-hop was used as a response to events in the community. It provided a voice, for those creating the music and also listening to it, in a time when voices often went unheard.

Hip-hop's earliest development was shaped by the thrust of the Black Power movement. In this era, African Americans initiated a vast corpus of cultural production that rejected minstrel-like figures... Emerging out of the highly politicized era of Black Power, many of the hip-hop generation were keenly aware of the pernicious stereotypes of black people in American popular culture, even if the most naked minstrel figures were no longer popular. In no uncertain terms, the minstrel became the antithesis of hip-hop, significantly because of the historical moment of Black Power that precipitated a new racialized consciousness among black people. In this historical moment, the unique provincial dynamics of New York City also significantly shaped hip-hop.” (Ogbar, 16-17)

The South Bronx in the 1970s and the 1980s bred the environment that allowed hip-hop to emerge, and to form a reaction and a voice to the conditions around them – unemployment and Reaganomics fueled this desire for a voice. Music was a far more productive response to living conditions in the Bronx than other activities, like fighting or gang involvement. Political activist and Congressional candidate Kevin Powell explained “most of the music, no matter what genre we’re talking about from jazz to hip-hop, is actually apolitical. The music becomes political if there’s something political happening in the community” (The Griot). In general, there are going to be songs in hip-hop and most other genres that

have political power and deeper meaning, but since the rise of pop music, it is easy to find examples that don't apply to the idea of music making political statements. However, in the 1980s, the genre of hip-hop took a stance against apartheid control in South Africa. Decades without genre-wide support for one cause does not mean that a community is not taking political stances. Touré, a journalist and cultural critic, points out that "...hip-hop comes from so many angles. There's the politicized talk; there's the discussion of what happens with crack in our communities. So many Nas songs have a political message just woven into a lyric – the song may not be about politics but he's dropping science in every verse" (The Grio). On the other hand, Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam and the brother of Joseph Simmons (more commonly known as Rev Run), stated that "Everything is political" and that the hip-hop community "speaks to the next America and reminds them of what's important, so that's political... You can't name the politicians who have charities, they're on one hand, you can name them. But every rapper has a charity." According to The Grio, an online site for African American Breaking News and Opinions, "Powell laments that America has not had a real political movement since the apartheid movement of the eighties." I wouldn't necessarily agree with this – modern Americans fight political battles, be it about lesbian and gay marriage rights, reproductive rights, war, or any other number of issues. However, Powell's point is that America's political debates rarely involve members of pop culture in the form of their music.

In the past, hip-hop was clearly, in some cases, used as a form of expression in regards to race relations in America. However, this often ignored the issue of misogyny. Tupac's music drew attention to where women fit into the African American community – but not the hip-hop community. In hip hop, the issue of race and the issue of gender were not connected until later on, most specifically in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. In Queen Latifah's 1993 Grammy award winning song "U.N.I.T.Y.," she questioned the language in mainstream hip-hop directed towards women: "Who you calling a bitch?/... Every time I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho/ Trying to make a sister feel low/ You Know all of that gotta go." Salt N Pepa's "Ain't Nothing But a She Thing" asserts that "I could be anything that I want to be

baby/ Don't consider me a minority/... We got the power, yeah, you know the deal/ So you go, girl (You go, girl!), it ain't no man's world!" Feminist thought in mainstream hip-hop had finally moved from being expressed by a few men, to popular African American female artists. Hip-hop began to embrace socio-political movements besides race alone. Race was still an issue addressed in this musical genre, of course – as long as racism exists, hip-hop will address it, like in Jay Z's "Somewhereinamerica" off of his recent album *Magna Carta Holy Grail*, or several of the songs released about police brutality in America, even more powerful in light of recent events. It has only been recently that women of other races have broken onto the hip-hop scene. Hip-hop has historically been for the African-American community. It's not like other genres, like pop music, that don't have roots in racism and activism. Hip-hop has always been able to mean something more. Of course, the commodification of music has changed some aspects of this drastically. Tupac is a prime example of the "party" side of hip-hop and the "political" side being brought together. He was from the era of hip-hop that came from the political roots, and his Black Panther mother made politics inescapable in his life, so naturally it wove its way into his lyrics. However, he too had songs that had touches of misogyny, referring to women as bitches, despite the songs reviewed previously in this paper. The partying side of hip-hop popularized the sexist language that surrounded women, lyrically. Tupac wrote in a time of transition, and highlighted issues of racism in America while adding to the problem of misogyny in hip-hop. The female Asian American artists discussed combine their experiences with race, just like the founders of hip-hop did, and also their experiences with sexism. And this has led to an influx of artists of different races, genders, and sexualities flooding onto the scene. Caucasian rapper Macklemore was played all over, first with his silly song "Thrift Shop," and then with the far more serious "Same Love," in support of LGBTQA relationships and marriage. Hip-hop, actually all genres in general hold power over audiences – especially with the goal of commerce and profit that now prevails over the hip-hop industry. Despite the roots of hip-hop in the Bronx, it has been embraced by mainstream media, by artists of every background, by listeners in every imaginable social, economic, and political situation. Chris Richards for the Washington Post explains: "Rap music will always be

rooted in the immutable allure of black masculine cool, but it's no longer an exclusive expression of black urbanity. As the music's horizons expand, it clings tighter to the vestiges of its radicalism – that anti-authoritarian sneer that's always provided the music with a magnetism that transcends race.” Hip-hop is contagious, which makes it popular, and therefore extremely lucrative. Everyone wants a piece; everyone wants to be in on it. The success of the culture of hip-hop is widely shown by its influence in countless other genres. However, Richards poses the valid question: “Will tomorrow's white rappers – and they will be legion – step into the spotlight as virtuous contributors or thoughtless colonizers?” This doesn't specific gender – as male or females can rap – but acknowledges that in hip-hop, white artists are the “other,” the outsiders. In fact, white female rapper Iggy Azalea from Australia has been attacked on social media by African American male and female rappers alike. America has a tendency to put race issues at the forefront. This isn't to say that racism still isn't very much alive. It is. But Iggy Azalea, as a white female rapper, received far more negative attention for her contributions to the genre than countless male white rappers. Her success as a white woman who raps and wins far more awards and has more top-charting hits than her black female counterparts is understandably a cause for discussion of race in hip-hop, and whom it really belongs to now. Many artists feel that hip-hop, in its commodification, has strayed too far from its roots, and is starting to lose its socio-political and historical meaning through appropriation by white artists. Q-Tip, a rapper, gave Iggy a lesson on the history of hip-hop via Twitter (this, too, appears as written – I have not changed it):

HipHop is an artistic and socio-political movement/culture that sprang from the disparate ghettos of NY in the early 70's. Coming off the heels of the CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT and approaching the end of the Vietnam war it was a crossroads 4 America specially for blacks in the US our neighborhoods were PROLIFERATED w/a rush of HEROINE. Our school systems here in NY dungeon traps with light for learning black men some of whom didn't return from tours of duty and the ones who did came with war baggage (agent orange, addiction, ect..) these men had families but due to these events and throw into the mix the public emasculation... they proved to

be handicapped parents. The surrogate parents? The STREETS the streets of gangs, crimes, and the hustlers coddled us and swept us up but! Being a spirited, rhythmic & expressive people music art dance outlined our existence it proved a way for us to exalt to scream to dance to laugh and find OUR VOICE. We weren't at the time skilled musicians as kids. We had records, turntables, ideas and INGENUITY. Being natural chemists we took from whatever was availed to us and we created something mighty and special we cut breakbeats back and forth we took a hybrid of Jamaican toasting along with radio jock rap( Hank Spann, Gary Byrd, etc.) and we put our rap down...It was a neighborhood thing really. Black and Latino Kids were carving out their space and it became infectious eventually Keith Cowboy coined the phrase hiphop. Years later the first rap record was recorded and now we are moving but during these strides this country still had the monster of racism and racial insensitivity breathing and ruling, believe it or not young black and Latino lives specifically weren't acknowledged in mainstream American culture unless Of course...the convo was about gangs, being criminals or uneducated. And hey! Like I stated early our families were rushed, our schools sucked, and we were left to put devices to survive. But HIPHOP showed that we had DEPTH, fire, and BRILLANCE. The music was undeniable! It moved from NY and became national and even GLOBAL. Hiphop now was FOR EVERYBODY!! All of those who could relate to the roots, the spirit, the history, the energy...It reached YOU. It touched your spirit and took you up. We magnetized you! That's what BRILLANCE does. Now you are fulfilling your dreams ... BUT! You have to take into account the HISTORY as you move underneath the banner of hiphop. As I said before hiphop is fun it's vile it's dance it's traditional it's light hearted but 1 thing it can never detach itself from is being a SOCIO-Political movement. You may ask why ... Well once you are born black your existence I believe is joined with socio-political epitaph and philosophy based on the tangled and treacherous history SLAVERY alone this is the case it never leaves our conversation... Ever. Whether in our universities our dinner tables our studios or jail cells the effects still resonates with us. It hurts...

We get emotional and angry and melancholy did you know president Clinton was the ONLY PRESIDENT to apologize for it? Did you know that remnants of slavery exist today thru white privilege? When certain “niceties” are extended your way because of how you look? Isn’t that crazy? I say this to say you are a hiphop artist who has the right to express herself however she wishes. This is not a chastisement this is not admonishment at ALL this is just one artist reaching to another hoping to spark insight into the field you are in. I say this in the spirit of a hopeful healthy dialogue that maybe one day we can continue.

This Twitter-lesson came in response to her feud with female Harlem MC Azealia Banks, who commented that Iggy Azalea was quiet on the decision to not indict officers in the murder of Eric Garner and Mike Brown. She pointed out on Twitter, “Black culture is cool, but black issues sure aren’t huh?” Later, on a New York City radio station, Banks stated, “...In this country, whenever it comes to our things – black issues, black politics, black music, whatever – there’s always an undercurrent of a ‘fuck you,’ ‘fuck y’all n\*\*\*as. Y’all don’t really own shit, y’all don’t really have shit.’ You know what I’m saying? That Macklemore album wasn’t better than the Drake record. That Iggy Azalea shit ain’t better than any fuckin’ black girl that’s rapping today. When they give those awards out – the Grammys are supposed to be accolades for artistic excellence, you know what I mean? Iggy Azalea is not excellent” (asterisks added). To Banks, and to many other hip-hop artists, the popularity of hip-hop has turned it from a powerful movement to a mockery of what it once was. The commodification of hip-hop has opened up other race issues, because now that it is popular and mainstream, white artists are attempting to and succeeding at breaking into the genre. Richards feels that this is not a straightforward race issue, but in the case of Banks and Azalea, and others, a gender issue. “Because the rap world has failed to create sufficient space for female artists to flourish, the media still lazily pits female artists against one another – and ironically, those unfortunate conditions have made all of this beef chewable.” In other words, America is so used to race issues, it is easier to understand those in terms of popular culture, rather than in terms of gender. The lucrative and well-established turn hip-hop has taken opens it up to a variety of

people, but also follows the set pattern of discussing race, when the discussion is in some cases really about gender. Awkwafina claimed that she will know she is successful when she sees “white girls vibing out” at her shows. Hip-hop is now about appealing to and speaking to an even larger group of people, and having listeners and artists of different races and genders opens up the genre to even more political conversations. Female Asian American rap stars have drawn attention to what it means to be Asian in their genre, but more importantly what it means to be a woman, who happens to be Asian American, in their genre.

Hip-hop is a political genre, but its roots of making statements about race have almost become a thing of the past. Racism is, of course, still a prominent and deeply disturbing issue not just in the United States, but everywhere else as well. However, the political power of hip-hop to make statements about race has been watered down in the modern era of the genre. When something becomes lucrative, the desire to profit can often outweigh the desire to make a positive statement. We hear countless versions of what sounds like the same pop songs, because there is a proven formula of what will sell and what won't. When money emerged as the motivating factor, the genre of hip-hop became diluted with the stereotypes of the rapper we think of today. Ian Condry, author of *Hip-Hop Japan*, argues that the nature of hip-hop has changed, in our market-based and global society:

A kind of borrowing and remixing ... happens in American uses of Asian imagery, as when the Staten Island-based hip-hop crew Wu Tang Clan uses kung fu imagery and sound samples in their videos and songs or produces Wu Wear shirts with gibberish Japanese writing. Dismissing such gestures as orientalist or racist implicitly invokes notions of cultural authenticity that may prove ill-suited to such transnationally oriented productions. If anything, a transnational cultural politics should encourage the perspective of locating the meaning of gangsta or samurai or kung fu rappers in broader contexts, not simply in terms of visuals of album covers. (Condry, 28)

In other words, it is hard to just write off a form of imitation as blatantly and purposefully racist. Rather, it shows how globalization and consumerism has, within reason, made embracing other cultures

apparently appropriate, but also lucrative. Furthermore, mainstream hip-hop has not removed the political aspect from hip-hop, but lessened it, in the United States and abroad in Asian countries. Condry explains that

While there exists great positive potential for hip-hop in Japan, both as a space for articulating alternative visions of Japanese identity and for providing a comparative context for thinking about hip-hop's border crossings in the United States and elsewhere, it would be misleading to suggest that the hip-hop reaching mainstream Japan is only, or even primarily, a vehicle for progressive change. Generally, in Japan, corporate support has flowed more quickly either to those who accommodate the marketing world's fetishization of blackness as hip, sensual, and rebellious or to those who deemphasize blackness in favor of aligning themselves with Japan's traditionally lighthearted and inoffensive pop music realm. If one's exposure to Japanese rap music comes from television, radio, or the mainstream music press, one is likely to see the edginess of hip-hop promoted through racially coded imagery, often combining an outlaw stance with conspicuous, brand-name consumption. Hip-hop is not only "cool" (*kakkoi*) but also "bad" (*yabai*, meaning of course "good"). It surely is a sign of globalization that in addition to McDonald's, Disneyland, and Starbucks, Japan now boasts its own self-styled thug (*saagu*) rappers, complete with gold teeth, "ice" (diamonds), and platinum chains. Alternatively, J-Pop versions of hip-hop that appear on the charts tend to be stripped of any racial nuance. (Condry, 29-30)

Even racial markers specific to African American hip-hop can be applied in other countries. For those of other races, it isn't about what such actions, or outfits, or terms really mean, but what they represent – a decadent and successful hip-hop lifestyle.



## Chapter 5 Conclusion

### A Brief Comparison of Moments in Hip Hop

Consumerism and globalization have made the issue of race less prominent in hip-hop, but, at the same time, have highlighted continuing discrepancies in the genre about gender, in particular the gendered treatment of Asian-American women in hip-hop lyrics. At the beginning of the hip-hop movement in the South Bronx, hip-hop was political; the music was a way to express artists' individual experiences, and to share them with a much larger audience. Though race relations was a central issue, the negative treatment of women was presented by several artists, like in Tupac's "Brenda's Got a Baby." Tupac lived and worked in a time when the genre was changing – moving away from its political roots to lyrics that denoted a lifestyle of partying and luxury, once the genre began to take off and become more mainstream, more popular, and therefore more lucrative. With this shift came the more widespread occurrences of misogyny in the hip-hop lifestyle, as highlighted through the lyrics. This has continued to the present day, increasing in vulgarity. In particular, some artists have a penchant for demeaning not just women in general, but Asian-American women. At the surface, these are glaring examples of the sexism of the society we reside in – on a deeper level; it may be the result of race. By targeting women of a race that aren't generally seen as being active members of the hip-hop community, and are commonly referred to as the "invisible" minority, male African-American rappers exploit both another race and the opposite gender. A discussion of hip-hop will always involve a discussion of race. It wasn't until recently, however, that race can be somewhat put aside, overshadowed by the discussion of gender. The female Asian-American artists previously reviewed in this work have made lyrical statements regarding their gender in the music industry. To these women, their race is not more important to their music than their gender; they are at least equal. Their performances and their lyrics have addressed the patriarchal overtones in their genre. Because of the globalization of hip-hop, it is far more acceptable to approach

another culture's style, as long as it is respectful, and doesn't reduce it to purely aesthetic aspects. Of course, this still happens. However, it is possible to embrace a different culture while still maintaining the value of the original, and creating political efficacy. In some sense, globalization and consumerism is the new theme in hip-hop. Utada Hikaru, a Japanese American R & B singer who "defined the pinnacle of Japanese pop music in the late 1990s with a style that drew on hip-hop production methods of sampled, bass-heavy music," is a prime example of this (Condry, 172). The music video for her song "Addicted," "shot in Taiwan, revels in pan-Asian imagery – red dragons, paper screens, silhouetted break-dancers, a hundred bicycle-riding, Walkman-listening Asian youth – a kind of global consumer *kawaii*" (Condry, 172). *Kawaii*, the Japanese word for "cute," is a gendered stereotype that groups like Cibo Matto sought to shatter. However, in Hikaru's music video, *kawaii* is applied to globalization instead of gender. Overall, the progression of hip-hop has shown the ability of the political power the genre has, but also how it can evolve.

Hip-hop was created as, and remains as, a means to make statements. As an addictive genre that draws many who seek to use it as a means of expression, it is forever changing in regards to what that statement may be. It began in the political turmoil in the South Bronx, and as consumerism became more important, the "badman" trope led to an attempt to fit in by status symbols – mostly women. As this became more and more important, the objectification of women was more prominent. However, because of the historical and inaccurate depictions of Asian American women, they are a group that is often prejudiced against. This prejudice has often flown under the radar in mass media – however, talented female and Asian-American rappers, lyricists, and performers are drawing attention to this with their own hip-hop productions. They are once again reinventing the genre to make a statement – about their race, yes – but also about their gender and their success.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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### Education

The Pennsylvania State University: University Park, PA  
Schreyer Honors College  
College of the Liberal Arts  
*Bachelor of Arts in English*  
Minor: Environmental Inquiry  
Dean's List: Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013, Spring 2014

### Experience

#### **Journalism Internship**

Summer 2014-present

Voices of Central Pennsylvania

- Improved writing skills through contribution of several articles every month
- Enhanced editing skills by assisting in monthly editing of paper
- Formulation of story ideas through creative thinking

#### **Penn State id+ Office Summer Employee**

Summer 2014

Sales Associate for LionCash

- Established interpersonal communication skills necessary to work in sales
- Miscellaneous office tasks

#### **Serials Department Intern**

Summer 2012, Summer 2013

Bucknell University

- Updated OCLC Worldcat catalog database
- Reshelved, shifted, and removed appropriate titles
- Completed simple administrative tasks such as the mail room

#### **Habitat for Humanity**

2013

Vero Beach Spring Break Trip

- Volunteered by building houses over Spring Break in Florida

#### **Club Treasurer**

2013-2014

Unabridged, Undergraduate English Majors Club

- Planned events and fundraisers for English Majors

### Awards

#### **CURIAS Grant for Undergraduate Research**

Cornell University Hip-Hop Archives

- Completed several days of archival training and then completed my own archival research for my undergraduate thesis.