Br(other) Rabbit's Tale

Tom Jennings

'Didn't the fox never catch the rabbit, Uncle Remus?' asked the little boy the next evening.

'He come mighty nigh it, honey, sho's you born.'[1]

One of the central conceits of *8 Mile*—Curtis Hanson's (2002) film about an aspiring hip hop performer, starring controversial rapper Eminem—seems to have eluded the notice of critics and reviewers. This adds to the levels of contradiction and irony in the way the film tackles the subject of hip hop—which, if not ignored altogether in serious debate and polite conversation alike, is generally condemned and dismissed as one of the most scandalous, degraded and degrading forms of contemporary popular culture. Partly this opprobrium results from rap's refusal to practice the subterfuge usually necessary to sidestep sanctions when bringing lower class vernacular into the public domain. But whatever its significance in terms of social class, hip hop and rap music derive from and draw upon the rich veins of African American culture, even if in America itself and on a global scale young people of all races and backgrounds have taken it to heart, and take part in it in their millions. Even so, the musical forms,performance sites and conventions, expressive styles and lyrical and narrative structures employed in rap are most usefully seen as developments—in the context of today's social, cultural and technological environments—of African American community and artistic traditions also prominent in the blues, jazz, soul and funk, and in Black oral folklore,storytelling and literature.[2]

Black and White and Read All Over

So despite its commercial success US rap is still generally perceived as a predominantly Black artform, even if increasingly marketed to white youth. What,then, does it mean for the main protagonist of *8 Mile* not only to be white, but also to choose the stage alias of 'B.Rabbit'? In the script his friends affectionately clarify the 'B' as the rather childlike 'Bunny'. This is appropriate given the Oedipal conflicts experienced by Eminem's character, Jimmy Smith Jr., and as a bonus also refers to cartoon trickster Bugs Bunny. But his 'official' *nom de guerre* as an M.C. who competes for supremacy in lyrical 'battles' is not Bunny, but *B*. Rabbit—referring to a figure from a different genre, but with similar levels of complexity and ambivalence and a parallel degree of social and political significance.Brer Rabbit, along with the predatory Brer Fox and other animals living in the 'briar patch', is a mythic hero of children's stories, and for older generations something of a lower class antidote to Beatrix Potter *et al*. His origins lie squarely within fables and parables refined and passed down orally in enslaved communities—as social practice rather than literary form—educating Black youngsters in the ways of the world,how to stay out of trouble and even,maybe, come out on top.

From their humble beginnings (at the cotton-picking grass-roots, so to speak), these cautionary and inspirational tales passed into acceptable literature courtesy of Joel Chandler Harris, from Atlanta,Georgia, who was the first author to publish such an extensive collection of 'Negro' stories, as related by fictional narrator 'Uncle Remus' standing for the realism,wisdom,benevolence and political savvy of Black elders. In literary criticism starting from the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, Harris is cited as an exemplary case of the appropriation by white people of Black cultural resources.Now in *8 Mile* we have the first Hollywood representation of underground hip hop, but written, produced and directed by white people, telling the story of a white rapper trying to get by. The choice of moniker refers to this troubled history, and to the contemporary exploitation of Black culture via the commodification of rap music and the ambiguous presence of white people within this field.

Tourism, Tarzan and Toryism

To many critics, this presence is not ambiguous at all, but represents straightforward colonisation—a view appealing to politically correct liberals,who are already predisposed to rubbish hip hop (and any other lower class cultural expression resistant to their moralising). So novelist Jeanette Winterson sees Jimmy Smith as merely: "a tourist ... a white man going into Black culture and, lo and behold, he does it better".[3] This echoes Black separatist discourses aiming to maintain the purity of hip hop as Black culture. In US rap magazine *The Source,* Harry Allen invokes the figure of Tarzan to explain the success of both Eminem and Jimmy Smith Jr.: "a white infant, abandoned by its mother and father and raised by apes, who rises to dominate the non-white people and environment around him", taking advantage of "the Black facilitation of white development". This process is argued to be pivotal to the contemporary "refinement of white supremacy"where, for example, "hip-hop is valuable for one reason only: because a lot of white people are into it".[4]

Both kinds of criticism are persuasive to a certain extent,arguing in essence that any active involvement of white people in Black culture necessarily implies theft and mastery—and, after all, the history of imperialism and white racism (not to mention, more specifically, Western popular music) has consistently led in that direction. Unfortunately, as well as entailing a rather simplistic, static and closed conception of both Black culture and hip hop, such judgements are extremely pessimistic about the potential for meaningful interaction between Black and white people, whether in culture,politics, or any other arena.However, Eminem's character is not dubbed 'Lord Greystoke'; and the origins and associations of Brer Rabbit have survived Joel Chandler Harris's colonisation as well as Enid Blyton's bourgeois white supremacist erasure.Maybe hip hop's Black roots are still hardy and perennial in the briar patch,whatever their fate in the well-to-do garden.

If so, a distinction must be drawn between what happens at the grass roots of hip hop among real live individuals and groups, and how this is mediated,transformed and distorted in the public sphere. The film clearly wants to straddle both realms in purporting to depict participation in a local hip hop scene, while itself being a commercial product aiming for mass consumption. Yet critical positions such as those outlined above refuse to consider such complexity, preferring 'black and white' caricatures which are just as crude, restrictive and downright unhelpful as those found in the discourses of politicians, the media, elite cultural institutions and all the other vested interests inimical in principle to any of our subversive pleasures.

Into the Melting Pot

So, in a post-industrial Detroit suitably photographed by Rodrigo Prieto (*Amores Perros*) as toxic and rotting,Jimmy Smith Jr. struggles to carve out some autonomy and escape the rabbit's fate (to be tamed, captured and eaten). The hostility and hopelessness of the ghetto offer him only insecure drudge jobs, reinforced by his equally bankrupt family dynamics and relationships with women. His crew provides a nurturing surrogate family for its members,immersed since childhood in hip hop as part of the popular cultural landscape. They have gravitated towards the local rap scene, led by Future (Mekhi Phifer) who hosts regular nightclub events featuring contests between aspiring MCs. Witnessing and encouraging his emerging wordplay skills, his friends urge Jimmy to overcome his shyness and insecurity and take part. The film covers the period in which he tentatively enters and negotiates the contours of this vibrant public sphere,practising and elaborating his lyrics in various settings—culminating in victory over lead rapper of rival posse 'The Free World'.

8 Mile does capture, if sketchily, the atmosphere of grass roots underground hip hop—and is thus one of very few representations in the mainstream visual media of a phenomenon common in urban centres globally.[5] It marks out the different interests and agendas of those involved, and correctly emphasises the quintessential site of hip hop performance—the party. Here boundaries between production and consumption blur as DJs, MCs and the dancehall audience collectively interact in call and response,bodily and aesthetic

appreciation and ritual communal celebration.

Slaughtered, Skinned and Gutted

Beyond that, the meagre characterisations and backstory barely hint at how Jimmy Smith's personal trials and tribulations have given him the drive and energy (let alone the poetic skill) to craft the rap performances that the film is structured around. Worse, B.Rabbit's lyrical attacks as a battle MC are similarly one-dimensional. They do conform to some conventions of the form, weaving biographical and local material into references to popular culture, current affairs and the traditions and history of hip hop—focusing on the socio-economic position shared with his audience in the here and now. But he avoids deeper issues of identity, difference, roots and origins, except when criticising in others the commonplace discourses of racial prejudice and machismo's sexism, misogyny and homophobia. So, pre-empting the recycling of 'poor white trash' stereotypes, he acknowledges and embraces these, glosses their injustice and external causes, and trumps them with well-rehearsed elaborations exposing their lazy repetition.

Most seriously, the price of failure to invoke a positive presence of his own is an inability to boast—that archetypal rapping device crystallising one's rhetorical manouevres and stylistic prowess into a stage embodiment of gravitas and purpose. Thus at one point he 'dies' on stage, unable to respond to a Black audience's collective ridicule of his whiteness. He can deal with it individually, though, using his smart mouth to puncture his opponents' pretensions. He cuts The Free World adrift from their roots in Black oral traditions, accusing them of empty posing (by copying 2-Pac—a seminal 1990s MC), rather than engaging in a genuine process of growth using the wisdom of the ancestors. Capped with the revelation of their middle class backgrounds, this clinches the argument for the crowd.

B.Rabbit's self-erasure is intelligible, given the historical status of 'whiteness' as a badge of automatic (fictional) superiority and (actual) domination over others. Flirting with the white racist denigration of Blackness, he insists on the pathetic nature of whiteness, and is content for the Black audience—as his social equals—to judge. Nevertheless, his rejection of minstrelsy (pretending to be 'Black'), while important, extends to a weak integration of style, lyrics and music—he has no charisma, raps with a clumsy, fractured 'flow', and his rhymes consistently miss the beat and work against the rhythm. All that remains is linguistic trickery fuelled by disembodied anger, detached from a coherent personality, historical anchorage and the sense of cultural continuity implicit in African-American popular music. As it happens, this recalls the passage of Brer Rabbit from subversive West African trickster, via transgressive free-living slave, to sanitised cuddly toy.

White, Sliced and Wholesome

Having rendered its hero insubstantial, inoffensive and bland, *8 Mile* works as a safe, conformist narrative of 'poor boy makes good' in that long tradition of conservative Hollywood films exhorting the popular mass audience to keep their heads down, work hard and fulfil the promise of the (white anglo saxon) protestant ethic. But if the talent to justify success is now sacrificed to local ordinariness, hip hop's invention and imagination are lost along with the complex, diverse artistry of its practitioners. As usual, cinema can only represent the richness of lower class life in reductive stereotypes. But the big payoff is that the main attraction rap offers its audiences—a Black challenge to the hypocrisies of mainstream society—is falsified. All signposted in the allusion to Brer Rabbit.

Ritual naming as transformation is a frequent theme in Black cultural visions of transcendence, yet this choice of name marks a space made vacant by violation, exactly signifying a lack of progression. Drawing attention to their own deceit is thus the film makers' alibi for viewing hip hop through the lens of whiteness—because a biopic about any of the Black superstar rappers would have required none of these levels of concealment and evasion to guarantee healthy box office. But it would have had to tackle an issue that the big money behind Hollywood blockbusters is terrified of—the increasing centrality of race *combined with class*—a theme familiar in the daily lives of the mixed hip hop nation of American youth. Instead, *8 Mile* counterpoises class *against* race, just as all shades of reactionary and separatist US political discourse have consistently done since the 1970s—mystifying deprivation with euphemisms of Black deficiency in the former, and nailing the prospects of the Black poor to the interests of the vanguard middle classes in the latter.

Convenience Food for Thought

Naturally, in its cynical exercise of postmodern irony, the film wants to have it both ways, so the aspirational trajectory as well as the promotional strategy devolve onto Eminem. But he has been eviscerated of his exhilarating deployment of infantile excess, the shock tactics aimed squarely at respectable society and hysterical cartoon exaggerations exposing the effects of poverty and despair on the personal and social fabrics. Surely only the ignorance of critics, the gullibility of consumers, and the complacency of power could confuse *this* performer with *this* role. Now that is an unsavoury alliance—albeit one very convenient for those to whom culture is simply entertainment and hence profit.

For *8 Mile* to fit Hollywood conventions and its own publicity, the most salient features of both rap's Black heritage and Eminem are effaced, so that the film hides its most serious flaws by trading on his reputation. Hamstrung by their wholesale collusion in this, the reviews were able to recognise neither the flaws nor the (limited) achievements.[6] Now, the status of critics in the popular media is often predicated upon the public's naive susceptibility to the commercial wiles of the Brer Foxes of capitalism. But here they unwittingly reproduce it, obliterating the distinctions between the marketing hype generated around a commodity, and what the material used might mean to its audiences. No surprise, either, that *8 Mile's* most convincing stereotypes are the hustlers picking over local rap for its juiciest packageable morsels, just as mainstream record companies do with their raw material. With Eminem this means crafting a celebrity brand image that isolates, fetishises and falsifies each of his attributes as unique and unsurpassed individual achievements of (white) genius, rather than the minor (if interesting) variations on well-established hip hop themes that they undoubtedly are.

The Multiple Slim Shady

Eminem's vision starts from vicious infantile revenge fantasies, switching indiscriminately among targets—his mother, wife, peers, other MCs, the social environment, economy, media or government—attacked for their various failures to support his needs and wishes, in moods veering from depression and self-disgust to persecution mania and full-blown paranoia. The rage is channelled into lyrical anecdotes in the familiar hip hop registers of lower class teenage rebelliousness, abusive hypermasculinity and gangsta rap

nihilism, with video vignettes dressed in the lurid iconography of exploitation film genres, comics, animation and a general wallowing in trash culture, kitsch and bad taste. Ice-T—an original 'gangsta rapper'—aptly describes him as the "Jerry Springer of rap", practising the art of "saying the most wrong thing possible".[7] This captures the sense of a community of grievances being played out, but misses the psychotic core—a splintered and embattled self, deriving purpose and energy in combatting the absence of unconditional love (e.g. respect as an MC) with hatred, bile and malice.[8]

The comic artfulness of the rendering of nightmare into narrative, and its catharsis as performance, positions Eminem as a tragic clown more in the comedy tradition (from Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor onwards) linking pain, shock and mirth. Whereas the many talented hip hop jokers have tended to play it just for laughs, the feelings Eminem expresses are audibly and visibly heartfelt. And what takes the shock tactics beyond the adolescent exuberance and sleaze of rap acts marketed as teenage rebellion, like the Beastie Boys or Smut Peddlers, is the focus on the dire social implications and circumstances of his existential misery, as well as the converging political and economic interests that demand it. Put bluntly, the party always goes (badly) wrong.

This configuration follows the 'deranged MC' subgenre—itself derived from the urban mythic 'mad and bad' Black man. There is even the occasional presence of producer and father figure Dr Dre, or Detroit rap crew D12, as a social safety net, as with other famous rap portrayals of lunacy and inadequacy. But Eminem is basically solipsistic. Alone in his internal universe of conflict—not alienated *from* others but *within*—he has no shared aim or project for successful performance to embody. Unable to take solace and courage from a Black heritage, he accepts that the self-destructive logic of his abjection promises no escape.[9] Thus the lyrics lay scattershot blame, vehemently but without specificity or the explanatory power to convince, at a system which is mad, or "politically incorrect".[10]

Hip Hop Hype

Just as the compulsive staccato processing of language in multiple alliteration, rhyming and metaphor reproduces the obsessive repetition of psychosis; so the integration of linguistic elements into spoken flow and rhythm is likewise fragmented. Whereas what Adam Krims[11] terms 'speech-

effusiveness' is now typical of the most skilful and innovative rap, many practitioners of it are far more accomplished than Eminem—both in terms of the musicality of the vocals (pitch,timbre,texture), and their meshing with the antiphony and polyphony in the instrumental. Failing to align the voice and poetic metre with the beat hinders the pleasurable experience of the music with the body as well as the mind—hence the usual judgment within hip-hop that Eminem is very far from being the best rapper around.[12]

But the publicity terms he has been saddled with—and which he consents to for the sake of a career—say otherwise, because those who succeed can then be held up as examples of 'the American Way' able to transcend their backgrounds (of class and/or race)—exceptions which prove the rule. So Eminem is produced and sold as universal (i.e. white) novelty pop,[13] even while coincidentally undermining various racial stereotypes that neither he nor his commercial backers or critical

detractors, for their diverse reasons, dwell on. A foul-mouthed,drug-crazed psychopath hardly fits the historic white 'genius' profile; there is none of the middle class 'wigger's affected pose of fashionable Black styles; and the depiction of family dysfunction and moral failure turns on its head the politically-charged discourse of Black pathology hiding behind class rhetoric—the latter being notable given rap's reluctance to tackle this directly.[14]

However, Eminem's silence on his personal experience of racism—except individual prejudice against his whiteness—shows that he is no 'race traitor'[15]. This avoidance allows him to assert the irrelevance of race, substituting the world view of the universal loser—just a "regular guy"[16] like millions of others. If challenged, he projects back onto whoever is his enemy at the time—"I am whatever you say I am"—where the simulacra of his personae and their progress in the mediated world preclude any 'real'[17]. His personal route to salvation is instead implied by the honesty and humility of his engagement with hip hop. Against all the odds, this gives the gratification of finding a voice and deploying a language—a conclusion common to adherents of hip hop in all its manifestations across the world.

Hip Hop Hope

If Eminem's ravings lack the social embeddedness to provide historical perspective or communal insight into the nature of the processes which afflict people and make them mad—these are precisely the kind of criteria which have consistently given Black artists the desire and wherewithal to seek paths to redemption. This kind of ethics has been a preoccupation of hip hop since the start—notable in Afrika Bambaata's Zulu Nation; Grandmaster Flash ('The Message'); KRS-One, Public Enemy and Rakim; through to hardcore via NWA,2-Pac, Wu-Tang Clan and Nas (among thousands of less famous examples).However, each new wave of rap styles has been facilitated,amid accusations of dilution, by the steady growth of relatively independent music industry sectors with a strong Black presence, striving to influence and moderate commercialisation. In this climate, class politics of any kind have rarely been prioritised, although a quietly persistent strand alongside the much heralded Black nationalism and pride.[18]

So, Chuck D of Public Enemy is surely correct in saying that, being white, Eminem can tackle "issues that Black rappers are encouraged to leave alone for marketing and commercial reasons".[19] But that's not the whole story. The Black traditions have persistently militated towards subverting oppression by wresting its adverse cultural and discursive conditions into some form of social agency and control. Since the ideology of Black capitalism—popularised by the Nation of Islam, Spike Lee and Public Enemy, for example—came to be embraced by US hip hop entrepreneurs (and reflected in the music), economic control has taken centre stage. Thus record labels and management companies that are (at least partly) Black owned and controlled have gained commercial footholds by deliberately packaging the music to appeal to local Black community markets (in Atlanta, California,Miami,New Orleans,etc.),pandering to corporate media (so-called 'hip-pop') and/or crossing over to white rock and heavy metal (Run DMC,Ice-T, Public Enemy, Cypress Hill, etc). However, even the current 'ghetto fabulous' fairy stories of wealth and glamour, which incorporate mainstream pop and R&B, still retain muted elements of social critique in Blues laments and lower class sentimentalism. Similarly, the Black Mafia subgenre could be interpreted as an oblique critique of capitalism *as* crime, equating the competitive rivalry of the music industry with mob families who were once mere street gangs. If so, gangsta rap might represent an underclass corrective to the moral sophistry inherent in a philosophy of uplift through the success of the few—but which absolutely *requires* the continuing failure of the many.[20]

Sadly, if predictably, marketing imperatives work hard to hinder such incipient political potential from clearing the space to develop. The media, politicians and major record companies may have their pound of institutionally racist flesh,but money sets the parameters.2-Pac is a typical case—his attempt to meld lower class manifesto ('Thug Life') and Black Panther-derived social credo was sabotaged by the commercial strategy of his label, Death Row, who progressively spiked all but the most nihilistic material.[21] On the whole, the transgressive power of lower class vernacular retains the affiliation of core audiences, but being presented solely in terms of Blackness sells more widely, engages the pro-censorship Black and white middle classes, suits the scaremongering of the media and conservative politicians, and fits various agendas of racial essentialism and Black unity (hence the furore over Eminem's casual disruption of these rhetorics). Paul Gilroy characterises the outcome of this ideological tangle in the cultural compromise formation that is contemporary hip hop as "revolutionary conservatism". He points out that its utterly hybrid and syncretic nature, and the diversity (especially in terms of class) of its producers and users account for both hip hop's unprecedented global popularity and the consistent failure of public discourses to understand it.[22]

Arts of Resistance

Russell Potter argues that the resistive potential of hip hop lies in its continuing capacity to articulate contemporary vernacular subversions of dominant cultures, in late capitalist conditions of increasingly global and frantic commodification. The significance of African American traditions is that their particular cultural trajectory from slavery till now has enhanced the ability to creatively steal,mock, honour and re-present ideas, words and sounds simultaneously, in order to convey experience,history, pain and desire in artistic expression—and have thus been especially well-placed to exploit post-modern forms of bricolage and revision.[23] So from a core, or benchmark,of black practice, hip hop has mobilised the whole range of cultural material at its disposal, using all available techniques and technologies, to suit its own local and equally subordinated expressive needs—including those of racially mixed and culturally hybrid communities and scenes. This has enabled its worldwide dispersal,through a commodified 'word of mouth', to overflow and sidestep all of the clumsy and misguided attempts at policing and suppression.[24]

But while these vernacular cultures can provide the necessary grounds for transgression,this can easily resolve into mere coping mechanisms on the part of the oppressed, who remain contained by power. This danger is acute given that the fetishised fashion accessory of superficial 'blackness' in style without content is now offered unremittingly for consumption, including the purely commercial manufacture of simulations of grass-roots practice.Many marketed hip hop acts, black as well as white, could be interpreted as domesticated Brer Rabbits in this sense, such as Puff Daddy/P.Diddy (a bourgeois 'class minstrel' and rather bad MC), Vanilla Ice (fake 'black' and fake 'street') or N'Sync's Justin Timberlake (fake everything)—not Eminem, though, who is to some extent honourable even if failing to outwit the Fox.Conversely, various derivations of hip hop have virtually offered themselves up for recuperation, taking themselves too seriously through pretension or elitism. In the UK this might include the trip-hop and drum and bass genres,which sought to legitimise themselves in terms of mainstream aesthetic values and the accumulation of cultural capital; or the remnants of rave cultures whose absorption into mere weekend recreation seems virtually complete. Whereas in rap music the dense and sophisticated vernacular, the oppositional stance and refusal of respectability, and grass-roots credibility, affiliation and involvement

combine in ways that, even after more than two decades, still seem to completely confound the status quo—as the reception of *8 Mile* in clueless celebration or malicious dismissal suggests.

James Scott has revealed how colonised and enslaved subjects communicate among themselves using 'hidden transcripts' in language and cultural activities.[25] These nurture resistance to domination and keep hope alive, while the explicit versions in 'public transcripts' purport to and seem to fit the demands of the ruling groups—to whom the 'real' meaning is opaque. Scott concludes that when political action does develop against domination, it is the hidden transcripts which provide the discursive and cultural weaponry and ammunition which explode into overt expressions of revolt.Maybe hip hop's enduring achievement will be that, in terms of surface appearance in the age of Spectacle, the hidden and public transcripts are the same—although the meanings are worlds apart. The complacent networks of privilege try to suppress the open expression of the vernacular, mistaking symptom for cause and in the process revealing the stupidity, venality and complicity of their cultural disciplinarians. But the politics of rap's reception provides the younger, newer strata of colonised, enslaved,migrant and surplus urban populations with the opportunity to bear witness to the obscenity of the globalised New World Order and its neo-feudal military economy.

This isn't politics in the recognised formal,programmatic sense; it's a set of cultural patterns which adeptly resist the hitherto false promises of such straightjacketing—on the part of those excluded from all other sites and systems of cultural *and* political expression. By the understanding and generalisation of the details of specific experience into actively shared anger, private dissatisfaction can be transformed into a rap(t) productive engagement when, all around,defeatist cynicism is a more intelligible response to today's most unpromising of circumstances (and fostered as such as a deliberate tactic to shortcircuit opposition). As Paul Gilroy stresses, quoting Rakim, "It ain't where you're from,it's where you're at".[26] The question of where you want to go is still open.

Notes

1 From 'The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story', Joel Chandler Harris,in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, illustrated by A.B. Frost, Appleton Century Crofts Inc., 1908.

2. The best introduction to hip hop is still Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Wesleyan University Press, 1994.Discussions of the African American genealogy of the Blues and Black literature respectively can be found in: Houston A. Baker Jr., *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, University of Chicago Press, 1984; and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifiying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford University Press, 1988. For the global reach of rap music see: David Toop, *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop*, Pluto Press,1991; and Tony Mitchell (Ed.) *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the U.S.A*, Wesleyan University Press, 2001.
3. In: BBC 2's *Newsnight Review*, 17th January, 2003.
4. 'The unbearable whiteness of emceeing: what the eminence of Eminem says about race', *The Source*, February 2003, pp.91-2.
5. Other than music videos, of course. The nearest mainstream cinema has come recently is the portrayal of a rap poet (Saul Williams) in *Slam* (Marc Levine, 1999), and a documentary on hip hop DJing (*Scratch*, Doug Pray, 2001).
6. For example Ryan Gilbey, 'In the ghetto', *Sight & Sound*, February 2003,pp.36-7.
7. In: *Lock Up Your Daughters: Sex,Drugs and Rock 'N' Roll*, BBC 1, 2003.
8. Most clearly seen in *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000,both Aftermath Entertainment/ Interscope Records); and D12's *Devil's Night* (Shady Records/ Interscope Records, 2001).
9. In 'Insane in the membrane: the Black movie antihero of the '90s', *The Source*, May 1997,pp.36-37, Marcus Reeves shows how this staple figure in Blaxploitation films relates social conditions to *behaviour* rather than to *being*. See also S.Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema*, University of Chicago Press, 1999.
10 Eminem, in: *Rhythm Nation*, BBC Radio 1,28th March 1999. His latest release, *The Eminem Show* (Aftermath Records, 2002) leavens the shock tactics with faltering attempts at serious commentary and some rather bland pop and rock sentimentality parachuted in.
11 Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, Cambridge University Press,2000.
12.Eminem freely acknowledges his shortcomings here, for example in *Angry Blonde*, Regan Books/Harper Collins, 2000,and Chuck Weiner (Ed.) *Eminem 'Talking': Marshall Mathers In His Own Words*, Omnibus Press,2002.Hilariously, Will Self mistakes this for a "white sensibility": *Newsnight Review*, BBC 2, 17th January, 2003.
13.UK rap critics generally appreciate the wordplay skills (and little else) in the Eminem "circus": e.g. Philip Mlynar's review of *The Eminem Show in Hip Hop Connection*, July 2002, p.77.But again, the final judgement still tends to come down to race.
14.Unless veiled by 'the dozens' or displaced into sex stories. See: Robin D.G. Kelley's contemporary-historical analysis, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*, Beacon Press, 1997; and Bell Hooks' painstaking and moving discussion in *Salvation: Black People and Love*, Women's Press, 2001. Paul Gilroy examines related questions of freedom, race and gender relations in Black music in 'After the love has gone: bio-politics and etho-poetics in the Black public sphere', *Public Culture*, Vol. 7,No. 1, 1994,pp.51-76.
15.In the sense of "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity", Noel Ignatiev & John Garvey (Eds.) *Race Traitor*, Routledge,1990; and contrary to Tom Paulin's wish-fulfilment (ascribing to Eminem sentiments like "I don't want to be white any more"), in *Newsnight Review*, BBC 2, 17th January, 2003. For whatever reasons,Eminem has scrupulously edited out of his lyrics all signs of the lower class white racism and much of the Black ghetto vernacular he will have grown up with.Incidentally in UK hip-hop, racism is also viewed depressingly often as mere individual prejudice rather than a historical and institutional phenomenon.
16.This is Eminem's mantra, repeated in countless interviews,apparently unaware of the skin privilege giving him the luxury of asserting it. So, receiving probation in April 2001 for a weapons offence, he stated that the judge "treated me fair, like any other human being" (Mansel Fletcher, 'A year of living dangerously', *Hip Hop Connection*, January 2002, pp.59-61). Whereas a Black 'regular guy' would get jail time—particularly pertinent given the new 'plantation slavery' of US prisons and sentencing policy.
17.'The Way I Am', *The Marshall Mathers LP*. Meanwhile, the media's celebrity chatter remains oblivious to creative licence, obsessing about the lyrics' literal truth, for example in Nick Hasted's, *The Dark Story of Eminem*, Omnibus Press, 2003.
18.Nelson George's *Hip Hop America* (Penguin, 1998) gives a concise account of the commercial rap industry's development.
19.In: *Lock Up Your Daughters: Sex, Drugs and Rock 'N' Roll*, BBC 1,2003. Apparently Dr Dre also expected less censorship pressures on a white artist (Ian Gittins, Eminem,Carlton Books,2001, p.17).
20 See Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough For You? Popular Culture from the Hood and Beyond*, Indiana University Press,1997.As well as the liberal-conservative themes of films like *Boyz N The Hood* (John Singleton, 1991) and *The Player's Club* (Ice Cube, 1996),there is now a sickening trend for hip hop celebrities to publish self-help homilies and cliches about believing in yourself and working hard to gain success (for example in books by Queen Latifah and LL Cool J).Also note that

'gangsta' now conflates the earlier terms 'hardcore' and 'reality' rap in a classic African American Signifyin' move.
21.See Armond White, *Rebel for the Hell of it: the Life of Tupac Shakur*, Quartet,1997; and Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching For Tupac Shakur*, Plexus, 2001. Earlier, the inspiring political initiatives from the 1992 LA uprising and subsequent gang truce were neglected in commercial LA rap: see, for example Mike Davis, *L.A. Was Just the Beginning. Urban Revolt in the United States: A Thousand Points of Light*. Open Magazine Pamphlets,1992.
22. Paul Gilroy, 'After the love has gone' (see note 14), and *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, Serpent's Tail, 1993. The importance of hybridity and syncretic processes in the development of Black culture is stressed in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993. Many writers of the 'hip hop generation' use this kind of analysis to avoid the critical impasse which results from the assumption of a singular Black (or any other) identity—for example in Mark Anthony Neal's superb *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic*, Routledge, 2002.
23.Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, State University of New York Press,1995.
24.Including occasionally from within the rap industry: see for example ex-*The Source* editorial staff member Bakari Kitwana's *The Rap on Gangsta Rap*, Third World Press, 1994.
25. James C.Scott, *Domination: the Arts of Resistance*, Yale University Press, 1990.
26. Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts*, see note 22.