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# Representations and Discourses of Black Motherhood in Hip Hop and R&B over Time

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## Representations and Discourses of Black Motherhood in Hip Hop and R&B over Time

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This study will examine how representations and discourses regarding Black motherhood have changed in the Hip Hop and R&B genres over time. Specifically, this scholarly work will contextualize the lyrics of 79 songs (57 Hip Hop songs; 18 R&B songs; 2 songs represented the Hip Hop and R&B genre; 2 songs represented artists who produce music in 5 or 6 genres) from 1961-2015 to identify the ways that Black male and Black female artists described motherhood. Through the use of Black Feminist Theory, and by placing the production of these songs within a sociohistorical context, we provide an in-depth qualitative examination of song lyrics related to Black motherhood. Results gave evidence that representations and discourse of motherhood have been largely shaped by patriarchy as well as cultural, political, and racial politics whose primary aim was to decrease the amount of public support for poor, single Black mothers. In spite of the pathological framing of Black mothers, most notably through the “welfare queen” and “baby mama” stereotypes, a substantial number of Hip Hop and R&B artists have provided a strong counter narrative to Black motherhood by highlighting their positive qualities, acknowledging their individual and collective struggle, and demanding that these women be respected.

How has patriarchy influenced the production and release of Hip Hop and R&B songs related to Black motherhood? In what ways has Hip Hop and R&B supported and challenged dominant representations and discourses surrounding Black<sup>1</sup> motherhood? How has Black Feminist Theory validated the experiences of Black mothers in Hip Hop and R&B? This manuscript will respond to these three questions by examining how societal changes have directly influenced how Black mothers in Hip Hop and R&B<sup>2</sup> are intellectualized. Within this context, it is important to focus on both *representations* and *dialogue* of Black mothers in these music genres over time. Specifically, when discussing *representations* we address how Black motherhood has been depicted, and when discussing *dialogue* of Black motherhood we address how members of society have specifically talked about Black mothers. Thus, *representations and dialogue* simultaneously highlight how outside entities have created negative perceptions of who Black women are, but more important, how Black male and female artists have used Hip Hop and R&B to provide a resounding counter narrative to help Black mothers retain their power.

<sup>1</sup> The terms “African American” and “Black” will be used interchangeably in this manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Hip Hop and R&B are not the same. In fact, Rap is only one form of the Hip-Hop culture, which includes other elements such as dance, graphics, slang, and fashion. For a detailed discussion of all the elements of Hip Hop culture see: Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. (New York: Macmillan, 2005). Nelson George, *Hip Hop America*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998); Robert Price Jr., “Hegemony, Hope, and the Harlem Renaissance: Taking Hip Hop Culture Seriously.” *Convergence* 38, no. 2 (2005): 55-64; Michael Ralph, “Hip-Hop.” *Social Text* 27, no. 3 (2009): 141-146; Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Be-Bop to Hip Hop*. California: University of California Press, 2003; James Stewart, “Message in the Music: Political commentary in Black popular music from rhythm and blues to early hip hop,” *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3(2005): 196-225; Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005).

This topic is important for four reasons. First, this study recognizes the current trend of “broken homes in the Black community.” Between 1960 and 1995, the number of African American children living with two married parents dropped from 75% to 33%, yet currently 72% of African American births are to single mothers as compared to 33% nationally. In light of this startling statistic, a new documentary from Moguldom Studios, “72%,”<sup>3</sup> tackles what is known as the “baby mama epidemic” among the African American community.<sup>4</sup> In light of this statistical reality, this study will bridge the family studies and Hip Hop cultural studies literatures by examining how representations and discourses of motherhood have been shaped by political agendas, patriarchy, and the reclaiming of Black women’s power.

Second, this study examines how Black mothers have been perceived by male and female Hip Hop and R&B artists over time. Thus, an historical lens allows us to highlight how patriarchy has denigrated Black women via the “baby mama epidemic” as well as how Black artists have used Hip Hop and R&B to actively resist pervasive and negative representations of Black mothers. Third, this topic builds on Black feminist scholarship by highlighting the voices of a historically marginalized group, Black men and women, in two very popular music genres among the Black populace (i.e., Hip Hop and R&B) discuss how Black motherhood is demonstrated and perceived. Last, and most important, instead of reinforcing the historical negativity associated with single Black mothers, this study upholds this “significant marker of womanhood” for many Black women<sup>5</sup> by drawing attention to how forces outside of the Black community have shaped how single Black mothers are generally depicted and discussed.

### Review of Literature

This section will highlight key scholarship related to Black motherhood. Included within this review is the historical interest in single Black mothers, changes in the structure of Black families over time, how Black mothers have generally been described in Hip Hop and R&B, as well as how patriarchy effects the representation and discussion of Black mothers in these genres. Next, we provide the theoretical framework on which this study was built. Then, we describe the methodology that was utilized in this study. Following this, we present Hip Hop and R&B lyrics that support the primary themes that were foundational in this study. Finally, we discuss how negative representations of Black motherhood are generally resisted within the dialogue of the Hip Hop and R&B genres.

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<sup>3</sup> This documentary won the Audience Buzz Award at the Black Women’s Film Festival in June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Brande Victorian. August 1, 2014. “New Documentary Tackles Startling Statistic That 72% of Black Children Are Born To Single Mothers.” Retrieved from: <http://madamemoire.com/453912/new-documentary-tackles-startling-statistic-72-black-children-born-single-mothers/>

<sup>5</sup> Lawson Bush, “Solve for X: Black Mothers + Black Boys = X.” *Journal of African American Men* 5, no. 2 (2000): 31-51. Cassandra Chaney, “The character of womanhood: How African American women’s perceptions of womanhood influence marriage and motherhood.” *Ethnicities* 11, no. 4 (2011): 512-535.

### The Black Family during the 1950s and 1960s

Even though the 1950s have been generally described as the “golden age” of marriage in the United States,<sup>6</sup> after at least seventy years of rough parity, African American marriage rates began to fall behind those of European Americans. In 1950, the percentages of White and Black women (aged 15 and over) who were currently married were roughly the same, 67 percent and 64 percent, respectively.<sup>7</sup> In the first comprehensive study of the family life of African Americans, *The Negro Family in the United States*,<sup>8</sup> the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier,<sup>9</sup> chronicled changes in the Black family that extended through colonial-era slavery, the years of slavery and emancipation, as well as the impact of Jim Crow and migrations to both southern and northern cities in the twentieth century. Although this sociological work was published in 1939, Frazier discussed many issues that are relevant for the contemporary Black family. Specifically, he discussed the effects of matriarchy and patriarchy, the impact of slavery on family solidarity and personal identity, the impact of long-term poverty and lack of access to education, migration and rootlessness, and the relationship between family and community. Frazier insisted that the characteristics of the family were shaped not by race, but by social conditions.

As Frazier noted, changes in the structure of the 1950s African American family coincided with “Jim Crow,” which posed tremendous educational, legal, social, and economic constraints on Black Americans.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1800s and until 1965, the term “Jim Crow” became more than a term to mock the stereotypes of Blacks, but also a legal system to promote White supremacy and Black inferiority in a land that no longer made slavery mandatory. This legal structure created separate schools, parks, churches, and businesses as well as certain seating arrangements on buses and buildings for people of color. At some facilities, the mere presence of African Americans was not allowed and it has been noted that the sign “Negros and Dogs Not Allowed” was not unusual in the South.<sup>11</sup> Comparing human beings to dogs perpetuated the ideology that Blacks were

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<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Coontz, "Historical perspectives on family studies." *Journal of marriage and family* 62, no. 2 (2000): 283-297. Stephanie Coontz. *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. Basic Books, 1992. Cherlin, Andrew. *Marriage, divorce, remarriage*. Harvard University Press, 2009. Cherlin, Andrew J. "The deinstitutionalization of American marriage." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 4 (2004): 848-861.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas J. Besharov and Andrew West, "African American Marriage Patterns," *Beyond the Color Line* (2001): 95-113.

<sup>8</sup> E. Franklin Frazier and Anthony M. Platt, *The Negro Family in the United States*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1939).

<sup>9</sup> E. Franklin Frazier was the first African American to be elected to the American Sociological Society.

<sup>10</sup> The term “Jim Crow” was used as early as 1828 when a white minstrel performer did a routine that was created to mock the dancing, singing, and demeanor of African Americans. He named it “Jump Jim Crow” and Abolitionist newspapers further popularized the term after discussing railroad separation based on race in the North in the 1840s. See Leon F. Litwack, “Jim Crow Blues,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 2 (2004): 7.

<sup>11</sup> Litwack, “Jim Crow Blues,” 8.

subhuman and deserved dehumanized treatment. Furthermore, restricting Blacks from certain schools and libraries perpetuated the lack of knowledge among this group and structurally enforced a particular entertainment culture and other ways of life.<sup>12</sup> Although the system of chattel slavery was removed, Jim Crow laws stood in the way of African American freedom.

Starting in the late 1950s the Civil Rights movement made a tremendous impact on African American life, being responsible for the removal of “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws by the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954. While being the catalyst for integration, the Civil Rights movement brought forth the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made discrimination on race, sex, or any other category illegal. Shortly after, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 made voting discrimination illegal.<sup>13</sup> The Civil Rights era was a time of Black leadership, unity, and progression where African Americans first gained a sense of power. However, in March 1965, that power was threatened by a national report that painted the Black family as pathological, dysfunctional, and broken.

### **Black Motherhood as Pathological and Dysfunctional**

In a well-publicized national report published over four decades ago, “The Moynihan Report,”<sup>14</sup> sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan proclaimed the rise in mother-headed families was not due to lack of economic opportunities (e.g., stable jobs) afforded Black families, but rather a ghetto culture that encouraged and glorified out-of-wedlock childbirth. In “The Tangle of Pathology” section of this report, Moynihan proclaimed:

There is, presumably, no special reason why a society in which males are dominant in family relationships is to be preferred to a matriarchal arrangement. However, it is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating on one principle, while the great majority of the population, and the one with the most advantages to begin with, is operating on another. This is the present situation of the Negro. Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage.<sup>15</sup>

In essence, by “presuming male leadership” is the natural “arrangement of society,” Moynihan simultaneously espoused patriarchy as well as negated the racist, sexist, and classist experiences of Black women in general, and Black mothers in particular. Several prominent Black scholars and civil rights leaders asserted the image of Black families

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob U. Gordon, “Black Males in the Civil Rights Movement.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 569, (2000): 42.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (March 1965), [www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm](http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

and Black motherhood offered in The Moynihan Report advanced negative stereotypes and blamed the victim for their disadvantaged plight.<sup>16</sup>

While many radicals have asserted Frazier's<sup>17</sup> groundbreaking sociological discussion of the Black family, *The Negro Family in the United States*, promoted patriarchy, this scholarly work provided fodder for the "Black as pathological" narrative that was subsequently advanced by Moynihan.<sup>18</sup> Since that time, a growing body of Black scholars have highlighted glaring limitations of "The Moynihan Report" as well as heralded the complexity of Black motherhood.<sup>19</sup>

### Black Motherhood in Hip Hop and R&B

Although regarded by his supporters as "the great communicator," former president Ronald Reagan frequently engaged in rhetoric that stigmatized the poor, and coincidentally, gave birth to what is perhaps one of the most damning images of Black motherhood. While dutifully promising to roll back welfare, during his stump speeches Reagan frequently told the story of a so-called "welfare queen" in Chicago who drove a Cadillac and had ripped off \$150,000 from the government using 80 aliases, 30 addresses, a dozen social security cards and four fictional dead husbands. Although journalists searched for this "welfare cheat" in the hopes of interviewing her, they discovered that she did not exist. Sadly, even though the majority of recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are White,<sup>20</sup> Reagan's public advancement of the fictitious "welfare queen" resulted in wide-sweeping representations of poor Black mothers as lazy, promiscuous, the primary recipients of public aid, and deserving of their lot in life.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup>William Ryan, "Blaming the Victim." Vol. 226. Vintage, 1976; Hortense Spillers. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

<sup>17</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

<sup>18</sup> Vernon J. Williams, "E. Franklin Frazier and the African American Family in Historical Perspective." *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 4 (1999): 246.

<sup>19</sup> Juan J. Battle and Michael D. Bennett, "African-American families and public policy: The legacy of the Moynihan report," *African Americans and the Public Agenda* (1997): 150-167.

Alan S. Berger and William Simon. "Black families and the Moynihan Report: A Research Evaluation," *Social Problems* (1974): 145-161. Jill Quadagno, "*The Color of Welfare*," (Oxford: University Press, 1994): 119-120. Jerry Gaston and James Sherohman, "Origins of Researchers on Black Americans," *American Sociologist*, 9, no. 2 (May 1974): 75. James T. Patterson, "*Freedom is not enough: The Moynihan report and America's struggle over Black family life--from LBJ to Obama*," (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> According to 2013 data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the program, 40.2 percent of SNAP recipients are white, 25.7 percent are black, 10.3 percent are Hispanic, 2.1 percent are Asian, 1.2 percent are Native American, 0.7 percent are multiple races, 12.8 percent are unknown, 7 percent did not participate.

<sup>21</sup> Avila, "The 'Welfare Queen,' The 'Homeless by Choice': Reagan's Toxic Legacy," (Sunday, October 6, 2013). Retrieved from: Retrieved from: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/10/06/1243243/-The-Welfare-Queen-The-Homeless-By-Choice-Reagan-s-Toxic-Legacy#>. Peter Dreier, "Reagan's Legacy: Homelessness in America," May/June 2004. Retrieved from: <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/135/reagan.html>

During the same time that the "Black welfare queen" was gaining political traction, an increasing number of Black women, many of whom were mothers, were incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the multidimensionality of Black life was heralded on Black Entertainment Television (BET), the first American basic cable and satellite television channel for African Americans. Launched 35 years ago on January 25, 1980 (as a Program block on Nickelodeon), BET has the distinction of being the most prominent television network targeting African American audiences, and currently reaches more than 88 million households. Programming on the network consists of original and acquired television series, theatrically- and home video-released movies, and mainstream rap, Hip Hop and R&B music videos. As of February 2015, approximately 88,255,000 American households (75.8% of households with television) receive BET.<sup>23</sup> Thus, BET has historically and contemporaneously given Black artists the platform to provide a strong counter narrative to negative discourses of Black motherhood.

Four years after the introduction of BET, America was introduced to The Huxtable family on *The Cosby Show* (First episode date: September 20, 1984), an upper-middle class African American family that resided in Brooklyn, New York. Unlike prior media representations of Black mothers, Claire Huxtable had the distinction of being an attorney, mother of five children (four daughters and one son) and wife of a pediatrician. Although *The Cosby Show* ended after eight seasons (Final episode date: April 30, 1992) for many Americans this show is a beacon of successful Black families and provided an affirmative representation of Black motherhood. Although this decade gave birth to grossly conflicting representations of Black motherhood in the printed and televised media, several Black scholars drew attention to the extended family networks of Black mothers,<sup>24</sup> the propensity for Black mothers to rely on family and friends,<sup>25</sup> the higher likelihood for Black mothers of infant children (1 year of age and younger) to work outside of the home,<sup>26</sup> as well as how Black mothers help their children cope with racism.<sup>27</sup>

### Conflicting Images of Black Motherhood

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<sup>22</sup> Stephanie R. Bush-Baskette, "The war on drugs as a war against black women." *Crime control and women: Feminist implications of criminal justice policy* (1998): 113-129.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Seidman, "List of how many homes each cable network is in as of February 2015." *TV by the Numbers*. Zap2it (February 22, 2015). Retrieved February 24, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Harriette Pipes McAdoo, "Black mothers and the extended family support network," *The black woman* 21 (1980): 125.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph H. Stevens Jr, "Social support, locus of control, and parenting in three low-income groups of mothers: Black teenagers, black adults, and white adults," *Child Development* (1988): 635-642.

<sup>26</sup> Howard Hayghe, "Rise in mothers' labor force activity includes those with infants," *Monthly Labor Review* (1986): 43-45.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara B. Richardson, "Racism and child-rearing: A study of Black mothers," PhD diss., ProQuest Information & Learning, 1981.

Societal increases in the number of poor single mothers coincided with the War on Poverty, which produced legislation that reduced federal support to impoverished people during the 1990s.<sup>28</sup> In addition, during this decade a particular form of Hip Hop, namely Gangsta Rap, which largely highlighted the ghetto's frustration with law enforcement,<sup>29</sup> violence, misogyny,<sup>30</sup> as well as conflicting images of Black motherhood, in the form of "The Black Lady" and "Welfare Queen" stereotypes. Tia Tyree's<sup>31</sup> study revealed clear distinctions between how Black male rap artists perceived Black mothers and the juxtaposition of these women in either "good" or "bad" terms. While their biological mothers earned a Queen status due to the trust they instilled within their sons, Black male rappers did not trust their "baby mamas" or deem them worthy of respect.<sup>32</sup> Generally, rap artists characterized their biological mothers as comforting, trusting, supportive, understanding, and compassionate and "baby mamas" as freaky, sleazy, scandalous, cold-hearted, revengeful, and lazy. Furthermore, rap lyrics that described baby mamas were often saturated in misogyny and sexism and generally described these women as opportunistic "gold diggers" and "drama queens." Specifically, 11 out of 12 songs contained negative content about the mothers of their children. Women were described as "gold diggers," who get pregnant for wealthy rappers to secure and/or elevate her financial standing.

Although rappers' position of their mothers as "good women" and queens merit virtue, respect, and admiration, misogynistic attitudes toward unmarried Black mothers maintain the racist experiences they endure. According to Pough, "When misogynistic songs couch baby mamas as bitches and hoes, listeners are lead to believe young Black mothers are worthy of the centuries of oppression, hatred, and racist condemnation experienced at the hands of the patriarchal male social systems in America. Further, the misogyny within Hip Hop and American culture threatens the lives and stunts the

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<sup>28</sup> The most notable of these forms of legislation was the Republican-sponsored Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, which, as President Bill Clinton claimed, "end[ed] welfare as we know it."

<sup>29</sup> In April 1992, four California police officers were not indicted for severely beating Black motorist Rodney King on March 3, 1991. Although there were several police brutality cases and lawsuits in the city of Los Angeles prior to King's case, this particular incident became the representation of police brutality against African American men and riots were initiated nationwide after the verdict was released. As the story was aired on all major news channels, many commenters and writers considered this to be a great tragedy for the Black community, and the incident fueled harsh feelings of disdain towards the LAPD and general law enforcement.

<sup>30</sup> Edward G. Armstrong, "Gangsta misogyny: A content analysis of the portrayals of violence against women in rap music, 1987-1993," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 8, no. 2 (2001): 96-126.

<sup>31</sup> Tia C. M. Tyree, "Lovin' Momma and Hatin' on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representations in Songs about Rappers' Mothers and Baby Mamas," *Women & Language* 32, no. 2 (2009): 50-58.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Weitzer and Charis Kubrin, "Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings," *Men & Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3-29.

growth of Black girls as well as denigrates Black womanhood.”<sup>33</sup> Correspondingly, Oware<sup>34</sup> found that Black males subscribed to a conservative and patriarchal view of male-female relationships,<sup>35</sup> in which males financially provide for the family and women physically and emotionally nurture the family. However, it is important to recognize the conservative and patriarchal dialogue advocated in Hip Hop and R&B may be largely influenced by the record-labels of Black artists, which are primarily owned by wealthy, educated White men from privileged backgrounds.<sup>36</sup>

### **Black Motherhood during the Age of Obama**

After the 2008 Presidential election of Barrack Obama, many African Americans believed this election epitomized triumph over the many milestones that they faced. Prominent Black individuals who took part in the Civil Rights movement, such as Reverend Jesse Jackson and Senator John Lewis, were filled with joy as President Obama entered the White House. The 2008 election was a time of celebration for African Americans but it also perpetuated and deepened the notion of color-blindness, which is the ideology that race does not matter and racism does not exist. Subscribing to color-blindness is harmful because when racism is not acknowledged, individuals feel no need to act on a problem that does not exist.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the renowned lawyer and scholar Michelle Alexander asserted the election of President Obama coincided with a “New Jim Crow” that has led to the mass incarceration of Black men and established a caste system that maintains generational poverty for the families of these men.<sup>38</sup> While the election of President Obama in 2008 was an historical moment, increases in the number of poor Black mothers have been found to be especially deleterious for the African American family.<sup>39</sup>

### **Black Motherhood as a Symbol of Strength and Courage**

In spite of the re-election of President Obama in 2012, in many respects, the state of the Black family remained precarious. To illustrate, the media’s targeting of alcohol

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<sup>33</sup> Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Oware. "Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy: Black Male Rap Artists' Views of Fatherhood and the Family." *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2011): 327-351.

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Paul Resnikoff, "The Music Industry: It's Still a White Boys' Club," *Digital Music News*, Monday, January 20, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Helen Neville, et al., "Color-Blind Racial Ideology: Theory, Training, and Measurement Implications in Psychology," *American Psychologist* 68, no. 6 (2013): 455-456.

<sup>38</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy E. Roberts, "Prison, Foster Care, and the Systemic Punishment of Black Mothers," *UCLA L. Rev.* 59 (2011): 1474.

and tobacco sales to people of color,<sup>40</sup> high rates of AIDS/HIV infection,<sup>41</sup> the stress experienced by poor Black mothers,<sup>42</sup> and the substantial number of Blacks that are murdered by police each week<sup>43</sup> demonstrate the multiple stressors experienced by Black families. In the face of these stressors, Black mothers have gained national attention. For example, when former neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman killed the 17-year old Black male, Trayvon Martin, in February 2012, his mother Sabrina Fulton became a social activist and beacon of strength and courage.<sup>44</sup> While Zimmerman's acquittal of the shooting of Martin outraged and saddened Black America, the same pattern continued two years later with the deaths of 18-year old Michael Brown and 43-year old Eric Garner in 2014. Tragically, Brown was fatally shot by White Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson in Missouri, and Garner died due to a chokehold by a NYPD officer while four other officers were present holding Garner down. None of the officers in these instances were indicted and this yielded riots, protests, and forums across the entire world in a myriad of spaces—from Black neighborhoods to predominantly White universities. Clearly, these tragic incidents are a patent reminder of the social structures that dominate and oppress Black men, however, it is important to recognize how *all men* may oppress and dominate Black women.

### Patriarchy

We concur with British sociologist, Sylvia Walby's<sup>45</sup> view of patriarchy, in which she defined patriarchy "as a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." Absent from this cursory definition is the *privileges* that men receive from the oppression of women. While men are the

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth C. Hirshman, "Motherhood in black and brown: Advertising to US minority women." *Advertising & Society Review* 12, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>41</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention, African Americans, more than any other race, have the highest rates of HIV infection in the nation. Although just 14% of the U.S. population, blacks account for nearly half of those living and dying with HIV and AIDS. Among African Americans, gay and bisexual men are the most affected, followed by heterosexual women. AIDS is the third leading cause of death among black women aged 25-34 and 35-44 and among black men aged 35-44.

<sup>42</sup> Lisa Rosenthal and Marci Lobel, "Explaining racial disparities in adverse birth outcomes: Unique sources of stress for Black American women." *Social Science & Medicine* 72, no. 6 (2011): 977-983. According to these scholars, Black American women are subject to unique sources of stress throughout their lives and particularly during pregnancy based on their multiple identities as women, Black, and pregnant.

<sup>43</sup> In an article written by Johnson, Hoyer, and Heath for *USA Today* (August 15, 2014), African American males are killed by police almost twice a week.

<sup>44</sup> After the death of her son, Sabrina Fulton created the Trayvon Martin Foundation, which aims to "create awareness of how violent crime impacts the families of the victims and to provide support and advocacy for those families in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin." Moreover, Fulton created the Circle of Mothers as a way to empower women and whose purpose "is to bring together mothers who have lost children or family members to senseless gun violence for the purpose of healing, empowerment, and fellowship toward the larger aim of community building."

<sup>45</sup> Sylvia Walby, *Theorising Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 154.

beneficiaries of patriarchy, Elaine Neunfeldt<sup>46</sup> found it important to not view patriarchy as an individualistic system in which a few individuals create oppression; rather, an intricate social system in which everyone plays a part and has some level of responsibility in its perpetuation.

According to Dorothy Roberts,<sup>47</sup> patriarchy specifically affects the notion of motherhood by sustaining the ideology that women are defined by motherhood. She asserted that in this patriarchal society, women are strongly encouraged and pressured to become mothers,<sup>48</sup> and that pronatalism causes many to “define women as mothers or potential mothers.”<sup>49</sup> Because patriarchy promotes the oppression of women and the privileges of men, it is sexist. However, Roberts<sup>50</sup> believed that patriarchy is also *racist*. Patriarchy encourages and appreciates motherhood for White women, but devalues motherhood for Black women.<sup>51</sup> Because patriarchy is racist and sexist, Black women face the additional racism plight compared to their white female counterparts. Cheryl Gilkes<sup>52</sup> asserted this double plight gives Black women a “clear view of oppression.” In other words, Black women in a White patriarchal society are better able to understand the consequences of racism and sexism than others. Given this reality, it is important to utilize a theoretical framework that highlights the unique experiences of Black women who must navigate in a patriarchal society.

### Black Feminist Theory

Although the National Feminist Organization was created in 1973, Black feminist theory has been around for hundreds of years as historical women such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and many others have critically analyzed the unique experiences of Black women.<sup>53</sup> A major part of Black feminist theory is the notion of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 that explained the unique and oppressing experience of Black women due to their race and gender.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Elaine Neunfeldt, "Identifying and Dismantling Patriarchy and Other Systems of Oppression of Women," *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 1 (April 2015): 20.

<sup>47</sup> Dorothy E. Roberts, "Racism and Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood," *American University Journal of Gender and the Law* no. 1 (1993): 1-38.

<sup>48</sup> Martha L. Fineman, "Images of Mothers in Poverty Discourses," 1991 *Duke Law Journal* 274, 276, quoted in Roberts, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Martha E. Gimenez, "Feminism, Pronatalism and Motherhood," in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot, (New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 287, quoted in Roberts, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cheryl Gilkes, "From Slavery to Social Welfare: Racism and the Control of Black Women," in Amy Smerdlow and Helen Lessinger (eds.) 288-300, "Class, Race, and Sex: The Dynamics of Control," (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981).

<sup>53</sup> Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement." nd, 1982.

<sup>54</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139-167.

Similar to intersectionality, terms such as “multiple jeopardy”<sup>55</sup> and “interlocking nature of oppression”<sup>56</sup> both focus on Black women’s subordinate identities—being Black, being a woman, and their social class. Kimberlé Crenshaw explained the importance of incorporating intersectionality into feminist frameworks and antiracist policies in her 1989 article:

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.<sup>57</sup>

Crenshaw echoed the words of Mary Church Terrell,<sup>58</sup> the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, from 1904 when she stated that Black women’s sex “handicapped” them and their race brought about mockery.<sup>59</sup> It is clear that Black women suffer from overt consequences of their “multiple jeopardy”<sup>60</sup> identity such as discrimination, ostracism, and marginalization, but there are also more covert, yet detrimental, consequences facing Black women, such as health problems. In 2011, Ailshire and House<sup>61</sup> found that low-educated and low-income Black women in two particular age ranges (25-39 and 45-54) had the highest increase in BMI while their high-educated and high-income white male counterparts had the lowest BMI increase. These findings show the interplay of identities (i.e., gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age)<sup>62</sup> many Black women face.

Recognizing and resisting the oppression from this interplay of identities is at the core of many Black feminists’ arguments. Deborah King<sup>63</sup> asserted that the major parts of Black feminist ideology are visibility, self-determination, challenging oppression, and maintaining a positive image. The visibility piece gives credence to Black women’s “special status” in society in the midst of privileged identities. Similar to Patricia Hill Collins’ idea of self-definition and self-valuation, King’s notion of self-determination means to make meaning of one’s own reality and create priorities to better the status of

<sup>55</sup> Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.” *Signs* (1988): 42-72.

<sup>56</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): 14.

<sup>57</sup> Crenshaw, 140.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women,” *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (July 1904): 292.

<sup>59</sup> King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology” *Signs* (1988): 42.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> J. A. Ailshire and J.S. House, “The Unequal Burden of Weight Gain: An Intersectional Approach to Understanding Social Disparities in BMI Trajectories from 1986 to 2001/2002” *Social Forces*, 90, no. 2 (2011): 397-423.

<sup>62</sup> Olena Hankivsky, “Intersectionality 101,” [PDF document] Retrieved from: [http://www.sfu.ca/iirp/documents/resources/101\\_Final.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/iirp/documents/resources/101_Final.pdf) (April 2014) *The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, SFU*.

<sup>63</sup> King, 72.

Black women on a personal and political scale.<sup>64</sup> Having a focus of liberation and having “feminist consciousness” in the midst of intersectional plight challenges oppression.<sup>65</sup> Lastly, King believed that maintaining a positive image while resisting oppression is important. This includes not viewing Black women as victims, but recognizing their strengths and crucial part in society.<sup>66</sup> Patricia Hill Collins<sup>67</sup> also believed that giving attention to African American culture is an essential part of Black feminist ideology.

Turning attention to Black motherhood within the context of Hip Hop and R&B, Chaney and Brown’s<sup>68</sup> recent qualitative content analysis of song lyrics in these genres revealed the elevated status of motherhood. In particular, the lyrics of songs in these respective genres largely heralded Black motherhood as the source of emotional comfort and support, the reason for children’s strength and self-confidence, the superiority of this form of parentage to Black fatherhood, the teacher and disciplinary role of Black mothers, as well as the unconditional love that Black motherhood instills within the child-artists in these genres. Through the use of a Black Feminist Theory lens, these authors emphasized how artists in these respective genres have provided affirmative and strong counter narratives to societally-constructed negative discourses and representations of Black motherhood.

### Method

This study used a qualitative approach that examined contextual themes present in song lyrics. In order to determine the songs that were chosen, several steps were taken. First, all songs had to be sung by or featured a Black Hip Hop or R&B artist and had to be specifically related to motherhood. Initially, we focused on songs that had the word “Mama,” “Baby Mama,” “Mamma,” “Momma,” “Mami,” “Mommy,” or “Mother” in the song title, yet broadened our examination to include songs that were specifically related to motherhood that did not use any of the aforementioned words in the song title. Sole singers and groups were included in the analysis if the song’s title and/or lyrics met the aforementioned criteria. This involved analyzing the song titles of over 100 songs between the years 1961-2015 from Billboard Research Services. Second, the complete lyrics of all songs were then analyzed, which were obtained from the following websites: <http://www.aaalyrics.com/>, <http://www.azlyrics.com/>, <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/>, <http://www.lyrics-now.com/>, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/>, <http://www.sing365.com/index.html> and <http://www.songs-lyrics.net/>. (The song title, singer or singers, year released, the

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<sup>64</sup> King, 72.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Collins, 21.

<sup>68</sup> Cassandra Chaney and Arielle Brown. “Is Black Motherhood a Marker of Oppression or Empowerment? Hip Hop and R&B Lessons about ‘Mama.’” *Journal of Hip Hop Studies*. 21, no. 1 (2015): 8-37.

individual or individuals that composed the song and the genre are provided in the Table).

Second, after the songs were identified by the authors, the next part of the study involved: (1) identifying whether the song was provided by a solo artist or group; (2) determining the year that the song was released; (3) providing the individual or individuals that composed the song; (4) identifying the music genre; (5) running statistical analyses on the aforementioned.<sup>69</sup>

**Song Title, Singer, Year Released, Composer, and Genre**

Song Title	Singer/s	Year	Writer/s	Genre
"Mama Said"	The Shirelles	1961	Luther Dixon and Willie Denton	R&B
"Tell Mama"	Etta James	1967	Wilbur Terrell, Marcus Lewis Daniel, and Clarence George Carter	R&B
"I'll Always Love My Mama"	The Intruders	1973	Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff, Gene Mcfadden and John Whitehead	R&B
"Sadie"	The Spinners	1974	Charles Simmons, B. Hawes, Bruce Jefferson, & Joseph Banks	R&B
"Thanks for My Child"	Cheryl 'Pepsi' Riley	1988	Full Force	R&B
"Always on the Run"	Lenny Kravitz	1991	Lenny Kravitz and Slash	Rock; Funk Rock; Hard Rock; Neo-Psychedelia; Neo Soul
"Step Daddy"	Too Short	1992	Todd Shaw, Donna L. Clinton, Ronald Dunbar, and Donnie Sterling	Hip Hop
"I'm Outstanding"	Shaquille O'Neal	1993	Alisa Yarbrough O'Neal, Erick Sermon, and Raymond Calhoun	R&B
"Keep Ya Head Up"	Tupac Shakur	1993	Tupac Shakur	Hip Hop
"Sadie"	R. Kelly	1993	R. Kelly	R&B
"Dear Mama"	Tupac Shakur	1995	T. Shakur, J. Sample, and T. Pizarro	Hip Hop
"Guess Who"	Goodie Mob	1995	Robert Barnett, Thomas Burton, Cameron Gipp, Willie Knighton, and	Hip Hop

<sup>69</sup>Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

			Organized Noize	
"Wonda Why They Call You Bitch"	Tupac Shakur	1996	T. Shakur and Johnny Lee Jackson	Hip Hop
"All I Got Is You"	Ghostface Killah	1996	D. Coles, M.J. Blige, R. Diggs Jr., B. Gordy, D. Richards, A. Mizell, and F. Perren	Hip Hop
"A Song for Mama"	Boys II Men	1997	Kenneth Edmonds	R&B
"4 Page Letter"	Aaliyah	1997	Melissa A. Elliott and Timothy Z. Mosley	R&B
"My Baby Mamma"	Luniz	1997	Tone Capone	Hip Hop
"Every Ghetto Every City"	Lauryn Hill	1998	David Axelrod, Lauryn Hill, Johari Newton, Tejunold Newton, Vada Nobles, and Rasheem Pugh	R&B
"I Honor U"	Canibus (featuring Jenny Fujita)	1998	Germaine Williams and Wyclef Jean	Hip Hop
"Mama Raised Me"	Master P. (featuring Snoop Dogg & Soulja Slim)	1998	Daryl Anderson, Calvin Broadus, Percy Miller, Jr., and James Trapp	Hip Hop
"I Love My Momma"	Snoop Dogg	1999	Calvin Broadus, Lenny Williams, and Cecil Womack	Hip Hop
"Ed-ucation"	Dr. Dre (featuring Eddie Griffin)	1999	Andre Young	Hip Hop
"My Homie Baby Mama"	Insane Clown Posse	2000	Mike Clark, William Dail, and Joseph Bruce	Hip Hop
"Mom Praying"	Beanie Sigel (featuring Scarface)	2001	Dwight Grant, Brad Jordan, Harvey Scales, and Justin Smith	Hip Hop
"Baby Mama"	Three 6 Mafia (featuring LaChat)	2001	Paul Beauregard and Jordan Houston	Hip Hop
"This Woman's Work"	Maxwell	2001	Kate Bush	R&B
"Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)"	Jay-Z	2001	Shawn Carter, Al Green, and Roosevelt Harrell	Hip Hop
"Baby Mama"	Daz Dillinger	2001	Ran Dogg	Hip Hop

Drama"				
"Survivor"	Destiny's Child	2001	Beyoncé Knowles, Anthony Dent, and Mathew Knowles	Hip Hop and R&B
"Baby Mama Drama"	Grand Puba	2001	Grand Puba	Hip Hop
"Baby Mama"	Lil Boosie (featuring Webbie)	2001	Jeremy Varnard Allen and Torence Hatch	Hip Hop
"Dance"	Nas	2002	Nasir Jones	Hip Hop
"Big Mama (Unconditional Love)"	LL Cool J	2002	Charles B. Simmons, Bruce Hawes, Joseph B. Jefferson, James Todd Smith, Mark Curry, and Joe Woolfolk	Hip Hop
"Momma Knows"	Will Smith	2002	Lennie Bennett, Willard Smith, Lance Bennett, Lemar Bennett, and C. Wilson	Hip Hop
"Motherfather"	Musiq Soulchild	2002	Taalib Johnson, James Jason Poyser, and Vikter Duplaix	Hip Hop
"Not My Baby"	Bone Thugs N Harmony	2002	Edward Theodore Riley, Tim Middleton, Anthony Henderson, Anthony, Steven Howse, Bryon Mccane, Charles Scruggs, Timothy William Gatling, / Gene Griffin, and , Aaron Robin Hall III	Hip Hop
"She's Alive"	Andre 3000 (Outkast)	2003	Kevin Kendricks and Andre Benjamin	Hip Hop
"To My Mama"	Bow Wow	2003	Geoff Gurd, Martin Lascelles, Gina Foster, Jalil Hutchins, Lawrence Smith, Shadd Moss, Jonathan J. Smith, Tenaia Sanders, and Rahman Griffin	Hip Hop
"Baby Mama"	Holla Point	2004	James Glasper, Michellin Barnwell and Robert	Hip Hop

			Getfield	
"Momma"	Brand Nubian	2004	DJ Alamo, Al Green, and Willie Mitchell	Hip Hop
"If..(My Mommy)"	Saigon	2004	Brian Daniel Carenard (aka Saigon)	Hip Hop
"Reason"	Nas (featuring Emily)	2004	Zoe Schneider, Manougazou, Martin Kilger, Mirta Junco Wambrug, and Ras Pyton	Hip Hop
"Look at Me Now" (featuring Mr. Porter)	Young Buck	2005	David Darnell Brown (aka Young Buck) and D. Porter	Hip Hop
"Nobody Knows"	Nelly (featuring Anthony Hamilton)	2005	Jermaine Dupri, Paul Maurice Kelly, Cornell Haynes, James Phillips, and Anthony Cornelius Hamilton	Hip Hop
"You Only Get One"	Skillz	2005	Shaquan Ian Lewis (aka Mad Skillz)	Hip Hop
"Hate It or Love It"	The Game (featuring 50 Cent)	2005	Jayceon Taylor and Curtis Jackson	Hip Hop
"Hey Mama"	Kanye West	2005	Kanye West and Donal Leace	Hip Hop
"We Ain't"	The Game (featuring Eminem)	2005	Songwriters: Rufus Cooper, Katari Cox, Jean Yves Ducornet, Michael Elizondo, Henry Garcia, Malcolm R. Greenidge, Curtis Jackson, Steve King, Marshall Mathers, Luis Resto, Delray M Richardson, Tupac Amaru Shakur, Jayceon Taylor, and Andre Romell Young	Hip Hop
"Benediccion Mami"	Fat Joe	2006	L. Brown, J. Cartagena, L. Glover, H. Gordy, A. Story, and N. Warwar	Hip Hop
"I Made It"	Jay-Z	2006	Shawn C. Carter, / Khalil Abdul Rachman, and Dontae Winslow	Hip Hop

"Freedom of Preach"	Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long)	2006	Christopher Brian Bridges, William Larkin Jones, Craig King, and Eddie Long	Hip Hop
"Dreamin"	Young Jeezy	2006	Jermaine Jackson, Bill Summers, Claytoven Richardson, Jay Jenkins, Larry Batiste, and Andrew Harr	Hip Hop
"Bury Me A G"	Young Jeezy	2006	Jay Jenkins, Kevin Crowe, Donald French, Clifford Brown, Mildred Jackson, Erik Ortiz, iii, Tupac Amaru Shakur, Iii Clifford Brown, and Randy Walker	Hip Hop
"Big Brother"	Kanye West	2007	Kanye West	Hip Hop
"Mama"	The Dream	2007	Terius Youngdell Nash, and Christopher Stewart	R&B
"Mama"	Chris Brown	2007	Christopher M. Brown, Eric Hudson, and Atozzio Dishawn Towns	Hip Hop and R&B
"No Hook"	Jay-Z	2007	Sean Combs, Shawn Carter, Barry Eugene White, Levar Coppin, and Deleno Matthews	Hip Hop
"If (My Mommy)"	Saigon	2007	Brian Carenard	Hip Hop
"Future Baby Mama"	Prince	2007	Prince Rogers Nelson	Funk; R&B; Rock; Pop; New Wave; Minneapolis Sound; Synthpop
"I'm Only Human"	Rick Ross	2008	James Harris III, Rodney Kohn, Terry Lewis, Johnny Mollings, Leonardo V. Mollings, J Newman, William Roberts, and E Williams	Hip Hop
"Superwoman"	Alicia Keyes	2008	Alicia Keys, Linda Perry, and Steve Mostyn	R&B
"Momma Can You Hear Me"	Talib Kweli	2008	Talib Greene	Hip Hop

"Woman"	Raheem DeVaughn	2008	Braun, Robin Hannibal Moelsted, and Michael Edward Milosh	R&B
"Hey Lil' Mama"	Vic Damone (featuring Lil Wayne)	2008	Shatek	Hip Hop
"Mother"	Ashanti	2008	Ashanti	R&B
"3 Peat"	Lil' Wayne	2008	Dwayne Carter, Vaushaun Brooks, and Colin Westover	Hip Hop
"Playing with Fire"	Lil' Wayne	2008	Dwayne Carter, Nicholas M. Warwar, and Jason Joel Desrouleaux	Hip Hop
"I'm Sorry"	Ne-Yo (featuring Cristal Q)	2009	Shaffer Smith	R&B
"Rap Cemetery"	Lil Wayne (featuring Juelz Santana)	2009	Leak Jones	Hip Hop
"Blessed"	Jill Scott	2011	Andre Harris and Vidal Davis	R&B
"Mama Nem"	Tech N9ne	2011	David Sanders II, Samuel Watson, and Aaron Yates	Hip Hop
"I Love My Momma"	E-40	2011	E. Stevens, Mic Conn, and R.O.D.	Hip Hop
"Look What You've Done"	Drake	2011	Jesse Graham Shebib Woodward	Hip Hop
"Maybach Curtains"	Meek Mill (featuring Nas, Rick Ross, and John Legend)	2012	Rick Ross and Robert Williams	Hip Hop
"I Love My Mama"	Lil' Wayne	2013	Lil' Wayne	Hip Hop
"Future Baby Mama"	Jacquees	2014	Jaycee	Hip Hop
"Blessings"	Big Sean (featuring Drake and Kanye West)	2015	Boi-ida and Vinylz	Hip Hop
"I've Got Life"	Lauryn Hill (featuring Nina Simone)	2015	Lauryn Hill and Nina Simone	Hip Hop

"Hey Mama"	David Guetta (featuring Nicki Minaj and Afrojack)	2015	David Guetta, Giorgio Tuinfort, Ester Dean, Sean Douglas, Nicki Minaj, Bebe Rexha, Nick Van De Wall, John Lomax, and Alan Lomax	Hip Hop
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Table 1

**Presentation of the Findings**

There were a total of 79 songs related to motherhood and 57 songs (74% of the total number of songs) represented the Hip Hop genre; 18 songs (22% of the total number of songs) represented the R&B genre; two songs (2% of the total number of songs) represented the Hip Hop and R&B genre; two songs (2% of the total number of songs) represented artists who produce music in 5 or 6 genres, respectively. In addition, 48 songs (61%) were provided by a sole artist; 20 songs (25%) were provided by the artist and a featured artist and 11 songs (14%) were provided by a group. In addition, 44 songs (56%) were written by an individual or individuals other than the artist, 23 songs (29%) were written by the artist and another individual or individuals, and 11 songs (15%) were written by the artist. Furthermore, two songs (2.5%) were produced in the 1950s; two songs (2.5%) were produced in the 1970s; one song (1%) was produced in the 1980's; 17 songs (22%) were produced in the 1990s; 47 songs (59%) were produced between 2000 and 2009; 9 songs (13%) were produced between 2011 and 2015. Furthermore, 61 artists offered one song related to Black motherhood.

The following artists produced two songs related to Black motherhood: (1) Kanye West ("Hey Mama" in 2005 and "Big Brother" in 2007) and (2) The Game ("Hate It or Love It" (featuring 50 Cent) in 2005; "We Ain't" (featuring Eminem) in 2005). Three artists produced three songs related to Black motherhood: (1) Tupac Shakur ("Keep Ya Head Up" in 1993; "Dear Mama" in 1995 and "Wonda Why They Call You Bitch in 1996); (2) Jay-Z ("Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)" in 2001; "I Made It" in 2006; and "No Hook" in 2007) and (3) Lil' Wayne ("3 Peat" in 2008; "Playing with Fire" in 2008; and "I Love My Mama" in 2013).

The following 14 songs (18% of the total number of songs) were related to "Baby Mamas;" (1) "Step Daddy" by Too Short (1992); (2) "Wonda Why They Call You Bitch" by Tupac Shakur (1996); (3) "My Baby Mama" by Luniz (1997); (4) "Ed-ucation" by Dr. Dre (featuring Eddie Griffin) (1999); (5) "My Homie Baby Mama" by Insane Clown Posse (2000); (6) "Baby Mama" by Three 6 Mafia (featuring LaChat) (2001); (7) "Baby Mama Drama" by Daz Dillinger (2001); (8) "Baby Mama Drama" by Grand Puba (2001); (9) "Baby Mama" by Lil Boosie (featuring Webbie) (2001); (10) "Not My Baby" by Bone Thugs N Harmony (2002); (11) "Baby Mama" by Holla Point (2004); (12) "Future Baby Mama" by Prince (2007); (13) "Hey Lil' Mama" by Vic Damone (featuring Lil Wayne) (2008); (14) "Rap Cemetery" by Lil Wayne (featuring Juelz Santana) (2009).

There were three aspects of these songs that were particularly noteworthy. First, one song was first offered by a singing group and the same song was later released by a solo artist. In particular, the song “Sadie” was originally produced by the R&B group The Spinners in 1974 and later released by the R&B artist R. Kelly in 1993. Second, three songs shared the same title, save for different spellings for the word Mother. These songs were: (1) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg (1999); (2) *I Love My Momma* by E-40 (2011); and (3) *I Love My Mama* by Lil Wayne (2013). Furthermore, the song “Future Baby Mama” was released by Prince in 2007 and Hip Hop artist Jaycee in 2014. Lastly, The Dream and Chris Brown shared the same song title (*Mama*), and both released their songs in 2007, yet the genre of these artists differed in that the former is an R&B artist while the latter is both a Hip Hop and R&B artist. In addition, three songs shared the title of “Baby Mama” yet were produced by different artists. These songs were: (1) “Baby Mama” by Three 6 Mafia (featuring LaChat) (2001); (2) “Baby Mama” by Lil Boosie (featuring Webbie) (2001); (3) “Baby Mama” by Holla Point (2004). Two songs shared the same title of “Baby Mama Drama” and were both produced by Hip Hop artists Daz Dillinger and Grand Puba in 2001.

### Discussion

This study had three primary goals. The first goal of this study was to examine how Hip Hop and R&B songs challenge and counter dominant representations and discourses surrounding Black motherhood. The second goal of this study was to examine how patriarchy influences the production and release of Hip Hop and R&B songs related to Black motherhood. The final goal of this study is to highlight how Black Feminist Theory validated the experiences of Black mothers in Hip Hop and R&B. In this section, we deliberate on the cultural, political, and racial interventions that have shaped and continue to shape *representations* and *dialogue* of Black mothers in these music genres over time.

### Black Motherhood during the Motown Era

Prior to 1961, the Black mother was, for all intents and purposes, invisible in R&B.<sup>70</sup> During the 1960s, the Motown Record Label, was mainly a male-dominated industry that catapulted the success of Black male singing groups such as The Spinners, Smokey Robinson & The Miracles, The Drifters, The O’Jays, and The Temptations. Yet, within this largely male-dominated space, a few Black female groups, such as The Marvelettes (the first girl group of Motown), The Chiffons, The Supremes, and Aretha Franklin, gained entrée to success. In the representative song from this decade, “*Mama Said*” (produced in 1961), The Shirelles represented the love-gained/love-lost dichotomy that was perhaps one of the definitive marks of many songs from this

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<sup>70</sup> Hip Hop did not begin until the late 1960s/early 1970’s. See Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Macmillan, 2005). Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-boys, B-girls and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 125.

decade. However, when the female-protagonist “almost lost her mind” when she met and fell in love with “a little boy named Billy Joe,” it was the wise “mama” who assured her child that “there’ll be days like this,” or times of emotional pain for which her daughter must be prepared.

Two years after this song was produced, however, a number of historical events forever changed the musical miscellany that currently exists. According to *The People History*, “In 1963 and the years to follow, a number of social influences changed what popular music was and gave birth to the diversity that we experience with music today. The assassination of President Kennedy, the escalation of the war in Vietnam and the forward-progress of the Civil Rights Movement all greatly impacted the mood of American culture and the music began to reflect that change.”<sup>71</sup> In spite of this time of societal upheaval, the Black mother remained a beacon of stability and comfort. In the R&B song, “Tell Mama” by Etta James (produced in 1967), the son is deeply hurt and embarrassed by a woman that he loved, yet publicly rejected him (“She would embarrass you anywhere, She’d let everybody know she didn’t care”), yet the Black mother tenderly requested that he “tell her about it” so that she could comfort him.

### **Black Motherhood during the Post-Civil Rights Era**

Several years after the negative representation of Black mothers that was offered in The Moynihan Report, an increasing number of songs provided a strong counter narrative to this form of parentage. The songs “I’ll Always Love My Mama” (produced in 1973) by The Intruders and “Sadie” (produced in 1974) by The Spinners,<sup>72</sup> acknowledged Black motherhood by placing these mothers on a pedestal. In “I’ll Always Love My Mama,” the male artists recognized the hard work engaged in by the Black mother (“How mama used to clean somebody else’s house / Just to buy me a new pair of shoes”), as well as their deep fondness (“She’s my favorite girl”) and love (“I’ll always love my mama”) for her. In “Sadie,” The Spinners dedicated this song to “young mothers like the ones, that were around when I grew up,” and who through their love, discipline, nurturance, and love continued to “live on in memory.” Interestingly, the positionality of the Black mother is so high that even in heaven, her children are confident that “she’s teaching angels how to love.” Still, 14 years after the release of “Sadie,” one song, produced by a Black female R&B artist provided perhaps ones of the strongest and most unapologetic dialogues to single, Black motherhood. In the song “Thanks for My Child,” the R&B artist, Cheryl “Pepsi” Riley, shared that although the father of her child abandoned her (“And though your daddy / He ran away free”), she thanked God for her “love child” who “brought her so much joy,” “made everything right,” and gave her strength to face life’s challenges (“With you right here with me / I’ll have the strength to go on”). Societally, this song was released during the Reagan-years (January 20, 1981 – January 20, 1989), and under the auspices of a president who

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<sup>71</sup> Patricia Poole, *The History of Music* (May 31, 2014). Retrieved from: <https://prezi.com/l0foyqed0srr/the-history-of-music/>

<sup>72</sup> The song “Sadie” was later produced by R&B artist R. Kelly in 1993.

cut many programs that assisted mothers, children, and minorities.<sup>73</sup> In spite of the financial and emotional difficulties experienced by many single Black mothers, Riley's R&B song was a defiant declaration that Black single mothers had nothing to be ashamed of, could successfully rear their children alone, and daily be thankful for the existence of their child/children.

### **Black Motherhood during the Age of Hip Hop**

To be clear, the fictitious "welfare queen" that emerged during the 1980s was fueled by racial, class, and gender politics whose true mission was to justify decreasing government support for poor single women and their children. Yet in spite of negative representations of poor, Black, single mothers, several Black Hip Hop and R&B artists during the 1990s provided strong dialogues of Black motherhood. For example, in "Guess Who," the Hip Hop artist Goodie Mob shared that even though his mother was young when she gave birth to him ("She was barely even grown and became my Moma"), he credited her for helping him turn his life around and ultimately become the man that he is today. Crediting the single poor Black mother for her parenting success was a resounding theme in "All I Got Is You" by Ghostface Killah (i.e., "What made me the man I am today"), "A Song for Mama" by Boys II Men (i.e., "You showed me right from my wrong"), "I Honor U" by Canibus ("And the reason people love they mother so much...besides the fact she carried you for nine months, is trust"), as well as the primary parental role assumed by these women. In the song "Mama Raised Me," Hip Hop artist Master P (featuring Snoop Dogg & Soulja Slim) acknowledged the reason why he was reared in a single-mother home ("Daddy wasn't home, so mama raised me") as well as his conflicting dual-identities of thug and mama's boy ("I'm a thug but still mama baby"). In "4 Page Letter," the late R&B artist Aaliyah shared that her mother "always told me to be careful who I love," and in "Every Ghetto, Every City," R&B artist Lauren Hill exclaimed that when she was "just a little girl, skinny legs, a press and curl," her "mother always thought she'd be a star."

Paradoxically, even during the emergence of what has been commonly referred to as 'Gangsta Rap,' several Black Hip Hop artists' highly-praised Black mothers. For example, in "I'm Outstanding," the physically-imposing (7'1", 325 pound) Hip Hop artist Shaquille O'Neal thanked his mother for successfully rearing him ("Mom's you never let go, mad thanks for raising me right, bro"). Although Snoop Dogg and the late Tupac Shakur are widely known for songs that glorify misogyny and violence,<sup>74</sup> in their

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<sup>73</sup> In the first year of the Reagan Administration, the real median income of all Black families fell by 5.2 percent. The number of Americans living below the federal government's poverty line grew by over two million in a single year. In 1982, over 30 percent of the total Black labor force was jobless at some period during that year. In June 1982, Congress reduced federal assistance programs by 20 percent and cut federal assistance to state and municipal governments.

<sup>74</sup> Examples of misogyny are "I Wanna Fuck You" by Snoop Dogg and "I Get Around" by Tupac Shakur. Examples of male-driven violence are Snoop Dogg's "Serial Killa" and "Gunz on My Side" by Tupac Shakur.

offerings they expressed admiration, respect, and love for their biological mother (“I Love My Momma” by Snoop Dogg) or Black mothers in general (“Keep Ya Head Up” and “Dear Mama” by Tupac Shakur). Given society’s condemnation of Black women in welfare, in two songs, Tupac Shakur highly esteemed these women. In the song “Dear Mama” Shakur specifically gives homage to the “poor single mother on welfare” by showcasing their work ethic (“And I could see you coming home after work late / You’re in the kitchen trying to fix us a hot plate”), their commitment to rear their children without their child’s father, and assured them that he truly appreciates them. Even though society castigates poor Black women for being mothers, Tupac engages in a form of Black Feminist political resistance by showcasing the visibility of Black women on welfare (“I give a holler to my sisters on welfare”) as well as how the children of these women “place no one above” them.

### **Patriarchy, Black Feminism, and Black Motherhood**

There are several ways that patriarchy and a Black Feminist resistance are manifested in these musical offerings. For one, it was noteworthy that the overwhelming majority of Hip Hop and R&B artists only had one song related to Black motherhood. As stated previously, since most record labels are owned by White males from privileged backgrounds, these individuals are at the helm of which songs are produced as well as when these songs are produced. In order to secure and grow the Black female fan base, these record executives may deem it financially prudent for their artists to produce songs for the large army of Black women that are rearing Black children.<sup>75</sup> So, while it may appear that Black Hip Hop and R&B artists have a great deal of agency in regards to the type of songs that are released, in reality, there are covert reasons why the Black mother is the focus of the song. On the other hand, the Black Feminist perspective demands that society acknowledges and respects the experiences of Black women. This is especially true since Black women are most likely to give birth as single mothers.<sup>76</sup> Since the experiences of poor, Black single mothers are not at the forefront of Hip Hop and R&B, a patriarchal push for positivity muffles the voices of Black women as well as minimizes the ways that society can support them. In addition, and related to a point that was made earlier, the Civil Rights movement was greatly led by African Americans’ demands for respectability, and since poor, Black mothers are a subset of this group, White male record executives may believe these songs are a cultural nod to anti-Black racism, that allows them to become active agents of change.

The substantial number of Black children that are currently born out of wedlock has given the mothers of these children a certain degree of societal recognition. Case in point: The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2015) recently added the slang term “baby

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<sup>75</sup> Child Trends Data Bank. Births to Unmarried Women, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=births-to-unmarried-women>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

mama" to its lexicon, which is defined as "the mother of a man's biological child; *especially* :one who is not married to or in a long-term, intimate relationship with the child's father." The first act of musical disrespect of these women occurred in 1992 by the Rapper Too Short. In the song "Step-Daddy," this Black male condemns the Black woman for having children by different men ("Three different daddies and all is well"), only bearing children for financial gain ("As long as them brothers keep making mail"), being his sexual conquest ("And then fuck her, that's how it's done") of a man who has no interest in being in a relationship with her or rearing her children ("And it's cool, when I come through, Play step daddy for a minute or two"). Since that time other Hip Hop artists (e.g. Tupac Shakur, Luniz, Dr. Dre, Insane Clown Posse, Three 6 Mafia, Daz Dillinger, Grand Puba, Lil Boosie, Bone Thugs N Harmony, Holla Point, Vic Damone, and Lil Wayne) have added their collective voices to the public shaming of unmarried Black mothers.<sup>77</sup> Sadly, the societal condemnation of Black women by Black men ignores the minimal education, bleak economic realities, and disadvantaged family experiences that make motherhood a more attractive and viable option for many of these women.<sup>78</sup> With that said, the Hip Hop artist Tupac Shakur embodied a patriarchal degradation of poor unmarried Black mothers by referring to these women as both "Queen" and "Bitch."

From the start of the new millennium until the present, an increasing number of Hip Hop and R&B artists have dramatically shifted the representation and dialogue of Black mothers in a positive direction. Since the fictitious welfare queen" spun by former President Reagan during the 1980s gave steam to the 1990s War on Poverty, and its subtle condemnation of single Black mothers, Hip Hop and R&B artists have become a strong voice for poor Black single mothers by engaging in politics built on positivity, anti-Black racism, and strong demands for respectability. Even though the government claimed to provide greater support for these women and their families, during 1999 and 2000, the poverty rate for Blacks and Hispanics was virtually the same as in 1975. These artists demanded that Black women be respected for their hard work (within and outside of the home), for protecting their children from harm and rearing them to be successful adults, and that their experiences of being Black, female, and mothers take priority. In the song "Motherfather," the Hip Hop artist Musiq Soulchild prioritized the Black mother by placing her name before the father. Furthermore, during the Obama administration, R&B artist Alicia Keyes elevated Black women/mothers to the status of

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<sup>77</sup> (a) "Wonda Why They Call You Bitch" by Tupac Shakur (1996); (b) "My Baby Mama" by Luniz (1997); (c) "Ed-ucation" by Dr. Dre (featuring Eddie Griffin) (1999); (d) "My Homie Baby Mama" by Insane Clown Posse (2000); (e) "Baby Mama" by Three 6 Mafia and LaChat (2001); (f) "Baby Mama Drama" by Daz Dillinger (2001); (g) "Baby Mama Drama" by Grand Puba (2001); (h) "Baby Mama" by Lil Boosie and Webbie (2001); (i) "Not My Baby" by Bone Thugs N Harmony (2002); (j) "Baby Mama" by Holla Point (2004); (k) "Hey Lil' Mama" by Vic Damone (featuring Lil Wayne) (2008); (l) "Rap Cemetery" by Lil Wayne (featuring Juelz Santana) (2009).

<sup>78</sup> Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, "Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage." Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

“Superwoman,” which was no doubt due to their strength, focus, stable work ethic, and determination to successfully care for themselves and their families.

In light of the decades-long cultural war that has been raged against poor Black single mothers, one song in particular, is noteworthy for its transparent acknowledgement of racism, sexism, classism and the demand for Black female respectability. In “I’ve Got Life” Hip Hop artist Lauryn Hill sings: “Get caught in the hype, it's tight from morning 'til night, I'm demanding my rights, Women's suffrage then black suffrage, Or Jim Crow, the KKK, American terrorism.”<sup>79</sup> In essence, in this musical offering, Hill acknowledges specific historical events that have made life difficult for Black women (e.g., Black Suffrage, Jim Crow, the KKK, and American terrorism) as well as the importance that Black women “demand their right” to be seen, heard, and respected. Since a hostile law enforcement system does not give special consideration to Black female bodies,<sup>80</sup> several Black women have recognized and accepted the charge to protect *all Black people*. Case in point: The contemporary Black Lives Matter (#BlackLivesMatter) movement, was started by a trio of strong Black women, namely Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, whose philosophical mission is to protect the very lives of the men in Hip Hop who publicly castigate them in their lyrics.<sup>81</sup>

In the last Hip Hop offering, “mama” has the connotation of a female that demonstrates idealized traits for a romantic male partner. In “Hey Mama,” Nicki Minaj, who is one of the most successful Black female artists in the Hip Hop industry,<sup>82</sup> advances the patriarchal belief that women’s sole aim is to serve men. Furthermore, the ideal female respects her man and allows him to take the lead (“Yes you be the boss / yes I be respecting”), is willing to assume traditional roles (“Yes I do the cooking / Yes I do the cleaning”) and is the perfect representation of the “good” and “bad” dichotomy (“Keep him pleased, rub him down, Be a lady and a freak”) highlighted by previous

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<sup>79</sup> I’ve Got Life Song Lyrics by Lauryn Hill (featuring Nina Simone). Retrieved from: <http://genius.com/Lauryn-hill-ive-got-life-lyrics>

<sup>80</sup> Chaney, Cassandra and Ray Robertson. “Armed and Dangerous? An Examination of Fatal Shootings of Unarmed Black People by Police.” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8, no. 4 (2015): 45-78. Chaney, Cassandra and Ray Robertson, R. “Racism and Police Brutality in America.” *Journal of African American Studies* 17, no. 4 (2013a): 480-505. doi: 10.1007/s12111-013-9246-5. Chaney, Cassandra and Ray Robertson, R. “Media Reporting of the Sandy Hook Elementary School Angels.” *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5, no. 6 (2013b): 74- 114.

<sup>81</sup> BlackLivesMatter is “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.” Retrieved from: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/>

<sup>82</sup> Nicki Minaj who clocked in at no. 4 with an estimated \$29 million, is the only woman on the list, earning more than Snoop Lion (who was formerly Snoop Dogg but changed his name in 2012 after a trip to Jamaica and converting to the Rastafari movement), Eminem and Kendrick Lamar combined. In fact, Minaj, who made her 2011 debut raking in \$6.5 million has been the only female to ever make the Cash Kings list since its inception in 2007 (Natalie Robehmed, *Forbes*).

scholars.<sup>83</sup> Given the increasing amount of policy geared toward stabilizing Black families via stable marriage and strong fatherhood,<sup>84</sup> it would be advantageous to link the joys and challenges of Black mothers to the Hip Hop and R&B genres.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

There were several limitations of this study. For one, this study's focus on the representation and discussion of Black motherhood in Hip Hop and R&B obscures how these women are discussed in other genres. Therefore, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to Black mothers in other musical genres (i.e., Blues, Country, Gospel, and Popular). Second, as the majority of songs were mainstream, this study may not have highlighted songs from underground Hip Hop and R&B artists. So, although they may produce songs that are directly related to Black motherhood, the obscurity of the independent artist signed to an independent record label would invariably decrease the likelihood that the majority of the population would be aware of them. Finally, as the increasing number of songs were not written solely by the artist, it is possible that mainstream record executives may exert a tremendous amount of influence in regards to the songs that their artist will release, as well as the focus of those songs. While we cannot assert that Hip Hop and R&B artists have no agency in this regard, it is important to realize that the creative work of these artists may be shaped by the record labels of which they are under contract.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There are three ways that scholars can build on the present study. First, future research can examine how the counterpart of Black parenthood in Hip Hop and R&B is discussed, namely Black fatherhood. Given the societal positionality of Black men, future work in this area would reveal how Black fatherhood, whether through choice (unwillingness to rear their children) or circumstance (lack of education, unemployment, incarceration, addiction, death), is directly related to specific times in history. Second, future research can explore how other genres of music besides Hip Hop and R&B discuss Black motherhood. At this point, we briefly acknowledge the songs provided by two artists who produce music in multiple genres, namely Lenny Kravitz ("Always on the Run" in 1991) and Prince ("Future Baby Mama" in 2007). Both of these artists elevate the Black mother. Specifically, the mother in "Always on the

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<sup>83</sup> Tyree, "Lovin' Momma and Hatin' on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representations in Songs about Rappers' Mothers and Baby Mamas."

<sup>84</sup> Administration for Children and Families – African American Healthy Marriage Initiative. Retrieved from website: <http://www.aahmi.net/focus.html>; National Fatherhood Institute. 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistics>

Run" is a strong Black woman that assures her son that life will be difficult ("There's much weight you will lift"), to avoid unscrupulous associates ("Leave those bad boys alone") and to not give up ("You must push with much force"). In addition, in "Future Baby Mama," Prince acknowledges the mental stability of the Black mother ("You're too secure to ever want to fuss and fight / That's why your man never ever got a reason to doubt you") her strength ("None of them got what it takes to be a future baby mama / Gotta bend in the wind but don't break to keep your man") as well as his promise to keep her life drama free ("I'll make her mine with no more drama"). Since these artists are able to extend their musical message to a broad audience, future work in this area would highlight what to any extent, the experiences of Black mothers are similar or dissimilar to those of mothers in other music genres such as Alternative, Blues, Country, Gospel, or Popular. Finally, future research can explore how Black motherhood is influenced by specific historical events. Future work in this area would pinpoint the language that Hip Hop and R&B artists use as a form of political resistance to narratives that put Black families, and in particular Black mothers, in a negative light.

### Conclusion

As evidenced by these Hip Hop and R&B songs regarding Black motherhood, race, class, and gender politics have largely influenced how Black mothers have been represented and discussed. Even though the political agendas advanced half a century ago sought to castigate poor, single Black mothers, a substantial number of artists in the Hip Hop and R&B genre have engaged in a form of social resistance by demanding that these Black women be heard, appreciated, and respected. As the Obama administration comes to an end, it will be interesting to monitor how artists in these genres support existing narratives of Black motherhood as well as uncover and highlight new ones. As society continues to observe and critique the status of Black mothers, it will be interesting to note whether the representations and dialogue that Hip Hop and R&B creates around these women diminishes, deems neutral, or elevates their place in society. Although we cannot predict what future work in this area will uncover, the findings in this study are evidence that although most single Black mothers do not presume "male leadership in private and public affairs,"<sup>85</sup> these women are hard-working, resilient, and committed to rearing their children with love.

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<sup>85</sup> Moynihan, 1965.

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