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The Effects of Commercialization on the Perception of Hip Hop Culture and Black Culture in Mainstream Culture in the United States

Abstract

This thesis examines how the perception of a sub-culture can be altered by a dominant culture. Specifically this project addresses the effects resulting from the assimilation of Hip Hop Culture by mainstream culture in the United States, and its subsequent use as a marketing tool. Because Hip Hop Culture originated in Black Culture, the perception of Black Culture as reflected by hip hop music is also discussed. All of these themes are addressed creatively through a narrative script project.

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Rodney Buxton, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Kim Axline

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The Effects of the Commercialization of Hip Hop Culture on the Perception of Hip Hop
Culture and Black Culture in Mainstream Culture in the United State

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Chris A. Robinson

June 2011

Advisor: Rodney Buxton

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Author: Chris A. Robinson

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Project Proposal

I was first introduced to hip hop music by my older brother. He bought a copy of N.W.A.'s (Niggaz with Attitude) *Straight Outta Compton*, and played it for me after school one day. It was like nothing I'd ever heard before. The radio stations I had been exposed to played only heavy metal, oldies, classic rock, jazz or R&B. The bass and the emcees' cadence and rhymes drew me in instantly even though I was too young to fully understand the lyrics. When my mother took the cassette from my brother citing the use of profanity in the lyrics it was my first experience with censorship. And so, hip hop music became even more alluring to me because it was forbidden.

As I entered my teen years Gangsta Rap was at its peak and I listened to a lot of Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and the like. It was what I was hearing on the radio, hearing about on the news, and seeing on MTV. In 8th grade I discovered a different kind of hip hop music. A friend introduced me to A Tribe Called Quest, De La Sol, Pharcyde, Public Enemy, and KRS One. Although these groups have become iconic, at the time they did not get as much exposure in the media as Gangsta Rap groups. While I appreciated Gangsta Rap's intensity and rugged style, De La Soul's laid back demeanor and clever lyrics added a new

dimension to hip hop music I had never experienced. As I became more enamored with the music I discovered that when most people talked about hip hop they were only talking about Gangsta Rap. De La Soul addressed this disparity and set themselves apart in their 1996 track *The Stakes is High*.

*I'm sick of bitches shakin' asses
I'm sick of talkin' about blunts,
Sick of Versace glasses,
Sick of slang,
Sick of half-ass awards shows,
Sick of name brand clothes.
Sick of R&B bitches over bullshit tracks,
Cocaine and crack
Which brings sickness to blacks,
Sick of swoll' head rappers
With their sicker-than raps
Clappers and gats
Makin' the whole sick world collapse
The facts are gettin' sick
Even sicker perhaps
Stickabush to make a bundle to escape this synapse*

In just one verse, De La Soul expresses their disgust with the content of popular hip hop music at the time. The underlying theme of the track is that hip hop music that has found commercial success in mainstream culture in the U.S. is leading Hip Hop Culture and Black Culture in the wrong direction, that the core values that hip hop was founded on have been deranged, and that the culture's vitality is in jeopardy. Thus the "stakes are high."

In this thesis proposal I will discuss the history and evolution of Hip Hop Culture in the U.S. and examine the influence of commercial success on Hip Hop Culture. I have chosen to address this topic through a creative project rather than through a traditional research paper.

My goal is to explore the contention that Hip Hop Culture is dead, based on the belief that by achieving acceptance in mainstream U.S. culture, Hip Hop Culture has lost its authenticity. With this in mind I would like to examine the effects of the commercialization of hip hop on Hip Hop Culture, Black culture, and mainstream United State's culture through a narrative film. Among the questions I would like to address within this film are: What happens to a sub-culture when it is assimilated into a mainstream culture? Has Hip Hop Culture been subverted by commercialism? How has the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture affected the perception of Black Culture and Blacks' self-perception in the United States?

Although the film will be a critique of the subversion of Hip Hop Culture by commercialization it will also be a celebration of the culture's success and influence on mainstream culture.

I believe a script is the best vehicle to accomplish this goal and to explore the aforementioned issues for several reasons. Throughout this essay I will use the term 'authenticity' to describe Hip Hop Culture at different stages of its development. Although in exploring the application of the term in Hip Hop Culture I will discuss several different definitions, the nature of the term remains

highly subjective. By using a narrative script I will be able to approach the term from the perspective of several characters. This way I will be able to give the competing ideologies that seek to determine authenticity in Hip Hop Culture actual voices. Using a narrative film will also allow my audience to create their own definition of authentic Hip Hop Culture. I believe this will generate multifaceted discussion of the issue more effectively.

My decision to use a narrative film is also based on considerations surrounding my target audience. Although I am writing this script 90% for my own personal enjoyment, and 10% for the completion of my thesis requirement, it has helped me to consider a hypothetical audience when making writing decisions. I would have no qualms about selling the script if there was an interest in it, but I do not aspire to make a career out of writing films. The audience I have in mind for my film would be primarily males between the ages of 18 to 40. Because the film is focused on Hip Hop Culture, it would presumably attract young urban Black, Latino, and White moviegoers who have a connection with the many different aspects of the culture.

At first it may seem that writing a script about the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture by mainstream culture for a mainstream audience is contradictory. However, as I will discuss in greater detail later in this proposal, I believe that commercial success in mainstream U.S. culture can both harm and benefit sub-cultural movements.

Additionally I would like to use my script to pay homage to the Hip Hop film genre. I will discuss specific examples of Hip Hop films later in the proposal,

but for the purposes of this introduction I will focus on one of the traits that is common to films in the genre here. One unique trait found in the Hip Hop film genre is the blending of history with historical fiction. Often figures in the real world of Hip Hop portray themselves or likenesses of themselves in film.

Eminem's portrayal of the character Jimmy 'B-Rabbit' Smith in the film *8-Mile* is a poignant example that I will discuss in greater detail later in this essay. Actual events are also retold through fictional accounts, as was the founding of Def Jam Records as portrayed in the film *Krush Groove*.

In my own script several characters are based on real hip hop artists and some events in the script are fictional accounts of actual events. The main character of my film was inspired in part by hip hop artist, Kanye West, but is meant to stand as a metaphor for the evolution of hip hop music. This would not be the first time an artist has used an extended metaphor to personify hip hop music. Most notably, Chicago based emcee Common used a woman to represent hip hop in his song "I Used to Love H.E.R.," using H.E.R. as an acronym for Hearing Every Rhyme.

*I might've failed to mention that the chick was creative
But once the man got to her, he altered the native
Told her if she got an image and a gimmick
That she could make money, and she did it like a dummy
Now I see her in commercials, she's universal
She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle
Now she be in the burbs lookin' rock and dressin' hip
And on some dumb shit, when she comes to the city
Talkin about popin glocks, servin rocks, and hittin' switches... (1994)*

In his lyrics Common used personification to express his opinion that hip hop music has changed for the worse in order to achieve financial success. Like

Common, I hope to use personification to create a deeper connection with my audience while examining the effects of commercialization on Hip Hop Culture

Finally I would like to preview my approach to writing my script. I have chosen to write my script as a remake of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. Dickens' classic tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miser who having become corrupted by greed, is given one last chance at redemption by reflecting on his past and present, and by through a glimpse at his possible future.

I believe that Dickens' classic is the perfect vehicle to explore the stages of hip hop music's historical development. In my script my main character Emcee Duck will take on the role of Scrooge. I derived the character's name from Disney's Scrooge McDuck, because I think the ridiculousness of the name is comical, and because I hope to replicate in my main character some of Scrooge McDuck's greed and love of money as portrayed in the Disney cartoon Ducktales. Emcee Duck will have to take a journey through three stages of hip hop music's development in order to finally find his redemption.

Using A Christmas Carol as a format will also serve two additional purposes. First, because the story is a familiar part of mainstream U.S. culture my target audience will be able to easily relate to the film. Secondly, the idea of remaking a classic film synthesizes (replicates?) the creation of Hip Hop Culture. Because hip hop music developed the practice of sampling (the act of using previously recorded music as an instrument for making new music) I think it's only appropriate to remix a classic script to write a new film about hip hop. Another issue that I address in exploring the effects of commercialization on Hip

Hop Culture is that the creation of meaning is shared by both the producer and receiver of a message. I ask the question, who controls meaning in hip hop? More directly, if mainstream culture directs the meaning of a sub-culture's product, has the sub-culture been subverted?

To begin to answer these questions and to continue to examine the development of my script project it is important to begin by taking a look at the history of Hip Hop Culture in the United States. Each era in hip hop history will be represented by a stage in Emcee Duck's growth as a hip hop artist.

The Roots of Hip Hop Culture

Hip Hop Culture began in the Bronx, New York in the late 1970's.

(Jenkins, Wilson, 22) The roots of hip hop music reach back into the history of the blues, jazz, and rock n' roll. In the beginning hip hop music was the artistic expression of the young Black and Latino inner city experience. Hip hop music was created out of the culture's poverty and hopelessness. Over a short amount of time the sub-culture that evolved from the music has become an industry, and a major influence on mainstream culture in the United States.

In my film I will reflect this rapid shift from grass roots movement to mainstream industry through Emcee Duck's own journey to fame and fortune. Because my film takes place primarily in the present I hope to capture the scope of Hip Hop Culture's current influence on mainstream culture by setting the film in L.A., a city that has become a Mecca for the grandeur and decadence that hip hop music has come to embody.

Before examining Hip Hop Culture in further detail I believe it would be helpful to reflect on the development and trajectory of another music based sub-culture, the British Punk Sub-Culture. While I will not address Punk in my thesis project I think a brief discussion of the Punk sub-culture will provide a valuable comparison with the course of Hip Hop Culture.

Musically, hip hop and punk have opposite sounds, one relying on rhythm and base, the other on treble and high energy guitar chords. However the two sub-cultures share several similarities when comparing the youth movements that fueled their creation. Like Hip Hop Culture, Punk began as a localized phenomenon that eventually gained acceptance in the mainstream culture that its early artists had railed against.

In exploring Punk Sub-Culture Dick Hebdige describes Barthes' concept of culture as "an 'anonymous ideology' penetrating every level of social life, inscribed in the most mundane of rituals, framing the most casual social encounters(Hebdige 11). Barthes' 'anonymous ideology' is ascribed by mainstream culture and is so pervasive that it is taken for granted as normal. Sub-cultures arise when individuals living within the mainstream culture express the contradictions of or revolt against the tenets of the anonymous ideology. The sub-cultures take shape as they develop their own ideology which stands in opposition to mainstream values. Members of the sub-culture place value on products that reflect this opposition and finally, this restructuring results in the development of style.

Punk and Hip Hop Sub-Culture arose in response or more specifically in rebellion to their respective country's dominant ideology at the time. Punks revolted against Britain's persistent class system, and frustration with unemployment in an economic downturn in Britain (Hebdige 25). Hip Hop Culture grew out of young urban Black's and Latino's frustration with poverty, racial discrimination, and feelings of disenfranchisement in the United States.

Sub-Cultures gain momentum by assigning and reassigning meaning and value to objects and rituals that stand in contrast with the values of mainstream culture. Punk's style reflects a mid-century British working class mentality and stands in stark opposition to Glam rock, the music that was popular with intellectuals at the time of Punk's conception. In Punk, shredded clothes symbolized the sub-culture's disdain for the fashionable Glam Rock set that was popular in the U.K. at the time. In Hip Hop Culture excessive gaudy jewelry has come to symbolize a revolt against the prudent values associated with mainstream culture in the U.S. Punk also incorporated aspects of Reggae's political discourse. Punk's appropriation of music with African origins was also a rebellion because of the negative connotation ascribed to Africans by White British society.

Like Punk, Hip hop music also began as a pastiche of popular musical genres. Innovative DJs created the music at the center of Hip Hop Culture through a process called sampling. The DJs sampled, or played only the hooks from popular disco songs and looped them in order to play them back as a continuous track. The hook was the part of the song that audiences waited for, so DJs cut out the rest. The creative act of sampling changed and appropriated the sound of the popular music of the time thus changing its meaning. Sampling in hip hop music was more than just the means to create a new sound, it was also the means for establishing the style that provided the sub-culture's momentum.

A number of other different cultural elements came to exemplify Hip Hop Culture. While the focus of my research on the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture pertains to hip hop music, looking at other parts of the culture is

important to understanding the effects of commercialization on the culture as a whole.

Breakers, also known as b-boys and b-girls, created a new dance style based on the music. The first breakers converted street corners into dance studios with only boomboxes and cardboard laid over concrete. With no money for other forms of entertainment, breakers created their own dance style. Breakers' formless style of dance defied classical dance. Like DJs breakers took bits and pieces of popular dance styles and used them to create a new style all together. Graffiti artists worked in clear defiance of mainstream culture because they broke the law with each piece. Their art was also special because it was meant to be seen by many and understood by few, thus creating a secret language within the culture. Unlike pieces created on canvas graffiti was an ephemeral phenomenon because it lasted only as long as it took for someone to remove it from its unauthorized location. Hip hop DJs, emcees, breakers and graffiti artists existed literally and figuratively outside the conventions of mainstream art and dance. As a form of expression Hip Hop Culture was raw, unscripted, and rebellious.

Bombers, also known as taggers and graffiti artists, turned public spaces like subway trains and empty walls into canvases. Some wanted to become famous while others used graffiti to express their frustration with their lives. Still others used graffiti to rebel against society. The act of appropriating a public space was not only rebellious, but also illegal. The young Blacks and Latinos at the center of the movement physically laid claim to their environment, taking ownership of public property. Although this symbolic ownership was only

temporary it allowed them to assert at least some degree of control over their environment.

As discussed earlier, DJ's were the originators of hip hop music. Before emcees became synonymous with rap they were masters of ceremony. Their main function was to pick up the mic and hype up the crowd while the DJ, the centerpiece of the show, spun records. Eventually emcees took the spotlight away from DJs as they began to rap lyrics over the beats the DJs were producing. It is difficult to pinpoint when this transition occurred, but emcees have become the face of and the driving force behind mainstream hip hop music.

While all of these elements embody Hip Hop Culture I will only focus on the role of hip hop music, specifically the role of the emcee in my thesis project. Although I will attempt to address other elements of Hip Hop Culture through the setting and style of the film, I think the role of the emcee has become the most accessible part of the culture for mainstream audiences, and has been the most criticized aspect of hip hop by the culture's critics.

I hope to reflect the importance of the emcee in hip hop music through my main character, Emcee Duck, but I also want to point to the emcee's relative insignificance in terms of the lifespan of the artist's relevance in the mainstream music industry.

Starting in the late '70s, Hip Hop Sub-Culture became a mainstay for urban Black youth. Emcee's, rap groups, and breakers performed at parties and on street corners. DJs like Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaata, the legendary "Godfather of Hip Hop," and founder of the Zulu Nation, organized block parties and

breaking competitions to provide urban youth with an outlet for expression and an escape from the poverty and violence in the ghetto(Jenkins, Wilson 23). Up to this point Hip Hop Sub-Culture was confined to the urban centers of New York City. In 1979 the Sugarhill Gang's "Rappers Delight" became the first rap record to become a top 40 hit(Jenkins, Wilson 19). The single's success focused America's attention on this new form of music. In an instant, hip hop music and the sub-culture surrounding it became commercially viable.

Just as with British Punk, when people discovered that they could make money with hip hop, the quality and success of Hip Hop Culture's products began to be measured in terms of profitability. As hip hop music became a commercial success the sub-culture became open to consumption and interpretation by a wider audience. Profits increased with the number of people willing to buy hip hop music, but were the artists generating the consumers or were the consumers shaping the artists? Did the principles of supply and demand dictate the development of Hip Hop Culture after the Sugarhill Gang?

In my film project I will use the supporting characters to illustrate this quandary. Emcee Duck will feel responsibility towards his fans, his manager, his record label, other artists and his wallet. He will reflect on decisions he made in the beginning and middle of his career and face the outcomes of those decisions when he gets a glimpse of his future. Throughout Duck's journey he will have to determine whether he's remained authentic, whether he's keeping it real.

In order for Emcee Duck to answer this question and in order to understand how mainstream culture has affected Hip Hop Culture it is important

to understand the role authenticity plays in the commercial viability of hip hop music. Because authenticity is a subjective term, defining anything, especially a culture, as authentic or inauthentic presents a problem. In this essay and in my thesis project the competing definitions of authenticity as applied to Hip Hop Culture will illustrate how mainstream culture can change the ethos of a sub-culture

In Hip Hop Culture, authenticity plays a unique role, in that it is in part related to racial identity. This is a major distinction that separates other music based sub-cultures like Punk from the Hip Hop Sub-Culture. Although Hip Hop Culture has racially diverse roots, my analysis will focus on the effects of commercialization in relation to Black Culture. I do not intend to belittle the role that other ethnicities have played in Hip Hop Culture, but I believe mainstream culture in the U.S. has attached Black stereotypes in particular to their definition of authenticity in hip hop music.

Members of British Punk Sub-Culture identify with class stereotypes, but because Hip Hop Culture originated in the urban Black community, authenticity in the culture and its products is linked to race. Hip hop and race will always be linked and in turn will be subject to mainstream culture's perception of each as inseparable. So in Hip Hop Culture authenticity is linked with what the mainstream perceives as authentically Black and vice versa.

The Sugarhill Gang provides an illustration of this phenomenon. Interestingly, the Sugarhill Gang never existed prior to the foresight and creativity of Sylvia Robinson. Robinson was a soul singer in the 50s and later the founder

of the Sugar Hill record label. After hearing hip hop performed at her birthday party, Robinson was inspired to capture this new sound on wax. A true entrepreneur, Robinson auditioned performers and assembled a group that she named after her label. The Sugarhill Gang consisted of the three emcees, Wonder Mike, Master Gee, and Big Bank Hank, three relatively unknown performers. Hip hop music's first most commercially successful group was put together out of performers relatively unknown within the sub-culture by an entrepreneur otherwise unassociated with Hip Hop Culture. Within Hip Hop Culture, the Sugarhill Gang was considered inauthentic (And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop. Dir. Richard Lowe, Dana Perry. Bring the Noise LLP, 2004). They had not established themselves within the sub-culture. Some of their lyrics were "borrowed" from other better known performers. Their style of dress was informed by popular music at the time, not Hip Hop Culture. Although Sylvia Robinson's label was independent, her background was in R&B music so the group she assembled and their style were reminiscent of that genre. However, since their hip hop music was the first mainstream audiences had ever experienced those distinctions were irrelevant to their success.

So while the Sugarhill Gang's commercial success fueled the growth of Hip Hop Culture I believe that this was an early example of how mainstream culture can redefine a sub-culture by manipulating its ethos for commercial consumption. I will reflect on this manipulation in my script by illustrating Emcee Duck's transformation from an unknown rapper to a millionaire recording artist. In doing so I will examine his motivation for changing his style so that he can sell

to a larger audience and the difficulties that he endures in order to stay authentic in the eyes of a mainstream audience. But what does a mainstream audience consider to be authentic hip hop?

Hip Hop Finds Commercial Success

The early 1980's marked another turning point in the history of hip hop music. Although the Sugarhill Gang produced hip hop music's first hit song, Run DMC's early commercial success solidified hip hop's foothold as a part of the mainstream industry (Dimitriadis, 1). Run DMC was the first hip hop group to have a #1 R&B chart topping album, and they were the first hip hop group to produce gold, platinum, and multiplatinum albums(Rundmc.com). In 1988 hip hop sales broke the \$100 million mark. By 1993 hip hop was producing \$700 million in revenues (McLeod, 136).

In less than a decade hip hop evolved from an outsider sub-culture, to a highly visible and influential genre within mainstream music. In two decades hip hop made inroads into fashion, sports, television, and movies. On March 5, 2006 Three 6 Mafia became the first Black music group to win an Academy Award for Best Original Song with their hit, "It's Hard to be a Pimp." Yet in that same year hip hop music icon Nas, declared "hip hop is dead" with the release of his aptly titled album, *Hip Hop is Dead*.

*“Everybody sound the same, commercialize the game
Reminisce when it wasn't all business...
So we all gather here for the dearly departed
Hip hopper since a toddler
One homeboy became a man then a mobster
If the guys let me get my last swig of Vodka
R.I.P., we'll donate your lungs to a rasta
Went from turntables to mp3s
From "Beat Street" to commercials on Mickey D's
From gold cables to Jacobs
From plain facials to Botox and face lifts” (2006)*

Here, Nas’s lyrics lament the “golden era” of Hip Hop Culture before “Gangsta Rap” and before technological developments like the MP3. He implies that recent hip hop music is homogenized, for commercial use, and fake. Nas’s sentiments give insight into the opposing definition of authenticity put forth by hip hop artists who claim that they have not sold out to be accepted into mainstream culture. In my film *Emcee Duck* will be torn between this ideology and the demands of the commercial market.

While Nas’s sentiments have been echoed by other hip hop artists, the finality of his statement “Hip Hop is dead,” in the face of hip hop’s continued commercial success not only in music, including his own, but in film, television, fashion, sports, and art seems contradictory or at least premature.

How can hip hop music exist simultaneously as an art form accepted by mainstream culture and on the brink of death as a sub-culture? I would argue that this duality in Hip Hop Culture has always existed, as illustrated by the success of the Sugar Hill Gang. Even though the Sugarhill Gang was considered inauthentic within Hip Hop Sub-Culture, their success had the greater effect of spreading

awareness of hip hop as an art form, and in doing so, opened doors for other hip hop artists whether they were considered authentic by mainstream culture or not.

Authenticity, although ill-defined by either side still determines the value of the artists and their work in the U.S. Unfortunately for Hip Hop Culture it seems as though achieving financial success depends on reaching an audience outside of the sub-culture. So in order to be financially successful hip hop artists must present an image to mainstream audiences that conforms to their definition of authentic. Here, the duality of Hip Hop Culture comes into conflict. Is the image hip hop artists produce authentic within the Hip Hop Sub-Culture, or do hip hop artists present an image that mainstream culture identifies as authentic based on their perceptions of Black Culture?

Emcee Duck will ask himself whether he created his persona or whether he has become a product, shaped by mainstream culture for commercial consumption.

It is not my intention to argue whether hip hop music is vulnerable to the affects of over saturation, homogenization, or radicalization due to the influence of the United States' mainstream culture. In fact hip hop music has almost certainly fallen prey to all of these pitfalls. It is my intention to examine the effects of commercialization on Hip Hop Culture and the implications that arise when mainstream culture influences a sub-culture that is linked with racial identity.

As a Black hip hop artist, Duck's character will reflect the worst of the effects of commercialization in his public persona, but his journey will reveal his personal struggles with the maintenance of his image.

Hip Hop In the Mainstream - Late 80's Early 90's

When hip hop artists started making money, Hip Hop Culture started to change. Certain aspects of Hip Hop Culture proved to be more profitable than others. Graffiti went through a short-lived period when it was recognized by the mainstream art community, but has yet to be accepted as a true art form. In the early 80's Jean-Michele Basquiat, who began his career as graffiti artist, drew the attention of New York's modern art scene. Break dancing has also remained largely an underground culture within a culture although it has recently experienced resurgence in popularity in part fueled by the success of the MTV program "America's Best Dance Crew" and the FOX network's "So You Think You Can Dance." Comparing the slow rate of acceptance of breaking and graffiti in mainstream U.S. culture and to the rapid acceptance of hip hop music gives insight to the characteristics of Hip Hop Culture that appeal to mainstream consumers.

In 1988 Will Smith, formerly the Fresh Prince, and his partner DJ Jazzy Jeff won the first Grammy awarded to a hip hop group (And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop. Dir. Richard Lowe, Dana Perry. Bring the Noise LLP, 2004) with their album, *Parents Just Don't Understand*. Smith's clean cut image, lighthearted humor, breezy rhymes, and Jazzy Jeff's production of party music created a winning combination with mainstream audiences, but in another

example of Hip Hop Culture's contentious relationship with acceptance into the mainstream, many hip hop artists chose to boycott the event because the Grammy was awarded prior to the televised portion of the show. Instead, several artists attended their own unassociated awards ceremony (And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop. Dir. Richard Lowe, Dana Perry. Bring the Noise LLP, 2004).

I believe awards and more specifically awards shows are one of the best indicators of acceptance in mainstream U.S. culture. In my script I've chosen to make Emcee Duck's quest to achieve an achievement award and thus his acceptance in mainstream culture an indication of the growth of his character. Here, Kanye West's notorious reputation for stealing the spotlight at awards shows will serve as the inspiration for Duck's quest for recognition. In 2004 West rushed the stage at MTV's VMA's to protest that he should have won the Best New Artist award. In 2006 he stole the mic at MTV's Euro Video Music awards because he thought that he should have won the award for Best Video. Finally, in 2009 West stole the show again at MTV's VMAs to express his opinion that Beyonce Knowles should have won Best Female Video. In Hip Hop it would seem that the quest for recognition is second only to the quest for bling. I will use Duck's desire for recognition to question whose recognition is most important and exactly what qualities award shows seem to value.

In the early '90s the rise of Gangsta Rap provides a different illustration of how the commercial success of hip hop music affected the development of Hip Hop Culture. The themes of poverty and racial discrimination against Blacks that were explored in early hip hop music were replaced by gangsta imagery. The

success of groups like N.W.A and Ice – T fueled a backlash against hip hop music from mainstream culture. Figures like Delores Tucker, a civil rights activist, denounced rap music as obscenity, and argued that the music inspired misogyny, teenage sex, drug use, and violence. Her sentiments were echoed by religious groups, the NAACP, and even Tipper Gore (Deflem, Mathieu 1993).

N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude) was also one of the first hip hop groups to emerge from the West Coast. Prior to the 1990s, hip hop artists from New York dominated the scene. The group consisted of Easy-E, whose criminal dealings were rumored to support the group financially, Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, MC Ren, and DJ Yella. N.W.A.'s explicit lyrics got them banned from several U.S. radio stations and their gangsta image as portrayed on MTV through their videos inspired fear. With their hit "Fuck the Police" and the accompanying video N.W.A. protested against police brutality and racial profiling.

*"Fuck tha police comin straight from the underground
A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown
I'm not the other color so police think
They have the authority to kill a minority" (1988)*

N.W.A. explicitly condemned police for racial discrimination and violence toward minorities. While the message was clear to the Blacks and Latinos living in urban areas on either coast that identified with Hip Hop Culture, the group's use of profanity and displays of aggression inspired harsh criticism and censorship from the mainstream music industry.

I would argue that the backlash against hip hop music was integral to its continued commercial success. The mainstream focus on many of the negative

aspects of Hip Hop Culture, which are synonymous with urban Black culture, altered hip hop music and Hip Hop Culture's ethos. This reaction resulted in a mixed blessing. It brought attention to the poverty and turmoil of disenfranchised Black youth while also making Gangsta Rap more popular and profitable to the point that other forms of hip hop were deemed inauthentic. As the Gangsta image proved to be profitable, violent lyrics, misogyny, profanity, and glorification of drugs became the earmarks of authenticity in hip hop music. Although criticism lead to Gangsta Rap's overexposure in the media, I believe Gangsta Rap was immediately dubbed credible and authentic because its characterization of young poor Blacks fit with the image already accepted by mainstream White America.

The Gangsta Rap Era will serve as the setting for Emcee Duck's beginning as a hip hop artist. I chose this era because it spawned the careers of several of today's most well established and successful hip hop artists, such as Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg. During this era there was also a divergence in hip hop music between hip hop artists who became Gangsta Rappers and hip hop artist who would later be described as conscious or underground. Underground hip hop is characterized as so because its artists do not have a major following in mainstream U.S. culture. This is credited in part to the genre's focus on political messages and the artists' appeal to niche audiences. In my script I attempt to use Duck's choice to go mainstream to illustrate this divergence.

Hip Hop In the Mainstream the Ice Age - Late 90s

At the peak of Gangsta Rap's popularity in the nineties the murders of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. rocked the hip hop world and ushered in what some hip hop artists have labeled the Ice Age. Many emcees were achieving rock star status in the image they portrayed, After the violent murders of Shakur and B.I.G., the most popular hip hop shifted its focus from violence to decadence. Notorious B.I.G personified this transition before his murder in his classic hit "Juicy."

*It was all a dream
I used to read Word Up magazine
Salt'n'Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine...
I made the change from a common thief
To up close and personal with Robin Leach...
Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis
When I was dead broke, man I couldn't picture this
50 inch screen, money green leather sofa
Got two rides, a limousine with a chauffeur
Phone bill about two G's flat
No need to worry, my accountant handles that
And my whole crew is loungin'
Celebratin' every day, no more public housin'
Thinkin' back on my one-room shack
Now my mom pimps her act with minks on her back..."(1994)*

While misogyny and violence were still common themes in popular hip hop music in the late '90s to the present, bling has become the new staple of success in Hip Hop Culture.

Hip Hop Culture's Ice Age will be the setting for Emcee Duck's present. Duck's persona will emphasize the decadence and extravagance that characterizes the era. Like Notorious B.I.G. Duck will project a true Horatio Alger rise to wealth and fame. Though Hip Hop Culture began as a grass roots outsider culture, hip hop has been redefined by its own commercial viability in mainstream culture. Because profits drive sales, the industry sells the brand that makes the most money. Unfortunately in the United States sex, drugs, violence, and material excess have become the earmarks of authenticity for hip hop artists because hip hop music that incorporates these topics sells the most. In my script, rather than trying to assign blame for this trend I will attempt to illustrate some of the factors that contribute to its continued occurrence. To do this I will further examine the relationship between sub-culture and mainstream culture.

The Co-optation of Countercultures by the Mainstream

In order to take a broader view of how sub-cultures can be influenced or even subverted by mainstream cultures I researched literature on the commercialization of hip hop, hip hop as a sub-culture, other youth driven music sub-cultures, and the issue of authenticity as it pertains to hip hop music. I found the greatest amount of literature on the commercial use of hip hop, which would seem to support the argument put forward in the Blair study that Hip Hop Culture has already been subverted through commercialization (Blair, 21).

In addition to reviewing Blair's work in detail I will review a sampling of the other literature that examines the effect of commercialization on Hip Hop Culture and the perception of Black culture in the United States.

Blair's study, "The Commercialization of Rap Music Youth Sub-Culture" explores what happens when a culture that is in opposition to or on the edges of mainstream culture is endorsed by the mainstream and used as a marketing tool by the members of the mainstream culture. Blair makes the assertion that, "There is something horribly wrong with a dominant community repeatedly co-opting the cultural forms of oppressed communities, stripping them of their vitality and form, the heritage of their creators and then popularizing them. The result is bleached Pepsi culture masquerading as the real thing" (Blair, 21). Blair notes that

there have been other youth music sub-cultures, such as punk and heavy metal, but maintains that hip hop, because of its use of sampling of previous popular music, is more accessible to more people and is a more viable commercial tool. The article goes on to examine hip hop's roots as a localized form of expression utilized by young Blacks in the Bronx, NY and then applies a theoretical framework around its development in order to suggest the next possible step for hip hop.

Blair uses Gottendiener's proposed model, which takes a semiotic approach to better explain the process of hegemony, the power exerted over the culture of a sub-culture by a dominant culture. Gottendiener's model seeks to explore the exchange of symbols and meaning between the producers and users of pop culture. His view is that the "mass" culture develops as a result of dynamic meaning creation from groups which may or may not be closely allied with the dominant ideology" (Blair, 26). From here, Blair applies Gottendiener's three stage model to Hip Hop Sub-Culture that explains the development and demise of a culture. In stage one a product takes on the meaning given to it by members of a culture. In stage two members of the culture purchase these products for their symbolic value, and finally in the third stage, the symbols of the culture are appropriated by mass producers to sell their products (Blair, 28).

Duck's character follows a path loosely based on this model. Duck's early career will reflect stages one and two. His life in the present will demonstrate the beginning of stage three in which Duck as a symbol for hip hop has been appropriated by mainstream culture. Finally Duck will have to face the possible

outcome of Gottdiener's third stage when taking a glimpse of his future as his image is stolen for the purpose of selling products unrelated to music.

Blair contends that presently hip hop music is in the third stage of the model and looks to television advertising as proof. Blair looks specifically at a sampling of ads that aired during children's Saturday morning programming in the 1990s when hip hop was starting to demonstrate great commercial success. She found that Barbie, Barney Rubble, McDonald's Chicken Nuggets, and "Punchy" from the Hawaiian Punch soft drink were all featured as rappers in commercial ads (Blair, 29). In conclusion, Blair blames the watered down hip hop that most Americans are exposed to through mass culture for the end of hip hop's utility for disadvantaged youth who were the original creative force behind the music.

I think that Blair's methodology and her assertions are not without merit; however, her study focuses in on only two aspects of Hip Hop Culture, the MC's and the DJs. She ignores bombing (the practice of writing graffiti on public spaces) and breaking (referring to the style of dance associated with early hip hop music) almost completely. These omissions provide a limited perspective on the scope of the effect commercial success has had on the culture. Blair also omits the evolution of Underground Hip Hop into a culture within the sub-culture.

Underground Hip Hop artists rebuke the standards of authenticity as prescribed by the mainstream and establish their own set of values. Blair's argument that hip hop music has been watered down can only be applied to one genre of hip hop music; however, because the mainstream audience's financial support of the hip hop music industry has been the driving force behind its rapid growth the

repercussions of the effects in Blair's study may eventually apply to Hip Hop Culture in its entirety. If watered down hip hop becomes the staple in the mainstream music industry, will other forms of hip hop survive once it has become out of fashion?

As the gangsta image that critics of hip hop music have always slammed has proved more popular and profitable in mainstream music, the many positive images portrayed by socially "conscious" emcees, breakers, graffiti artists, and DJs in the underground have been largely ignored by the same critics. I believe this dichotomy should be at the center of the current debate over the direction of hip hop music in the future. How can a diverse sub-culture be entirely condemned by members of the mainstream because the negative aspects of part of that sub-culture are the only parts that are profitable within the mainstream?

As a Black fan of hip hop, I am concerned that the commercial viability of hip hop music has led to the destruction and exploitation of Hip Hop Culture and Black culture through manipulation of what it means to be authentic in hip hop. The politically and financially minded hip hop artists Dead Prez, explored this situation in their song "Hip Hop."

*Nigga, don't think these record deals gon' feed your seeds
And pay your bills, because they not
MCs get a little bit of love and think they hot
Talkin' 'bout how much money they got; all y'all records sound the same
I'm sick of that fake thug, R&B-rap scenario, all day on the radio
Same scenes in the video, monotonous material
Y'all don't here me though
These record labels slang our tapes like dope
You can be next in line and signed; and still be writing rhymes and broke
You would rather have a Lexus? or justice? a dream? or some substance?
A Beamer? a necklace? or freedom? (2000)*

Dead Prez asserts that hip hop artists have replicated the “fake thug, R&B rap scenario” over and over to the point that the image has lost its efficacy. They compare the sale of hip hop tapes to “slangin dope,” implying that record labels have taken on the role of drug dealers and that their product is a negative commodity. In addition Dead Prez contend that the artists’ value is limited because they are easily replaceable, saying, “you can be next in line and signed; and still be writing rhymes and broke.” The group’s statement amounts to the belief that Hip Hop Sub-Culture has been taken over by the mainstream culture it once rebelled against. At the beginning of my film Emcee Duck will represent hip hop music that has been corrupted by mainstream culture’s definition of authentic. Finally he will have to decide whether he would rather have “A Beamer? A necklace? Or Freedom?” In other words, will he continue to sell mainstream hip hop music?

While I believe Duck’s resolution of this dilemma suffices for the resolution of the film, I believe that the impact of commercialism on Hip Hop Culture and Black culture deserves a broader discussion, which warrants returning to Blair’s examination of the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture. She applies Gottdiener’s three stages of “production and control of ideological meanings” to Hip Hop Culture (Blair, 28). Gottdiener “assumes that the production of meaning takes place by virtue of a social relation, such as reciprocal linkages between producers and users as mediated through mass cultural objects”(Blair, 25). In the third stage of Gottdiener’s model, mainstream culture commodifies a sub-cultural

form, removing it from its context and stripping it of its intended or initial meaning. Because sub-cultures are formed by reconstructing meaning to create style, this deconstruction renders the style defunct as well as the sub-culture associated with that style. As I argued previously, I believe Blair has a narrow view of Hip Hop Culture. I also believe that her application of Gottdeiner's model is too one sided. I agree with her argument that mainstream culture in the U.S. has had a profound influence on Hip Hop Culture, and that it has presented a redefinition of authentic Hip Hop Culture, but I do not believe that the sub-culture is defenseless against mainstream culture's influence.

In McLeod's exploration of authenticity in hip hop, he identifies several properties that make hip hop authentic based on claims from hip hop artists and interviews with fans. Among these properties are "Blackness (meaning produced by Black artists)," masculinity, staying true to yourself, being from the "street", and staying old school (McLeod, 144). I believe that these values are poorly defined at best and have more to do with the intangible mystique of any culture witnessed by an outsider; however, underground hip hop artist like Dead Prez and Public Enemy have contributed a competing definition of authenticity in Hip Hop Culture that has received minimal media attention from mainstream culture. I will return to this competing definition and sub-culture's defense against assimilation later in further detail.

Although all aspects of Hip Hop Culture may not be in the same stage of Gottdeiner's model it is important to understand the effect of commercialism on the sub-culture as a whole. Again, this will be the perspective I want to explore in

my film project. To get a clearer idea of the way Hip Hop Culture has been appropriated by mainstream culture I think it would be useful to look at some concrete examples of how it has been used directly as a marketing tool.

Hip hop as a Marketing Tool

Keeping the power of mainstream culture's ability to change a subculture in mind, it is interesting to examine literature on how different aspects of Hip Hop Culture have been used as marketing tools. In a 2003 *Advertising Age* article "Corporate America Cozies up to Hip hop," authors Atkinson and Halliday looked at the corporate line-up whose products were promoted at the Source Hip Hop Music Awards. T-mobile and Nike joined auto marketers from Ford to GM in sponsorship of the event. Larry Samuel, author of "The Trend Commandments," is quoted in the article as saying, "Hip hop is where rock n' roll was in the '70s. It's evolved into a safe place...there's too much bling-bling in it for everyone"(Atkinson, Halliday, 2). Safe seems to be the important word here. The question might be, "safe for whom?" Because hip hop music's commercial success has been derived in part from its dangerous image and rebellious rhetoric, its evolution into a safe place for mainstream audiences implies that it is no longer separate from mainstream culture. This seems to be an index of Blair's third stage.

Another article, "Adidas aims for 'street cred' with hip hop alliance" from *Media Asia*, speaks of the pairing of rapper Missy Misdemeanor Elliott with a new line of shoes that have been labeled the 'Respect Me' collection. An Adidas brand spokesman stated, "We have an ongoing partnership with Missy, whereby she has been wearing Adidas in a lot of her music videos and at award shows.

This is the first formal endorsement and is the first time we have partnered with a performance artist" (Hargrave-Silk, 6). Not surprisingly a shoe company is trying to base their product's image around a Black celebrity. It is, however, surprising that this is Adidas' first formal endorsement with a performance artist, since the brand already has such following among breakers, and was given years of free advertisement by RUN DMC, one of the first commercially successful rap groups who wore Adidas predominantly and even rapped about Adidas.

In another article found in *Advertising Age*, "Cool Consumption good fit for Hip hop," author T. L. Stanley points out that hip hop music has easily lent itself to product placement. As Ryan Berger, a strategic trend spotter, notes in the article "these brands are part of the artist's lives, and what they're selling is a lifestyle"(Stanley, 16). The article goes on to explain how rappers like Busta Rhymes have parlayed their affection for Courvoisier into endorsement deals. Andre 3000's mention of Polaroid in his 2004 hit "Hey Ya" is also mentioned as the inspiration for the company's new image. The article goes on to note that there are limitations on the products rappers can endorse, by quoting a brand strategist's statement: "There's a law of diminishing returns...and customers are smart enough to know that if Missy Elliott starts rapping about household cleaning products, then there's something wrong" (Stanley, 16). It would seem that this strategist believes that consumers are not totally blind to blatant marketing ploys.

In an article taken from the *New York Times*, "Bridging Hip hop Consumers and Suits," Jeff Leeds takes a look at the career of Steven Stoute, an

advertising executive with roots in the hip hop music industry. Because of his unique position as the manager of several hip hop artists, Stoute has been able to live a double life, as an authentic member of the hip hop music industry and an executive in the not-so-hip corporate world of mainstream advertising. Formerly the manager of early '90s rap group Kid n' Play, Stoute has pioneered such pairings as McDonalds and Justin Timberlake, and Reebok and Jadakiss (Leeds, E.1). A spokesman for Hewlett-Packard said that Stoute, who is now working on their campaign, "has ensured that the company's bids for young consumers will come across with 'authenticity.' The last thing we want to do is look like we just wrote a check for entry to the music business"(Leeds, E.1).

Inspired by the growth in sales of Ray Ban sunglasses after the hit movie, song, and video "Men in Black," Stoute began his career as "a translator, explaining the music industry's Sub-Cultures, predominantly the black world of hip hop, to the typically middle-aged White ranks of the corporate world, and vice versa"(Leeds, 2). Given the proliferation of advertising using the formal elements of hip hop, it would seem that corporate America is getting better at addressing its consumers using hip hop.

Toyota's recent use of hip hop in marketing the Scion brand gives insight into just how deeply entrenched commercialization has become in hip hop. The car manufacturer has actually created a sub-brand and promotes underground artists financially. The article goes on to state that, "Scion, trying to preserve the hip hop, underground community, has elevated talented amateur musicians, artists, and fashion designers into more commercial exploits" (Halliday, 8). When

asked how "Scion will adapt when today's underground becomes tomorrow's mainstream," the head of Scion's campaign says "we will be evolving to the next thing in a couple years" (Halliday, 8). Scion's marketing strategy would then seem to provide clear evidence that hip hop music is in the third phase of Gottdiener's model. Once hip hop music has lost its authenticity it will no longer be useful as a marketing tool, but the greater tragedy is that the culture will have lost its vitality. Once Scion has transformed underground artists into commercially successful artists, their utility in reaching Scion's target audience will be lost because despite the artists' intended message, they will be perceived as a marketing ploy.

In effect even hip hop music that has found a place outside of mainstream radio play is being co-opted in the same way as mainstream hip hop. These last five articles have served to illustrate that hip hop has become an effective and widely used marketing tool. Some marketing campaigns have arisen naturally because hip hop artists have endorsed certain products in their songs. Other brands, like Scion, Hewlett-Packard, and McDonalds, have used hip hop music to reach their target markets. Though some artists are sharing in the wealth of the commercialization of their products, the exploitative nature of marketing a sub-culture is summed up in the Scion spokeswoman's assertion that they will move on to the "next thing" when underground hip hop has lost its edge and their market, which ironically their commercialization of the form will facilitate. Though the articles' main focus has been on hip hop music artists, most of the

campaigns have relied on the lifestyle of hip hop, which includes breaking and bombing, to contribute to the sense of authenticity behind their brand.

Further Effects of Commercialization on Hip Hop Culture

In order to gain perspective on the impact of mainstream culture's effect on Hip Hop Culture I think it is important to consider the effects on aspects of the culture that have not been assimilated as rapidly as the music. In the early eighties, bombing (writing graffiti) was briefly assimilated into mainstream art culture, but its commercial success was short-lived as was its acceptance as a mainstream art form. Lynn Powers discussed the evolution and decline of the graffiti art movement in her "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" Graffiti art began in the inner cities of New York in the '70s, and has been considered a pillar of Hip Hop Sub-Culture since the beginning (Powers, 137). Inner city youth, primarily Black males, would write their names on public and private property in order to express themselves, as acts of rebellion, and to achieve a certain level of fame and respect in their community. The stylized lettering that bombers use is personal to each artist, and sometimes undecipherable to outsiders, which helps to create an identity for bombers that sets them even farther outside of mainstream society and mass culture. "Taki 183" is widely noted to be one of the earliest, if not the first bomber (Powers, 137). His signature could be found anywhere from subway cars to ice cream trucks.

Bombing grew as a practice among youths as did the size of the tags. Whole subway cars and sides of buildings became murals. Graffiti artists were gaining the hatred of public officials and community members that considered graffiti to be vandalism, but at the same time, graffiti was also garnering the attention of mainstream art enthusiasts. At the onset of the movement, some graffiti artists found in the streets were commissioned as artists to create murals on buildings and later on canvas.

Powers makes the assertion that “in most cases the work’s (graffiti) popularity was based more on the novelty of being produced by poor minority criminals than on any intrinsic artistic value. Ultimately (and quickly) the novelty wore off” (Powers, 141). In this example, the cooption of the graffiti sub-culture into mainstream art culture resulted in the misrepresentation of the original art form, generated a small amount of financial gain, and ended in the rejection of graffiti as art by the mainstream. It is easy to draw parallels to the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture in total with the way that one of its pillars was co-opted and rejected by mass culture. But at the same time the decline of the graffiti art movement did not spell the end of the graffiti sub-culture. This is evidenced in the widespread existence of bombers today. Graffiti was also always on the fringes of acceptability in the mainstream because in its true form bombing is illegal. Still I can’t draw conclusions about the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture by comparing it to the commercialization of just one of its parts. As discussed earlier, marketers are selling the hip hop lifestyle, not just the emcees, and the music, so in that way, graffiti is still being co-opted by the

mainstream even though it has not been endorsed as a traditional art form by mainstream culture. Even though graffiti will not be a major subject in my film project, the idea that sub-cultures and the products of sub-cultures can function as fads in mainstream culture has influenced the direction of my script. This oversimplified perception of Hip Hop Culture by mainstream culture in the U.S. deserves further examination because of the sub-culture's link with Black culture.

In the article "A Nation of Millions: Hip Hop Culture and the Legacy of Black Nationalism," S. Craig Watkins, traces the roots of the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture to the commercialization of Black Nationalism. Watkins asserts that mass culture changed the meaning associated with the Black Nationalist movement by focusing on its members' style of dress rather than their message. Watkins writes that, "Ultimately, by associating black militancy with revolutionary style rather than revolutionary politics images of the past are appropriated in a way that negates rather than enlivens social and political memory" (Watkins, 388). In other words, style takes precedence over substance.

The commercialization of Hip Hop Culture mirrors this phenomenon in the explosion of Gangsta Rap into the scene in the early '90s. Watkins states that:

"...though the ghettocentric gaze(of gangsta rap) produced insightful commentary on the lived experiences of poor and alienated black youth its growing popularity obscured alternative ways of imagining and representing black American life...The infusion of corporate dollars accelerated rap music's penetration of the cultural mainstream while also establishing a narrow conception of production-worthy music" (Watkins, 389).

Watkins concludes by questioning whether the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture, which he equates, with Black culture will take control of production out

of the hands of Black culture. (392) While I agree with Watkins' reasoning, I would argue that control of production of hip hop music is less important than the control of the culture's ethos. Because the value of the culture's products to its members is dependent on the meanings they associate with them, altering the meaning strips the value of those products for members of the sub-culture.

In the articles so far I have examined the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture and the possible ramifications. In these last few articles I will explore the ways in which Hip Hop Culture strives to preserve itself, and take a look at some of the effects of the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture.

Retaining Sub-Cultural Authenticity in Hip Hop Culture

The control of the definition of authentic hip hop music and Hip Hop Culture will determine whether Hip Hop Culture can resist the effects of commercialization. In order to explore this idea in my film I researched literature that attempted to define what it means to be authentic in Hip Hop Culture.

In his study, Watkins suggested that hip hop music attempts to maintain its authenticity through the essential tenet of Hip Hop Culture, which is ‘keeping it real.’ I believe that the phrase is used so much in and outside of Hip Hop Culture, that ironically, ‘keeping it real’ has lost its authenticity. Kembrew McLeod’s article, “Authenticity Within Hip hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation,” addresses one of the main issues at the heart of the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture: can hip hop stay authentic and still make money commercially? McLeod sought to define authenticity/keeping it real in hip hop by conducting phone interviews with several Black hip hop artists. He asked each artist the four questions listed below:

1. What does the Phrase “keepin’ it real“ mean to you?
2. Who, in hip hop is keepin’ it real?
3. What makes someone real in hip hop?
4. What makes someone fake in hip hop?
(McLeod, 138).

McLeod's findings indicated that Blackness is defined through expressions of masculinity, staying true to yourself, being from the streets, and staying old school (McLeod, 139). While McLeod's study found that there seemed to be a consensus of what constitutes keeping it real among the artists he interviewed, the definitions he arrived at were poorly defined at best. At worst they are very limiting to the genre as a whole. The success of female artists like Queen Latifa, and Erykah Badu contradict McLeod's findings. The major success of Eminem also stands in opposition of Blackness as a determinant of authenticity in hip hop music.

Dipa Basu's study "What is real about 'keeping it real'?" approaches authenticity from another perspective. Basu's definition of keeping it real is based on his conception of selling out. The phrase 'selling out' implies sacrificing authenticity for financial gain. Basu likens hip hop preoccupation with selling out to the attitudes of '60s' folk musicians that selling too much meant selling out (Basu, 375). Keeping this in mind, Basu decided to find out what keeping it real meant to Black entrepreneurs in the hip hop industry. Basu and the entrepreneurs that he interviewed advanced the belief that financial success had nothing to do with selling out. They noted that historically Blacks were not able to profit from the music they pioneered and, most Black artists today have no choice but to seek profits from their work because many seek music as their only means of achieving financial success. Basu concludes that in "the notion of 'keeping it real' as an entrepreneur making a living from rap there is an emphasis on maintaining an outlook, posture, and sentiment that resonates with key elements

of Black cultural life indelibly linked to race, class, space and gender and its various forms of cultural representation” (Basu, 379).

Basu’s study puts a different twist on hip hop music’s use of authenticity as a defense against commercialization. For Basu and the entrepreneurs he interviewed, authenticity has nothing to do with making money. The implication is that authenticity should have more to do with racist attitudes towards Blacks who have found a means of economic success that is for the most part inaccessible to Whites. So does keeping it real while making money mean keeping it Black?

Basu’s take on authenticity will play an integral part in my script as Emcee Duck contemplates his image. Is his image really detrimental to Hip Hop Culture, or are his critics motivated by the racist attitudes toward successful Blacks? This will be a theme that I will touch on repeatedly in my script. Because this is an important element in my film it is worthwhile to study the possible real world repercussions of this issue.

Defining authenticity in Hip Hop Culture could have deeper consequences than dipping record sales. Hip Hop Culture and the perception of Black culture in the United States are forever intertwined. Child Psychiatrist Ardis C. Martin explored the possible effects of media depictions of Blacks on the development of Black children’s racial identity in his article, “Television Media as a Potential Negative Factor in the Racial Identity Development of African American Youth.”

Martin asserts that the persuasive nature of television causes people to believe what they see and that “Adolescents often look to the media to explore

new roles, observe the way they are depicted, and see if they can identify with these images. This can prove dangerous because groups of people can be reduced to mere negative depictions or categorized in unflattering ways which may then be accepted by the majority and possibly minority cultures as fact.” Hip Hop Culture is reflected not only through music, but through videos, movies, television shows, fashion, and in sports. If Martin’s contention proves valid hip hop could influence not only Black children’s development of racial-identity, but also the perception of Blacks by outside cultures.

A 1976 article by Ball-Rokech and De Fleur explored the latter. Their Media System Dependency Theory sought to define the relationship between consumers of different media and their perception of the real world and how their perception influenced their behaviors. One aspect of MSDT holds that people are likely to believe what they internalize from different media and that this belief can be especially strong when they are exposed to something that they have no formal experience with in reality.

Because television and film media have the most far reaching and pervasive influences, representations of Hip Hop Culture and Black culture within those forms of media are important indicators of the perception of each culture in the United States.

Martin’s study of the influence of media depictions of Blacks and Ball-Rokeach’s 1976 study concerning media system dependency theory are issues that I will attempt to explore in Duck’s relationship with several other characters in my script as he questions the impact of his art. Hoping to harness the pervasive

nature of film in my own work I researched three Hip Hop genre films that I believe have influenced the way people in mainstream U.S. culture have come to view Hip Hop Culture.

Film Review

Although Hip Hop Culture is based in music, television and film have played important roles in the culture's development. MTV, which first aired in 1981, helped to popularize hip hop through videos. Run DMC, MC Hammer, and LL Cool J. opened the door for other artists like Snoop Doggy Dogg and Tupac Shakur. MTV's show, "YO MTV Raps" featured hip hop videos and interviews with artists in a daily hour long segment from 1988 – 1995. MTV provided a format for hip hop artists to reach audiences that might not have access to their music, it gave the music a face, and because the network was focused on a youthful audience, hip hop was put in a position to win over a highly marketable fan base.

By exposing the visual aspects of hip hop, television and film made the culture more accessible to people who might not have connected with the music alone. In addition, break dancing, graffiti, and hip hop fashion, visual aspects of Hip Hop Culture were presented to mainstream audiences.

Because some of the images were taboo in the mainstream, they also drew criticism and even censorship. In the early '90s, the hip hop group 2 Live Crew, whose lyrics and videos were infamously misogynistic and riddled with profanity, were censored to the point that their 1988 album *Move Something* earned the first explicit lyrics warning sticker.

Hip hop movies added powerful mythology to Hip Hop Culture by creating stories to which mainstream audiences could relate. The way that films in the Hip Hop genre blend fact with fiction also adds to the power of their mythology. Often real figures in Hip Hop Culture, artists and even businessmen are featured as themselves or as characters that are similar to their hip hop personas. By adding some facts to the fictional presentation of Hip Hop Culture in films audiences are more likely to base their behavior or ideology on the film's version of reality.

Most early hip hop films were presented from the perspective of the underdogs struggling to overcome an obstacle or gain acceptance in a society that looks down on his or her talent. The 1984 film, *Breakin* is an example of a Hip Hop Culture underdog story. *Breakin* introduced break dancing culture to mainstream audiences. When Kelly, a White upper-class teen who is a classically trained dancer, meets Turbo and Ozone, two urban Black and Hispanic B-Boys(Break Dancers) culture's collide. Turbo and Ozone were real b-boys, but played fictional versions of themselves in the film. An unlikely partnership forms between the three because of their love for dance. The trio "battle" for acceptance in the world of classic dance, but are rejected as much for their diversity as for their style of dance.

Another common theme in early hip hop movies was the struggle to succeed financially or artistically without sacrificing authenticity. The 1983 film, *Wyl'd Style* follows the life of a graffiti artist, Zoro, who is played by the real life graffiti artist Lee Quinones. Zoro is famous in the Hip Hop community for his

art, but his identity is a secret. When graffiti becomes fashionable in the New York City art scene, other graffiti artists copy Zoro's style and begin to make money and win acclaim. Zoro is faced with the decision whether to "sell out" and succeed or "keep it real" and live in obscurity and poverty.

These films and films that I will discuss in more detail have added to the mythology of hip hop through establishing common themes, settings, and character types like the "quirky underdog," the "street smart thug with a heart," and the "ruthless gangsta." Whether seen as character types, or stereotypes, these thematic elements created representations of Blacks and Latinos that were already familiar to White mainstream audiences. Although these films are fantasy, I believe they helped to establish the parameters of commercially defined 'authenticity' in Hip Hop Culture as seen from the mainstream perspective. Understanding these common themes will help me to differentiate my script from its predecessors and allow me to play against these themes to illustrate the invalidity of these stereotypes.

One of the earliest and most influential hip hop films, *Krush Groove*, released in 1985, is loosely based on real story behind the creation of Russell Simmons's Def Jam record label. The film's tagline, "In the streets, the subways and the clubs, they created the sound that would turn their world around," reinforces the message that the film is an accurate depiction of the birth of hip hop; however, like Eminem's *8-Mile*, *Krush Groove*, is more mythology than fact.

The film features several big names in early hip hop who portray themselves, including Run DMC, Kurtis Blow, Sheila E, The Fat Boys, and LL

Cool J. Their performances and simply the presence of real hip hop artists lent a great deal of credibility to the film.

The main characters, Russell Walker (Simmons) and Rick (Rubin) are young entrepreneurs trying to start a hip hop record label. They don't have enough money to start the label, so Russell borrows the money from a known crime boss. The entrepreneurs meet with immediate success, inevitably run afoul of the crime boss who tries to leverage his investment into a controlling share in the label. In the end Russell and his brother Run come up with the money in the nick of time.

In reality Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons started Def Jam Records out of Rubin's New York University dorm room (Guerraseva 5). Rubin was a music aficionado, but his background was in punk rock. His education was paid for by his family, but Rubin spent most of his time during college networking in New York music venues. Def Jam was an idea before it was a company, but Rubin presented the company as if it were already in business, even distributing business cards with his dorm room address.

Meanwhile, Russell Simmons had dropped out of college and was working as a concert promoter. When he met Rubin, Simmons had already founded Rush Artist Management using the connections he made as a concert promoter. The two entrepreneurs shared a common vision, each contributed \$4000, and Def Jam became a real label.

Although the origins of the Def Jam label are not entirely dissimilar from those presented in the film, there are key differences that not only serve to make

the film more entertaining, but also feed into the mythology of Hip Hop Culture. In *Krush Groove*, Russell is the main character and is responsible for starting the label. Rubin is in the film, but his role is marginalized. In the film, Russell is portrayed as a street-smart hustler, not a college educated entrepreneur. In the film Russell borrows the money to start the label from a gangster instead of using money earned from his success as a concert promoter. In this sense the film presents a skewed view of history that aligns more closely with the gritty urban image of Hip Hop Culture that gives the music its edge and that draws fans to the stores.

While the story and production quality are not the best, the film romanticizes this early hip hop success story in such a way that it has a nostalgic feel about it that was even present when the film was first released in 1985. Although at this time, hip hop was still a fledgling in the music industry, Def Jam was already an established label and the hip hop artists who portrayed themselves were already famous.

In one iconic scene, a young LL Cool J., along with his crew, force their way into the Krush Groove offices in order to audition for the label. He slams down a boom box and bursts into a verse from his hit "I Can't Live Without My Radio." Impressed by his swagger and ability to rock the mic, LL is signed on the spot. Although LL Cool J was playing himself in the film, Rick Rubin selected him because he was impressed by a tape that he submitted in 1984. Later, Rubin introduced Cool J to Russell Simmons. Although LL's audition in the film captured the essence of the qualities that made Cool J a successful hip hop artists,

by introducing him as a street savvy kid who wouldn't take no for an answer Cool J's origins, like the origins of the Def Jam label take on legendary status.

Like the Sugar Hill Gang, *Krush Groove*, presented an image of hip hop that was not truly authentic, but because the Time Warner film was the only exposure that most people who were not familiar with the culture of hip hop, it became what was authentic to the majority of viewers who had no first-hand experience with hip hop.

Unlike *Krush Groove* the next film that I will examine tries to tear away the fantasy and romanticism that surround Hip Hop Culture. Rusty Cundieff's 1994 mockumentary, *Fear of a Black Hat*, is the hip hop equivalent of Hair Metal's *This is Spinal Tap*. In *This is Spinal Tap*, a documentary crew follows the careers of the members of a heavy metal band. The film is a satirical look at aspects of the musicians' lives and a behind the scenes look at the music industry. Like heavy metal, hip hop isn't presented as a business, but as a life style. When that fantasy gives way to reality the film draws humor from the incongruity.

Fear of a Black Hat takes audiences behind the scenes as it follows the story of fictitious hip hop group N.W.H. (Niggaz with Hats). The film is riddled with references to actual hip hop artists, as evidenced by the title which is a play on Public Enemy's album title, *Fear of a Black Planet* Although N.W.H. is a play on the real group N.W.A, an early gangsta rap group from the west coast featuring Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and Easy – E, the hip hop artists in the film parody a conglomeration of different of real artists. N.W.A was one of the first successful

West Coast gangsta rap groups. Tasty Taste's name is a play on name of Public Enemy's Flavor Flav, but Tasty's appearance and behavior parodies Easy-E.

Cundieff uses absurdity to lampoon the violence, misogyny, and profanity of gangsta rap juxtaposed with the realities of the music industry to shed light on the creation of hip hop's dubious ethos. The members of N.W.H. are followed by a documentarian working as a sociologist examining Hip Hop Culture. In interviews the band members slip back and forth between their one-dimensional rap identities and their more realistic personalities. Often the group's over the top presentation of their gangsta image sheds light on the absurdity of the image put forth by real gangsta rappers. For example, when asked why they never smile the group explains that smiling gives the appearance of weakness. Tone Def explains "See Taste, he once shot a motha fucka for taking a picture while he was thinking about smiling."

Throughout the film, Gangsta Rap's use of violence and sex to sell records is questioned. Defending the group's use of violent lyrics, the character Tasty Taste explains that though N.W.H. might seem violent, "We anti-violent. Anyone says different, I'll bust a cap in their ass." In an effort to explain the deeper meaning of the group's song P.U.S.S.Y. Ice Cold breaks down the anagram, "P", Political, "U", Unrest, "S", Stabilize, another "S", Society, "Y", Yeah. The group's feeble attempts to defend their image reinforce the film's assertion that the hip hop industry is less about art and more about making money.

Cundieff's absurd look at Hip Hop Culture succeeds in exposing the realities and contradictions that shape the presentation of hip hop to mainstream

audiences. When N.W.H. breaks up, satirizing the break up of N.W.A., the three members of the group pursue different paths allowing Cundieff to scrutinize aspects of hip hop beyond gangsta rap. Tone Def enters the world of alternative “positive” hip hop, Tasty Taste delves further into gangsta rap, and Ice Cold turns to pop music. When their solo careers fail, the group reunites, setting aside personal differences for the sake of making money, and the members return to their gangsta personas. The artists’ transformations expose them for what they really are, actors portraying characters.

The final film that I will discuss is the most recent and reflects most directly the intersection of Hip Hop Culture into the mainstream. In the film *8 Mile*, Eminem portrays a character loosely based on the persona that Eminem has developed as a rapper in real life. In this fictional account, Eminem’s character “Bunny Rabbit” literally battles for acceptance within Hip Hop Culture as a White emcee.

Rabbit is poor, fatherless, has an estranged girlfriend, and speaks with the dialect of urban African-Americans. Rabbit faces discrimination when trying to break into the hip hop industry because he is White and Black audiences will not accept him as an authentic emcee. The film reaches climax when Rabbit wins a rap battle by listing his flaws as a White rapper while at the same time emphasizing the hardship that he shares with the poor urban blacks.

*I am white, I am a fuckin’ bum,
I do live in a trailer with my mom,
My boy Future is an Uncle Tom...
Don't ever try to judge me dude
You don't know what the fuck I've been through*

*Fuck y'all if you doubt me
I'm a piece of fucking white trash, I say it proudly
And fuck this battle, I don't wanna win, I'm outty (2002)*

Similarly Eminem overcame limitations other White hip hop artists have faced by adopting and overstating black stereotypes, by drawing legitimacy from his association with black hip hop artists like Dr. Dre, and by turning his weakness, being White in a Black sub-culture, into his greatest strength. Eminem also sets himself apart from the image of the middle-class White America by emphasizing his origins on the bad side of the tracks, in the poverty stricken 8 *mile* neighborhood.

Eminem's appropriation of hip hop authenticity can be received in different ways. One could make the argument that Eminem broke barriers and expanded the definition of authenticity in hip hop. His success as a White hip hop artist means that race is less important to authenticity in hip hop. On the other hand, Eminem's ability to style himself as an authentic hip hop artist could support that authenticity in hip hop is a commodity to be bought and sold or given away.

Like the hip hop artists in Rusty Cundieff's mockumentary, Eminem is an actor playing a role. The persona that he puts forth in his music is just one aspect of his personality. Unlike Eminem, black hip hop artists may shed their hip hop personas, but they cannot separate themselves from mainstream culture's perception of black culture as defined through hip hop. Audiences perceive Eminem as a White artist in a genre largely dominated by Blacks, but Black hip hop artists are perceived as representations of authentic Black culture.

Each of these films examines authenticity in hip hop. *Krush Groove* romanticizes the origins of the Def Jam record label. *Fear of a Black Hat* shatters the 2 dimensional portrayal of gangsta rappers and asserts that their use of violence and misogyny is exploitive. *8 Mile* examines the intersection of ethnicity and socio-economic status as the criteria for determining authenticity in hip hop.

In all of the films, acceptance and financial success are the protagonists' end goals, and in all of the films, authenticity is the means to that end. Although *8 Mile* pushes the boundaries of authenticity by introducing a White protagonist, his acceptance and success are still based on his approximation of the characteristics associated with poor urban Black culture. I find this problematic because I think it applies limits to the art form and, in turn, the art form produces a two dimensional presentation of poor urban Black culture.

All of the films reviewed in this section end right after their protagonists have achieved success and acceptance, but what happens after a hip hop artist achieves success and acceptance, if their outsider status was the key to their initial success? My film will explore this issue.

Thesis Project: Screenplay Synopsis

Among artists who have gained acceptance as measured by radio play and album sales, the current focus on money and bling has caused critics to label the current era of Hip Hop Culture the “Ice Age.” Because hip hop has achieved acceptance and its artists have become moguls, my film will not be told as an underdog story, but from the standpoint of a champion at the height of his career.

In order to explore Hip Hop Culture from this stand point, I think the story A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens provides an ideal format. As outlined by Blair’s study, Hip Hop Culture has arisen from modest beginnings to achieve great financial success. Like Dickens’ character Ebenezer Scrooge, Hip Hop Culture has become obsessed with money. And finally, like Scrooge, if Hip Hop Culture is truly on its deathbed, it must carefully examine its past and present in order to prevent a dismal future.

Dickens’ story has been adapted and remade several times as a film. According to the website Internet Movie Database there have been 39 incarnations of the story on film and on television (IMDB.com,7/2010). The underlying theme that is repeated throughout the retellings is that greed is the root of evil. While the remakes have varied in tone and humor this theme has persisted. By remixing A Christmas Carol I hope to emulate Hip Hop Culture’s ability to appeal to an audience through familiarity and relevance while altering

the original work's intended message. I believe that familiarity will help the audience connect with the characters and that the relevance of the topic will be made clearer by contrasting the old theme with the new one.

I chose to model my film after 1988's *Scrooged*, starring Bill Murray and directed by Richard Donner. I hope to replicate the tone and humor of Donner's adaptation in my film. Donner's adaptation replaces Ebenezer Scrooge with a television executive, Frank Cross, played by Bill Murray. Cross began his career playing a lowly dog on a children's show, but through guile and ambition became a high ranking television executive. Cross's heartless pursuit of success as an executive is typified in a scene in which he instructs a stage hand to staple reindeer horns to the head of a mouse as part of his production of a television adaptation of A Christmas Carol.

In Donner's film, Bob Cratchet is replaced by Cross's overworked underappreciated secretary, and Tiny Tim becomes the secretary's mute son. Karen Allen plays the role of Cross's former love interest, Claire, who he pushed aside as he climbed the corporate ladder.

I also believe Donner's version of Dickens' classic is the best fit to base my film on because it takes place in modern times. The Cross character, as portrayed by Murray, is also over-the-top relentless in his pursuit of success and in his obliviousness to consequences of his behavior. In the end Cross finds redemption by finding the Christmas spirit, repenting on national television, and rediscovering his humanity as evidenced by his reunion with Claire.

Like Scrooge and Cross, the protagonist of my film, Emcee Duck, will have to examine his origins, his present state and his possible future. The most important supporting characters in my retelling of the story will be Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim. In my script Bob Cratchit will take the form of Emcee Duck's manager, Bob, and his Tiny Tim, will be Cratchit's impressionable son Tiny.

Duck's relationship with Bob will closely resemble that of Dickens' Scrooge and Cratchit. Bob will be overworked and underappreciated, but loyal to a fault. However because in my script Bob will be Duck's senior he will also contribute a fatherly voice of reason.

Duck's relationship with Tiny will diverge from Scrooge's traditional relationship with the original Tiny Tim. In my script Tim will be used to explore the effects of media representations of Blacks as discussed in Martin's study. Unlike the original Tiny Tim, my version of the character will idolize Emcee Duck. Duck's treatment of Tiny in the present will influence his behavior in the future reflecting predictions of Martin's findings. Instead of Tiny being crippled literally, his misplaced faith will be the obstacle he must overcome.

In the end instead of rediscovering the Christmas Spirit, Emcee Duck will have to rediscover the true spirit of Hip Hop Culture in order avoid a horrible future and finally find redemption.

My film will reflect my belief that Hip hop music, for the most part, has been assimilated into mainstream culture in the U.S. Although some aspects of Hip Hop Culture have not reached Gottdiener's third stage, in which a sub-culture loses its vitality, as a whole the culture's ethos has been transformed. As

discussed previously Hebdige's study on the meaning of style elicits comparisons of Hip Hop Culture in the U.S. to the course of the Punk subculture in the U.K. Like Punk, Hip Hop Culture's style has been adopted by mainstream culture and used for marketing to the point that the formerly rebellious style is now a part of pop culture.

I believe this development has both positive and negative consequences. Mainstream hip hop music is no longer a viable means for artists to express the effects of poverty and discrimination for young disenfranchised Blacks. However, the success of commercialized hip hop music has fostered diversity and racial tolerance in both Hip Hop Culture and in the U.S. mainstream culture, as a wider audience has been exposed to and embraced underground hip hop music and culture. Underground hip hop artists have opposed the myopic definitions of "keeping it real," that were presented in McLeod's study in form and style, and through the success of women and racially diverse artists. Even the supposed "death" of hip hop music has at the very least focused artists' and fans' attention on the symptoms that contributed to the decline or in my opinion, transformation of Hip Hop Culture into its current state.

The current state of hip hop music allows for much more flexibility in its definition of authenticity. Previously hardened Gangsta rappers such as Ice-T and Ice Cube now portray detectives on network television shows, and wealthy heiresses like Paris Hilton as well as adolescent white teen idols like Justin Bieber can find commercial success as hip hop artists. So, although the things that made Hip Hop Culture authentic in the early '80s are of little importance in current

mainstream hip hop music, Hip Hop Culture persists. The continued success of hip hop music, underground or mainstream defies critics contention that hip hop has died. My study of the subject brought me to the conclusion that the only way that a sub-culture can die is by becoming stagnant. Whether Hip Hop Culture has changed for the better or for the worse, it's scope has broadened and it's effect on mainstream culture in the U.S. has been significant.

In my film I hope to reflect this contention. Within the format of a Christmas Carol, I will examine the origins and evolution of Hip Hop Culture, illustrate the current trends and problems facing the culture, and attempt to impart my belief that Hip Hop Culture has not died, but is in the next stage of its metamorphosis. By co-opting the use of redemption for Ebenezer Scrooge in the original A Christmas Carol I hope to give my audience the sense that the future of Hip Hop Culture should not, and does not have to be determined by the values of mainstream culture in the U.S., but instead by conscientious artists and informed fans.

“A HIP-HOP CAROL”

FADE IN:

EXT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - EVENING

It's the MTV music awards ceremony. FLAVOR FLAVE is there with BRIDGETTE NEILSON on his arm. Ahead of him 50 CENT limps down the isle in his signature wife beater and chains, accompanied by the G-UNIT. JOHNNY KNOXVILLE parachutes in on fire and is greeted by WEE MAN and BRAD PITT who extinguish him upon landing. ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER dressed in a tux waves to the crowd as he enters the theater. SUCHIN PAK abruptly breaks off an interview with JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE because the CROWD is now clamoring around the red carpet to catch a glimpse of the latest arrival.

A stretch Hummer limousine rolls past a clamoring MOB OF PAPARAZZI lining the edges of the red carpet. After at least ten tinted windows pass by at about 1 mile an hour the rear door of the limo pulls up to the edge of the carpet and a VALET opens the door. A stunning pair of gold bikini clad VIDEO HONEYS that could be twins step out onto the red carpe, each holding the end of a cylinder of gold fabric. The Two Honeys roll out a gold carpet over the red carpet. The limo pulls away and a sparkling gold convertible 64 Impala low rider driven by FARNSWORTH BENTLY rolls up with EMCEE DUCK, the hottest MC in the rap game perched atop the back seat head rest talking on his cell phone. Duck is Black, about 35, and has a tattoo on his left arm reading "R.I.P. Fezzy" above a scar from a bullet wound.

After pausing briefly to take a sip from his jewel encrusted pimp cup, Duck tosses it aside and jumps out of the car onto the gold carpet. Sporting a pair of aviators, a gold plated microphone necklace dangling over a kevlar vest, a pair of custom Tims, a diamond encrusted dollar sign necklace and a diamond ring for each finger, DUCK begins wading through the crowd pushing past the mics REPORTERS shove in his face. Duck

strides confidently into the theater, taking little time to bask in the adoration of the crowd.

INT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - ONE HOUR LATER

CARSON DALY is standing center stage at a podium with a crowd of teens of all types CHANTING "Emcee Duck, Emcee Duck!"

CARSON DALY

And the award for hip hop artist of the century year goes to..

Duck talking on his cell snaps to attention, abruptly ends his phone call and leaps to his feet making his way to the stage before Carson can finish. Pushing Carson aside he lifts the award above his head triumphantly.

DUCK

First of all, to all the haters who said I couldn't do it, what now? What? I'd like to thank first and foremost...myself. Without my vision, creativity, physical strength, insightfulness, and single-minded determination and individual effort this never could've happened. I would also like to thank MTV for proving itself as a credible organization and finally giving me the recognition I deserve. Speaking of recognition it's 'bout time all ya'll recognized..

MUSIC comes up signaling that Duck has used up his allotment of time.

DUCK

Wait, no, I'm not finished!
Nooooo!

INT. - DUCK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Duck awakens startled from his dream by his CELL PHONE RING. Grabs the phone.

DUCK

Hello? Bob? Do you know what time it is? What time is it? Why didn't you call me? Look, the meeting will start when I get there.

Duck rolls out of bed, rubs his eyes and then smiles as he looks over at the wall of Grammys, Source, and BET awards opposite his massive bed. Reenergized, Duck skips merrily out of the room.

INT. - DUCK'S HALLWAY - Morning

Duck skips down the hall past ten framed gold and platinum albums taking time to gaze adoringly at each. At the end of the hall he abruptly stops.

INT. DUCK'S LIVING ROOM - Morning

Duck pauses to admire the gigantic portrait of himself hanging above his mantle. Now solemn, he uses the sleeve of his robe to polish an empty glass case marked 'MTV Hip-Hop Artist of the Year, 2011'.

Duck's cell phone RINGS again snapping him out of his trance.

INT. - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

LEO, music promoter, sits at the end of a long conference table. The room is decorated with rock n roll memorabilia and platinum records. Leo, a balding white guy with a pony tail looks as if he purchased his outfit from a store specializing in music promoter uniforms...from the '80s, complete with a ragged the Who t-shirt under a suit coat and narrow red-framed glasses. As he texts on his iPhone he sips a vente from Starbucks. When he sees Duck enter he jumps to his feet and attempts

a complicated handshake with Duck. Duck ignores him.

LEO

Whassup bra? Perrier? Gin and Juice? You want it, we got it.

Duck nods a half greeting as he wraps up a call on his cell and sits at the end of the long table. Duck's manager BOB CRATCHIT enters the room, arms overflowing with papers, files, and two cell phones. He sits down awkwardly, looking disheveled and nervous as usual. Bob is followed into the room by DR. CORNELL WEST, a scholarly gentleman with a wild afro and RUSSELL SIMMONS, wearing a jogging suit from his own line of clothing. The men exchange greetings and sit down.

LEO

Let's get to it homies. Let's not bullshit, hip-hop is on the brink of..

RUSSELL

Bankruptcy!

DR. WEST

Moral bankruptcy!

LEO

Yeah, all that, whatever. Here's what I think they're talking about. Lets take a look at a clip from your latest video.

Leo CLICKS a remote to lower a gigantic plasma TV screen from the wall behind him. The screen lights up and the group turns its attention on the display. The video begins with a scene set in Duck's office. Both the members of the meeting and the viewing audience are transported into the scene.

INT. DUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is decorated in a reserved, but modern style with a large mahogany desk surrounded by bookshelves, but the main feature of the room is a huge vault door occupying almost the entirety of one wall.

Duck, dressed in a gold robe and aviator sunglasses approaches the door. He allows a laser censor to scan his retina, unlocking the safe. Duck steps through the door.

INT. - MONEY VAULT - SECONDS LATER

The room has stark white walls surrounding a small swimming pool filled with gold coins and gemstones. Duck steps out onto a diving board 20 feet above all of his gold. He disrobes revealing his sparking gold boxers and gold swim fins. He dives head first into the pit of gold coins and swims through them like a fish through water. He emerges holding a suspicious baggie with one hand and holding BEYONCE, wearing a gold bikini, with the other arm.

DUCK

Yup, yup, My Number One Dime and my number one "dime."

A gang of CROOKED COPS burst through the door of DUCK's money vault guns drawn, interrupting his verse. DUCK back flips into his sea of coins and disappears, only to reemerge YELLING and wildly firing a gold plated AK.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

LEO

See that's what we're talking about.

DUCK

What?

LEO

Dr. West.

DR. WEST

The shameless materialism! The objectification of women! The violence!

DUCK

You're absolutely right. I told the director I shoulda had 2 AK's.

Dr. West, Leo and Russell can't believe Duck's density.

LEO

Ok, ok. What about these lyrics... "Bitches, bitches, bitches was a problem when I didn't have no loot, now I'm iced out and ballin' in paternity suits."

DUCK

Yeah that shit is tight! And it's true, too.

Duck pulls out his wallet and flips it open to reveal a picture of a child that looks exactly like him if his head was attached to a baby's body.

DUCK

That boy don't even look like me. Well, he does have my eyes.

RUSSELL

What we're talking about here brotha is your image. You're on top of the game. You represent hip-hop and hip-hop represents African-Americans. You're a role model!

LEO

Exactly! You feelin' me? Huh?

Leo extends his fist to Duck for a pound, but this time Duck, Russell and Dr. West give Leo a 'you-must-be-kidding-me' look.

DUCK

Look, we all know sex and violence is what they want. If it didn't sell then I wouldn't even be in here. Besides fool this is my art. Whatever happened to the first commandment?

DR. WEST

That's the first admendment.

Duck stands to address the room.

DUCK

Whatever. "Free speech is intended to protect the controversial and even outrageous word; and not just comforting platitudes too mundane to need protection." Colin Farell.

BOB

That's Colin Powell.

DUCK

True dat.

LEO

Ok, ok, ok. Here's something we can all agree on. The "N-Word." It's gotta go. For example the track listing on your latest album...Niggaology, Nigganomics, Niggarithmetic. How can you respect yourself when you refer to yourself as a, a...nigger?¹

DUCK

Who you calling a nigger, Nigga?

Duck lunges out of his seat at Leo, but Bob, Russell and Dr. West manage to hold him back. In the commotion, Duck's gun slips out of his jacket pocket and fires, shattering the plasma screen still frozen on Duck's video image. Everyone hits the deck.

LEO
Ok that's lunch.

INT. - THE BACKSEAT OF DUCK'S LIMO - LATE AFTERNOON

Duck looks stressed sitting next to Bob whose jitters aren't helping him as he tries to roll a joint on his lap. He hands the joint to Duck and lights it for him. Duck inhales half of the joint with one breath.

DUCK
Why Bob? Why are they trying to stifle my creativity? I'm giving the people what they want.

BOB
It's just that, you know, sir, the world has changed. Since Don Imus...and and...

DUCK
Don Imus! That cracker mothafucker never listened to any hip-hop.

Duck takes another drag.

BOB
But you have to admit sir, your songs are all over the airwaves, and kids. I have kids sir, and well aren't they impressionable?

Duck blankly stares out the window at the passing scenery. The limo rolls past a liquor store next to a McDonald's in the corner of a strip mall

underneath a Victoria's Secret Billboard with Tyra Banks modeling a bra, then an Army Recruitment office with a Classic Uncle Sam 'We Want You' poster, and finally a rundown looking public high school. Duck exhales a plume of milky white marijuana smoke directly into Bob's face.

DUCK

Yeah, I agree. I'm just a scape goat. Scrape goat. Gooaaaaat. Greatest of allllll time. Home Jeeves! Big day tomorrow. You'll see. Everybody loves me.

INT.- DUCK'S LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Duck enters the room still smoking his joint, but stops dead in his tracks at the sight of LILAH, standing, scowling at him from beneath his giant portrait, clutching an issue of *Entertainment Weekly*. Standing in a pair of three inch heels, Lilah towers over Duck. Though she has a thin model's body her dark eyes and mane of black hair make her into an intimidating figure.

LILAH

You shiftless no account broke dick cheating nigga mothafucker! I hate you!

DUCK

He doesn't even look like me!

Lilah, even angrier throws the magazine in his face.

LILAH

Page 9, paragraph 3. "Emcee Duck will walk down the isle at the MTV awards accompanied by his mother June and his rumored fiancée Lily."

DUCK

It's just a typo.

LILAH

It better be! No way your mama is coming to the show. That's my night to shine and there's no way your momma's gonna be all up in my lime light.

DUCK

But she's ...

LILAH

In the way. You're Em Cee Duck, the richest, hardest hip-hop gangsta M.C. on the planet. Not the biggest punk ass momma's boy. It's marketing. Think about it. Brad and Angelina, Jay-Z and Beyonce. We're Lilah and Duck! We're set to be the hottest power couple in hip hop.

DUCK

But I finally got her to...

LILAH

NOT coming!

DUCK

But...

Lilah glares at Duck with new intensity.

DUCK

Ok, I'll text her.

Lilah softens and lovingly caresses DUCK's face.

LILAH

One more thing honey.

Gripping Duck by the shirt, Lilah violently knees him in the balls, dropping him to the floor.

LILAH

Next time you feel the need to spread your little seed with some groupie think about that!

Or at least wear a condom. See
you at the pre-pre-party at
Diddy's.

Still clutching his groin, Duck passes out curled
up on the floor in the fetal position.

INT. - DUCK'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

DUCK awakens still balled up on the floor. The
sound of glasses CLINKING together draws Duck's
attention to his living room bar.

DUCK
Lilah? Is that you? Damn Girl!

OLD DIRTY BASTARD, appearing as a large dark
silhouette continues to rummage through the
liquor selection without reply. Duck can only
make out a few curly braids on top of the
figure's head.

DUCK
Freeze nigga!

Duck pulls out a shiny 22 from behind his back
and aims it at the figure, holding it sideways,
gangsta video style.

ODB
What up dun, got any Grey Goose?

DUCK
Old Dirty Bastard? Ahhhhh!

Duck unloads six shots wildly at the ghost. The
bullets pass harmlessly through ODB's body and
explode the bottles and glasses behind him.

ODB
(singing)
Recognize I'm a fool and you
love me! Ha ha ha haaa.

ODB steps out from behind the bar and takes a
long swig from a bottle of Grey Goose, but the

vodka streams through his ghostly body and spills all over the floor. Duck jumps behind the couch in fear, but ODB appears out of nowhere standing beside him.

DUCK

But you, you're dead. Am I dead?

ODB

No fool! Hip-hop is dead.

DUCK

No, I'm dreaming right? Yeah that album didn't even go plat once, ok, maybe with sales abroad, but the Euro is stronger than the dollar so if you carry the two uh...

Duck stops mid sentence taking notice of ODB's ghost slyly pocketing his diamond studded Rolex off the side table. The watch falls through his ghostly coat pocket and onto the floor.

DUCK

You really are Big Baby Jesus.

ODB

Yeah, and you're fucked nigga. Tonight you will be visited by three ghostly ass mothafuckers. The Ghost of Hip-hop Past. The Ghost of Hip-hop Present. And the Ghost of Hip-hop Future, dun.

DUCK

Huh?

ODB

Wu-Tang is for the children! We teach the children!

DUCK

Huh?

As ODB fades away into the darkness Duck's giant plasma screen TV comes on in a flash illuminating the room in pale light, and blasting the latest Duck video through the surround sound. Startled, Duck stumbles over the couch in fear. Calming himself Duck rummages through his pockets and finds the remains of his joint. He starts to light it, then thinks twice and puts it down and backs away. Then he thinks a third time, picks it up, takes a drag and flips his cell phone out of his pocket.

DUCK

Bob be here in 5 min. Gotta hit up the pre-party.

BOB (V.O.)

But sir you said I could have the night off to...

DUCK

Bob! I need you man. This skunk you got me is off the heezy. Gotta be on my game, bring Starbucks.

BOB (V.O.)

But I have to take my son...

Duck flips the phone closed before Bob can finish his sentence.

INT. DUCK'S LIMO - EARLY EVENING

Duck sits next to Bob in the backseat of his limo. Duck is sipping on an espresso with a confused look on his face. TINY TIM sits opposite Duck in the limo. The tiny 5th grader is enveloped by his massive starter jacket, baggy jeans and gigantic Timberland boots that don't even touch the floor. His eyes are wide as saucers and his mouth is hanging open.

DUCK

Bob, who's that lil nigga?

BOB

That's my son Tim sir, we call him Tiny. It's my night to take him to the boys and girls club for hip hop club.

DUCK

What's wrong with him?

BOB

He's starstruck sir. He's one of your biggest fans.

Duck suddenly becomes friendly. Tiny reaches into his coat pocket. Duck suspiciously reaches for his 22, but comes to his senses when Tiny extends a copy of his latest cd across the seat.

DUCK

Oh you want an autograph? Don't let me see this shit end up on E-bay!

Tiny nods nervously.

DUCK

You gonna be a big time agent like your pops, Tiny?

TINY

Hell no! I'm gonna be a mothafuckin G, a M.C. and a millionaire, and I'm gonna have a clothing line! Just like you.

Bob bows his head and pinches the bridge of his nose as if he's heard this speech one time too many.

DUCK

Well good for you Tiny dogg!
Don't let nobody say you can't.
Haters, police, teachers,
doctors, mommy and daddy. You
gotta be like 'Got Beef?' I'm
stackin cheese! Chedda! I got
lettuce! I'm makin bread!

Bringing home the bacon. Getting that ice and cream. Cash rules everything around me, get the money. Dolla Dalla bill yall.

Tiny nods excitingly at every word spoken by his hero.

TINY

Wow! Mr. Duck will you come to my hip hop show? I'm not very good and the other kids, well if you came with me...

BOB

We're here sir.

DUCK

Aright Tiny, wouldn't miss it. Bob write that down. Peace Tiny .Stay Black ma nigga.

Duck tosses the cd to Tiny. Tiny reads the inscription... "Got Beef? Stack chedda, Tiny ma nigga. Emcee Duck. Not for resale."

INT. DIDDY'S PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - 2:00 AM

Duck enters the room and instantly becomes the center of attention. He gives JUSTIN BIEBER a pound and winks at RIHANNA. Someone tosses him a beer that he catches deftly without even looking. As Duck mingles with the crowd he gets a lot of props to his face and some hateful looks behind his back. Duck spots NINA, his former partner, standing at the other side of the room wearing an African head wrap and a long gown. He discretely makes his way over to her, purposely bumping into her, but pretending it was an accident.

DUCK

Assalamu Alaikum, Sista Shabazz.

NINA

Uh-huh. Nigga please.

DUCK

Good to see you too. How's your mom and dad? They still ask about me?

NINA

I'm serious Calvin. All that bling, money, bitches shit is getting real old. You're better than that. Listen, I'm hosting a benefit concert for...

DUCK

Ok. Charity. I'm a charitable person. How much do you need?

NINA

No I want you to perform. Bob's son is performing too. We can do some of the old material.

DUCK

You mean the 'doesn't sell enough to cover the cost of marketing' material? The 'nobody wants to dance too, let alone purchase' material?

Duck looking over Nina's shoulder notices Lilah enter the room.

DUCK

I gotta go! Call my agent about the check.

INT. - EMPTY HALLWAY - NIGHT

Duck escapes down a hall, ducks into an open elevator.

INT. - ELEVATOR - 3:00 AM

Duck smashes all the buttons just trying to get the doors to close. The elevator lights flicker as the elevator drops and then smoothly lowers to the floor marked '\$'.

INT. - DIDDY'S STUDIO - NIGHT

The lights are off, but there's someone SCRATCHING RECORDS ON AN OLD PAIR OF TURNTABLES. The elevator doors open and Duck steps cautiously into the room. Noticing a dark figure standing behind the turntables, Duck reaches for his gun, but he can't find it. The DJ lets the record play:

"Kick off shoes, jump on jock,
Listen to the Jam Master as he
starts to rock
His name is Jay and he's on his
way,
To be the best DJ in the US of
A..."

The lights come on revealing the GHOST OF JAM MASTER JAY wearing the signature RUN DMC black hat, sunglasses and gold chain. Duck backs away in disbelief.

DUCK

Jam Master Jay? Damn that was
some good weed.

JMJ

I'm the Ghost of Hip-hop Past
stupid.

JMJ starts SCRATCHING a familiar beat and Duck is mesmerized by MJ's turntablism. MJ allows the records to PLAY out the recognizable hook to LL Cool J's "My Radio."

INT. - A 1980'S STYLE LIVINGROOM - DUSK

A modest but comfortable middle-class home complete with shag carpeting, a new VCR and cable, hooked up to

a TV perched on top of a broken console tv from the '60s. Duck and JMJ are standing in the back of the room where a YOUNG EMCEE DUCK and his fat friend FEZZY are sitting enthralled by the image on the working TV.

JMJ

Nice digs, baller. I thought you were from the hood?

DUCK

Yeah, well we moved on up.

Young Emcee Duck is watching the LL Cool J audition scene in "Krush Groove."

INT. - KRUSH GROOVE OFFICE - DAY

Russell, RICK RUBIN and some OTHER EXECs are holding auditions in a cramped room filled with records and papered with concert fliers.

RUSSELL

No more auditions.

LL COOL J., a young man in a blue kangol hat and matching blue shirt, pushes his way into the room accompanied by TWO OTHER YOUNG MEN in track suits, one holding a stereo.

RICK RUBIN

Sorry man, auditions are over today. Maybe you can come in next week? We can work something out ok?

LL COOL J

Box!

LL's stereo carrying friend presses play and BLASTS a BEAT at the stunned audience. LL begins rapping and posturing, even getting in the faces of the now-receptive execs.

LL COOL J

My radio, believe me, I like it loud

I'm the man with a box that can
rock the crowd
Walkin' down the street, to the
hardcore beat
While my JVC vibrates the
concrete
I'm sorry if you can't
understand
But I need a radio inside my
hand
Don't mean to offend other
citizens
But I kick my volume way past 10
My story is rough, my
neighborhood is tough
But I still sport gold, and I'm
out to crush
My name is Cool J, I devastate
the show
But I couldn't survive without
my radio.

INT. - DUCK'S CHILDHOOD LIVINGROOM - DUSK

Young Duck and Fezzy rewind the tape and Fezzy dances while Duck raps and moves along with LL. JMJ and DUCK watch and join in as they've gotten caught up with the kids' excitement.

JMJ

Now that's how we used to do it.
Look at your chunky friend go!

Fezzy deftly pops and locks and then smoothly transitions into a back spin on the floor.

JMJ

It used to be about being
creative, having fun, and
getting respect on the mic. Not
about being iced out and making
it rain.

The effect of the nostalgia having worn off, Duck now stands uncomfortably in his old home,

DUCK

Yeah, that's what it was about alright? I saw Rev Run rockin' a mink on "Run's House," livin' in his mansion with his Bently and a Viper just the other night. Now let's get out of here before...

The front door opens and Duck's MOM walks in wearing a nurse's uniform, carrying a bag of groceries. Mom shuffles over to Duck's younger self and grabs the remote to lower the volume.

MOM

I could hear that loud mess from the driveway. Keep it down.

DUCK

Mom can I have turntables for my birthday?

MOM

Maybe if you get your grades up, you might have time to get a job, and then you can get yourself some record players.

DUCK

Turntables mom! I don't need a job. I'm gonna be a MC.

MOM

You're going to college, and get a degree, and work for a living, because that's real life. That mess on TV, that's just the latest minstrel show. If you don't know what that means look it up and write it down for me before dinner.

JMJ

Damn! Your mom is serious dog. She must be proud of you now though.

DUCK

Yeah. Can we go?

JMJ motions toward the front door. Duck opens the door and steps outside.

INT. - SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

But instead of finding himself on the front porch, Duck steps onto a subway platform and is engulfed by dozens of other passengers exiting a train. It's a subway stop in Queens, New York.

JMJ

Home sweet home.

DUCK

Jay, I'm serious take me home! I got the MTV awards in like 9 hours. I gotta get my beauty sleep.

JMJ

But Duck, you are home.

A TEENAGE DUCK and TEENAGE NINA are rapping over a beat playing on a boombox sitting on a cardboard sheet with a smattering of change.

TEEN DUCK

...and then elections got stole,
the polls officially closed...

TEEN NINA

Two towers fell, and some assets
got froze...

TEEN DUCK

Now the climate got cold, but
the new threat...

TEEN NINA

Is the same as the old...

The CROWD largely ignores the performance. Teen Duck and Teen Nina hold out copies of their album

for sale, but the crowd avoids them. An OLD MAN and a COUPLE OF WHITE COLLEGE KIDS drop some change next to the boom box.

JMJ

You two had good chemistry.
Why'd you break up?

DUCK

Creative differences.

Teen Duck and Teen Nina gather up their belongings and take a seat on a bench next to the escalator by the payphones.

TEEN DUCK

Only \$20 off 5 trains?

TEEN NINA

We'll make triple that during rush hour.

TEEN DUCK

You're missing the point. This is bullshit. People don't want to hear it. Why starve when we could get paid? We need to get big, and then we can give back. Now that's the win win.

TEEN NINA

You don't have to go through with this?

TEEN DUCK

Yes I do. I told you I'm just gonna move a couple o-zees for a friend of a friend and I'll be able to pay for the studio time.

TEEN NINA

Why can't you just be patient?

TEEN DUCK

Why can't you grow the fuck up? Damn! Tryna keep a nigga down.

Nina's look of concern becomes a disappointed frown. She turns and walks away, taking the escalator up pausing to look back, but Teen Duck doesn't notice.

A rotund YOUNG MAN Duck's age wearing a hoodie and shades gets off the train carrying a duffle bag. He walks over to the payphone next to Teen Duck and drops a bag. Teen Duck drops his backpack and discretely picks up the duffle bag at his feet.

An OLD BUM asking for change interrupts the exchange. He grabs the backpack and reveals himself as an undercover cop. The Young man struggles with the cop. Teen Duck joins the scuffle. A SHOT RINGS OUT. Teen Duck falls down holding his arm and the Young man falls down and lies motionless. The Cop pulls out a walkie talkie.

COP

I need back up. You, freeze!

TEEN DUCK

Fezzy! You ok? Fezzy?

DUCK

What's the big deal, Jay? I did 6 months in juvie. That stint just helped to establish my street cred.

JMJ

What about him?

Jay points to the Young Man, clutching his stomach in pain.

DUCK

That wasn't my fault! It wasn't my fault.

A train pulls into the station and Jay steps on board. Duck boards behind him just as the doors are closing.

INT. - ELEVATOR - 4:00 AM

Duck finds himself back in the elevator at Diddy's going up, but Jam Master Jay has disappeared.

INT. - DIDDY'S PRE-PRE PARTY - 4:00 AM

The party is dying down and only a few scattered groups remain. Duck emerges from the elevator confused. He see's Nina approaching.

DUCK

Nina, did you just see Jam
Master Jay come through here?

NINA

Nigga, you trippin'?

DUCK

I just...nevermind.

NINA

What are they doing to you
Ducky? Call me if you ever want
to get your head straight, or
if..

Duck sees Lilah coming his way. He starts to back away, but she stops to give dap to LIL BOW WOW.

NINA

The concert's at the urban youth
center tomorrow night. You can
make it there before the awards.
It would mean so much to Tiny
and to me.

DUCK

And miss my grand entrance? I
got an image to uphold. Now
who's trippin'?

Duck recognizes Nina's look of disappointment. She turns and walks away without looking back. Duck sees Lilah coming his way again and decides to run before she can corner him. Opting for the

door marked stairs instead of the elevator, Duck bounds out of the room.

INT. - DUCK'S OFFICE, DEF MUSIC STUDIOS - DAYTIME

Duck is asleep, laying face down on his desk holding his gun in one hand and sucking his thumb on his other hand. Duck's secretary LORRAINE, a middle-aged black woman with wide hips, butts into the room holding a Starbuck's cup and a bag of doughnuts. Finding Duck asleep on his desk, Lorraine carefully removes the gun from his hand before slamming the coffee onto the desk to wake him up.

LORRAINE

Your publicist, image consultant, and stylist are waiting.

DUCK

Well send them in then.

Lorraine scuttles out of the room and Duck's publicist ESCOBAR busts into the room with FARNSWORTH BENTLEY, his stylist, and KATRINA, his image consultant, right behind. The three stumble over each other trying to be first to get Duck's attention. Escobar, a portly Hispanic man with pink hair wearing a Gucci track suit elbows his way to the front.

ESCOBAR

T.I. is getting out of jail, again, soon. You need to get busted for weed or something so he doesn't take up all the free publicity.

BENTLY

And you're not wearing that whack shit tonight. I got you that new shit right here.

Bentley, dressed in a dapper white suit, pulls a jewelry box out of his jacket pocket and flips it

to Duck. Duck opens the box and is blinded by the glare from a huge pair of diamond dollar sign shaped earrings. Katrina, a young white woman with glasses, holding a stack of disorganized folders interrupts by dropping her pile on Duck's Desk.

KATRINA

Look Duck, I need you to break up with Lilah. She's too old for our new target demographic, the fourteen to eighteen year old crowd. Have you ever met Miley Cyrus? Oh, and with the whole T.I. situation, it might be time to toughen up your image again. Wink wink.

Escobar pretends to shoot himself in the arm.

DUCK

That was a serious flesh wound! If it had been one inch to the left I might never have been able to play piano ever again. Maybe we shouldn't be glorifying that type of violence anyway.

The Katrina, Escobar, and Bentley look at each other to make sure they just heard the same thing. Duck picks up his gun and points it at the group.

DUCK

Bounce!

The group scurries out of the room. Duck taps the button on his desk intercom.

DUCK

Cancel all my appointments till the awards. All of them!

Duck exhales a breath of relief and puts his head down to go back to sleep on his desk. There's a KNOCK at the door.

DUCK

Go away! All appointments
canceled!

Duck picks up his intercom angrily, but it's not
working. There's another KNOCK at the door.

DUCK

Lorraine! I thought I said no
appointments!

Duck slams the intercom down and stomps toward
the door, but as he reaches for the handle EAZY
E'S GHOST passes through the door into the
office. Duck falls backwards onto the floor.

E

Eazy duz it, Nigga.

DUCK

Eazy E?

As the ghost approaches Duck pops up and backs
away until his back is against his window.

E

I'm the mothafuckin Ghost of
Hip-hop Present.

DUCK

What? This shit is too much.
We're in the present. Whatta you
got to show me I can't see for
myself?

Eazy pulls out a pair of dark sunglasses and
hands them to Duck. Eazy waits for Duck to put
them on then opens the office door.

E

Get to stepping...

INT. - HALLWAY OF DEF MUSIC RECORDING - DAY

Duck steps hesitantly into the main hall of Def
Music.

LORRAINE

Nice glasses, sir. Very old school.

As if reading her mind, the sunglasses provide subtitles translating her inner thoughts into words.

SUBTITLE: *I hate you, you egotistical moron. I hope you go to jail soon.*

Duck pauses in stunned silence. Duck's intern, CHUCK, a skinny college kid wearing a "Duck For Life" t-shirt, walks by.

CHUCK

What up sir? That new track you're working on is sooo tiiiight!

SUBTITLES: *So I leaked it on-line for beer money.*

Duck starts to chase after him, but notices Leo walking down the hall with the CEO of DEF Music, RICH GUY.

DUCK

Sup' my niggas.

LEO

Emcee Duck, I was just looking for you.

SUBTITLE: *So that I wouldn't have to run into you.*

DUCK

Hello Mr. Guy.

GUY

I am such a big fan.

SUBTITLE: *Who are you?*

GUY (CONT.)

My grandkids just love your music.

SUBTITLE: *It just put them through college.*

DUCK

You two must've been discussing
the future of my next album?

LEO

Exactly!

SUBTITLE: *No.*

LEO (CONT.)

We're going to break records.

SUBTITLE: *In the percentage we're gonna make off
this.*

GUY

We have a lot riding on your
success.

SUBTITLE: *Although we'll still make money on
your certain failure.*

LEO

You're the sound of this
generation.

SUBTITLE: *Only an idiot would buy that.*

GUY

Excuse us son. It was nice
meeting you.

SUBTITLE: *Now fuck off so I can get some
coffee.*

Guy and Leo walk away smiling at each other,
occasionally glancing back at DUCK.

GUY

Is he still a worthwhile
investment?

LEO

One or two more mediocre pop
albums. Then we'll put him on

the hook of some R&B shit til he gets played out. The Ja Rule treatment.

GUY

Just remember to get the rights. He might get shot or something.

Guy and Leo high five and part ways. Duck stands in stunned silence. Eazy shoves him in the chest to wake him up.

DUCK

What? That just confirms what I already knew about those two.

E

Nah, I just thought we outta be in Compton soon.

Eazy smacks the back of Duck's head causing the magic sunglasses to flip off.

EXT. - ARTIFICIAL *CUL-DE-SAC* IN COMPTON - DAY

Duck stands on a sidewalk entrance to the *cul-de-sac*.

DUCK

What the fuck did you bring me here for? You know I got beef with some niggas up here.

E

Them niggas over there?

A black lowrider '62 Chevy Impala with tinted windows slowly creeps around the corner. Duck reaches for his gun, but remembers that he can't be seen or heard. A group of TEENAGE BLACK BOYS emerges from one of the homes. One of the boys is wearing a diamond necklace and some Tims, and another is wearing big diamond earrings, and another rolls out in a wheel chair holding a basketball and wearing the latest Jordan's. The Impala continues its slow advance in their

direction. The front window slowly rolls down revealing a LATINO YOUNG MAN with a tattooed arm wearing a blue head scarf at the wheel.

DUCK

Oh shit. Them fools is 'bout to get jacked. Do something Eazy!

As the Impala pulls along side the kids, they stop in their tracks. The rear window rolls down and clouds of smoke billow out of the window. A man's hand emerges from the window and motions with a thin black finger for the kids to come closer.

DUCK

I'm serious Eazy. What does this shit have to do with me? Drive bys happen here everyday.

The kids take a step toward the window and the glint of metal momentarily startles them. It's a kitchen knife. The figure in the shadow finally emerges from the dark, leaning against the window frame. It's SNOOP DOGG, holding a knife and slice of bread!

SNOOP

Pardon me little homies. Do ya'll got any Grey Poupon?

DIRECTOR (OS)

Cut! Perfect Mr. Dogg. Once more, but this time more smoke.

SNOOP

Fo sheezy ma nizzle.

Duck turns realizing that he's not really in Compton, but in a soundstage designed to look like a Compton neighborhood.

DUCK

What the fuck is this shit?

E

I guess the boyz in the hood
aren't always hard after all.

DUCK

What are you trying to tell me?
Is this supposed to mean hip hop
has depicted life in the ghetto
in such an exaggerated and one
dimensional manner? That the
problems caused by poverty in
the Black community have been
hidden in plain sight? That a
truly sad situation has been
turned into a marketing ploy?
That hip hop is no longer an
effective tool of subverting the
mainstream because hip hop has
subverted itself for a piece of
the pie? For Grey Poupon?

EE

Don't quote me boy, I ain't said
shit.

Duck's cell phone RINGS.

DUCK

Hello?

LILAH (VO)

Where the fuck are you?

EXT - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - DAY

A bustling CROWD OF YOUNG BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE have
already arrived and celebrities are filing out of
limos and Hummers and Ferraris, one after the
other. As Duck's gold limo arrives the crowd
rages into a frenzy. Lilah timidly steps out of
the limo, still on her cell.

LILAH

Hello? You're dead! You are
dead!

INT. - COMPTON SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Duck claps his phone shut and spins around.

DUCK
Eazy, I gotta...

But Eazy has disappeared and Duck finds himself standing on an empty soundstage. He checks his watch and scrambles for the exit.

EXT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - DAY

With a mix of hate and embarrassment, Lilah helps Duck's Mom, now a middle-aged conservatively dressed Black woman, step out onto the red carpet. Cameras stop flashing and the crowd sighs in disappointment realizing that Duck is nowhere to be found.

EXT. - STREET CORNER OUTSIDE OF THE STUDIO LOT - DAY

Duck flips out his cell phone and dials frantically.

DUCK
Bob, where the...What do you mean where am I?

BOB (VO)
I've been trying to reach you for hours. Don't worry, if you can't make it, we'll say you were arrested or something. Besides I arranged for your mom to accept the award on your behalf.

DUCK
What! Just send the limo Bob, NOW.

BOB (V.O.)
Where are yo...

Duck's phone cuts out.

INSERT: Cell phone reading "Low battery".

DUCK
Noooooooooooo!

Duck checks his watch, and then starts running attempting to hail a cab, but no one will stop. Duck notices the Impala from Snoop's commercial pulling off the lot and runs to intercept it. He throws his watch into the driver's window and jumps in back.

INT. - IMPALA - DAY

DUCK
Get me to the MTV awards right now and I'll double...

Before Duck can finish his sentence the driver turns to face him. The GHOST OF HIP HOP FUTURE places the watch on his skeletal wrist. He's wearing a black hooded robe and his face is obscured by the darkness of the hood.

HIP HOP FUTURE
Bling bling.

The Ghost turns away LAUGHING maniacally and CLICKS THE AUTOMATIC LOCKS to prevent Duck from escaping. The low rider bounces once on its hydrolics and peels out around the corner.

DUCK
Enough! Enough already. I'll do some PSA's, I'll quit smoking weed, I'll even stop saying nigga! What do you want from me nigga?

The Impala stops abruptly and the doors unlock.

EXT. - A BRICK BUILDING - DAY

The Ghost of Hip-hop Future steps aside revealing a life size shining gold statue of Emcee Duck. Duck looks astonished.

DUCK

This must be my memorial. It's beautiful!

Duck approaches the statue in awe. He reads the inscription written on the placard below. The inscription reads 'Over a million niggas served!'

VOC

Got beef?

Startled, Duck realizes that the voice came from the statue. He looks closer.

VOC

Got beef? Hello? Order when ready.

DUCK

Ok I'll take a...Wait a minute.

Duck looks around him and realizes he's standing in a drive thru at a fast food restaurant. He looks at the large menu next to the statue. Above the menu the words Duck Burger glow in yellow light. The restaurant's slogan is written below in cartoon letters, "Got Beef? Come get served." Duck strains to read the menu items.

DUCK

Duck burger, with extra beef?
Duck Fries? Cheddar Stacker?
Lettuce Rapper? C.R.E.A.M shake
with duck fries? No! This can't
be right!

VOC

Can I take your order?

Duck clutches his chest ala Fred Sanford. HONK, a car edges up to the menu. Duck runs to the pickup

window and pushes his face through the glass doors.

DUCK

Get me the manager! This is copyright infringement. I'll sue...

Duck realizes that the worker at the window is Nina. Deep lines in her face show her age and her hair wrap has been replaced by a visor and hairnet, which can barely contain her scraggly gray hair.

DUCK

Nina? Is that you?

The car, full of TEENAGERS pulls up to the drive through window.

DRIVER

Hey, aren't you, uh famous?

NINA

You recognize me? You must be older than you look sweet thing. I'll autograph your duck fries' wrapper.

DRIVER

But you...what happened? You're so...and you're working at...?

NINA

Look, you want these fries or not?

DRIVER

Yeah, sorry.

NINA

Here you go kid.

Nina hands the order through the window, but before she closes the window the driver throws his coke back at her, splashing the liquid all

over Nina's face and the Teenagers PEEL OUT while LAUGHING WILDLY.

DUCK

Ghost! Ghost! Take me home,
please!

Hip Hop Future, stuffing Duck Fries into his hood, points a skeletal hand toward a mansion on a nearby hill. Duck realizes it's his home and he starts running in that direction.

INT.- DUCK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Duck runs through the door past his gigantic portrait.

INT. - DUCK'S STAIRCASE - DAY.

Duck bounds up the stairs past his gold and platinum records.

INT. - DUCK'S BEDROOM - DAY.

Duck finally enters his room. He trips over a pile of fast food wrappers and slides face first through a sea of trash. When he stands up he sees that someone is in his bed. An OLD, OBESE, BALDING, EMCEE DUCK struggles to bring his fat arm to his face in order to eat a Duck fry. In Old Duck's other hand he holds an MTV award.

DUCK

No! No, that can't be me? I
turned into Jabba the Duck! Why?
Whyyyyyy?

Without knocking, GROWN UP TINY enters the room. He's still tiny, but wears a suit and carries a briefcase. He wades through the food wrappers and plops a clipboard down on Duck's chest. Old Duck drops his fries and signs the paper without reading what's on it.

DUCK

He must be my manager now. I
thought he wanted to be an Emcee.

OLD DUCK

S'up Tiny?

OLD TINY

What's up is I'm buying you out
old man!

OLD DUCK

Huh?

OLD TINY

While you've been eating our
profits from Duckburger I've
been buying up stock and now I
hold majority control. I'm
selling the franchise and the
rights to all things Emcee Duck
to China. I'm gonna be rich
biatch! Got beef? Ha ha ha ha
ha.

OLD DUCK

But I'm your idol?

OLD TINY

That's right. I'm just doing
what you told me to do, getting
chedda by any means necessary.
You just got served. And I
almost forgot, Baby Girl?

Lilah, a bit older, but still
stunning walks into the room and
kisses Tiny passionately.

Old Tiny and Lilah walk out of the room LAUGHING.
Simultaneously Old Emcee Duck and Emcee Duck
grasp their chests, but Old Emcee Duck is having
a real heart attack. Emcee Duck attempts to start
chest compressions, but he can't because his
hands go right through him. He looks at his
future self's ketchup covered mouth in disgust.

DUCK

Least I can't do mouth to mouth.

Emcee Duck throws himself at the feet of the Hooded Figure. He grabs his robe and begs.

DUCK

Please no? I can change! I can change! Please?

INT. - EMCEE DUCK'S BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY

Emcee Duck wrestles with his bed sheets, still pleading.

DUCK

I can change!

Emcee Duck is awakened from his trance by his CELL PHONE RING. He opens his eyes and looks around. He grabs his phone and answers.

DUCK

Hello? Bob! Shut up! What day is it? I'm not too late! I'm not too late!

INT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - EVENING

The MTV Awards are close to finishing. KURT LODER is sitting at a table with Lilah, Bob, Tiny, and Duck's Mom.

LODER

I'm here with the mother of multi-platinum...

Lilah grabs for control of the mic.

LILAH

And fiancée!

Kurt deftly regains control of the mic and nudges Lilah back into her seat.

LODER

...Multi platinum recording artist, business mogul, and self proclaimed richest MC in the world, Emcee Duck, who is yet to

arrive. To quote the man,
himself, "He went from OE and
Cheetos to caviar burritos."
Could you ever have imagined
your son would achieve such
success?

MOM

Even as a young boy he excelled
at anything he put his mind to.
And ambitious, so ambitious.

LODER

Hero to many, reviled by others,
who is Emcee Duck to you, Mrs.
Duckett?

MOM

He'll always be my wonderful son
and I'll always be...

MILEY CYRUS and ZAC EFFRON are standing at the
podium on the main stage. The lights dim and
Duck's face flashes onto the gigantic screen
above the main stage. He's eating a money
sandwich in a scene from one of his latest
videos.

MOM

...proud of him.

CYRUS

The first nominee for hip-hop
artist of the year is the
richest mother duc...

EFFRON

Shut yo mouth.

CYRUS

I'm just talking 'bout Duck.
Emcee Duck.

The giant screen displays Duck's table with his
Mom, who'd be blushing if she could, Lilah trying
to take up as much room on the screen as

possible, and finally focusing on Duck's empty seat.

EXT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - EARLY EVENING

Bob is waiting outside nervously. Duck's gold stretch Hummer speeds round the corner and skids to a halt in front of Bob. Duck is at the wheel.

DUCK

Jump in!

BOB

But sir?

DUCK

No time, let's go! We're late.

Bob cautiously gets into the vehicle and Duck floors it before Bob can even shut the door.

INT. - MANN'S CHINESE THEATER - EARLY EVENING

Cyrus, holding the envelope, is about to announce the hip-hop artist of the decade award.

CYRUS

And the winner is...Emcee Duck!

The audience erupts in APPLAUSE, but Duck is nowhere to be seen. Cyrus and Efron look around the audience. Cyrus's iPhone RINGS. She answers.

CYRUS

It's him. Uh, ok. Check out this app!

Cyrus holds the phone up to the mic. Duck's image is simulcast from the phone onto the giant screen above the stage.

DUCK

Hello MTV and America. I can't accept this award because if I do hip hop in the future will only sell things like fast food

and real artists won't be taken seriously. When our kids grow up they'll abandon us 'cause we didn't show them how to live right. And I'll become morbidly obese and have to wash myself with a washcloth wrapped around a stick! Hi Mom! I love you. Thanks. Peace I'm out. I got a show to do.

The crowd in the theater is silent. Duck's Mom smiles proudly.

EXT. - URBAN YOUTH CENTER - EARLY EVENING

In the middle of a park, a DIVERSE CROWD OF YOUNG PEOPLE gather around a stage.

EXT. - BACKSTAGE - DUSK

Nina is helping Tiny get ready for his performance. Tiny peeks out from behind the curtain searches the audience.

TINY

Duck's not coming is he?

Nina pats him on the shoulder.

NINA

Don't worry, he'll see the video.

Tiny can't hide his disappointment. He balls up his face, grabs the mic from Nina and takes the stage.

EXT. - URBAN YOUTH CENTER - EARLY EVENING

HONKING, Duck drives his gold stretch Hummer through the middle of the crowd. He emerges from the sunroof and runs onto the stage. Tiny, Nina, and the crowd are amazed. The crowd CHEERS

wildly! He takes off Tiny's head scarf and necklace and gives him a hug. Tiny waves at Bob.

DUCK

Tiny, forget what I said before
about beef and chedda. Be like
your dad, not like me.

Tiny waves at Bob.

DUCK

Now, let's kick it old school.
Nina, you too.

The DJ starts the MUSIC.

DUCK

Broken glass everywhere,
People pissing on the stairs,
You know they just don't care.

NINA

I can't take the smell,
I can't take the noise,
Got no money to move out,
I guess I got no choice..

TINY

Rats in the front room,
Roaches in the back,
Junkies in the alley with a
baseball bat,
I tried to get away but I
couldn't get far
Cause the man with the tow-truck
repossessed my car.

DUCK/LILA/TINY

Don't push me, 'cause I'm close
to the edge.
I'm trying not to lose my head.
It's like a jungle sometimes, it
makes me wonder
How I keep from going under..

FADE OUT

Thesis Report

The process that I used to write “A Hip Hop Carol” was a learning experience. I found that writing a script is a challenge that can be exhilarating and fulfilling, but can also be draining and replete with frustration. My script took about two years to write; however, at certain points I let it sit idle for weeks and even months at a time. At other times I would work diligently, setting aside several hours each day to write and revise. The principal difficulty I encountered when trying to write my script was that I was simultaneously trying to revise and finish my thesis proposal. Both my proposal and script evolved in unison. When I would change my mind about a point in my proposal, I would revise my script accordingly and when I found that my narrative conflicted with an argument in my proposal I had to reevaluate the idea in my proposal. In the end I believe that this process, however long and disorganized, helped me to come to a better understanding of my argument and of myself as a writer.

My goal in undertaking this project was to explore the questions I put forward in my thesis proposal creatively through a narrative script. The main question I wanted to answer was: what happens to a subculture when a dominant culture appropriates its style in order to achieve financial gain. Specifically I wanted to examine the effects of commercialization on Hip Hop Culture in the United States.

True to my indecisive nature and my disorganized approach to this project, I only arrived at this plan after deciding not to produce a short documentary on the subject. I wanted to use documentary to explore the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture because I thought it would be straightforward, entertaining, and concise. I thought using testimonials from hip hop artists and fans, and footage of Hip Hop Culture in the media would present a clear picture of the effects of commercialism on the subculture that I could see clearly in my daily experience. However, as I have explained, I hadn't completed my thesis proposal and my mind was full of ideas and arguments, but no direction.

As I made progress on my thesis proposal I began to understand that the documentary I had in mind had become more nuanced and less straightforward. This is because my perspective changed and arguments that I once believed to be solid began to lose their footing. Specifically, I think my initial agenda was to focus on the negative consequences of commercialism on Hip Hop Culture like the emphasis on violence and the two dimensional depiction of Black people. Blair and Gottdiener's line of reasoning seemed to uphold this approach, but I began to believe that the scope of their argument was too narrow based on my own background knowledge of the subject.

Their summation of Hip Hop Culture only focused on hip hop music that is played on the radio or featured on MTV. In addition, the three-stage model Gottdeiner presented seemed to overlook the possible effects of subcultures on dominant cultures. Writing "A Hip Hop Carol" helped me to arrive at the

conclusion that culture is not something that exists and then stops existing, but something that evolves.

As discussed in my thesis proposal I chose to write my script as a remake of Dickens' classic A Christmas Carol. I found that the parallels between Dickens' protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge and Hip Hop Culture's recent materialistic turn were ideal for my exploration of the effects of commercialism on Hip Hop Culture. Because hip hop music is such a young invention I thought that the way Dickens led his character into the past, present, and possible future would allow me to present the past, present, and a possible future of Hip Hop Culture in a recognizable and proven format.

When I began writing I built my script around a protagonist similar to Dickens' Scrooge, and some of his more recent incarnations. In Donnar's remake of A Christmas Carol, the film *Scrooged* featured Bill Murray as Frank Cross, a frustrated, contemptuous, and miserly television executive. I chose to attempt to replicate the humor of Donnar's character in my own protagonist, Emcee Duck. My character's namesake was inspired by the often comical monikers hip hop artists have created for themselves and from Disney's incarnation of the Scrooge character, Scrooge McDuck, the richest duck in Duckberg. McDuck's love of money and his tendency toward excess influenced the depiction of my protagonist.

Hip hop artist Kanye West was another influence. I believe his brash attitude, award show antics, and exuberant displays of wealth are endemic to Hip Hop Culture. He is also one of the artists who I believe has best captured the

contradictions of commercialized hip hop music with the most honesty and style. “Jesus Walks,” a song on his debut album, *The College Drop Out*, decries the role of diamonds in Hip Hop Culture in light of the devastation the diamond industry has wrought on Sierra Leone. In another song from the album, “All Falls Down,” West laments on his own internal struggle with materialism.

*Man I promise I'm so self conscious
That's why you always see me with a least one of my
watches
Rollies and Pasha's done drove me crazy
I can't even pronounce nothing, yo pass the Versace
Then I spent \$400 bucks on this
Just be like nigga you ain't up on this
And I can't even go to the grocery store
Without some ones that are clean and a shirt with a team
It seems we living the American Dream
But the people highest up got the lowest self esteem
The prettiest people do the ugliest things
For the road to the riches and the diamond rings
We shine because they hate us floss because they degrade
us
We trying to buy back our 40 acres
And for that paper look how we'll stoop
Even if you're in a Benz you still a nigga in a coup (2004)*

Kanye's statement, “We shine because they hate us, floss because they degrade us. We trying to buy back our forty acres,” emphasizes the lack of personal fulfillment and intrinsic value an individual or culture can experience in trying to achieve success in terms of a materialistic value system. I want my script to illustrate that the values associated with Hip Hop Culture have been subverted by the materialistic value system of dominant culture in the United States by using Emcee Duck's journey to enlightenment as a metaphor for the hopeful evolution of Hip Hop Culture.

To begin I wanted to set the scene by presenting my audience with Duck's idealized world concept. To do this I open my script with a dream sequence in which Duck is idolized and praised at the MTV music awards where he is the honored recipient of the Hip Hop Artist of the Decade Award. In this scene I wanted to exaggerate his extravagance and his narcissism. My description of the scene is meant to be light-hearted on the one hand, but I included a real location and the names of real celebrities in the scene to point to the fact that the depiction is not far from reality. This dream sequence also leads to the reveal of Duck's goal at the start of the story. He wants validation, praise, and a gold reward for his achievements from MTV, which I use as metaphor for mainstream culture.

When Duck awakens from his dream I wanted to continue to emphasize the over the top extravagant lifestyle he leads in reality. I wanted this scene to live up to the depiction of so many hip hop artists' homes on the MTV show *Cribs*. Duck's home is plush and huge. He's surrounded by gold and platinum records and gigantic images of himself. The only bare spot in his home is the empty spot in his trophy case that awaits his ultimate prize, the MTV award.

I went back and forth on the tone of these two scenes. After presenting a draft of these scenes to my thesis advisor I reworked them because I think they cast my main character in a bad light. Initially I wanted my audience to see Duck as a fool to be reviled. Upon revision I decided that I wanted Duck to play as more of a misguided character with self-esteem issues. I thought audiences would be more interested in and able to relate better with a more likeable character so I

tried to push the scene in an almost whimsical direction, like the opening of an Austin Power's movie.

One of my most difficult struggles was with the reinterpretation of the Bob Cratchit character, Bob, Emcee Duck's manager. Cratchit was essential to Dickens' character as Scrooge's tormented servant. Here I looked back on Donnar's *Scrooged* for inspiration. In Donnar's retelling, he uses Frank Cross's secretary to play the Cratchit role. In his film the embattled secretary both cares for and puts up with Cross's miserly and bitter attacks. In my remake, Bob is not servile, but underappreciated. Duck relies on him for everything, but when Bob offers guidance Duck turns a deaf ear. I made Duck younger than Bob because I wanted Bob to have a fatherly air about him. I wanted Bob to embody Duck's missing conscience and good sense. When we first meet Bob, he's with Duck in a meeting in which Duck is being berated for the irresponsible depiction of sex, greed, and violence in one of his videos. Afterward Bob offers words of wisdom, but Duck blatantly shuts him out. I think this scene turned out to be very important, but it actually came about as an afterthought.

Another place I had struggled with my script was in setting up the storyline to jump into the A Christmas Carol format in a somewhat believable way. On my first attempt I placed Duck's character at a party when the first ghost, my reinterpretation of the Marley character appeared. I thought this was an abrupt jump because although I had shown that Duck was living an extravagant lifestyle, I hadn't shown that it was an empty life devoid of moral value. In order to deliver a better set up, I added the scene in which Duck arrives at his record label for a

meeting with Leo, his representative at the label, Russell Simmons, and Dr. Cornell West. Again I wanted to use real people to give the film a stronger impact. In this scene the meeting examines one of Duck's music videos and the characters present their perspectives on his behavior. Simmons and West attack the morality of his behavior while Leo panders to their criticisms. Duck defends himself with a misquoted freedom of expression argument coupled with the argument that he only produces what audiences want to buy. Here Duck confronts criticism that has been leveled at hip hop music's crass commercialism and uses a similar defense, that it's the consumers' fault. Finally, Duck takes on the role of a victim.

Because I reworked this section of the script I cut out a scene in which Duck meets with his girlfriend Lilah. Lilah's character is a departure from Dickens' story. She was meant to play a greater role, but I found that developing her character was not essential to the goal of my script. Instead I use her character as a tool to move the story along (how?) and to illustrate the division of Duck's public life with his private life in part by providing a stark contrast with the other women in Duck's life: Nina, his love interest and Duck's mother. While Lilah, a superficial and materialistic model pushes Duck to pursue fame and fortune at any cost, Nina a down to earth artist pushes Duck to reevaluate his image. Duck's mother is a reserved and dignified woman who supports her son, though she disapproves of his lifestyle.

At this point after illustrating another side of Duck's life I think the introduction of the Ghost of Old Dirty Bastard, who plays the role of Marley in

my remake, makes more sense. Like Marley, ODB formerly one of Duck's contemporaries, returns from the dead to warn him that the life he is leading is misguided at best and immoral at worst. I chose to use hip hop artists who had died in reality to play the roles of the ghosts because hip hop artists have a reputation for becoming the victims of violent and early deaths. I chose ODB to represent the Marley character because in life ODB fell victim to excess. Having become bankrupt, he died in poor mental and physical health due to complications associated with the abuse of drugs and alcohol. He represents that part of Hip Hop Culture that glorifies self-destruction.

After ODB delivers his mysterious warning, Duck goes back to living his life unshaken. In the next scenes I introduce the two remaining consequential supporting characters Nina and Tiny.

Nina is my interpretation of Dicken's character Belle, who Scrooge forsakes in his quest for riches. For my purposes Nina represents not only Duck's forsaken love interest, but underground hip hop. Her character's physical description is meant to resemble Eryka Badu, which I thought was appropriate because of her well known reputation for dating hip hop artists. Her style is also meant to represent underground hip hop music. She deplores the violence, sexism, and materialism of mainstream hip hop music, choosing instead to make music that sells less, but speaks honestly to the experience of urban poverty.

Tiny represents the character Tiny Tim, but aside from his name and short stature he doesn't resemble Dickens' character. He does serve a similar purpose, to show Duck the error of his ways. My version of Tiny Tim is an impressionable

elementary schooler who idolizes Duck despite his father's discouragement. I chose to depart from Dickens' version of the character because I think the traditional role he fulfilled would not fit with my story. Dickens' Tiny Tim was all innocence and faith and a little too pure. In my remake Tiny is innocent, but impressionable, and he easily succumbs to the influence of Duck's hip hop music, which is anything but pure. In Duck's first interaction in 'real life' with Tiny, he gives him advice, similar to the message I believe mainstream hip hop extols, make money by any means necessary because that's all that matters.

At this point I stepped away from writing the script for several weeks. I was satisfied with my start, but I had lost track of how I wanted the story to end. Here I was still trying to complete my thesis proposal and was beginning to consider the idea that Hip Hop Culture had not died as it seems that Gottdiener's model would indicate. I settled on ending in a dystopian future where hip hop had died, and the materialistic values it supported had created a war between the impoverished masses and the wealthy elite. This was too big of a departure from the tone of the film and it was too big of a leap to suggest that one hip hop artist would cause this upheaval. I was also stuck on how to write out the remainder of the story so that this ending would make sense. However, I still wrote out this ending. Although I was unsatisfied with it and I knew it would have to be reworked, it helped me start writing again. I think that I learned that for me, writing anything no matter how bad is a better cure for frustration and writer's block than stepping away and getting out of a routine.

Another reason I think my choice to write a remake was a beneficial decision is because it gave me an outline to follow. When I got back to writing I knew I had to present my protagonist with ghosts who would lead him through episodes from his past, present, and possible future. Filling out those scenes was difficult, but having a template helped me to get started. I knew that when Emcee Duck visited his past I wanted celebrate the beginnings of hip hop music, to let him and my audience reminisce and experience some nostalgia. Following Dickens' storyline I also knew that I had to illustrate the turning point when Duck would choose a life of greed and abandon his love interest Nina. I also had to consider Duck's age because I wanted to link the events that I visited in the past with his childhood. Finally, I had to choose an appropriate dead hip hop artist to play the role of the ghost.

To accomplish these goals I set the scene in Duck's childhood home. Duck finds his younger self watching a classic scene from the movie, *Krush Groove*, in which hip hop icon LL Cool J makes his film debut. The scene sparks nostalgia with any hip hop fan. I hoped that the setting, Duck's average middleclass home, and Young Duck's youthful exuberance would make his character more likeable.

I chose Jam Master Jay of Run D.M.C. to play the part of the Ghost of Hip Hop Past because he was an early hip hop artist that had a great influence on the culture and because despite his non-violent image, he still suffered a violent death. This has added significance to my script because the second scene I wrote for Duck's visit to the past originally centered on an idea I had to have Duck play

an inadvertent role in Jay's murder at this studio in New York. I wanted to place responsibility on hip hop artists for their role in generating the violence in Hip Hop Culture.

In the end I decided to change the scene because I think that it was too long and convoluted, and because it departed from the storyline too much. Instead I focused on a Teenaged Duck's relationship with his partner Nina at the time. I set the scene in a subway station where the couple are performing for donations and trying to sell their demo with little success. Duck blames their material's political message for their lack of success. The couple parts ways when Duck decides to go through with a drug deal that ends in violence and his arrest. However, Duck's arrest ends up playing a part in his success as a mainstream hip hop artist by adding to his street credibility. I wanted this scene to mimic the evolution of the Gangsta Rap genre of hip hop music and I think by changing the scene I got closer to accomplishing that goal.

Again, following Dickens' template I returned Duck to the present. I wanted to show that Duck's character was already starting to experience some internal struggle and growth. I also wanted to take a page out of Rusty Cundieff's book and illustrate some of the unexpected behind the scenes aspects of the hip hop music industry. Cundieff's *Fear of a Black Hat* spoofed the hip hop music industry by showing that hip hop artists aren't as tough or two-dimensional as they appear, and showed some of the factors that contribute to the image they present to their audience. I tried to replicate this concept by using a scene in which Duck is confronted by his image consultant, publicist, and style consultant. I wanted

their exaggerated superficiality to lampoon the outrageous images presented by some real hip hop artists.

Returning to the Dickens storyline, I chose Eric Easy – E Wright to play the part of the Ghost of Christmas Present. Easy – E represented the Gangsta Rap era through his role as a founding member of N.W.A. one of the most successful Gangsta Rap groups. Easy – E was also one of the earliest public figures in my memory to die from AIDS.

I wanted to use Duck's visit to the present to allow his character to see mainstream hip hop music as a cold and practical business. I wanted to present Duck and hip hop music as a replaceable cog within that business. Using Easy – E's sunglasses as a vehicle Duck is allowed to literally see the true thoughts of his colleagues at his record label. This was a scene that I struggled with and am still not thoroughly happy with, but several revisions later I ended up returning to my original concept for the scene.

In the second scene with the Ghost of Hip Hop Present I wanted Duck and my audience to visit the reality of urban poverty. My hope for this scene was to show that the depictions of life in urban ghettos have become so common place that they no longer provoke contempt or compassion for the plight of the people who have to live there. I tried to accomplish this by tricking the audience. Duck is put in a position to witness gang violence, firsthand, but is shocked to learn that what he thought was real, was actually a staged commercial. I hoped this scene would reflect the use of Hip Hop Culture to market goods to mainstream

audiences who are attracted to its edgy style, but aren't confronted with the harsh realities that contributed to the style's development.

At this point I had to confront the difficulty of writing the lead up to the climax and resolution of my remake. Although I've noted a few times that I revised scenes and how I've gotten off schedule there were actually many more revisions and breaks in my schedule than I could write about coherently. When I came to my final decision on how to end my script I had finished my thesis proposal and came to the conclusion that neither Hip Hop Culture nor mainstream culture in the U.S. was totally responsible for the commercialization of Hip Hop and the resulting effects. I found that both sides contributed to the formation of Hip Hop Culture in its current state. I also concluded after reading Hebdige's work surrounding the evolution of British Punk Culture that although Hip Hop Culture is unique, it is subject to the same cycle of rebellion, acceptance, and assimilation. So in my script I decided that I wanted to explore the negative aspects of the commercialization of Hip Hop Culture in the future and allow my protagonist to choose a different path representing the potential of Hip Hop Culture to redeem itself.

I chose not to use a hip hop artist to play the role of the Ghost of Hip Hop Future although I considered the ploy of having the Hooded Figure reveal himself to be Duck's ghost, but I thought that was too contrived. Instead I chose to leave the Ghost anonymous and focus on Duck's vision of the future. In the future I wrote for Duck his image has been stolen to use to market a chain of fast food restaurants. His love interest Nina is reduced to the position of a cashier for one of

the restaurants and has lost her beauty and faith. And Tiny, having taken Duck's advice, betrays his idol in the name of greed. Duck himself dies an unflattering death alone with only his MTV award.

In the end I wanted to mimic Dickens' depiction of Scrooge awakening on Christmas morning just in time to redeem himself. I revised this scene more than any other in the script. In one version I used Duck to deliver a tirade against commercialized hip hop at the music awards. In another I had Duck give the award to his mother. Finally I thought about my goals for the scene and the morals I wanted to impart to my audience. I wanted the scene to sum up the lessons Duck learned, offer him a chance at redemption, and to stay true to Dickens by involving Tiny in the scene. I cut the scene down to the bare minimum remembering that a quick resolution is usually the most effective. With Duck refusing the award I wanted to imply that acceptance by mainstream audiences shouldn't be hip hop artists' primary goal. And finally, I wanted to use Duck's fulfillment of his promise to Tiny to represent a new direction for hip hop music in the future.

Overall I am happy with the script I wrote. More importantly I have new confidence in approaching a project of this scale. While at the outset of this project I intended to write a feature length script I am not disappointed that I ended up writing a short film script. As I worked I tried to rely on the lessons I learned in my script writing class, the most important being make sure that every scene has a purpose. That lesson helped my writing a great deal. I found that when I got stuck on a scene it was not just helpful, but necessary for me to

evaluate my goals. Then, I approached my writing with them in mind revising a scene until I could see a clear path between the events in the scene to the goal I set out to accomplish.

While I am satisfied with my script I am very aware of my shortcomings as a script writer. Dialogue was something with which I struggled throughout this process. I tried to take shortcuts as often as possible. In fact many of the lines I wrote for the Ghosts are direct quotes from the artists taken out of context. As often as possible I wanted to make up for my failings as a dialogue writer by illustrating my views through scene descriptions rather than using back and forth banter between characters. I think that if I were to revise this script again I would spend more time fleshing out those descriptions to that end.

My last assertion about this project was that it was completely worthwhile. I have gained a better understanding of how to gather my thoughts, ground them with research, and how to direct them with purpose. I have enjoyed pushing myself to grow intellectually through this project and its completion has set a benchmark that I will attempt to surpass in my future work.

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