
COUNTERING HIP-HOP AS A BLACK SPACE: HOW “THE OTHERS” STRUGGLED TO FIND SPACE IN RAP BATTLE CULTURE AS ANALYZED IN *8 MILE* (2002) AND *BAD RAP* (2016)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the normativity of the black race in rap music and how it affected Asian American and White American MCs in Rap Battle (specifically Jin the MC, Dumbfoundead, and Eminem), the importance of rap battle in connection between race and rap, and how rap battle’s connection with race and rap contributed to Jin the MC, Dumbfoundead, and Eminem’s success factors as they tackled racist attacks from their rap battle opponents. The corpus of the study is a documentary about Asian American’s struggle in the hip-hop industry called *Bad Rap* (2016), as well as Eminem’s revised-autobiography film *8 Mile* (2002). The study uses De La Garza and Ono’s CRT (2016) tenets and Edgar and Sedwick’s New Criticism (1999) to discover the importance of Rap Battle in the connection between race and rap as well as the ways that black-originated music affected the nonblack MCs mentioned; specifically, in their performance characteristics, strategies to battle racist attacks from the opponents, as well as their recognition and career development in the industry. Following that, the researcher discussed a gap within racial and sociocultural aspects of black normativity in rap and how it contributed to the ‘success factors’ of these mentioned artists, while racist attacks played a strong role from Black American opponents.

Keywords: *Asian America; Black Culture; Hip-Hop; Racial Discrimination; Rap Battle*

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INTRODUCTION

“You wanna say I’m Chinese, Sonny, here’s a reminder, check your Timbs, they probably say made in China,” “Ask your girl, I was doing something in her house, matter

fact she had my eggroll and my dumplings in her mouth”. The crowd cheered in awe in 2002 on BET’s popular show 106 & Pain for its segment Freestyle Friday, where rookie rappers took turns performing in a battle rap. The guy draped in an oversized jacket and

backward cap was Jin The MC (abbreviation for master of ceremony), and he soon became the first Asian-American solo rapper to be signed to a major record label in the US. It was the beginning for Asian American rappers to rise as Jin entered the scene.

Rap battle is not a mere aggressive competition between two rappers who are seeking money prize by shouting offensive rhymes at each other; instead, it is an authentic performance based on the values of the black community, a communication done powerfully to let people speak up about ideas and problems (Aleksanyan, 2018). The contents of a rap battle can usually be related to ideology, status, identity, or race in a signature call-and-response style by pointing to the opponent’s weak points. The “bars” are used in rap music and music theory to reference a line in a rapper’s lyrics.

Every line in a rap song is usually considered a bar. According to Daily Rap Facts, bars emphasize a verse or a line in a rapper’s lyrics that may determine if it is good or clever. They function as one of the aspects used to determine whether a rapper wins or loses. The bars, including bragging and insulting, can be complex. Historically, rap battle was formed in the 1970s in the Bronx, one of New York’s suburbs, and was associated with hip-hop performances like graffiti, DJ, breakdance, and rap. Eventually, the competition began moving to HBO, BET, and MTV TV shows by the early 2000s. Participants in this competition originally used hip-hop music as a black space that often foregrounds the working-class street community, delivered with gestures that exude hypermasculinity (Alim et al., 2011). From my observation, rap battles may give an outlet for performers to express their skills

to gain recognition. Still, there is a missing link regarding how black normativity (Alim et. al, 2015) in the rap battle culture challenges non-black participants. Learning from Jenkins (2021), black normativity is a view of blackness as the default culture in hip-hop society or regarded as the unspoken norm. Therefore, hip-hop’s black normativity carries the notion that connects the social identity of this subculture with Black American artists as its main proponent.

Next, the black normativity in rap music automatically put the non-black MCs from the early days of hip-hop in a challenging position in which they were in the spotlight for challenging the origin of hip-hop from black artists. It is in contrast to the fact that non-black MCs tend to refer to blackness only indirectly or mostly not at all since it is important to gain audience approval to win. White and Asian Americans are considered “the others” in the rap music (Alim et al., 2010) due to the existing notion of black normativity in the hip-hop music category. However, there were some cases when White and Asian American rappers made strategies for their rap battle performances by embracing the racist attacks coming from their opponents. For instance, in *Bad Rap* (2016), the Asian American rapper Jin, the MC used humor to disarm his rivals with bars that recast his ethnicity as a weapon (Coates, 2004).

Additionally, early White-American hip-hop MCs like the Beastie Boys and Eminem beat the racial boundary while participating in the genre (Ford, 2004), but Eminem stands out as a white MC who defied the stereotype of black artists and their authentic presence in the hip-hop industry based on the comments made by other rappers like Big

Sean and Jay-Z (Trending Tracks, 2021). However, non-black MCs were subjected to racial discrimination in many hip-hop performances like rap battles.

The origin of rap music is firmly attached to the act of resistance. At the beginning of its era and arguably until the present time, rap was formed as a medium to speak up for voicelessness and performed as a language that addresses silence, the silenced, and the state of being silenced (Ibrahim, 1999). This research explores how black normativity in hip-hop affects White and Asian American MCs in rap battles and how these rappers seek strategies to counter discrimination against their race, especially. Asian Americans in this research are specifically Chinese-American and Korean-American, to which the two selected subjects from *Bad Rap* (2016) belong. Using the application of CRT, which is an intellectual movement that seeks to understand how white supremacy as a legal, cultural, and political condition is reproduced and maintained, mainly in the US context (De La Garza and Ono, 2016), Eminem will be analyzed as subject depicted in the film *8 Mile* (2002), Jin the MC (Jin Au-Yeung) as well as Dumbfoundead (Jonathan Edgar Park) as depicted in the recent black-produced documentary movie called *Bad Rap* (2016), a presentation about Asian American rappers and their struggle to fit within the rap industry.

In this research, CRT (De La Garza and Ono, 2016) discusses how racial elements construct hip-hop alongside its space as a part of American culture. Tenets from the theory, for example, the resistance of the oppressed, a radical approach to challenge normativity, structural racism, and

commitment to social justice that affect social phenomena, are observed for the analysis.

Additionally, the importance of rap battle as an arena where race and rap collide was also observed, along with how it played a significant role in MC's success and displays how they face racial attacks from their Black American opponents. Several highlighted texts, such as dialogues, lyrics, and other excerpts from *8 Mile* (2002) and *Bad Rap* (2016), are seen through the lens of New Criticism (Edgar and Sedwick, 1999). Swann (2022) defines this as a way of analyzing literature based only on that work's text since the theory promotes close reading by dismantling the elements within a text, such as symbolism or metaphors, to find the meaning of the work. The study matters in the Generation Z era or anyone born from 1997 onward (Dimock, 2022) who actively seeks mediums as a form of self-expression. The popularity of hip-hop draws attention, either by listening or performing, as an art with enough ability to cultivate a sense of power in the enjoyer's souls. In that context, as the youth and hip-hop's popularity coexist, this study seeks to acknowledge the importance of respecting the actors who originated and participated in it. More importantly, this study aims to elaborate on the historical aspect of how several Asian and White American MCs contributed to racial dynamics in the US culture, which countered the origin of hip-hop as a mainstream genre.

The research novelty lies within rap battle's racial and sociocultural aspects and how they contribute to the 'success factors' of Eminem, Jin the MC, and Dumbfoundead. At the same time, racist attacks against Asian

and White Americans exist as a common strategy Black MCs use in underground rap battles. This article fills the gap by presenting two films that depict the counterattack from these non-black participants as they participate in rap battles as an act to begin their careers in the industry. Using New Criticism (Edgar and Sedwick, 1999), this paper examines rap lyrics and performance characteristics of the subjects and elaborates on several issues with De La Garza and Ono’s CRT (2016) to put together the racial elements that construct rap as a part of Black Americans culture, where aspects such as resistance of the oppressed, rap as a radical approach to challenge the normativity, structural racism, and social and political condition are observed through the analysis. Gathering several journal articles that highlight race issues in rap as a hip-hop performance, there emerged a gap regarding the multiracial encounter upon the entrance of Asian and White American MCs to the music that was derived and is a medium that emancipates Black Americans.

METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to describe the performance characteristics of the subjects using textual analysis within the realm of qualitative research. The analysis mainly focuses on racial aspects within hip-hop and rap battles as one of its performances. In this case, De La Garza and Ono’s CRT (2016) enlightens how racism works in the US, uses the tenets to fit the research, and digs deeper into race and its correlation with political and social phenomena. Furthermore, texts such as lyrics and dialogues from *8 Mile* (2002) and the *Bad Rap* (2016) documentary are analyzed using the New Criticism Approach (Edgar and Sedwick, 1999). Through its self-

referential emphasis on rhetorical complexities like ambiguity and irony, New Criticism combined an investigation of linguistic structures with a more open-minded interest in the psychology and sociology of language production. It treated literature (in this case, scripts of film dialogues and rap lyrics) as an object that would reveal the complexities of life (Edgar and Sedwick, 1999).

DISCUSSION

Observing Rap as a Black Space in *8 Mile* (2002) and *Bad Rap* (2016)

Originating in the Bronx, New York, back in the 1970s, hip-hop was a blend of several influences and cultural powers. As rap was introduced as one of hip-hop’s subcultures, there started a renewal of an urban lifestyle in American cities (Trott, 2021). This fresh youth culture then flourished while focusing on the consciousness of economically disadvantaged urban black youth of the late 20th century (Phillips et al., 2005) as they expressed it through rap, and we can consider that a genre that came from the African-American culture is regarded as a black space; an area that originated and hence is forever linked to black artists. The existence of black space impacts the non-black participants in the hip-hop community.

First, the rough early life of the rapper Marshall Bruce Mathers III, known as Eminem, is depicted in his revised autobiography called *8 Mile* (the term “revised” refers to how the film is unreservedly inspired but not entirely based on the rapper’s life, with lyrics and few characters being fictional), whose title was adopted from Detroit’s *8 Mile* Road, a place

where the rapper grew up. B-Rabbit's habit of jotting down lyrics on paper on his way to work in a shuttle bus as he listens to a demo of a rap instrumental symbolizes his intelligence as a lyricist. His industriousness is highlighted despite him being booed off stage in his previous battle rap competition with Lil' Tic (DeShaun Dupree Holton, also known as Proof, who in real life was Eminem's hype man—a backup rapper who supports the rapper with exclamations and interjections and who attempts to increase the audience's excitement with call-and-response chants), whose lyrics against him began with:

Imma murder this man / he the type to
lose a fight with a dyke / they don't
laugh 'cause you wack / they laugh
'cause you white with a mic (*8 Mile*,
2002, 06:44).

This bar initially confirms B-Rabbit's otherness within the underground rap society. Among many freestyles aimed at him in the movie, this excerpt proves just how much the thing people first notice would be his skin color. Making use of New Criticism (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999) that believes that the need for a mind to explain and resolve control over language takes meanings in literature, it appears that this excerpt acts as a symbol that introduces the audience to the fundamental issue that underlies the problem of the film, which is a white person trying to challenge himself in an all-black underground rap battle society.

The observation continues as B-Rabbit continuously faces mockery for his failed rap attempt, especially for being white, as shown in the basement scene of *8 Mile*, as one of "The Free World" gang members calls out, "Hold on, yo Elvis, you don't wanna step to this, you need to take your white ass rap shit

of yours back across *8 Mile*. Caught your choke act at The Shelter last night. [Performs fellatio gesture] (*8 Mile*, 2002, 31:14)" Although B-Rabbit ends up being the winner of the battle rap in The Shelter by the end of *8 Mile*, competing against Lickety Split (Gerald L. Sanders), Lotto (Nashawn Breedlove), and finally Papa Doc (Anthony Mackie), I observe how his success is strongly influenced by his encouraging Black American sidekick Future (Mekhi Phifer) through his character development, not to mention the off-stage rap battles that gained him acclamation from the black audiences as shown in the food truck as well as the basement scene.



Figure 1. B-Rabbit's rap battle in his workplace. (*8 Mile*, 2002, 53:23)



Figure 2. B-Rabbit's rap battle in the basement. (*8 Mile*, 2002, 29:18-29:57)

In the first scene, B-Rabbit is defending his gay coworker from a street rapper's homophobic lines with,

"Hey why you fuckin' with the gay guy, G? When really you're the one who's got the H.I.V? Man I'm done with this clown, he's soft. Fuck it, I'll let my homegirl finish you off" and the people working at the pressing plant applauds

his successful attempt to rap battle the man that started the rabble (starring rapper Xzibit) (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 54:18)

In the second scene, the predominantly black underground rappers witness and cheer for B-Rabbit’s clever freestyle rhymes: “My style is generic / Yours authentic made / I roll like a renegade / You need clinic gate / My technique’s bizarre and ill / I scar and kill / You were a star until I serve you like bar ‘n grill” (*8 Mile*, 2002, 29:18) From these scenes, how black people encourage and uplift B-Rabbit’s confidence in rapping in the film is noticeable and preeminent.

The observation continues with the use of textual analysis as in *Bad Rap* (2016) there is this lyric: “You can’t be an Asian rapper talking ‘bout busting guns, even if that’s your life. You can’t rap about that, ‘cause everyone’s gonna think it’s fake,” said Traphik (Tim Chantarangsu) (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 11:35). Here, the word ‘fake’ indicates racial stereotypes from the black community in which Asians are viewed to grow up studying for good grades, or their lives are ‘supposedly’ far from that of gang-related issues, such as the ones involving guns, drugs, the streets, etc. Next, sociology professor Oliver Wang also mentioned how “African American men, have that association in terms of being considered the most racially authentic performers. Anyone who does not fit into that particular box, becomes more, in a sense, suspicious for an audience member.” (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 11:27) This affirms the idea of the initial approach regarding how hip-hop was rooted in black society. The person implies that hip-hop, with its hybridity, the consistent contributions of nonblack artists, and the borrowings of cultural forms from other

communities, is black American music (Wang, 2017).



Figure 3. Traphik discusses how Asians cannot adopt black ‘gangsta’ accessories despite living a low- life (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 11:35-11:43)

Next, hip-hop as a black space became a starting point that triggered these Asian American rappers to create strategies while performing in a rap battle arena. In this case, I highlighted a topic from the CRT (De La Garza & Ono, 2016) that mentioned how the resistance of “the other” in the rap context shows “a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome,” as De La Garza and Ono (2016) cited from Bell (1991, p. 378). Acknowledging black Americans as the race that originated the genre, it is inevitable for “the others”, let alone rappers of Asian descent, to be conscious of their otherness status.

Then, regardless of how much the person has encountered the characteristics of living a ‘thug life’ or what is typically understood to be a determined and resilient attitude to succeed in life despite racism and injustice, racial struggles while using rap as a medium to express themselves would be unavoidable. While Black and Asian Americans are often considered minorities in American society, hip-hop has a bubble of deviation. When Asian Americans challenge a particular

culture that initially belonged to the Black community, they are susceptible to various prejudices. Black Americans unavoidably treat them unjustly as other underrepresented groups in the US.

Strategies Against Asian Stereotypes in *Bad Rap* (2016)

In the documentary *Bad Rap* (2016), Asian American hip-hop artists and people who work in the music industry claim that rap music is immensely tied to the black community. However, this part of the analysis will show whether Asian American rappers or the participants interviewed in this documentary have taken ownership of the hip-hop genre and battled racial discrimination. They use specific strategies to respond to racial attacks in rap battles, such as those shown by Chinese-American rapper Jin the MC and Korean-American rapper Dumbfoundead. Jin, the MC, began his career as a battle rapper on BET's Freestyle Friday in 2002. His method of responding to his opponents is by proudly announcing that he is indeed of Chinese descent. He embraced his ethnic identity and put a humorous touch to the bars he rapped on the show.

Yeah I'm Chinese / now you understand it / I'm the reason your little sister's eyes are slanted / If you make one joke about rice or karate / N.Y.P.D be in Chinatown searching for your body (Random7Seven, 2019).

While Jin The MC's clever strategy might win him the show for a record-setting seven straight weeks and a contract with Ruff Ryders, there lies an issue with this winning method. Delahoyde (2018) mentioned how, in applying New Criticism, the aspects inside

the text affect the meaning of the piece. This excerpt above communicates that Chinese stereotypes such as having slanted eyes, eating rice, and doing karate are considered long-time verbal discrimination from non-Asian communities. In the second line, a stereotype of Asians is that they have slanted eyes. Jin mentioned how he made Hassan's little sister have slanted eyes, implying how he impregnated Hassan's mother.

In the fourth line, Jin uses a violent bar that indicates what Asian people can do to blacks, despite how Asian men are often stereotyped as weak. Furthermore, Jin's bars that are mentioned in the background section of this article (p.1) also strengthen his rap characteristics to bring up sexual innuendos, "Ask your girl, I was doing something in her house, matter fact she had my eggroll and my dumplings in her mouth." (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 22:13) This particular lyric refers to Jin's opponent's girlfriend giving Jin oral sex by symbolizing an Asian man's manhood with 'dumplings' and 'eggrolls.' By doing so, Jin The MC affirms the racial stereotypes instead of breaking them. For instance, his first hit, "Learn Chinese" (2004), raised controversy as the song begins contentiously with the lyrics, "Yeah, you know who this is, Jin. Let me tell you this. The days of the pork fried rice and the chicken wings coming to your house by me is over" (Jin The MC, 2004). Jin The MC's choice of strategy is frowned upon by some of his Asian fellows.

However, by saying that the days are over, Jin might insinuate his agreement towards the stereotype of Chinese men working as delivery guys in the US Jin The MC himself mentioned,

The interesting thing about that song is, there's no middle ground. Out of all

people that I’ve ever encountered, they either loved it, like literally to this day right now, I’m still like, Are you lying? Are you just putting me on? When people see me they’re like, ‘Yo that Learn Chinese, that was my song,’ or they be like, ‘Yo I thought about you and I thought about that Learn Chinese song.’ Or the complete opposite end, which is, ‘Jin, that was the worst song you could have ever recorded, or wrote, or released. Like what were you thinking?’ to the point where people think that that song was the downfall of my career. (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 23:30)

The listeners’ response also shows that this song may have made Jin The MC lose popularity after he parted ways with Ruff Ryders and began recording independently in 2006. The song also raises eyebrows among some Asian-American rappers. “Learn Chinese, yeah, that one was kinda weird,” confirmed fellow Asian rapper Rekstizzy (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 23:11). It further exhibits how his lyrical strategy does not lead to a successful benchmark for him as an Asian-American rapper, yet resulting in a problem with him complying with Asian stereotypes. In addition, *Bad Rap* (2016) also shows one of Asian-American greatest rap battlers under the stage name Dumbfoundead. As an artist who began his career in the 2000s as a battle rapper in some random bars located in Los Angeles, Dumbfoundead has reached the point where he earned respect through rap battles, specifically from second-best-selling Black-American rapper like Drake.



Figure 4. Drake mentions that he is a big fan of Dumbfoundead, has been watching him for years, and he looks forward to seeing him battle. (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 55:50)

His lyrical strategy is mainly packed with wit, outstanding rap skills and comedic bars. “The power he holds in the rap battle world gives him the longevity that other rap battlers may not be able to have,” stated fellow Asian American rapper Awkwafina, one of *Bad Rap* (2016) subjects whose work in the hip-hop industry represents Asian women’s rebellion. A scene in *Bad Rap* (2016) shows Dumbfoundead’s rap battle against The Saurus and PH, the non-Asian MC’s opponents, as they throw racist jokes at his opponent.



Figure 5. PH Rap Battle Against Dumbfoundead (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 32:05)

The Saurus:

“I wanna punch the face of this guy (Dumbfoundead) / But based on the shape of his eyes, we know the policy / You break it you buy /”

PH:

And if you ain’t know / Dumbfoundead’s real name is Jonathan

Park / But we all know Asians can't
drive / So Jonathan parks

Dumbfoundead:

That first round was a weird display /
You've been rapping 30 years to date /
I'm surprised you didn't start your round
with 'My name is big P, and I'm here to
say / (Dumbfoundead refers to P as in
'penis'; which refers to how his
opponent may use rap as a strategy to get
a date).

What the hell, dude? / Stop rapping and
go sell shoes / After he lost that battle he
went to / His dad got down to his knees
and said, 'I have failed you' /
(Dumbfoundead (2009). Dumbfoundead
vs. Tantrum [Song]. Fun With Dumb.)

Like any other non-Asian battlers in the documentary, The Saurus and PH have grown up with prejudice against the people and culture of Asia in a way that he has familiarized himself with the discriminating stereotypes. Within the short freestyle excerpt above, PH included discrimination toward Asians in his bars. The first bar says: 'Based on the shape of his eyes, we know the policy / You break it you buy' a term adopted from signs commonly found in china shops. The racist humor is shown as he implies that punching Dumbfoundead may cause him trouble since his physical appearance reminds him of the policy inside Chinese shops (where customers tend to break porcelains).

In addition, PH Twists Dumbfoundead's name into a wordplay in which Park or Bak, the third-most-common surname in Korea, is turned into the verb 'parks', disgracing his descent with bad Asian drivers stereotype. However, it is notable that Dumbfoundead's rap skills act as a medium that successfully made him stand out amid the historical notion that hip-hop is a black space, thus

creating a racial boundary in the non-Black rapper's career, further positioning him as "the outsider." His rap battle opponents, including PH, whose bars are shown in the lyrics above, mention a direct, verbal bully towards Dumbfoundead's race and bring a pun twist to his Korean surname. Dumbfoundead, on the other hand, performs his strategy by tackling these racial attacks, but instead flipping insults back at his opponent, adding his blatant humor and excellent rhymes.



Figure 6. Sociology Professor Oliver Wang and his take on Asian Market in Hip-hop (*Bad Rap*, 2016, 12:42)

Furthermore, there is a question in *Bad Rap* (2016) coming from sociology professor Oliver Wang: "If you are a young person, regardless of your ethnic or racial background, you are inspired to want to perform hip-hop as a dancer, or graffiti artist, or as an MC, or as a DJ. Is the logic here, if you're not black you should just give up on that interest?" The dialogue may speak for itself, but most importantly, this shows how hip-hop is acknowledged as a medium for art expression that may attract people regardless of race. Thus, any boundary that hinders "the others" from entering the space is worth investigating. Dumbfoundead also mentions how, back in the day, the media would not show the 'cool' depiction of Asians. Instead, the media displays films, such as *Hangover* (2009-2011), which shows an Asian character played by Ken Jeong who speaks in

exaggerated Asian slurs and is greedy for money. This proves that in a social context, there is a gap between Asian rappers and the hip-hop industry.

The normativity of whiteness, giving voice to people of color, how liberalism is obtained, and interdisciplinary research are the five tenets of De La Garza and Ono’s CRT (2016). Making the third tenet, critique of liberalism, as a fundamental point of this section in the analysis, CRT believes that liberalism is associated with the use of numerous small incremental modifications rather than a few (extensively planned) significant jumps. Incrementalism believes that the theory of policy results from interaction and mutual adaptation between actors who advocate for different ideals, represent various interests, and possess different information (Hayes, 2013).

Given that racism has always been a structural issue for people of color, it is comprehensible from this tenet that incrementalism is crucial to ending oppression. The term “structural” refers to how racism’s history goes beyond the time and physical representation of slavery (Price, 2019). In this case, Jin The MC and Dumbfoundead are two of the several Asian American hip-hop forerunners who contributed an attempt to contest the black normativity that belongs to hip-hop to be seen and welcomed on the platform. Using their rap battle strategy to represent Asian Americans’ reach to liberalism in artistic platforms, these MCs completed the incrementalism practice to enter hip-hop. What may be inferred from this is that these Asian American rappers strategize their successes while representing their race. It favors how CRT scholars favor interaction

and adaptation to reach freedom rather than waiting for human society to improve over time, allowing racism to decline. *Bad Rap* (2016) counters that non-black artists cannot express themselves within this preference for culture-infused genres.

The Anomaly in Underground Rap: “White Trash” in *8 Mile* (2002)

Rodman (2006) mentioned Eminem’s status as a White American artist challenges mainstream societal constructs of race in hip-hop. The reason is that he has found critical and financial success within a predominantly black cultural idiom. Therefore, it can also be said that he works to deconstruct and reconstruct popular understandings of both Whiteness and Blackness in the US. *8 Mile* (2002) shows how the character B-Rabbit, played by Eminem himself, faces three black main opponents for the night of the rap battle. Each session is filled with racial attacks against his race, mainly using the infamous term “white trash,” referring to the insignificance of his race in the underground rap shelter.

Throughout the film, B-Rabbit debunks the concept of black space in rap with his authentic lyrical skills, making him the battle-winner. Eminem had a turbulent childhood, with his mother being a drug addict and his little brother being taken away by the state at eight. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade and worked poorly paid jobs to help his mother pay the bills until finally making it as a rapper upon releasing his second album, *The Slim Shady LP*, in early 1999. It is shown in autobiographical songs *Headlights* (2013), which was meant to be a letter to his mother

and *Mockingbird* (2004), which was written for his daughter:

Back to grandma's house, it's straight up the road / And I was the man of the house, the oldest / So my shoulders carried the weight of the load / Then Nate got taken away by the state eight years old / And that's when I realized you were sick / And it wasn't fixable or changeable / And to this day we remain estranged, and I hate it though (Eminem, 2013)

“And at the time, every house that we lived in either kept getting broken into and robbed / or shot up on the block / And your mom, was saving money for you in a jar / trying to start a piggy bank for you / So you can go to college / Almost had a thousand dollars / ‘Til someone broke in and stole it” (Eminem, 2004)

Although CRT seeks to understand how white supremacy is maintained in legal, cultural, and political conditions (De La Garza and Ono, 2016), the system would not pay attention to a broke White American who lives impecuniously in a location where more than one-third of the city's residents live below the poverty line. Race correlates with many other social phenomena, and the intertwining between race and other aspects of human life creates structural racism. White supremacy questions why BIPOC (an acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, a word used only in the US to highlight the struggles of Black and Indigenous communities and to show support for other communities of color.) whine about not getting well-paid jobs and why they would not level up despite the former times of enslavement.

According to one of CRT's tenets that White Americans pervade society, it is

unlikely for BIPOC to live in a world free from prejudice and under optimal circumstances. Even when they strive to improve, discrimination is an unshakable obstacle. Racism is viewed as a system not only because of one's skin color but also other aspects. For instance, a Black American child in Detroit (the city where *8 Mile* (2002) is set) might want the newest gadget. Still, their parents cannot afford it because of how difficult it is for the majority of Black people in Detroit to achieve wealth and justice in society due to racism's structural effects. When the CRT theory is applied, these Black MCs have adopted the aforementioned system throughout their lives as a member of the Black American community, making it fair for any Black MC, such as the character Lyckety Splyt (Gerard L. Sanders), to challenge B-Rabbit's racial identity in the film *8 Mile* (2002)'s final rap battle scene, as can be seen here during one of the rap battle performances against B-Rabbit:

You ain't Detroit, I'm the D, you the new kid on the block / 'Bout to get smacked back to the boondocks / Fuckin' Nazi, your squad ain't your type / Take some real advice and form a group with Vanilla Ice / And what I tell you, you better use it / This guy's a hillbilly, this ain't Willie Nelson music (*8 Mile*, 2002, 1:29:57-1:30:12)

With New Criticism (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999) and the method suggested by Delahoyde (2018), B-Rabbit is viewed by his Black-American opponents as an impostor of the Black-American community. It is explicitly noticeable how Splyt implies that a white person who resembles a boy band member cannot represent hip-hop. Thus, he suggests pursuing country music in the

countryside rather than trying to be a white rapper. Moreover, Splyt also insults B-Rabbit for his ethnicity, implying that he looks just like a German Nazi and does not fit in with his mostly Black-American peer group. Caucasian rapper Vanilla Ice was deemed a joke by the underground hip-hop community as he appropriated hip-hop for commercial gain with no regard for the origin of the music. Thus, Lyckety’s suggestion is an insult as that would go against Rabbit’s attempt to become accepted by the community. Following that, there is also an excerpt of freestyle lyrics from Rabbit to the ‘final boss’ of the rap battle, Papa Doc, which is noteworthy to discuss.



Figure 7. Final Battle between B-Rabbit and Papa Doc

Don't ever try to judge me, dude / You don't know what the fuck I've been through / But I know something about you / You went to Cranbrook, that's a private school / What's the matter, dawg? / You embarrassed? / This guy's a gangster? / His real name's Clarence / And Clarence lives at home with both parents / And Clarence's parents have a real good marriage / This guy don't wanna battle, he's shook / 'Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks (*8 Mile*, 2002, 01:40:59-01:41:23)

The paper observes how Eminem, the original freestyle writer of this rap battle, challenged the black normativity in this excerpt. Such a thing as ‘halfway crooks’ is adapted from the song “Shook Ones, Pt. II” (2013), in which rapper Mobb Deep refers to

the black “gangster” attribute. The attribute then infers to the idea given by the film: if you want to represent the underground hip-hop society, you have got to at least be a badass with a tough growing up. In other words, you cannot steal a little bit from someone and be called a partial thief. Applying De La Garza and Ono’s CRT (2016), as they mention that intentional racist acts must be understood politically, the normativity of blackness in the underground rap battle society in *8 Mile* can be disrupted when the leader fails to represent the lowlife.

In the excerpt, B-Rabbit highlights how his opponent, Papa Doc, grew up with both parents, lived harmoniously, and went to a private school, which commonly costs larger tuition than the public ones, called Cranbrook. The freestyle reveals Papa Doc’s financial status and privilege as an American. This is the complete opposite of B-Rabbit’s upbringing, considering how, at the time, he was living poorly with a depressed single mother, and they just got evicted from living inside a trailer. B-Rabbit is shown in the film to contribute to several crimes, for instance, being in street fights and possessing drugs and guns. A matter regarding how Papa Doc does not own the domestic attribute of being a gangster here is challenged by B-Rabbit, who holds a position as “the other” from the freestyle excerpt.



Figure 8. B-Rabbit held at gunpoint for beating up one of the Free World members. (*8 Mile*, 2002, 1:18:46)

As stated previously, *8 Mile* is a revised autobiography of Marshall Mathers, making him one of the all-time hip-hop legends who began his career from an underground battle and still uses rap to criticize other popular figures until this very day. In such an aggressive art expression medium like a rap battle, the battle's connection with race and rap contributes to Eminem's success factors, whilst racist attacks play a strong role from their opponents, based in the film. Williams (2018) propounded how Beastie Boys, a White American hip-hop group from New York City formed in 1981, started the commentary about the racial hijacking of hip-hop, in which the cultural phenomenon previously triggered by none other than Elvis Presley, who emerged in 1955 and snatched rock 'n roll, gospel, and blues image away from black artists.

Furthermore, this notion regarding racial hijacking is applicable as a medium to observe Eminem's accomplishments in the hip-hop industry. The veracity that in the 2000s, White audiences and industries preferred White artists selling Black aesthetics (works of art, literature, poetry, music, and theater that emphasized black life and culture) points to Eminem's success factors during his age. Eminem is regarded as one of the most influential artists in the genre's history because of his obvious privilege as a White man. Although his music contains many problematic elements such as homophobia, violence, and misogyny (yet also openly discusses his troubled upbringing and marriage), he can sell the favor for White people regarding their interest in hip-hop.

Evidence to support the idea that Marshall Mathers or Eminem in real life

might confirm his racial identity contributes profoundly to his quickly-escalating major success in the industry of rap, which is commonly known as black people's music, is shown in one of his songs titled "White America" (2002). In this song, Slim Shady, the alter-ego stage name for Eminem raps,

Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself / If they were brown, Shady'd lose / Shady sits on the shelf / But Shady's cute, Shady knew Shady's dimples would help / Make ladies swoon, baby (ooh, baby) / Look at my sales / Let's do the math, if I was black, I woulda sold half / I ain't have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know that (Eminem, 2002).

What is written in the lyrics is truly a depiction of pre-modern popular culture where in a vast American media platform like MTV, his whiteness acts as an asset that rapidly raises more popularity and fan base. Andre Young, publicly known as Dr. Dre, the founder of Aftermath Entertainment record label, mentioned how Eminem's entrance to the industry was frowned upon by many hip-hop producers who worked with him at first.

The records I'd done at the time didn't work. They wanted me out the building. And then I come up with Eminem, this white boy. My general manager had this 8-by-10 picture and was like: 'Dre, this boy's got blue eyes. What are we doing?' recalled Dre in his recent television documentary (The Defiant Ones, 2017, 09:58).

However, it is apparent that race was not an issue, considering Eminem's ability to develop rhymes for every beat Dr. Dre gave. This further affirms how Eminem's race might have been contentious initially,

particularly in his entrance into the industry, but then managed to become a stepping stone to his decade of success. It is proven by Eminem’s breakout album titled The Slim Shady EP, which was released in 1999, that made a significant impact on the music business by drawing attention to his exaggerated, nasal rapping style as a distinctive quality in addition to the fact that he is white (Ford, 2004). Record executives took note right once, and Eminem soon gained the reputation of being the music industry’s next “great white hope”. Even though many Black rappers had already achieved great success, more White Americans were purchasing rap music at this point. Knowing that 75.1 percent of White Americans were in the US in 2001, a respectable white MC with such an edge would generate even more sales (US Census Bureau Public Information Office, 2001).

CONCLUSION

As hip-hop has become increasingly streamed among young Generation Z, it is important to understand how the music’s attachment to its origin affects hip-hop’s non-black participants, referred to as “the others.” However, the entrance of “the others” can easily raise questions about whether the attempt deserves accreditation from the black community. These non-black participants, such as Eminem, Dumbfoundead, and Jin The MC, succeeded in putting on a strategy while coming up with freestyle ideas. Anyone can witness how Eminem, Dumbfoundead, and Jin The MC broke down a racial border built since the creation of music that represents the voice of Black Americans. Artistic expression through rap is now capable of being achieved regardless of race.

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