

TRYIN' TO MAKE A DOLLA OUTTA FI'TEEN CENTS: WHY THE AFRICAN-
AMERICAN CANON HAS WRONGFULLY EXCLUDED POPULAR URBAN
LITERATURE

By

RACHEL A. ROBINSON

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2009

© 2009 Rachel A. Robinson

For Everyone in the Struggle, 'Cause it's Real in these Streets

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis's completion and inception is solely a result of the support, compassion, and encouragement I have received. I want to thank my parents, grandparents, friends, sister and brother for a lifetime of love, joy, and keeping it real; and I would like to thank my professors for challenging me and fostering my academic growth and creativity. And finally, where would I be without "The Streets." I thank "The Streets" for inspiring Donald Goines's novels, Tupac's Music, and hybrids like Sister Souljah. Most importantly, I want to thank those who do not know what "The Streets" stand for and those who only see "The Streets" as something negative; it is for you I write this.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	8
2 FROM THE BR'ER TO THE BRONX: EXPLORING CAPITALIST THEMES IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE	29
3 CAPITALISM, SIGNIFYING, AND NOMMO COLLIDE IN POPULAR URBAN LITERATURE	43
LIST OF REFERENCES	64
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	69

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

TRYIN' TO MAKE A DOLLA OUTTA FI'TEEN CENTS: WHY THE AFRICAN-
AMERICAN CANON HAS WRONGFULLY EXCLUDED POPULAR URBAN
LITERATURE

By

Rachel A. Robinson

May 2009

Chair: LaMonda Horton-Stallings

Major: English

Popular urban literature producers like Donald Goines and Eric Jerome Dickey are rarely considered alongside canonical authors such as James Baldwin and Langston Hughes; and the genre Goines and Dickey write under is considered devoid of literary quality because of its popularity, and sexually and violently charged stories. However, popular urban literature contains many of the same qualities that made Baldwin and Hughes's work canonical. This piece reviews popular urban literature that should be included in the canon of African-American literature.

The capitalist themes featured in popular urban literature, which continue a tradition of capitalist themes in African-American literature, typically involve protagonists that have completely assimilated into a capitalist system. This is problematic insofar that the canon tends to focus more on texts that deal with issues of race and identity as opposed to capitalism. In spite of the canon's exclusion of popular urban literature, it does exhibit an array of works that feature minor themes of capitalism, but focus more on issues of race and identity such as Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits" and Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun."

The history and progression of capitalist themes within African-American literature will be traced in hopes of yielding a clearer understanding of popular urban literature's origins and shed light on previously neglected capitalist themes. Artists like Donald Goines, Tupac Shakur and Vickie Stringer, build upon themes, tropes and traditions found within the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* and *Call and Response*. These relationships will be explored in chapter two in hopes of demonstrating that the texts focus on capitalism does not devoid them of being literary texts worth serious scholarly exploration. And that the vulgarity, violence, and sex in these texts is not reason to ignore the many connections these works share with the finest African-American literary texts. The inclusion of popular urban literature into the canon is imperative as it preserves a facet of Black life that is often forgotten. Popular urban literature speaks for the disenfranchised, explores capitalism within the Black community, and explores problems that have long been ignored; and if this is not reason enough for inclusion, it also employs traditional Black literary tropes in innovative ways.

Popular urban literature reinvents the tropes of signifying and nommo. Signifying through the use of rhyme, toasting, boasting, humor, and irony for rappers is commonplace; and when these hip-hop narratives are coupled with the works of E.L. Franklin, Langston Hughes, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, it is evident that hip-hop culture manipulates signifying as no other text does. This expelled genre also reifies the African tradition of nommo through the use of naming and (un)naming as seen in Vickie Stringer's *Let That Be the Reason* and Tupac Shakur's 1996 single "Can't C Me."

Through objective and thoughtful analysis I hope to prove the value of popular urban literature to the entirety of all African-American literature. As well as stress its continuation of African-American literary and cultural practices.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

While contemplating a way to explore the works of popular urban literature authors like Tupac, Donald Goines and Vickie Stringer, I began to wonder what it was that drew me to these works, and what drew these works close enough to one another to be considered a genre. Once I began to think about the protagonists in these texts and what drew me to them, I realized that I liked their “hustle.” They were all willing to do whatever was necessary to survive in this capitalistic society, and like any true capitalist, they were never satisfied. Upon reviewing the genre as a whole, I discovered that capitalist pursuits were a constant theme throughout and that very few people were objectively reviewing these works for their literary quality and relevance to other African-American texts, and my thesis presented me the opportunity to defend this ignored genre.

When popular urban literature does garner academic attention, it typically focuses on its violence and sexuality. The most prolific popular urban literature producer and one of its founders, Donald Goines is one of the few popular urban literature writers that have been academically researched. But these scholarly works frequently only see the sex and violence in his novels. For instance, in Greg Goode’s 1984 article “From Dopefiend to Kenyatta’s last Hit: The Angry Black Crime Novels of Donald Goines,” Goode casts Goines solely as someone providing an insider’s perspective of the violent nature of the inner-city without fully exploring the literary aspects of his work. Peter Lehman does explore the literary aspects in Goines work, but only in an attempt to accentuate the sexuality in Goines’ work, in his article, “A ‘Strange Quirk in His Lineage’: Walter Mosley, Donald Goines and the Representation of the White Penis.” Some of the only representations of Goines that are apt are those that investigate his work in relation to hip-hop, which L.H. Stallings does in “I’m Goin Pimp Whores: The Goines

Factor and the Theory of the hip-hop neo-slave narrative” and “Why Hip Hop Heads Loves Goines” by Tracy Grant.

Other popular urban novels are almost entirely ignored by academics, with the exception of an occasional criticism concerning its commercialism or an Iceberg Slim reference alongside Donald Goines. Popular urban literature does however demand the attention of popular publications that are compelled to cover this financially burgeoning market; as such its titles are frequently reviewed in magazines, newspapers and journals. Even the titles of the genre’s literary reviews suggest that they are riddled with sex and violence, like *Essence Magazine’s* 2007 review “Love, Lust, and Lies,” which reduces the work of Eric Jerome Dickey and Omar Tyree to tawdry sex tales. There are also review titles that treat popular urban literature like the U.S. Congress treated gangster rap in the early nineties, such as “Parental Guidance: Gangster Lit: Do you Really Know What Your Teenager is Reading,” by TaRessa Stoval, which was featured in *Black Issues Book Review*.

Similarly, much of the scholarship on hip-hop music and its lyrics either focuses on its sexuality and violence or its political significance. Works by Robin D.G. Kelly, Mark Anthony Neal, and David Canton all suggest that these are the only themes worth exploration. Some scholars even suggest that the shift away from political aspirations for rappers was fueled by their capitalist pursuits, such as Bakari Kitwana, who writes in *Why White Kids Like Hip-Hop*, that “those who were into hip hop back in the 1980s, in the pre-mainstream era, were down for the struggle to create new racial politics. By contrast, kids now are not as political...it’s not even about the music anymore, it’s just all about the money” (67). Kitwana’s view is common within academia, as the influence of capitalism in both the content and production of music is blamed

for hip-hop's losing its way. Though the majority of texts submits to this limited view of hip-hop music, there are texts that explore the nuances of the genre as I do.

For instance, "Extending the Breaks: Fires in the Mirror in the Context of Hip Hop Structure, Style, and Culture," by Steven Feffer, treats hip-hop lyrics as literature when he analyzes a popular urban play that uses the hip-hop lyrics within its text. Further exploration of this topic is necessary as more and more popular urban literature novels have begun to include hip-hop lyrics; and many rappers have begun to write their own books such as Snoop Dogg's, *Love Don't Live Here No More* and Trick Daddy's forthcoming narrative *Magic City: Trials of a Native Son*.

"Tryin' to make of dolla outta fi'teen cents" is a term that both references the capitalist themes found in the content of popular urban literature and acknowledges the genre's aggressive marketing tactics. An expansion of this project would include a review of the marketing practices of producers of popular urban literature, which would reveal how this genre has used savvy and aggressive marketing tactics to promote their works. Although critics like Farah Griffin and Collin Channer contend that commercial fiction and aggressive marketing is destroying African-American literature, there is a longstanding history of African-Americans marketing their own work in an attempt to make more money, as was the case for Oluadah Equiano.

It is from the shortage of scholarship and conflicting scholarship, that I felt urged to make a case for the consideration of the entire genre as I fear that many academics have long dismissed popular urban literature in its entirety. My hope is that through scholarship, I can provide an analysis of popular urban literature that stresses its literary quality as well as its relation to other

canonical texts. Ideally, my work will create a dialect on the value and literary quality of popular urban literature, which may one day lead to its inclusion in the canon.

Unlike the lauded and canonized Black artists who preceded and composed the Civil Rights era and used their art as a tool to overcome oppression, producers of popular urban literature speak to a disenfranchised urban audience and appear to privilege monetary gain over racial equality and uplift, both in their personal lives and artistic production, inasmuch that they base their art and lives around the environments in which they are most familiar, which is often times the inner-city. The term “inner-city” is used as opposed to “ghetto,” because as Robert Wilson notes, “the word ‘ghetto’ is stereotypic in that it evokes an image of a disorganized neighborhood which contains an overdose of pathologies associated with urbanization;” while the term “inner-city” focuses on the urbanity of the area as well as its exclusionary nature, as it is truly a city within a city that operates by its own set of rules, (66). Within these areas, where poverty is commonplace, unemployment rates are highest, and violent crime is an everyday occurrence, the acquisition of money becomes pivotal for inhabitants of the inner-city. And when reviewing the work of its cultural producers, rappers and authors, capitalism is at the core of their story lines.

When V.F. Calverton published his *Anthology of American Negro Literature* in 1929, he wrote in his introduction that “Negro art and literature in America had an economic origin” and that “all that is original to Negro folk-lore or singular in Negro spirituals and Blues, can be traced to the economic institution of slavery and its influence upon the Negro soul” (Mullen 145). Although Calverton’s assertion about the origin of Black arts production in America ignores the influence of African culture and negates the existence of Black art that exists solely as art, devoid of racial or economic undertones, he does accurately denote the influence of the

economic institution of slavery on Black artists. I contend that this influence not only created narratives about slavery's atrocities, poems to express its effects, songs that called for freedom, and prose that begged for equality, but it also created narratives that internalized slavery's brutal capitalistic nature and reproduced it using Black literary tropes such as signifying and naming/(un)naming.

Popular urban literature mimics the market savvy of the slave trade, as well as the unconscionable profit at any cost mentality of slave holders. Popular urban literature is a term I am using to collapse gangster fiction, ghetto fiction, black pulp fiction, and hip-hop fiction into one larger category that also recognizes the literary value of musical lyrics. These multiple subgenres of African-American literature, although different, focus their plots around Black urban life and experiences, and are centered on capitalist themes, with the roots of these capitalist themes stemming from necessity. Christine Meloni suggests that "these tales of street culture go by many names: urban fiction, street lit, hip hop lit, ghetto fiction, ghetto lit," and that she only uses the term "hip-hop lit" because it is easily identified and "like hip-hop lyrics, the genre reflects the culture of the streets set in the urban world of hustlers, gang members and thugs, wannabe rappers and their girlfriends" (48). As such, it can be inferred that this type of literature is frequently renamed although its content remains the same; furthermore, Meloni's inference that hip-hop lyrics mimic these street tales suggests that such lyrics should also be treated as literature.

Although Hip-hop lyrics are orally delivered, I contend that these lyrics are treated as both literary and oral works by the majority of consumers and some scholars. For consumers, actually seeing the lyrics is oftentimes a priority as the rate of word delivery may be very high or words may be inaudible to some degree. Accordingly, music companies began including printed

lyrics along with the albums, a number of online sites emerged specializing in hip-hop lyrics, and MTV2 even features a weekly show, *Hip-Hop's Toughest Rhymes*, which scrolls hip-hop lyrics along the bottom of the screen. This nuanced consumption of hip-hop lyrics makes a compelling case for its consideration as literature. In fact, all anthologies of African-American literature feature oral forms of communication such as folktales, spirituals, and blues songs; and the *NAAAL* and *Call and Response*, both feature hip-hop lyrics. Furthermore, a number of scholars have begun to recognize hip-hop lyrics for their literary worth, as Brent Wood does in "Understanding Rap as Rhetorical Folk-Poetry" where he explores the poetic quality of hip-hop lyrics. Therefore, its inclusion in the genre of popular urban literature is based on the consumption of hip-hop as something that is read *and* listened to, its similar audience, and capitalist themes.

The audience and producers of popular urban literature vary across class and racial lines; however, it is produced from the perspective of underclass and working class Blacks and the majority of its producers and consumers are Black. Even though it has been argued that whites are the primary consumers of hip-hop music, as Bakari Kitwana notes, these assertions are based on soundscan sales which do not reflect the actual race of the consumer, only the area in which the album was purchased; and soundscan fails to reflect mix tape sales and untraceable downloads, which are arguably hip-hop's main two vehicles of delivery. Novels that fall under the genre of popular urban literature however, are consumed almost entirely by Blacks, who have been credited for the success of authors like Donald Goines, Terry McMillan, and Eric Jerome Dickey.

Producers of popular urban literature write primarily to and about working class and underclass Blacks whom Marx would consider to be members of the proletariat, or those who

have only their labor to sell in a free market. But even as members of the proletariat, these working class and underclass Blacks, who fill inner-cities across America, were forced to assimilate into a capitalist economy and seek to join the bourgeoisie as were many foreign countries. In *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx writes:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid movement of instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeoisie mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeoisie themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (4)

The protagonists and/or producers of popular urban literature and many of its consumers, do not have the necessary tools for success available to them such as a good education, quality housing, food, clothing, and employment. Manning Marrable suggests in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, that unemployment and the collapse of unions in the post-Civil Rights era led to a “growing dependency of broad segments of the Black community of public assistance programs and transfer payments of various kinds” (32). Much like the “barbarian nations” Marx speaks of, the disenfranchised that Marrable mentions and producers and consumers of popular urban literature are forced to conform to the bourgeoisie model of production, as the bourgeoisie possess the tools needed to survive. The existence of popular urban literature is derived from the disenfranchised conforming; as a genre produced from the perspective of underclass and working class Blacks, popular urban literature reflects the economic desperation and lack of opportunities that led working class and underclass Blacks to the bourgeoisie model in both its content and marketing tactics. And as a matter of survival, assimilation is not a choice; as their inability to produce capital leaves them powerless.

When the bourgeoisie model of production is coupled with modern capitalism and the socioeconomic conditions of the inner-city the results are unsettling. One of the basic tenets of modern capitalism, as outlined by Anun Ghosh, is that “it has no concern for the morrow; it lives

essentially for today,” which leads to more “capital-intensive forms of production” that are only concerned with profit margins (553). Furthermore, modern capitalism is dependent upon an “assiduous promotion of ‘consumer culture,’” which not only sustains a free market, but through savvy marketing and the use of various forms of communication, it creates a working class that aspires to attain elitist products that they cannot afford (553). Accordingly, in an atmosphere like the inner-city where inhabitants often do not have adequate food and shelter, the acquisition of elitist products cannot be funded by jobs that leave them in poverty. And in an economic culture that has “no concern for the morrow,” crime is seen as only a means to an end, while violence becomes a path to a more “capital-intensive form of production.” While reviewing the effects of capitalism within a modern inner-city setting, Carl and Virgil Taylor argue that:

Beautiful cars, expensive clothes, and other material goods are items of status in a capitalistic society. In the streets, such items determine a person's worth and therefore are so coveted that the means of obtaining them becomes less important than their acquisition (213).

This desire to attain wealth and material goods at any cost that Taylor and Taylor refer to is the mentality that has been adopted by protagonists and creators of popular urban literature. The incorporation of capitalism in these texts as a central theme is evident as wealth acquisition is their primary concern and doing so without fear for the consequences is status quo within the inner-city.

The most apparent use of capitalism as a major theme in popular urban literature can be found in the lyrics of hip-hop music; with songs like C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules Everything Around Me) released by the Wu Tang Clan in 1993, albums titled “Get Rich or Die Trying,” 50 Cent’s in 2001 multi-platinum album, and record labels named Cash Money, it is not difficult to see the proliferation of capitalist themes that exist throughout the genre. However, beneath the visible markers of capitalism in hip-hop music lies a more complex and subtle representation of

capitalism in the lives of working class and underclass Blacks that addresses both the need and want to embody capitalism.

Grammy award winning hip-hop artist T.I. is all too familiar with the need and want to embrace capitalism which so many experience; from his experiences selling drugs to pay bills to selling millions of records to buy Bentleys, T.I. has incorporated capitalism into his music as a major theme. As he seemingly boasts about “cutting school to sell fifty dimes by dinnertime” on “Doin’ My Job,” a track from 2003’s *Trap Muzik*, he is not advocating the sale of drugs, but as he goes on to rap “we got lives, we wanna live nice too/we got moms, dads, wives, kids just like you/but our options are few/it’s hell in high school/when you gotta help out with the rent, lights and gas bill too.” He realizes that selling drugs is his most viable option as he not only wants to survive, but “live nice too.” Moreover, while conveying his experiences with capitalism, T.I. employs traditional Black literary tropes.

One of the most common literary tropes employed by rappers is the use of African American English, which George Yancy suggests is “a significant site of Black cultural innovation, syncretism, and survival, laden with situated epistemological insights” (277). Through the use of African-American English rappers employ a language which is specific to African-Americans and continue a communal tradition that dates back to the days of slavery; and “in the literary world, Africanized English is a recognized literary element found in the works of celebrated creative writers” (McLaren 1). Arguably, hip-hop music employs African-American English as well as or better than a number of acclaimed literary texts; Geneva Smitherman contends that “rap music is rooted in the Black Oral Tradition of tonal semantics, narrativizing, signification/signifyin, the Dozens/playin the Dozens, Africanized syntax, and other communicative practices”(qtd. in West 269). T.I. signifies in this track by using slang,

vernacular, and a structure that is specifically familiar to his audience, and in doing so, “such existential events are constructed within a narrative structure, moving within a deep cultural semiotic space of familiarity” (Yancy 296). When T.I. raps; “Instead of calling the law and bustin’ my balls/with all due respect, we don’t even be fuckin’ with y’all,” he refers to the calling the police as “calling the law,” a term used within the inner-city, and harassment as “bustin’ my balls,” a term popularized by the influence of mob culture on hip-hop. In doing so, he makes this song very specific to his audiences’ linguistic praxis, and by using the narrative structure of hip-hop, which involves verses, rhyming, and slang, he is able to use African-American language as a literary trope.

Another literary trope found within hip-hop music is the bad man figure, which according to John Roberts in *From Tricksters to Badmen*, can be traced back to defiant slaves who “refused to accept either the master’s physical powers as a match for their own physical determination, or to accept the values of the black community as binding on them” (176). T.I. performs the role of the bad man by dressing, behaving, and speaking in a manner that both whites and some Blacks disapprove of, and focuses the content of his music around the lifestyle of a drug dealer that has little regard for the law. In doing so, he becomes what David Canton would describe as an “urban trickster, whose words, not actions are designed to create chaos” (Canton 251). T.I.’s actions do not create chaos. As a multi-million dollar rapper far removed from selling drugs, his actions are no longer threatening; but his words deceive by projecting a life he does not live and by twisting the literal meanings of the words he uses. The title of T.I.’s song, “Doin’ My Job,” which revolves around his selling drugs, is ironic because he refers to his illegal activities as a “job,” a term typically applied to legal pursuits. He goes on to normalize his activities by stating in the song’s chorus, “don’t mind me, I’m just doin’ my job,” as though his activities are

commonplace. The music for the track continues to distort images by using the trope of signifying to sample and reinvent the 1979 song “I’m Just Doing My Job“ by Bloodstone, an R&B, funk and soul band.

Donald Goines’s novels also feature capitalism as a major theme. For Goines’s characters, the acquisition of wealth is more important than the means by which it is acquired; and Goines leaves no stone unturned concerning the many types of methods used to acquire money. Throughout his works there is a plethora of criminal activities used by his protagonists to acquire money, ranging from faux weddings to prostitution to gambling. Most disturbingly, however, is the use of violence by Goines’s characters to gain money. There are even characters who are paid assassins, such as Daddy Cool and *El Dorado Red’s* Tank. Conversely, even those who are not prone to violence, like *White Man’s Justice*, *Black Man’s Grief’s*, Chester Hines, an imprisoned thief, who is forced to use violence to acquire wealth. Goines writes of Hines, “Only when money was involved was he able to resort to [violence] without any emotion; then he was a deadly weapon,” (175). His ability to disregard his emotions, his morals, and the law in hopes of attaining money further indicates that violence and criminality are always options within the inner city. And the fact that Chester is able to transform into a “deadly weapon,” shows that there are no limits, criminal or otherwise, to his pursuits.

Goines also explores the ways that society has failed his protagonists and forced them into pursuing wealth through criminality. He does this by directly noting the ways that traditional education has failed through *Inner City Hoodlum’s* protagonist, Johnny, the son of an alcoholic mother and unemployed father, who spent his nights stealing in order to support his family. Goines writes, “Johnny had quit school, realizing that...he would never learn anything valuable that would allow him to survive. At sixteen years of age, Johnny had realized that only

by making on the streets would he be able to survive in the jungle of the ghetto” (83). For Johnny, the streets offer the most valuable education available to him; learning to steal, selling drugs and using violence will meet his immediate needs far more effectively than learning Math, Science and English. *Dopefiend* contains a similar story that depicts Teddy, a heroin addicted thief, reliving the days of his childhood when “he would steal enough stuff from the various stores and bring home some of the stolen meat,” (57). As an adolescent, Teddy is forced to support both himself and his family and stealing was the only viable option available to him; and since school did not teach such skills Teddy dropped out. Thus, Goines’s protagonists must acclimate themselves to the marginalized society in which they belong by embracing capitalism at all costs.

Popular urban literature uses traditional Black tropes to convey stories centered around capitalist pursuits as T.I. does in the lyrics of “Doin’ My Job” and as Goines did in his novels. These texts continue African-American literary traditions and exhibit multiple canon-worthy attributes, but are excluded because of the often profane, violent, and criminal undertones found in the texts. Nonetheless, these artists appeal to a very large and broad audience that has made their genre successful.

In the high brow world of literary studies, popularity is enough to preemptively discredit actual literary value as popular texts are rarely if ever, included, as is the case for Terry McMillan, whose bestselling novels were overlooked by the canon in favor of a far less popular short story. This assertion is often posited on the fact that popular art is popular because it is simple and lacks depth, insinuating that the public is incapable of appreciating art that is worthy of scholarship. Accordingly, works and authors that seek popularity are branded the worst of the worst. Griffin writes that, “unfortunately, a number of aspiring writers believe their books will

pave the way to wealth” and “longs for the days when the most highly visible and widely read Black writers cared as much about craft as they did sales (in some cases more so) and saw themselves as a part of a politically engaged literary tradition” (171). Griffin’s assault on contemporary writers is based on his belief that writers who write for money cannot produce work that is worthy of scholarship. However, the canon features a number of popular and financially successful writers such as Terry McMillan and James Baldwin; and many artists such as Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman catalog times in their lives when they wrote with the sole purpose of making money. The attitude Griffin exhibits is typical and contributes to the exclusion of popular urban artists from the canon such as Donald Goines who wrote to support his heroin habit.

Unlike the works found in *Norton Anthology of African-American Literature (NAAAL)*, edited by great literary minds like Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hortense Spillers, and *Call and Response*, edited by prominent scholars such as Trudier Harris and Bernard W. Bell, popular urban literature would not be deemed work that “merits preservation and sustains classroom interest,” as the preface of the *NAAAL* suggests (xxxvii). Instead, many prominent scholars argue that “the literary quality and the political and social vision of Black fiction suffers with the rise of Black commercial fiction,” like popular urban literature (Griffin 171). Nonetheless, some of these scholars, such as Gates and Bell, have studied popular culture academically, but do not fight for their inclusion in the canon. As such, many valuable and influential African-American texts are excluded from the canon of African-American literature for their popularity and content. Popular urban literature not only lacks recognition and inclusion because of its financial success and popularity, but because the content of the stories feature capitalistic plots and/or subplots.

On the surface, the exclusion of popular urban literature could easily be attributed to the great divide, a theory that separates what is considered high and low art, but the divide in African-American literature is far more complex. As the great divide thrives on the notion that high art is, as Scholes describes, “‘necessarily difficult’ and requires work from the cultivated consumer,” it is also likely that the great divide, “expresses an important truth about a great social division between the exploiters and the exploited” (248, 251). However, when considered within the realm of African-American literature, the great divide does not privilege the exploiters over exploited; rather, it reveals the truth about the social divide between Black scholars and working class Blacks. This divide is evident as texts deemed worthy of preservation and study are only determined by elite black scholars who create canons and anthologies within the vacuum of academia.

Anthologies are made by academics and for academics, to be taught primarily on college campuses; as such it is presumable that its content would mirror the high/low class divide that is evident in all scholarship as academia itself is an elitist arena that thrives on exclusion. Then again, when creators of African-American anthologies contend that their selections were made to “illuminate the relationship between literary artists and the black culture within which they were writing,” as the preface of *Call and Response* states, one cannot help but wonder why some aspects of Black culture are deemed worthy of illumination and others are not (xxxiv). If James Weldon Johnson’s belief that the work of black authors must inevitably be an “aspect of their larger struggle for freedom,” and that they can never escape this role as their work “serves a *prima facie* evidence of the Negro’s intellectual potential,” then surely works that do not best represent the race in ways that whites will recognize as markers of intelligence should not be amplified (*NAAAL* xxxv). Although some Black scholars of today recognize that Blackness has

its own tropes and merits of greatness, such as Signifying and other oral traditions, and that Black intelligence is represented in a number of arenas, others also operate under the notion that “an African-American literary canon is required to be politically combative, a documentary of suffering and resistance” (Fox 9). Therefore, works that do not feature a politically combative tone and base their documentation of suffering and resistance on capitalists endeavors, do not qualify for inclusion in the canon.

Despite the many complaints scholars and others have about the most prominent canons on the market today, the *NAAAL* and *Call and Response*, it must be acknowledged that these scholars did an excellent job when they undertook the difficult task of cataloging hundreds of years of Black literature into a collection that features the vast majority of significant Black authors and works. No matter what criteria were used to make their selections, there would have been complaints, as is always the case when inclusion and exclusion is involved.

Before exploring the exclusion of certain texts and authors, we must first examine the creation of the canon, beginning with those who conceptualized it and selected the works that comprise it; these scholars are frequently referred to as the “Norton Generation.” Most readily identified with the creation of an African-American literary canon is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., editor of the most popular anthology, the *NAAAL*, and one of the most recognizable and respected Black Scholars working today. Gates graduated from Yale and Cambridge before teaching at elite institutions such as Yale, Cornell and Duke; after being hand selected to run the African-American Studies Department at Harvard, and receiving the coveted MacArthur Prize Fellowship, often referred to as the “genius grant,” Gates became a highly recognized and well respected scholar (Thomas 210). In addition to Gates, other elite scholars such as Hortense Spillers who taught at Cornell University before moving to Vanderbilt University, Barbara T.

Christian from the University of California, Berkeley, and the late Nellie McKay, who received her Master's and Ph.D. from Harvard before receiving tenure at the University of Wisconsin Madison, were also key contributors to the *NAAAL*, which is considered to be the pinnacle of African-American literary anthologies.

Call and Response also features a bevy of elite scholars such as Patricia Liggins Hill, the anthology's general editor who received her Ph.D. from Stanford University. Other scholars include Trudier Harris, J. Carlyle Sitterson, Professor of English at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Bernard Bell, former MLA chair of the Division of Black American Literature and Culture, as well as Sondra A. O'Neale, former Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wayne State University. Unlike the *NAAAL*, *Call and Response* is not considered the primary African-American literature anthology, but is recognized as a valuable compliment to the *NAAAL* and features many of the same contributors and some of the same editors.

Indeed, the undertaking of the important and difficult task of canon-making should call on the best and brightest minds in the field of African-American studies, as have *Call and Response* and the *NAAAL*. However, as Gregory V. Thomas writes in "The Canonization of Jazz and Afro-American Literature," the use of scholars can be problematic when canons are constructed by "a few institutional elites, who may use narrow, self-serving criteria for selection" (292). Arguably this could be said of Gates who focused the construction of the *NAAAL* around signifying, a decision which may have been influenced by his 1988 book *The Signifying Monkey*, possibly narrowing the scope of the anthology. To be fair, however, Gates' inclusion and recognition of signifying in the *NAAAL* is justified, as the *NAAAL* is deservedly praised for its focus on the oral tradition and vernacular found in African-American literature. The true

problem with choosing only scholars to construct a list of the most important texts is, as Gerald Early put it, “the anthology strives to be democratic, inclusive, and egalitarian, while being elitist and exclusive in an Arnoldian fashion at the same time,” (4). It is almost impossible to create a canon that is truly egalitarian when those constructing it are all from the upper echelon of society; to be truly egalitarian and democratic, the Norton Generation should have included an array of intelligences from many different walks of life.

The scholars who followed the Norton Generation, however, do acknowledge popular urban literature’s scholastic potential. Currently, numerous universities offer courses and degrees on hip-hop studies, ranging from its cultural influence to lyrical analyses, as they have begun to realize that there is a demand for the study of hip-hop and content that deservedly needs to be explored. Post-Norton scholars such as Robin D. G. Kelly, Bakari Kitwana, L.H. Stallings, Greg Goode, and Michael Eric Dyson have also begun to write about artists such as Donald Goines, Tupac Shakur, and Iceberg Slim, and are working to convince others of their importance. Although these scholars are in the minority, their contributions pave the way for including popular urban literature in the discussion of all great African-American literature.

Creators of the canon are not only constructing anthologies with altruistic intentions, but with a very definitive purpose which is pedagogical in nature. The *NAAAL* states in its preface under “Principles of Selection,” that they have “endeavored to choose for the Norton Anthology works of such a quality that they merit preservation and sustain classroom interest,” and based on their judgment they have unequivocally selected the texts that “define the canon of African-American literature at the present time”(xxxvii). However, in doing so they have neglected contemporary working class blacks, adding to what Carmen Kynard refers to as “the tangled knots of rhetorical and institutional practices endemic to the racist, class-based, hierarchical functioning of higher

education that chokes out the intellectual, human capabilities and revolutions of poor and working class students of color” (kynard 33). She goes on to argue that she “is not interested in...pimping a discourse of race upliftment,” much like the entirety of the *NAAAL* features (33). Clearly, kynard’s feelings about the pedagogical implications of standardized education and curriculum are strong, but they are also astute insofar as Black working class literature is not being included in the traditional classroom curriculum, because it is seen as inferior and incapable of racial uplift.

Call and Response also has pedagogical intent, as it is accompanied by a “comprehensive instructor’s manual” that “weaves successful practices for generating innovative classroom discussions and ideas for linking authors and selections...the manual also includes recommendations for effectively introducing the compact disc into both lecture formats and class discussions” (xxxvii). While it could be argued that the mere existence of an anthology with an accompanying instructor’s manual is representative of Paulo Freire’s banking method, which involves instructors “making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge,” the *Call and Response* instructor’s manual does call for dialogue between students and teachers (Freire 77). Yet, it is likely that the dialogue between students and teachers is ineffective by Freire’s standards, as he suggests that “the dialogue cannot...become a simple exchange of ideas to be consumed by the discussants” (89). If dialogue around the required texts and anthologies allowed students to influence their teachers, in addition to teachers’ influencing their students, than a call for change in the content of the canon would arise in favor of inclusion of popular urban literature. This would be inevitable, as the unexpected global success of hip-hop culture and music has sparked a curiosity about the urban experience and has a fan base which is now emerging in classrooms and offices on college campuses across America. Changes

to curriculum have been slow, and those in power seem to remain reticent to include popular urban literature as a major field of study.

As far as content is concerned for these anthologies, there have been debates that argue that “the Riverside anthology is more ‘militant’ than the Norton,” and that the Norton is “conservative in its content and presentation;” however, I contend that they are quite similar in both content and form (Fox 8-9). Between the two anthologies there are a number of authors, poems and spirituals that appear in both texts, from DuBois, to Amiri Baraka to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five to Terry McMillan; the selections are considerably varied and include a number of different types of Black art production from plays to song lyrics and even sermon transcripts. These canons appear to be inclusive, but they do not adequately trace the progression of certain aspects of Black literature and culture, such as criminality, sexuality, and capitalism, and by choosing to negate these works from the canon, important facets of Black literature and culture go unpreserved and expelled from classrooms. These anthologies preserve the progression of the most honorable aspects of black literature that involve the fight against oppression, accounts of slavery, and identity issues, ignoring the progression of sexuality, criminality, and capitalism. In the spirit of “books speaking to books,” as Virginia Wolfe phrased it, the *NAAAL* contends that “its sheer scope and inclusiveness enable readers to trace the repetitions, tropes, and signifying that define the tradition;” it continues, “African-Americans often extend or signify upon other works in the black tradition, structurally and thematically” (xxxvi). Popular urban literature works within the tradition by continuing to use a number of traditional tropes, and signifying on existing themes of capitalism found within the canon itself.

Capitalism has always been a part of Blacks’ experience in America, beginning with their acquisition and arrival as Africans sold by their countrymen to whites as slaves, trading their

lives for personal gain. Accounts of capitalism evolved from literal accounts to folklore and finally to written text within the Black community. Within both anthologies, stories of capitalist endeavors can be seen within African folklore like the story of “Rabbit Teaches Bear a Song,” which features the Br’er rabbit offering the Bear’s life in exchange for goods. More reminiscent of the of capitalism found in popular urban literature, “The Life and Confession of Johnson Green,” which catalogues the life of a career thief who never learned his lesson, and crossed whomever was in his way to steal more goods, expresses greed and excess in a similar fashion. Most famously bad men like Stagolee, featured in the poem of the same name, shot an acquaintance dead to recoup money lost in a bet. One of the only “recent” entries, 1982’s “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, reflects the capitalism found in working class Black life that is prevalent within popular urban literature.

Works that could fill the gaps left in this tradition include Iceberg Slim’s *Pimp: The Story of My Life*, Donald Goines’s *Black Girl Lost*, Sister Souljah’s *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Tupac Shakur’s album *All Eyez on Me*, and Eric Jerome Dickey’s *Thieves’ Paradise*. These texts not only exhibit capitalism within the working class Black community, but incorporate a number of tropes that have been used by Black artists throughout history. They possess literary qualities that are comparable and, in some instances, superior to those found within the canon.

The remainder of this piece will feature a review of popular urban literature that should be included in the canon of African-American literature, in an attempt to encourage consideration for the entire genre. Chapter One will trace the history and progression of capitalist themes within African-American literature. This should yield a clearer understanding of popular urban literature’s origins, and shed light on previously neglected capitalist themes. Artists like Donald Goines, Tupac Shakur and Vickie Stringer build upon themes, tropes and traditions found within

the *NAAAL* and *Call and Response*. These relationships will be explored in Chapter Two in hopes of demonstrating that the texts' focus on capitalism does not devoid them of being literary texts worth serious scholarly exploration. The vulgarity, violence, and sex in these texts is not reason to ignore the many connections these works share with the finest African-American literary texts. The inclusion of popular urban literature into the canon is imperative, as it preserves a facet of Black life that is often forgotten. Popular urban literature speaks for the disenfranchised, explores capitalism within the Black community, and explores problems that have long been ignored; if this is not reason enough for inclusion, it also employs traditional Black literary tropes in innovative ways.

CHAPTER 2
FROM THE BR'ER TO THE BRONX: EXPLORING CAPITALIST THEMES IN AFRICAN-
AMERICAN LITERATURE

The roots of popular urban literature can be traced back to the 1950s Harlem detective novels written by Chester Himes, such as 1954's *For Love of Imabelle*, also known as *The Five-Cornered Square* and *A Rage in Harlem*. Detectives Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones track a thief named Jackson, who coincidentally lost his life savings to a con man claiming to change ten dollar bills into hundreds. Himes' tales of urban crime that featured capitalist themes made him financially successful in both America and France; however, when compared with Himes' earlier works, which mimic Richard Wright's, Ralph Ellison's, and James Baldwin's explorations of African-American identity, Himes's popular fiction seemed inconsequential. Nevertheless, Himes paved the way for writers such as Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines, who inspired the works of prolific hip-hop artists Tupac and Jay-Z, ambassadors for the hip-hop culture that birthed hybrids like Sister Souljah and Eric Jerome Dickey. The lineage of popular urban literature can be traced back even further as capitalist themes appear in a myriad of canonical and well respected pieces of African-American literature that range from folklore to narratives and plays. Popular urban literature continues the path set forth by many great African-American artists, and excluding their work from the canon is a failure to fully explore African-Americans' experiences with capitalism.

Both the *NAAAL* and *Call and Response* include texts that feature capitalist themes; prominent African-American writers like Lorraine Hansberry and Langston Hughes have also made capitalism a theme in their work. Hansberry does so by exploring the acceptance of capitalist values in her play "A Raisin in the Sun," and Hughes's plays like "Tambourines to Glory" explores the unsavory elements of capitalism. But frequently, scholarship around such texts avoids the capitalist themes found within them in favor of examining African-American

literature as a tool of racial uplift and exploration. Despite the neglect shown to capitalism in African-American literary studies, there is a strong tradition of capitalist themes that began with tales from the Br'er patch and culminated into popular urban literature. While retracing the history of capitalist themes in African-American literature, its connection to popular urban literature becomes obvious, suggesting that popular urban literature's inclusion in the canon does in fact continue existing traditions and themes of African-American culture.

Br'er Rabbit is one of African-American literatures most beloved tricksters, always outsmarting the other Br'er animals to get his way or escape a precarious situation. And while his trickery and word play is recognized for its folkloric quality and signifying, the Br'er Rabbit also uses these skills to aid his acquisition of capital. "Rabbit Teaches Bear a Song," begins with Rabbit secretly killing Miss Reyford's hogs for his own consumption, when she proclaims, "If you tell me who been killin' my hogs I'll give you my daughter," immediately peaking Rabbit's interest ("Rabbit Teaches Bear a Lesson" 61). In this instance Miss Reyford's daughter is, in fact, a commodity; she becomes a commodity because she has no say over her future and is used by her mother as an asset to be traded in return for her hogs. Br'er Rabbit proceeds to frame Bear by teaching him a song which implicates him as the hog thief, causing him to be shot immediately after he sings it for Miss Reyford, securing his acquisition of her daughter.

In this tale, Rabbit's pursuit of capital involves lying, theft, and eventually murder, as Rabbit tricks Bear into pursuing honey surrounded by deadly bees. But like the protagonist and producers of popular urban literature, Br'er Rabbit is forced to use his skills to acquire capital or perish; Robert Cochran contends that the effective use of his skills, trickery and word play allowed Br'er Rabbit to "survive and even triumph in a world ruled by his enemies bent on his destruction" (21). Here Cochran implies that Br'er Rabbit is a disenfranchised member of the

forest, as his world is ruled by those bent on his destruction. Rabbit's manipulation of skills is especially important to his survival as his disenfranchised position makes acquisition especially difficult, as is the case when Rabbit must use trickery to conceal that he has stolen hogs that he rightfully could not have attained. Trickery and word play also aid Br'er Rabbit in achieving success, like being rewarded by Mrs. Rexford for turning in Bear. Br'er Rabbit's use of trickery, word play, and violence as a means of acquisition is one of the earliest cases of capitalism taking center stage in the form of the African-American oral tradition. Similarly, Iceberg Slim's novels feature a bevy of con artists who use trickery and word play to acquire capital as both a tool of survival and a marker of triumph.

The inclusion of capitalism in African-American literature is not just a dichotomy of need and want; there are, in fact, instances where the possession of goods is as important as the motives behind its pursuit. This is the case for Stagolee, or Stack-O-Lee, the bad man folk hero who first appeared in a ballad and "was popular throughout the South during the first decade of the 1900s" ("Railroad Bill" 181). Stackolee is most famous for his bad man antics when he shoots Billy or Bully Lyons. These bad man tactics have often been the focus of research surrounding Stackolee; however, the catalyst of the shooting is not thoroughly explored. John Roberts states in "Stackolee and the Development of a Black Heroic Idea," that there are multiple reasons that the shooting took place, ranging from a dispute over a Stetson hat to a disagreement over gambling; in other versions, he contends that "no explanation is given for the shooting of Billy except that Stackolee is a bad man" (181). Roberts goes on to suggest that the ballad changed over time and for different audiences, varying the cause of the shooting with each performance of the piece. Although both the *NAAAL* and *Call and Response* feature different versions of "Stagolee," both have chosen to include versions that base the shooting on a

gambling dispute over money, which indicates that both creators of this anthology and consumers of Black culture recognize the importance of maintaining capital in the lives of African-Americans.

The version of “Stagolee” featured in *Call and Response* includes Billy Lyon begging Stagolee to spare his life, “Please don’t take my life,/I’ve got three little helpless chillun’/ and one poor, pitiful, wife,” to which Stagolee replies, “you done mistreated me Billy/and I’m bound to take your life” (“Stagolee” 566). This exchange suggests the gravity of Billy Lyon’s indiscretion in the eyes of Stagolee, inasmuch that Stagolee feels “bound” to take his life as other methods of retaliation are no longer sufficient. Billy’s crime, which costs him his life, was threatening Stagolee’s capital. Stagolee states, “What do you think of that?/You win all my money Billy/now you spit in my Stetson hat;” in this stanza, Stagolee’s rage is based on the loss and damage of his goods (566). Not only has Billy Lyon taken all of his money, his most egregious offense, but he commences to spit in his Stetson hat, effectively rubbing salt in Stagolee’s wound and damaging the only object of value left to him. Stagolee even predicates his expression of discontent by questioning the man who wronged him, “Stagolee told Billy Lyons, ‘what you think about that?,’” suggesting that Billy’s actions are so questionable that he should be critical of his own behavior. The excessive force Stagolee uses as a response to Billy Lyons exemplifies how much he covets his capital and is willing to go to great lengths to maintain it. One of popular urban literature’s most prolific artist, Donald Goines, has also written multiple novels that express a desire to maintain capital at all costs, such as *Inner City Hoodlum*, wherein local kingpin Duke goes on a killing spree when his capital is threatened.

Examples of capitalism as a central theme can also be found in the narratives of freed Blacks, as is the case for *The Life and Confession of Johnson Green*, which was dictated in 1786

shortly before Green was executed. Green's narrative is one of the first written accounts that feature an excessive pursuit of material wealth born from necessity that evolved into a pursuit driven by want. The little scholarship that does exist on this piece focuses on Green's criminality, as does much of the scholarship surrounding popular urban literature; for instance, Lorenzo J. Greene titled the reproduction of this piece in 1946's *Phylon* as "Johnson Green-- Burglar," focusing on the criminality of the narrative in an attempt to demonize Green. Lorenzo Greene introduces the narrative by stating that Johnson Green was "probably a kleptomaniac, who purloined articles of trivial value, ranging from a few biscuits to three to four dollars in cash," minimizing Green's financial gains and focusing on his criminality (71). Other scholarly works feature Johnson Green's narrative as an account of 18th century New England crime or Negro crime. Nevertheless, Green's behaviors are indicative of more than just criminality; they exemplify the need to pursue capitalism as well as the desire to attain more than one need.

Lorenzo Greene concedes that Johnson Green's criminal tactics were likely a result of socioeconomic factors: "The terrible housing conditions under which the free Negroes and Indians lived encouraged vice and crime. Moreover, the freedmen found it difficult to find employment because of the prejudice against them, as a result of which many resorted to crime" (71). Like many modern examples of capitalists texts, necessity is the cause of Green's criminal exploits, which are effectively turned into attempts to attain wealth. This is clear as Green often stole more than he needed and spent much of his earnings on women:

Some of the things I have stolen I have used- some of them I have sold- some have been taken from me- some I have hid where I could not find them again- and others I have given to lewd women. (108)

Green's nonchalant attitude about his theft suggests that much of his stealing is no longer done purely out of necessity, but as a way of both attaining a life he could otherwise not afford

and excelling in one of the few opportunities presented to him. It could be, as Lorenzo Greene argues, that Johnson Green is merely a petty kleptomaniac, but it is more likely that Johnson Green was forced to pursue goods through crime as a means of survival and once he was able to survive, he embraced the ways of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, many rappers state that they began in a life of crime as a means of survival, but eventually adopted the bourgeoisie mindset of wealth acquisition.

Even after adopting a capitalist mindset, as Johnson Green did, there are multiple instances in which African-Americans are able to use what they have learned about capitalism against their oppressors. In “Ah’ll Beatcher Makin’ Money,” a folktale found in the NAAAL, the protagonist, a slave named John, does just that. John continually tells Massa that no matter what Massa does to him it will make him money, and after the Massa kills John’s horse and he returns with sacks of money, John convinces Massa that killing his horse will bring him the same prosperity. Massa kills his horse, but reaps no benefits; unbeknownst to the fact that John made his money reading fortunes with the horses hidden in town. The game escalates between them as Massa kills John’s grandmother as well as his own; after gaining nothing and watching John get rich once again through unknown means, Massa has had enough and decides to throw John in the river. But being a clever trickster John makes a secret deal with a frog to release him once Massa throws him in. After returning to see Massa once again with even more money, John manipulates Massa’s greed and convinces him to throw himself in the river as well, only no toad will save him.

John’s manipulation of capitalism in this narrative is masterful insofar that it exhibits the power of possessing money as well as the dangers and joys of pursuing it. Actually possessing money and showing it to Massa is what truly peaks his interest, when John returns with his first

bags of money Massa says to John, “where did you git all dat? [...] Reckon if Ah kilt mah hawse Ah’d make dat much money?” (“Ah’d Beatcher Makin’ Money 109). The more money Massa sees John make, the more willing he is to do things that are nonsensical; John recognizes this and makes a point to go to Massa’s house “wid his stuff so ole Massa could see ‘im“ (110). John keeps Massa’s attention with the money he makes selling fortunes, although Massa does not know where the money comes from. While working in the streets selling fortunes, John hones his own capitalist skills as he uses trickery to increase his prices. One man’s request for an extra reading allows John to maximize the sale; John lies, “Naw, Massa he’s tired now,” only to quickly change positions after the man offers him more money (110). John and Massa’s experiences with capitalism end quite differently and provides the readers with two extreme examples of the results of capitalist pursuits. The dichotomy created by John and Massa is comparable to the dichotomy of pimps and whores found in popular urban literature. Like John, Iceberg Slim’s character White Folks, a light skinned con man who appears in a number of Slim’s novels, uses his whiteness and capitalist savvy against other whites in a number of cons that thrive on the greed of the person being conned.

The type of capitalism found in Johnson Green’s confessional and “Ah’d Beatcher Makin’ Money” is far more self serving than the type of capitalism Booker T. Washington advocated, which viewed assimilation into the capitalist economy as a means of upward mobility for disenfranchised Blacks. Washington’s belief in capitalism as a means of mobility is evident in his research and personal endeavors, as much of his work at Tuskegee focused around teaching blacks to produce their own goods. In a review of Washington’s methods of liberation, John P. Flynn notes that Washington was innovative in “introducing new training methods by employing his students in manufacturing and building their own products” (270). By equating

production with liberation, Washington intended to work within the capitalism in the hopes that hard work and education would achieve their dreams.

Although Washington's call for Blacks to cast down their bucket where they were and begin to work within the system as opposed to against it was not new, it was still heavily contested by Black intellectuals like W.E.B. DuBois, who believed that whites would not be so willing to offer an even playing field to Blacks. While giving an address at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, Washington stated that only through "interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one," would equality be achieved (Washington 515). Like many rappers who have forsaken racial uplift for monetary gain, Recken writes that "Washington discouraged political confrontation and instead emphasized economic advancement," (58). The collaborative capitalism that Washington spoke about as a means of acceptance for Blacks has been reproduced in texts like *Genevieve*, by Eric Jerome Dickey, whose protagonist of the same name believes that her hard work and acquisition of wealth was a result of assimilating into dominant culture's economic and social systems, and that more Blacks would benefit from doing so.

Like DuBois, many Blacks believe that race will forever hinder their full participation in the capitalist system, and seemingly they are right, as the interlocking structures of colonialism, racism, and capitalism have consistently limited Blacks' involvement. Some African-Americans realized that their only opportunity involved abandoning their race. The protagonist of Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, published in 1922, Clare Kendry, passes as white for the majority of her life in the hopes of attaining racial equality and wealth. Clare's willingness to assimilate to whiteness as well as capitalism, suggests that the act of passing "assumes a center-periphery power paradigm with a socioeconomically specific 'whiteness' at its core" (Joo 176). Not only

does Clare aspire to a certain type of whiteness, as she does not pass as a poor white farmer, but she associates the act of passing with power. This power is constantly undermined, however, as her hidden identity forces her to endure racist ridicule from her white husband and friends.

Despite the ridicule, Clare is still more concerned with maintaining the benefits of whiteness. Clare covets the financial and racial freedom so much that she warns Irene, “Why, to get things I want badly enough, I’d do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really ‘Rene, I’m not safe” (Larsen 81). Clare’s willingness to “do anything” to get the things she wants is problematic because she no longer is able to control herself; her obsession with whiteness and its benefits reaches a critical level after her husband discovers that she is Black and she sees that everything her lies have built could be lost. Although gaining capital is not the only benefit of her whiteness, and arguably less important than the accompanying racial freedom, Larsen’s account of Clare’s capitalist pursuits, which have led her to betray her mother and most of her family, is very similar to the capitalist themes found in popular urban literature. Similarly, the protagonists in Eric Jerome Dickey’s novel *Sleeping with Strangers*, follows a protagonist who has surrendered all ties with friends and family to pursue a lucrative career as an assassin.

Like many disenfranchised Blacks who are lured into adopting the practices of the oppressive class, i.e. capitalism, the protagonist of Zora Neal Hurston’s 1933 short story “The Gilded Six-Bits,” Missy May, is attracted by the desire to constantly have more as well. Hurston opens this story with Missy May’s husband Joe throwing silver dollars at her door, as he does every Saturday; however, the arrival of Otis Slimmons from Chicago with his pocket full of gold coins and mouth full of gold forces both Joe and Missy May to long for something more than their silver coins. Joe writes of Otis, “he’s got a five-dollar gold piece for a stick and he got a

ten-dollar piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes' crammed full of gold teeth. Sho wish it was me;" even Missy May admits that she wishes Joe had the type of wealth that Otis did (Hurstun 1014). In "Racial Currency: Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Gilded Six-Bits' and The Gold Standard," Hildegard Hoeller contends that "Otis with his gold money represents, even embodies, the problematic allure for African Americans of a white, urban, corporate America," an allure which cannot always be escaped (771).

Sadly, Missy May's desire to attain more leads her to cheat on her husband in hopes that Slimmons would give her some of his golden coins. After being caught with Slimmons by her husband, her husband forgives but remains aloof to his wife who traded her affection for gold coins, or at least those that appeared to be gold. Slimmons' gold is not real; they are, hence the story's title, gilded gold coins. Thus Missy May's attempts to use her sexuality as a tool of acquisition fail her miserably, as she is cheated by Slimmons, and have caused the cessation of coins being thrown at her door by her husband. Regardless of her success, the fact that Missy May was willing to use her body and reject her role as a wife in order to attain more wealth suggests that she is a sex worker and uses Slimmons to "retaliate for [the] economic exploitation and persecution" she has experienced as a wife and Black woman ("Mutha' is Only Half a Word" 175). Stallings continues by stating that empowerment can be achieved when "the sex worker makes a distinction between her genitalia (pussy) and her sexuality as a commodity," which is what Missy May does as she attempts to take control of her own finances (179). Texts like Hurston's indirectly influenced the capitalist narratives of rappers like Lil' Kim and Trina who also treat their sexuality as a commodity to be traded in spite of politics of respectability that exists for women.

The evolution of capitalist texts, before popular urban literature gained notoriety in the

post-Civil Rights era, peaked with Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play "A Raisin in the Sun." This tremendously important text explores how capitalism divided generations within the Black community, as its applications and goals shifted further and further away from racial uplift. For the entire Younger family, upward financial mobility is ultimately the goal, as they are all working to move out of the inner-city. But after three generations, they remain in a small apartment in which they must share a bathroom with the entire floor. Only the arrival of the family's deceased patriarch's life insurance check, Walter, Sr., presents a viable opportunity to move into a home. The check brings a modicum of wealth to the struggling family and a mound of conflict about how it should be spent.

Mama Younger practically suggests that some of the funds be used on a new house and to pay for her daughter Beneatha's medical school, and that the rest be placed in the bank; her son and family patriarch Walter, Jr., has an entirely different plan for the money. Walter, Jr. wants to invest in a liquor store in the hopes of getting rich, which is his focus throughout the majority of the play. Kristin Matthews accurately characterizes the fundamental difference between Mama Younger, who wants to save, and Walter, Jr., who is waiting for the next "get rich quick" scheme to appear:

Unlike Mama, for whom life is 'freedom.' Walter Lee Younger equates self expression with material gain and wealth, and his aspirations mirror the segment of the post-war black population who believed acquiring capital would ensure entrance into "good" society. (559)

Walter believed that wealth must be actively sought, as life in his eyes boiled down to "the takers and the 'taken'" (Hansberry Act 3, Scene 1). His purely capitalist outlook varies greatly from that of his mother, who valued racial integrity; this is most apparent when Walter, Jr., decides to accept a bribe that would keep his family from moving into a white neighborhood. Although Walter, Jr. eventually rejects the bribe and returns to the tradition of racial uplift,

Hansberry's representation of capitalism in this play highlights the significance of monetary pursuits to modern working class Blacks. These same working class Blacks are, however, currently less likely to reject the pursuit of capital in favor of racial uplift. Donald Goines makes this painfully clear in texts like *Black Gangster* in which the protagonist exploits racial uplift in an attempt to gain more capital by staging a faux civil rights movement to divert attention away from an ensuing robbery.

One of the most recent entries in both anthologies concerning capitalism is Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's 1982 single "The Message." Contrary to the rappers who produce popular urban literature, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five deal with capitalism in an analytical way as opposed to dealing with capitalist pursuits, though still addressing an urban audience from an insider's perspective. In analyzing the effects of capitalism on the inner-city they rap:

You grow up in the ghetto living second rate [...]
You'll admire all the number book-takers
Thugs, pimps, pushers and the big money makers
Driving big cars, spending twenties and tens
And you wanna grow up to be just like them, huh [...]
Turned stick-up kid, but look what you done did
Got sent up for a eight-year bid (64)

In this stanza, Flash & the Furious Five are recapping the conditions that lead many inner-city youths to crime in an attempt to warn them of their inevitable down fall. By exploring the relationship between capitalism and crime from an insider's perspective, they recap how inner-city African-Americans are lured into the capitalist system. Jennifer C. Lena contends in her article "Social Context and Musical Content of Rap Music, 1979-1995" that these lyrics evoked the physical and social deprivation faced by many rappers and their families. These rap lyrics linked "'representin' the ghetto' with keepin' it real" (487). Hence, "The Message" provides the

type of authenticity that is inherent in the best popular urban literature texts, but elects to represent the ghetto with the same mindset of putting the race's best foot forward by lamenting capitalism as opposed to embracing it.

All of the most popular and talented producers of popular urban literature make it a point to show the downside of a life of crime and capitalist pursuits, but this is oftentimes an afterthought that follows a tale filled with the excitement and benefits of capitalists pursuits. "The Message" purposefully ignores the enthralling side of capitalist pursuits, but does recognize it through mockery:

My Son said, "Daddy, I don't want to go to school [...]
And all the kids smoke reefer, I think it'd be cheaper
If I just got a job, learned to be a street sweeper
Dance to the beat, shuffle my feet
Wear a shirt and tie and run with the creeps
'Cause it's all about the money, ain't a damn thang funny
You've got to have a con in this land of milk and honey (63)

This verse mocks those who vehemently pursue capital by exaggerating and demeaning the things people will do to obtain money. For instance, when they write, "dance to the beat, shuffle my feet," they evoke the singing and dancing Sambo figure to describe those with extreme capitalist pursuits. By making the speaker of this verse their son, Flash & the Furious Five cause the content of his words to inherently reflect immaturity. Still, "The Message" focuses around the hardships of capitalism as a systematic tool of oppression. Capitalism is also seen as a systemic tool of oppression by Sister Souljah, who appears in her own novel, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, to educate the protagonist Winter about the trappings of capitalist pursuits.

Thematically, capitalism is an integral part of African-Americans' cultural production; although the topic has garnered little scholarly attention, canonical texts such as "The Gilded Six-Bits," "The Message," and "A Raisin in the Sun," have contributed to the creation of popular urban

literature. By continuing the tradition set forth by these texts, popular urban literature is expanding on an important facet of Black culture that has not been thoroughly explored. Furthermore, popular urban literature continues these traditions by using the traditional tropes of African-American literature.

CHAPTER 3
CAPITALISM, SIGNIFYING, AND NOMMO COLLIDE IN POPULAR URBAN
LITERATURE

When considering the ways that popular urban literature continues the traditions of canonical African-American texts, the use of traditional tropes by contemporary artists most reflects the dialectical relationship with the reader that African-American literature is known for. David Baker argues in “If: On Transit, Transcendence, and Trope” that the use of the trope in literature is intended to reflect the reader and vice versa; he writes:

Literary language, the language of trope and representation, is itself a form of ecstatic or transcendental exchange. As we turn into something else, we turn into ourselves. And as we share the experience of literature, we turn into each other. We share the body. We are all more or less one entity, one life form, as connected to the tree, the stream of water, the humus and rich chemical soil, as to our lovers and children. And we know something resides there in the magic of metaphor. (328)

The “magic of the metaphor” that Baker writes of is the connection that the use of tropes creates between people, cultures, time periods, and circumstances; this same “magic” can be found in African-American literature. Tropes provide an identity for African-American culture, in addition to serving as a tool of connectivity. The identity provided by the use of tropes allows African-American literature to remain autonomous from American literature and continue its own cultural traditions.

Popular urban literature has adopted many of the most prominent tropes that distinguish African-American literature to tell its tales of capitalist pursuits. Hip-Hop music, for instance, has made signifying a required tool of communication through its adoption of metaphorical language, boasting, and toasting. While novels by Eric Jerome Dickey, Donald Goines, and Vickie Stringer explore the trope of naming/(un)naming, as Zora Neale Hurston and Ralph Ellison once did. The artists who create popular urban literature have used these tropes as tools for remaining connected to the history of African-American literature, while at the same time

adding to that history by making capitalism their focus. In spite of its focus on capitalism, popular urban literature employs these tropes as well as or better than canonical urban texts, more than justifying its scholarly merit.

Prominent scholar and NAAAL editor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s groundbreaking 1988 book *The Signifying Monkey* explores the trope of signifying in African-American literature. He contends that signifying originated with the Yoruban divine trickster Esu; the literature surrounding Esu frequently "concern[s] the origin, the nature and the function of interpretation and language use 'above' that of ordinary language" ("*Signifying Monkey*" 6). Esu's concern with interpretation and language use, when coupled with the comically ironic trickery of the monkey figure, which appeared in a number of African myths, evolved into Afro-American's Signifying Monkey. Gates argues that the Signifying Monkey is "not only is a master of technique [...] he is technique or style, or the literalness of literary language; he is the great signifier. In this sense one does not signify something; rather, one signifies in some way" (54). Referred to as the "master trope," signifying is an umbrella for a number of other African-American literary tropes and signifying in "some way" can occur in a number of ways. Geneva Smitherman writes in *Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans*, that signifying is a style of verbal play that contains the following characteristics:

indirection, circumlocution; metaphorical-imagistic (but images rooted in the everyday, real world); humorous, ironic; rhythmic fluency and sound; teachy but not preachy; directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context (siggers do not talk behind your back); punning, play on words; introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected. (121)

The variety of word play games that Smitherman introduced suggests that signifying can occur in a number of different arenas. No type of cultural production more readily employs multiple types of signifying than hip hop music.

The correlation between hip-hop lyrics and popular urban novels is extremely strong and

referenced by a number of scholars. For instance, L.H. Stallings acknowledges the dialectal relationship between hip-hop and Goines: “Hip-Hop does not inspire or come to a Goines novel; hip-hop culture reflects back and samples Goines’s texts, even if they are written,” (176). It is in these reflections and samples that hip-hop lyrics portray the same qualities as popular urban novels. Greg Goode describes Goines’s works as “the most sustained, realistic, multifaceted, widespread picture ever created...of the lives, activities and frustrations of poor urban blacks;” while hip-hop “has become the voice of choice for young people who find themselves on the margins,” continuing the work of Goines by sharing the experiences of the marginalized, (Goode 43 and Taylor and Taylor 210).

Rap music could easily be defined as profane, its lyrics are filled with obscenities, crime, sex, and violence; surprisingly however, its masterful use of signifying has divine origins. The performance of sermons within the African-American church signifies using the same tactics as rap music; Cheryl Wharry states that sermons feature “distinct textual features of rhyme, tempo, pitch, and formulaic language,” and that “aesthetic strategic elements such as elaboration, exaggeration, and metaphor are evident,” all of which are qualities that rap music possesses (204). It has been suggested by Michael Eric Dyson and Cornel West that rap music is in fact “a bridge figure who combines the two potent traditions in black culture: preaching and music” (Dyson 408). Stylistically, rap music and sermons have many similarities, but popular urban literature has employed its methods in order to promote capitalism as opposed to religion. A review of C.L. Franklin’s sermon “The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest” found in the NAAAL and Nas’s 1999 song “Money is My Bitch” will demonstrate how popular urban literature signifies in the same manner as canonical African-American literary texts.

The use of metaphor by Franklin and Nas in these readings are nearly identical; Franklin

likens God to an Eagle and Nas represents money as “his bitch,” or lover. In doing so, both offer in depth descriptions of their metaphorical representation, as it has taken center stage in their texts. Franklin describes God’s magnificence as regal, fast, strong, and visionary like an eagle; accordingly, Nas’s description of money as his bitch praises everything from her “green eyes,” to her shapely body, while never forgetting all of the things “his bitch” can buy him. Within both, the authors have used metaphors that are rooted in the reality of their listening audience.

Franklin’s use of the eagle correlated with America’s recent adoption of the eagle as its national bird and Nas’s metaphor of money as “his bitch,” is reflective of both the misogynistic culture of hip-hop music, as well as the patriarchal nature of the country, which has long treated women as something to be possessed.

Furthermore, both artists use their metaphors to make their messages less preachy but still informative; and to do so, as Geneva Smitherman writes, “the rapper,” and I contend the preacher as well, “must be lyrically/linguistically fluent; he or she is expected to testify, to speak the truth, to come wit it in no uncertain terms” (“The Chain Remains the Same” 4). This lyrical and linguistic fluency is apparent when Nas warns about the dangers of becoming enslaved to money: “Ohhhhh...love her cause she keep a nigga rich/Ohhh....but I think she got me pussy whipped,” a slang term that negatively characterizes someone for being solely controlled by the pursuit of sex. Here Nas’s implementation of slang makes his lesson clear, while at the same time not alienating his audience: money is good, but being completely controlled by it can be bad. Franklin’s use of the eagle similarly relates to his audiences. While describing how the eagle removes branches from the nest to make it less comfortable for her eaglets, Franklin says that, “God has to pull out a little of the plush around us, a little of the comfort around us, and let a few thorns of trial and tribulation stick through the nest to make us pray sometimes” (Franklin

73). His use of language, metaphor, and delivery make this “teachy not preachy,” yet still allows him to stress the importance of prayer.

Another form of signifying that has made African-American literature both rich and full is its use of humor and irony, which was first seen in hymns sung by slaves. Gordon writes, “humor in the folk tales and protest hymns of slaves had roots in West African tradition...Humor resonated through the music of slaves. The double entendre shrouded in lyrics ‘provided a small measure of comic relief from the cruelty of slavery’” (256). Thus, African-American comedy was born out of pain. Within black comedy, the use of language has always been prominent. Notably roasting, toasting or “‘playing the dozens,’ one of the more popular African-American language games, is also a strategic tool. These games are part of the humor that continues to fulfill the need for a sense of power in the midst of misery, the need for both a morale booster and amusement in black culture” (Gordon 258). Langston Hughes masterfully used humor in his plays and short stories to entertain his audience and comment on social issues through the use of irony. Producers of popular urban literature have continued the use of humor and irony in a like manner to express their experiences with capitalism. A study of Hughes’s 1935 play “Little Ham” and Kanye West’s 2005 song “Gold Digger” exemplifies the continued use of signifying through humor and irony.

“Little Ham” revolves around a small man named Little Ham from “Alabam” who “don’t give a damn” (Hughes Act 1, Scene 1). Similar to this introduction, Little Ham offers quips throughout the play that likely enamored audiences with his playful trickster attitude. Most notably, Ham is involved in “‘Playing the dozens,’ one of the more popular African-American language games,” in order to both lighten the mood and “fulfill the need for a sense of power in the midst of misery;” for Ham, his quips both humor others and allow him to employ the power

of words even as a disenfranchised person (Gordon 258). Ham's love interest, Tiny, who Hughes describes in his stage notes as "a large fat brown skin woman," is mocked throughout the play, but the most comical insults involve the use of irony (Hughes Act 1, Scene 1). The fact that her name is "Tiny" is ironic enough, but Hughes builds on this comical irony through the dialogue of Ham who sweet talks Tiny by constantly referring to her as small and little, to which Tiny finally responds, "you know I ain't little" (Act 1, Scene 1). Ham even engages in a game of dozens with Gilbert, Tiny's scorned lover; Gilbert yells from the closet that "none of you didn't have no mammy." Ham sharply answers, "well your'n must be a mole, what borned you in a coal mine, 'cause even your voice sounds caved in" (Act 3, Scene 1). This exchange, which signifies by using comedy, as well as a number of other tropes such as Black Dialect, irony, metaphors, call and response and toasting, eases the tension of Gilbert being locked in the closet with a gun and provides an opportunity for Little Ham to exert his power.

Hughes continues by using irony and humor to comment on police misconduct within Black communities. Upon the police's catching Ham and his friend Shingle with numbers slips, Ham says to his friend, in front of the police, that "they'll [the police] give the years to you --and the money to them, if any one of 'em hits," to which his friend quickly replies, "this ain't no laughin' matter" (Hughes Act 1, Scene 1). Even in the face of potential jail time, Ham uses humor to comment on the irony of police officers who arrest people for running numbers, but would keep any winnings seized during an arrest. More importantly, as Smitherman suggested earlier, Ham signifies in the face of his oppressor, as signifying does not occur behind one's back.

In terms of signifying through the use of comedy, West plays the dozens with the best of them while focusing on capitalism. Kanye offers comical commentary for both the gold digger

and her victim: “ You will see him on TV, any given Sunday/Win the Superbowl and drive off in a Hyundai/She was supposed to buy ya shorty Tyco with ya money/She went to the doctor got lipo with ya money.” Regardless of the sympathy shown to the male protagonist and women being described as trifling, selfish, neglectful mothers, West makes these assertions by comically juxtaposing the male’s Super Bowl performance with a mediocre vehicle and showing how quickly child support can become personal support when dealing with a gold digger.

The use of irony in Kanye West’s “Gold Digger” is as potent as Hughes’s work, insofar as his comical representations remain true to the customs of African-American humor. West’s art is specific to African-American life and could be considered “ethnic humor,” which Arnez and Anthony imply is in-group and “pokes fun at its customs, its idioms, its folkways...and helps to provide a social cohesiveness among people that are outside of the mainstream” (Arnez and Anthony 340). The use of the term “gold digger,” although it originated in the early twentieth century, has become prominent within the misogynist discourse of hip-hop, as rappers, like all men, have worried about women taking their money for quite some time. Nonetheless, West plays on the word “gold digger” in an ironic call and response between himself and featured vocalist Jamie Foxx. As Foxx sings, “(She steal my money),” West replies “Now I ain’t sayin’ she a gold digger,” and they continue “(When I’m in need) But she ain’t messin’ with no broke niggas (she steal my money) Now I ain’t sayin’ she a gold digger.” In this exchange, Foxx is describing the gold digger in literal terms as a woman that is solely concerned with taking a man’s wealth, while Kanye mockingly and ironically implies that she’s not a gold digger, she just wants a man with money, while in the remainder of the song West catalogues how she is, in fact, a gold digger. Like Hughes, West uses his irony to comment on social issues; although not as important as police misconduct within Black communities, his use of irony and mockery

comments on women's denial of their capitalists pursuits within relationships and men's distrust of women when finances are concerned.

The comedic elements of signifying are often aided by their presentation, which in African-American literature frequently involves rhythmic fluency and sound, and semantically and logically unexpected inserts. As far as rhythmic fluency and sound are concerned, hip-hop music utilizes these tropes especially well considering that it combines the Black aesthetics of preaching and music, which focus on rhythmic performance and tonal inflection, respectively. Moreover, hip-hop lyrics are an evolution of poetry. The rhetorical tools used by lauded African-American poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Gwendolyn Brooks have been recycled and remixed by hip-hop artists to accommodate the inclusion of music. In spite of its evolution, hip-hop music holds fast to African-American traditions such as syncopation, rhythmic fluency, rhyming, irregular logic, and semantically misplacing words. Eazy-E's 1988 song "Eazy-Duz-It" (also the title of the album) displays the complexities of hip-hop music's rhetorical style, and is stylistically comparable to Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1896 poem "We Wear the Mask." Both texts exhibit West Africa's influence on the use of meter and establish a rhythmic flow that is fueled by rhyming, pauses, repetition and syncopation.

In "Understanding Rap as Rhetorical Folk-Poetry," Brent Wood contends that as a result of the influence of West African Music, "the goal of the rapper, unlike the poet, is not to produce a steady or powerful meter of one's own, but to play with or against the meter already stated, which is determined by the rhythmic beat of the track being rapped over" (Wood 134). Although rappers are to some extent bound by the beat, as the nature of rap involves the correlation of vocals and music, they still use meter in a fashion similar to many other poets both within and outside of African-American literature.

Both Eazy-E and Dunbar exhibit a commonality with all English poets in terms of meter as “poetic meter in English is most commonly either iambic/trochaic or anapestic/dactylic-i.e., based either on a ‘one-TWO’ pattern or a ‘one-two-THREE” pattern” (Wood 140). The first four lines of “We Wear the Mask” use trochee by following a stressed syllable with an unstressed one to create a strong rhyme:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, -
This debt we pay with human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile (896)

Multiple stanzas based on trochee can also be found in “Eazy-Duz-It:”

Hitting my switches, collect from my bitches
The money that I make so I can add to my riches
Fill my stash box and start rubbing my gat
Feeling good as hell because my pockets are fat

Both texts use similar types of meter and use rhyme as a rhetorical tool, but because rap music is driven by the beat, its rhyming occurs at a much quicker pace and is oftentimes much denser than in other poems. The sole use that Gates refers to as “the most common structure [...] the rhyming couplet in a-a-b-b pattern” would make these texts typical, but the influence of West African culture and music makes these works specific to African-Americans (“Signifying Monkey” 54).

As Smitherman implies, signifying involves introducing the “logically unexpected,” which is what both artists do in terms of their use of rhyme and meter. Specifically, Dunbar breaks from the a-a-b-b rhyming couplet that he began with in the last line of the stanza, “And mouth with myriad subtleties” (896). But even when introducing a different format, Dunbar does not remain tied to it; the remaining stanzas vary from a-a-b-b to a-a-b-c to a-a-b-b-c-d. Eazy-E’s

shift in meter, however, is even more unexpected since it follows multiple stanzas in the a-a-b-b rhyme fashion. He raps:

Who does it?
Muthafuking Eazy duz it
But how does he do it
Eazy duz it do it eazy
That's what I'm doing
STOP
Man whatcha gonna do now

Here, Eazy-E abandons the rhyming meter that dominates the song in favor of no meter at all.

He also interjects a break in rhythm that likely correlates with the beat, when he yells, “STOP.”

As these illogical shifts are forms of signifying, it gives Dunbar the opportunity to focus on “the mask,” while allowing Eazy-E to stress his identity and lifestyle.

Even more important than the introduction of illogical meter by these artists is their use of rhyme. In *Talkin and Testifyin*, Smitherman contends that “key words and sounds are repeated in succession, both for emphasis and effect;” Eazy-E and Paul Laurence Dunbar both continue this tradition by using repetition for effect and emphasis (142). Most obviously this can be seen in both works as the titles “We Wear the Mask” and “Eazy-Duz-It,” are repeated throughout both texts.

“Eazy-Duz-It” is titled as such to play on Eazy-E’s name and establish his identity with the audience; this is evidenced as he repeats his name multiple times throughout the song and uses the phrase “Eazy-Duz-It” in the chorus. The respelling of easy as “eazy” in this song immediately correlates the state of being easy with the artist Eazy-E. Furthermore, he repeats, “Muthafuckin Eazy duz it...Eazy does it, do it Eazy,” between describing what he does every day, suggesting that you should do what he does. And in making the use of “eazy” as a representation of himself, he accomplishes his secondary goal which is to make his name known

to the audience. This is common for burgeoning rappers who seek to be known, as Eazy-E did when this song was first released.

Dunbar also uses repetition to stress both the existence of the mask and to instill a sense of unity amongst the readers. Immediately, Dunbar follows the title with its repetition in the first line, focusing on the fact that “we wear the mask” (869). This phrase is repeated at the end of the remaining two stanzas, while the last repetition is ended with an exclamation point.

Repetition in this instance is used to reiterate to African-Americans that wearing the mask will only prolong the struggle. In the third stanza he writes:

We smile, but, O great Christ our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh, the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

This final use of repetition effectively stresses the ultimate meaning of the phrase by reiterating that as long as “we wear the mask,” the world will continue to ignore our problems. This is preceded by Dunbar’s attempt to establish unity amongst his readers through the use of repetition. He does this by constantly repeating the words “our” and “we,” to stress to the reader that wearing the mask is the problem of the entire Black race, not just a few.

Obviously, Eazy-E and Paul Laurence Dunbar stand on completely opposite sides of the great divide, as do Nas and C.L. Franklin, and Kanye West and Langston Hughes. Nonetheless, producers of popular urban literature, especially rappers, have embraced the trope of signifying and recreated it with slight nuances in structure and an entirely different subject matter. These nuances and capitalist themes do not absolve the literary quality these texts possess; they add to its richness and continue the evolution of signifying in African-American literature.

Another tradition deeply rooted in African culture and frequently used by African-

American literature is the concept of “nommo,” or naming. Elizabeth Hayes contends in “The Named and the Nameless,” that in:

West African tribal cultures, the creative power of the word is called *nommo*. In these cultures, naming is considered a sacred act because it brings a person into being or makes real and actual what was considered only figurative or inanimate prior to its naming. (7)

In this sense, naming and (un)naming have become integral to African-American culture, beginning with the (un)naming and naming of slaves by slave owners. Thus, the power of (un)naming and naming one’s self, as many freed slaves did (Soujourner Truth, Oluadah Equiano, and Fredrick Douglass), can serve as a site of agency and power for those disenfranchised. Conversely, being named by someone else, or having no name, robs one of their agency. Instances of naming and (un)naming also hold special significance for women who often use this tactic to counter the patriarchal system.

The tradition of renaming oneself is explicitly tied to African-American Literature; canonical writers such as Oluaduh Equiano, Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, Countee Cullen, Toni Cade Bambara, and many others have all renamed themselves, as have many producers of popular urban literature, such as Iceberg Slim, K’wan, Sister Souljah, and the majority of all hip-hop artists. As such, these artists all use naming and (un)naming as a trope in their work; although popular urban literature producers use “nommo” and its power as it relates to capitalism.

Sigrid King states that “the namer has the power; the named is powerless. For the powerless, being named carries with it the threat of limitation, reduction, and destruction” (3). The female protagonists in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Vickie Stringer’s *Let That Be the Reason*, Janie and Carmen, respectively, both use the power of naming as a means of attaining agency after it has been used against them. The lack of power they

experience is, if nothing else, a result of the patriarchal societies in which they live that have systematically disenfranchised them. King continues:

the female need to achieve a command over language has, to begin with, been most practically expressed through strategies of unnamings and renamings, strategies that directly address the problem of woman's patronymically defined identity in western culture. Black women have experienced a 'double dispossession.' (238)

Thus these women must overcome oppression and seek identities as both women and as African-Americans.

Janie's and Carmen's negative experiences with being named by others is what leads them to employ the power of naming. Historically, Black women "fit into one of three categories...the asexual mammy, the hot-tempered sapphire, and the wonton jezebel;" and through the use of naming, these roles are forced on Carmen and Janie (Millward 162). From the onset, Janie is reduced to her actions; the townspeople do not directly "name" her a mammy or jezebel, but describe her as such. These descriptions initially take the place of her name, as the first several pages of the novel do not even mention her name, only the "names" given to her by the townspeople:

What she doin' coming back here in dem overhalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? [...] Where all dat money her husband took and died and left? --What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swangin' all down her back lak some young gal? ---Where she left that young lad of a boy she went off wid? -Thought she was going to marry. ("Their Eyes Were Watching God" 1042)

In this excerpt, the townspeople first question Janie's sexuality and femininity by suggesting that she does not look like a woman, which effectively makes her as asexual as the mammy figure in the eyes of the townspeople. The later descriptions pertaining to her hair being "all down her back lak some young gal," coupled with her non-marital exploits with the much younger Tea Cake, all suggest that she is also being named a jezebel. Before Janie's name appears, she has already been named by others, something she is quite familiar with.

When recalling her childhood Janie tells Pheoby, “‘Dey all uster call me Alphabet ’cause so many people had done named me different names’” (“Their Eyes Were Watching God” 1046). Throughout her life, Janie has been named by others, indicating that she has never identified herself on her own terms. At sixteen her grandmother, Nanny, tells her, “Janie, youse a woman now” (1048). And as a “woman,” Janie must deal with the problematic nature of the social construct that is “woman,” which is inherently oppressive in a patriarchal society. Nanny reiterates societal norms to Janie by suggesting that she marry immediately so she will always be protected and financially cared for, or face being alone in a world with few opportunities for Black women. In an attempt to warn her of the vulnerabilities associated with being Black and a woman, Nanny tells her, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world,” carrying the burdens that White men, Black men, and White women have put down but must be carried (1049). In naming her a “woman,” her grandmother theoretically places the load of the “nigger woman” on her back, and Janie spends much of her life trying to lighten that load moving from place to place and man to man.

Janie’s experience being named as a “woman” is similar to what Donald Pease describes concerning the process of “nommo” and naming children: “In its capacity to shape perceptions concerning a child’s destiny as well as the significance attributed to them, naming was responsible for the discursive construction of the child’s fate” (11). Naming for Janie, in this sense, has a similar effect, as the name “woman” destined her to seek the protection of a man; the same could be said for *Let That Be the Reason’s* Carmen. Like Janie, Carmen is seeking to find her identity amidst lost loves and the plight of being a Black woman; only Carmen, however, is not in the feminine world of domesticity, but works as a prostitute, pimp, and drug dealer.

Before renaming herself Carmen, Pamela allowed others to name her and began to

internalize the roles society had placed on her. Pam even referred to herself as a “whore,” before she was capable of renaming herself, an act that Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd and Evelyn M. Simien suggest “is the means by which people of African descent can assert their own vision of their reality in opposition to that of the dominant culture” (11). By naming herself in accordance with dominant culture, she is incapable of creating her own reality. The reality Carmen has created as a self-identified whore is no better than the names society has given her. For instance, an elderly white “John” who requests to be called “massah” degrades her by treating her like a slave during intercourse: “he just flipped up my skirt, got on top of me, fucking me, calling me ‘Kizzy’” (Stringer 9). In naming Carmen “Kizzy,” a black female slave from Alex Haley’s book and TV miniseries *Roots*, the “John” reinvigorates slavery’s image of Black women as sexualized, immoral, and for sale. The characteristics associated with the use of “Kizzy,” in this context, are synonymous to those of a Black whore.

Even in her reinvention from Pam to Carmen, many of the attributes that the names society has given her she has also given herself continually have an impression on her life. While involved in a relationship with her ex-boyfriend Chino, he frequently named her in ways that strip her power. One of their arguments, however, makes Pam think about her existence in a new way that influences her self-naming:

You just like the rest of these gold diggin’ ass bitches. Pooh...I do more for you than you can do for yourself...I made you...Bitch, I put you in this place. If it wasn’t for me where would you be? (Stringer 46)

Chino’s diatribe undoubtedly names Pam in negative ways, by describing her as a weak and dependent woman whose identity exists solely because of him. And while deriding her, he continues to call her the name that he chose for her, “Pooh,” to stress that she is still his creation; he calls her “Pooh” throughout the text, even as Pam becomes Carmen and they have been

separated for years. Chino is unwilling to relinquish the use of “Pooh,” as it becomes the only power he still holds over her. The other names given to Pam in this text excerpt state that she is a “gold digger,” which she in many ways becomes; and in terms of referring her as a “bitch,” Carmen’s redefines this word on her road to self naming.

Hurston does not allow Janie to name herself, but does provide instances in which Janie creates an identity and gains autonomy through naming others. One of the earliest instances of this occurs when she names Jody “Abraham Lincoln;” she tells Jody, “Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule”(“Their Eyes Were Watching God” 92). Janie’s use of naming here allows her to question Jody’s authority as well as mock him by stating that the only true power he had was to free a mule, although he believed himself to be all powerful. In undermining his power, Janie is capable of seizing some for herself, which is the beginning of her own identity creation.

Janie derives the most power from naming when she retakes the name she gave to Jody in a public verbal attack. The tirade of assaults Janie hurls at Jody disparages him in front of the entire town, she even goes so far as to expose his sexual impotence, after which she reflects, “ ‘Jody, no Joe, gave her a ferocious look’ ” (“Their Eyes Were Watching” 130). At this moment in the novel, Jody no longer controls Janie; she has established an identity on her own terms, she is no longer his silent and obedient wife, she has her own voice.

Pamela also finds her own voice through the power of naming by reconfiguring existing names given to her and changing her name from Pamela to Carmen. One of the names ascribed to Carmen and many women, “bitch,” becomes a source of power for Carmen. After deriding a male subordinate in her drug empire, Carmen thinks to herself, “I’ve turned into a real bitch!;” but this renaming does not carry a negative connotation (Stringer, 75). Carmen’s status as a

“bitch” mirrors the definition of the term when used within hip-hop culture; DoVeanna Fulton writes:

female MCs revise the standard definition of bitch, from an 'aggressive woman who challenges male authority' to an aggressive or assertive female who subverts patriarchal rule.' The term is an appropriation of misogynist discourse... (87)

Although both Carmen and Janie evolve into aggressive women who subvert authority, Carmen actually appropriates the term and applies it to herself.

Let That Be the Reason demonstrates Carmen's rejection of the virtues of womanhood and patriarchy as a marker of strength; her status as a “bitch” works completely in her favor and allows her to remain in control of the male dominated arena of drug trafficking. More so, this “gold-diggin’ ass bitch,” whose motto is “Bitch Gotta Get Paid,” has internalized the capitalist nature of a gold digger while asserting an independence that coincides with her self-made identity. Carmen has realized that “no one can pay her better than she can pay herself,” a concept that leads to her being financially empowered and no longer dependent upon a man (Stringer 46, 32, 10).

Her adoption of the name Carmen originated when she started her escort service, a period in the text that marks a transition of power, as she has reversed roles and is no longer a prostitute, but a pimp. The power derived from this renaming is evident in her description of Carmen. Carmen is “a totally different person from Pamela. Carmen was strong, emotionless, and untrusting. Pammy, well, she was the opposite. Weak, emotional and trusting” (Stringer 12). Renaming becomes an act of liberation for Carmen, as this is her first experience as an adult away from Chino and her first independent financial endeavor. Stringer uses the principles of renaming as a transitive trope, as many slaves used renaming to mark their freedom; Elizabeth T. Hayes writes that “Dropping one's slave name and renaming oneself to begin life anew as a free person was often the first act of a former slave” (7). Carmen's renaming does not mark a

transition to literal freedom, but it does mark her transition to self identification.

The power of “nommo” also can be seen in the act of (un) naming; under the premise of “nommo,” an object or person does not exist without a name and is effectively invisible.

(Un)naming is most effectively seen in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, in which the protagonist remains (un)named throughout the novel. A nuanced representation of (un)naming can also be seen through a review of Tupac Shakur’s song “Can’t C Me,” where he equates invisibility with power. Shakur’s nuanced interpretation of (un)naming is representative of the ways in which popular urban culture continues and builds upon African-American traditions.

Kimberly Benston argues that “self-possession through language occurs when the self is made external to itSelf;” for Ellison’s protagonist this is seemingly impossible (6). In the opening lines of the prologue the protagonist proclaims,

I am an invisible man [...] I am invisible understand because people refuse to see me
[...] When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or fragments
of their imaginations -indeed, everything and anything except me. (3)

His self identification as “invisible” indicates from the novel’s onset that he is incapable of making himself visible to himself; his identification is based solely on the fact that other people cannot see him. Thus, the desire to create an identity becomes so great that he seeks to be seen in any way possible, even through the use of violence.

The title of the album “Can’t C Me” is featured on, *All Eyez on Me*, sets the tone for the remainder of the album in which Tupac commands the attention of those who have not bothered to see him. Like Ellison, Tupac also feels that his invisibility is connected to his status as a poor, black man; however, unlike the protagonist of *Invisible Man*, Tupac chooses to remain invisible, but can certainly see himself. The opening of “Can’t C Me” mimics Ellison inasmuch that it immediately marks the protagonist as invisible; George Clinton enters the song over an eerie beat

warning that “The blind stares of a million pairs of eyes/lookin’ hard but won’t realize/that they will never see/the P.” In stating that they will “never see the P” or Pac, Shakur equates being “seen” with meeting a comparable foe. Within the culture of hip hop in which rappers’ “badman toasts are composed of hypermasculine, hypersexualized, sexist, reactionary, and oppositional lyrics,” Tupac’s assertion that no one amongst millions will be able to “see” him is just (Canton 9).

Contrary to Tupac’s braggadocio, the protagonist in *Invisible Man* seeks to remain invisible, as visibility comes at cost. Ellison writes, “I remember that I am invisible and walk softly as to not awake the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to wake them, there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers” (Ellison 5). Walking softly for the protagonist involves suppressing his desire to commit violent acts, as using violence awakens the sleepwalkers. However, in waking the sleepwalkers, the protagonist experiences a sense of identity and actually enjoys it. After brutally beating a blond man that failed to “see” him as anything other than an “insulting name,” the protagonist “ran away into the dark, laughing so hard [he] feared he would rupture [him]self” (Ellison 4, 5). The joy derived from these violent acts and the growing urge to commit them, all suggests that the protagonist wants some form of identity that has not been afforded to him because he is (un)named, nonexistent, invisible.

In “Plunging (outside of) History: Naming and Self Possession in *Invisible Man*,” Jim Neighbors suggests that by embracing one’s status as (un)named it is possible to “undermine its social function of self-denial and utilize it as a mechanism of self-mystification” (231). Tupac does this by obscuring invisibility in a way that makes being unseen a good thing. But most important to Tupac, is the fact that people can’t see him because he is making so much money. In the third verse of the song he raps, “I’m just a rich muthafucka from the way/if this rappin’

bring me money/then I'm rappin' till I'm paid/I'm getting green like I'm supposed to," he continues to brag about his criminal pursuits and sexual encounters before closing the verse with, "Niggaz can't see me," a phrase that is frequently repeated in the song. Although Tupac's posturing of his identity around his prowess in the capitalist, sexual, and criminal worlds may not be ideal, it does explore the ways that capitalism influences African-American identity.

Beneath the sex, crime, money and violence of popular urban literature, there lies incomparable literary value. As the genre explores the incorporation of capitalism into African-American life, it provides a voice for those whom society has abandoned. And with this voice, producers of popular urban literature have embraced traditional African-American literary tropes and nuanced them to convey the harsh realities of urban life. The genre also clearly continues a lineage of capitalist themes found throughout the history of African-American literature. In many ways, popular urban literature is identical to canonical texts, and its differences only display the multiple ways that signifying and nommo can manifest themselves.

Although scholarship on this genre is still in its infancy, there are scholars exploring similar issues. Jason Patterson's "Dead Prezence: Money and Mortal Themes in Hip-Hop Music," for instance, most correlates with my research as it "captures the central tension between those artisans of Hip-Hop who are continuously challenged by American Dream-like success with accompanying capitalistic pursuits, and an audience within Hip Hop culture that desires its own economic success, but only occasionally connects economic empowerment to political representation" (344). Patterson's investigation of the term "Dead Presidents" in this article, as well as the capitalist nature of hip-hop, is indicative of the type of in depth analysis that is possible when popular urban literature is scholastically engaged.

It is easy to be turned off by the money-hungry themes and aggressive marketing of

popular urban literature, but this rejection of capitalism by creators of the canon only limits the ways that Blackness is explored, by negating an integral part of Black culture, which has been with African-Americans since slavery. If texts like the Norton Anthology of African-American Literature and Call and Response are going to be used to represent the total tradition of African-American literature, then popular urban literature must be included.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- “Ah’l Beatcher Makin’ Money.” *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company 1997. 108- 111.
- Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. and Evelyn M. Simien. “Revisiting ‘What’s in a Name?’” *Exploring the Contours of Africana Womanist Thought* 27.1 (2006): 65- 89.
- Arnez, Nancy and Clara Anthony. “Contemporary Negro Humor as Social Satire.” *Phylon* 29.4 (1968): 339- 46.
- Baker, David. “If: On Transit, Transcendence, and Trope.” *Gettysburg Review* 16.2 (2003): 316- 30.
- Benston, Kimberly W. “I Yam what I Am”: Naming and Unnaming in Afro-American Literature.” *Black American Literature Forum* 16.1 (1982) 3- 11.
- Canton, David. “The Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Tensions in Gangster Rap.” *Reviews in American History* 34.2 (2006): 58- 77.
- Clarke, Lynn. “Talk About Talk: Promises, Risks and a Proposition of Nommo.” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18.4 (2004): 317- 26.
- Cochran, Robert. “Father: The Subversive Achievement of Joel Chandler Harris.” *African American Review* 38.1 (2004): 21- 34.
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. “We Wear the Mask.” *The Norton Anthology of African- American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 884.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. “The Culture of Hip-Hop.” *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2004. 408.
- Early, Gerald. “Conflicting Aspirations.” *American Book Review* 18.6 (1997): 1- 7.
- Eazy E. “Eazy-Duz-It” *Eazy-Duz-It*. Priority Record, 1988.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1995. 3.
- Flynn, John P. “Booker T. Washington: Uncle Tom or Wooden Horse.” *The Journal of Negro History* 54.3 (1969): 262- 274.
- Fox, Robert Elliot. “Shaping an African American Literary Canon.” *PMC* 9.1 (1998): 1- 14.

- Franklin, C.L. "The Eagle Stirreth Its Nest." *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 71- 78.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1970. 77-89.
- Fulton, DoVeanna. "Comic Views and Metaphysical Dilemmas: Shattering Cultural Images through Self-Definition and Representation by Black Commediennes." *Journal of American Folklore* 117.463 (2004) 81- 96.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis and Nelly Y. McKay. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. i- xxxviii.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988. 78.
- Ghosh, Arun. "Socialism, Modern Capitalism and Democracy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 28.14 (1993): 551- 554.
- Goines, Donald. *Inner City Hoodlum*. Los Angeles, CA: Holloway House, 1975.
- *White Man's Justice, Black Man's Grief*. Los Angeles, CA: Holloway House, 1973.
- Goode, Greg. "From Dopefiend to Kenyatta's Last Hit: The angry Black Crime Novels of Donald Goines." *MELUS*. 11.3 (1984), 41- 48.
- Gordon, Dexter B. "Humor in African-American Discourse: Speaking of Oppression." *Journal of Black Studies* 29.2 (1998): 254- 276.
- Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five. "The Message." *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 62- 65.
- Green, Johnson. "The Life and Confession of Johnson Green." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African-American Literary Tradition*. Ed. Patricia Liggins Hill. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. 105- 110.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Thirty Years of Black American Literature and Literary Studies: A Review." *Journal of Black Studies* 35.2 (2004): 165- 174.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. "A Raisin in the Sun." *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 1728- 1789.
- Hayes, Elizabeth T. "The Named and the Nameless: Morrison's 124 and Naylor's "the Other Place" as Semiotic Choraes," *African American Review* 38.4 (2004) 3-14.

- Hill, Patricia Liggins, ed. *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. i- xxxii.
- Hoeller, Hildegard. "Racial Currency: Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Gilded Six-Bits' and the Gold-Standard Debate." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 77.4 (2005) 761- 85.
- Hughes, Langston. "Little Ham." *Five Plays*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963. 48-71.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. "The Gilded Six-Pence." *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 1011- 1019.
- Joo, Hee-Jung Serenity. "Miscegenation, Assimilation, and Consumption: Racial Passing in George Schuyler's Black No More and Eric Liu's The Accidental Asian." *MELUS* 3 (Fall 2008): 169- 190.
- King, Sigrid. "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." *Black American Literature Forum* 24.4 (1990): 3- 21.
- Kitwana, Bakari. *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas, 2006. 67.
- kynard, carmen. "'New Life in this Dormant Creature': Notes on Social Consciousness, Language, and Learning in a College Classroom." *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell, eds. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinmann, 2002. 23- 30.
- Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1997. 81.
- Lena, Jennifer C. "Social Context and Musical Content of Rap Music, 1979-1995." *Social Forces* 85.1 (2006): 479- 498.
- Marrable, Manning. *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*. Boston, MA: South End Press: 1983. 32.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1998. 4.
- Matthews, Kristin. "The Politics of Home in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun." *Modern Drama* 51.4 (2008): 556- 578.
- McLaren, Joseph. "African Diaspora Vernacular Traditions and the Dilemma of Identity." *Research in African Literatures* 40.1 (2009): 97- 111.
- Meloni, Christine. "Hip-Hop Lit Attracts New Readers." *Library Media Connection*. (Feb. 2007): 3-4.

- Mullen, Bill V. "Breaking the Signifying Chain: A New Blueprint for African-American Literary Studies." *Modern Fiction Studies* 47.1 (2001): 145- 163.
- Nas. "Money is My Bitch." *I Am*. Sony/BMG, 1999.
- Neighbors, Jim. "Plunging (outside of) History: Naming and Self Possession in Invisible Man." *African American Review* 36.2 (2002): 227- 242.
- Patterson, Jason. "'Dead Prezence' Money and Mortal Themes in Hip-Hop," *Callaloo*. 29.3 (2006): 1-18.
- Pease, Donald E. "Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke: The Nonsymbolizable (Trans)Action." *Boundary 2* 30.1 (2003) 222-241 .
- "Rabbit Teaches Bear a Lesson." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African-American Literary Tradition*. Ed. Patricia Liggins Hill. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. 61.
- Recken, Stephen L. "Rags to Respectability: Arkansas and Booker T. Washington." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 67.1 (2008): 54-71.
- Roberts, John. *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989. 176.
- "Railroad Bill' and the American Outlaw Tradition." *Western Folklore* 40.4 (1981): 315- 328.
- "Stackolee and the Development of a Black Heroic Idea ." *Western Folklore* 42.3 (1983): 179- 90.
- Scholes, Robert. "Exploring the Great Divide: High and Low, Left and Right." *Narrative*. 11.3 (2003): 245- 69.
- Shakur, Tupac. "Can't C Me." *All Eyez On Me*. Death Row Records, 1996.
- Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press, 1977. 8.
- "The Chain Remains the Same": Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation." *Journal of Black Studies* 28.1 (1997): 3- 25.
- Word from the Mother: Language and African American*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006. 121.
- "Stagolee." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African-American Literary Tradition*. Ed. Patricia Liggins Hill. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. 566.

- Stallings, L.H. "'I'm Goin Pimp Whores!' The Goines Factor and the Theory of a Hip-Hop Neo-Slave Narrative." *CR: The New Centennial Review*. 3.3 (2003),175- 203.
- Mutha' is Half a Word: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press. 176.
- Stringer, Vickie M. *Let That Be the Reason*. Columbus, OH: Triple Crown Publishing, 2002. 5-211.
- Taylor, Carl and Virgil Taylor. "Hip-Hop is Now: An Evolving Youth Culture." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15.4 (2007): 210- 213.
- Thomas, Gregory V. "The Canonization of Jazz and Afro-American Literature." *Callaloo* 25.1 (2002): 288- 308.
- T.I. "Just Doin' My Job." *Trap Muzik*. Atlantic Records, 2003.
- Washington, Booker T. "Up From Slavery." *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nelly Y. McKay. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 490- 513.
- West, Cornel. *The Cornell West Reader*. New York, NY: Civitas, 1999. 281.
- West, Kanye. "Gold Digger." *Late Registration*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2005.
- Wharry, Cheryl. "Amen and Hallelujah Preaching: Discourse Functions in African American Sermons." *Language in Society* 32.2 (2003): 203-2 25.
- Wilson, Robert A. "Anomie in the Ghetto: A Study of Neighborhood Type, Race and Anomie." *The American Journal of Sociology* 77.1 (1971): 66- 88.
- Wood, Brent. "Understanding Rap as Rhetorical Folk-Poetry." *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature* 32:4 (1999): 129- 146.
- Yancy, George. "Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity Through Language." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18.4 (2004): 273- 299.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Robinson is a native of Miami, FL and attended the University of Florida for both her bachelor and master's degrees in English. Currently, her research involves a synthesis of African-American Literature, Cultural Studies, Urban Literature, and Hip-Hop Studies.