

HIP HOP BEEF: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION THROUGH  
A CASE STUDY OF THE FEUD BETWEEN KENDRICK LAMAR  
AND DRAKE

by

CADEN KEYSTON

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Philosophy  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Science

May 2025

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Caden Keyston for the degree of Bachelor of Science  
in the Department of Philosophy to be taken June 2025

Title: Hip Hop Beef: A Philosophical examination through a case study of the feud between  
Kendrick Lamar and Drake

Approved: Zachary Wallmark, Ph.D.  
Primary Thesis Advisor

Hip Hop has become the most popular genre of music in the United States. One of the key features of hip hop is rap beef where artists engage in a lyrical duel until one rapper has emerged on top. This thesis will explore the ideological fault lines of authenticity in hip hop and how tensions over these fault lines lead to conflict over what it means to be a rapper. I will argue that being authentic to yourself has a heightened importance in hip hop. Rappers who make music that lacks genuine self expression for monetary gain are often a topic of criticism within hip hop. This is due to the pioneers of the genre's advocacy for underserved communities and being politically outspoken.

I postulate that these conflicts known as rap beefs happen in the form of three primary thematic attacks: alignment between true self and hip hop persona, musical creativity and lyrical wit, and eventually nuclear lyrical warfare with the sole intention of hurting the opponent. I support these three primary themes with philosophical writings from Theodor Adorno, Simon Frith, Edouard Glissant and Jaques Attali. There exists a subculture within hip hop that will always show resistance towards what Adorno calls the Culture Industry and a preference for a “pure” version of hip hop. This is based on the original template of what it meant to be a rapper before the genre was industrialized in the 80’s and early 90’s. Recently, Kendrick Lamar and Drake engaged in what is now the biggest rap beef of all time. These two artists are very different and thus provide a case study into a rap beef encompassing the primary themes presented in this thesis. Through the case study of Kendrick Lamar and Drake’s battle the three primary themes presented are shown to provide an understanding of how rap beefs function symbolically and why they are so important.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to give special thanks to my Mom and my Dad for exposing me to the world of hip hop from a young age, in addition to fostering an appreciation for music as an art form. Additionally, I want to thank Professor Zachary Wallmark and Professor Anita Chari for guiding my research in this process and assisting me in curating the ideas in this thesis. Without encouragement from my family, friends, and faculty at University of Oregon this project would not have been possible.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter 1: History of Hip Hop	9
Early Days of Hip Hop	9
The Original Hip Hop Big Three	10
Hip Hop begins to get popular	11
The Rise of Gangsta Rap	12
The Standard Template of a Rapper	12
Evolution of Hip Hop Styles	13
Overview of Authenticity	14
The Problem with Fake Gangsters	18
Artists/factors that led to shifts in the boundaries of hip hop	19
Eminem and the explosion of white hip hop fandom	21
Tension and Competition in hip hop	23
Chapter 2: Philosophical undertones to the modern music industry	26
The Culture Industry	26
Ideological implications from music	27
The 'Indie Rap' Mentality	27
Simon Frith and defining Pop Music	28
Regression of the consumer	29
Music as a political entity	31
Edouard Glissant and the concept of Reversion	33
The 'Hip hop is dead' narrative	35
Concluding Philosophical Ideas	37
Chapter 3: The history of rap beef and three common types of attack	39
Rap Beef Origins	39
Theme One: Misalignment between musical expression and true self	40
Theme Two: Musical and/or lyrical creativity	42
Theme Three: Nuclear Lyrical warfare	44
Chapter 4: Beef case study	48
Drake Career Overview	48
Kendrick Lamar Career Overview	51
Track One: "First Person Shooter" by Drake, J Cole	52

Track Two: “Like That” by Future, Metro Boomin, Kendrick Lamar	53
Track Three: “Push Ups” by Drake	54
Track Four: “Taylor Made Freestyle” by Drake	55
Track Five: “Euphoria” by Kendrick Lamar	56
Track Six: “6:16 in LA” by Kendrick Lamar	59
Track Seven: “Family Matters” by Drake	60
Track Eight: “Meet the Grahams” by Kendrick Lamar	62
Track Ten: “The Heart Part 6” by Drake	69
The legal aftermath of the beef	72
The Pop Out Concert	74
Track Eleven: “Watch the Party Die” by Kendrick Lamar	75
Track Twelve: “Wacced out Murals” by Kendrick Lamar	77
Kendrick’s Super Bowl halftime show	82
Drake since the beef	84
Recap of the beef	85
Section 5: Concluding thoughts & the future of hip hop	86
Concluding Thoughts	86
Places for future research	87
Bibliography	89

## List of Tables

Table 1: BEEFS TABLE

47

## Introduction

Colloquially, a rap ‘beef’ is understood as two or more rap artists settling a disagreement by releasing ‘diss tracks’ directed at each other. It is exciting for fans of artists engaged in beef because it is similar to spectating a sporting event in which there is often a clear winner and loser. This thesis aims to provide a methodology for understanding rap beefs grounded in philosophy from Theodor Adorno, Simon Frith, Edouard Glissant, and Jaques Attali. These philosophical undertones will be confounded by the words of many rappers viewed as legends within hip hop to display the validity of these philosophical themes. This thesis begins with an overview of the history of hip hop, followed by the philosophical texts grounding the three methods of attack most common in beefs and historical context of how beefs go. The fourth section uses the beef between Kendrick Lamar and Drake as an example to explain these vast ideological differences and how they manifested in the form of some of the most popular diss tracks ever. The thesis finishes with places where hip hop could use more research as the next few years play out after the beef between Drake and Kendrick Lamar.

### *Disclaimer:*

There is a key aspect of the modern music industry that must be addressed. To some degree, any person who is publicly releasing their music is doing so as a source of income. Any artist who uses music as their career path is seeking financial compensation. It would be a naive and disingenuous argument to claim that popular artists have no care for the money they receive. Due to this, I do not believe that a “pure” form of hip hop exists. Through this thesis, referring to “pure” hip hop will refer to music encapsulating the themes described by Mos Def and GZA and many other of the legends within hip hop. The early forms of hip hop were not developed enough sonically, and even the perceived “Golden Age” in the 90’s existed in a heavily commodified

era. However, some of the most legendary rappers of all time show resistance to specific traits of what they consider to be “commercialized” hip hop. What this thesis aims to examine is to what degree being perceived as dedicated to financial success impedes the integrity of the core values laid out by the stars of the hip hop genre who pride themselves as artists representative of hip hop. This does not intend to vilify anyone who uses music as a career that can make them a living, rather this thesis wants to interrogate how differing motivations can impact their careers and lead to conflict in the genre known as hip hop. We will examine the entirety of this spectrum of musical styles and how wars over aesthetics permeate within the genre.

## Chapter 1: History of Hip Hop

### Early Days of Hip Hop

Since the inception of hip hop in the late 70's and early 80's, the genre has grown to heights the original MC's would never believe. The most accepted belief is that hip hop originated in the South Bronx in New York City in 1973 at a party thrown by DJ Kool Herc.<sup>1</sup> DJ Kool Herc was playing the typical role of a DJ at a party which is managing the music that is playing to facilitate a fun environment. He was playing everyone's music, when he launched a new technique he thought of before the party, which was letting the beat break play a little longer than normal and continually restarting it. This technique was called the "Merry go Round" and it became very popular among the crowd of energetic youth who were listening and enjoyed dancing to it. This was significant because the beat break is the part of the song in which b-boys and b girls would dance ("break dancing"). DJ Kool Herc's technique extended the time in which the beat break played, which allowed for more dancing. DJ Kool Herc did this by turning back the record. This was successful and he began to alternate back and forth on just the beat breaks between two records. DJ Kool Herc enlisted the help of an MC named Coke La Rock who freestyled (rapping without any pre-written lyrics) over DJ Kool Herc's beats. This was not recorded, but it is still known as the start of hip hop due to its techniques being foundational for the sonic aesthetics that would come later. An important thing to understand about early hip hop is the distinction between the MC and the DJ. The DJ would utilize turntable techniques to play music people could dance to, and the MC served as the person rapping over the beats.

---

<sup>1</sup> Orejuela, Fernando. *Rap and Hip Hop Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

## The Original Hip Hop Big Three

Aside from DJ Kool Herc, the two other south Bronx DJ's mostly credited for the growth of early hip hop were Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash. Afrika Bambaataa coined the term 'hip hop' and was known as the "master of records," having an expansive collection that led to some of the most sampled songs.<sup>2</sup> He also did things outside of music such as leading gangs away from violence through his group "Universal Zulu Nation." Through this group he guided other young people involved in hip hop towards expressing themselves through music.

Grandmaster Flash came later and studied Herc's technique, and developed the "quick mix theory." Rather than lifting the tone arm of the record player each time, he placed his hand on the center of the record and used the backspin technique.

With hip hop being a genre that is rooted so deeply in other cultures, we can say that hip hop as a culture has been around prior to the development of music we know as "rap." Afrika Bambaataa called "Apache" by Incredible Bongo Band the "national anthem of hip hop." We can consider this song as such due to its influence in terms of how it was sampled and used in future songs. A little further down the line in 1979, the song "Rappers Delight" was a big deal because it was the first song to glorify the idea of the MC (now called "rapper"). After this record was so successful, the role of the solo MC started to take shape, in the form of Kurtis Blow with his hit song "The Breaks." On "The Breaks" we hear Kurtis rapping solo, which to this point was uncommon, as the role of the MC was primarily in support of the DJ. Much of the progression of the early musical aesthetics in hip hop can be attributed to the rise of better quality speakers. In the '60s and 70's Jamaican sound systems allowed for sounds to go lower than ever before, which gave way to bass, a prominent feature of a hip hop song. The earliest

---

<sup>2</sup> Orejuela, Fernando. *Rap and Hip Hop Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

forms of competition came through sound clash competitions outdoors that pushed groups to take sounds further and better. King Tubby was a Jamaican engineer in the '70s that advanced hip-hop through the idea of the “dub and talk-over.” This entailed remixing and chopping songs in the studio and then talking over these recordings to make them a fully original idea. Overall, the origins of hip hop happened in a specific time and place in which young Black people in the south Bronx (among others) were able to channel their energy and creativity through music and form something that was truly unique in the musical landscape.

### **Hip Hop begins to get popular**

The popularity of hip hop guaranteed more money due to the capitalist nature of America. With more money comes more artists, and more ideas. This is true for any genre. The historical precedent shows that much of what is popular music started as Black music that was popularized by white artists and label executives watering it down and selling it to white audiences. For example, Elvis Presley famously co-opted a Black sound and put his own name on it. For hip hop specifically, the growth in popularity has had its pros and cons. It has given a voice to people who otherwise wouldn't have had one. The aesthetic diversification of sounds is a good thing for fans, and in terms of sheer quantity, there is more good hip hop as a result. It has also given a platform to artists who make poor quality music and has led to a more commodified product. The moment many people cite as when hip hop really started to break through was when Run DMC collaborated with Aerosmith on a cover of “Walk This Way” released in 1986 with accompanying music video. The video features Run DMC literally jumping through a wall, as a representation of how big that song was at the time. This song marked a point in time when an entirely new audience was exposed to hip hop and it grew in popularity from there.

## **The Rise of Gangsta Rap**

In the early 90's, the gangsta rap sound began to resonate with audiences for its provocative, violent lyricism. Lucien Flores has an article titled "Hip Hop Is for Everybody" about the growth of hip hop over time which discusses this radical shift that occurred in the late 80's once more and more label money started pouring in to support artists. Flores points out that soon after major labels started signing hip hop artists the lyrical content began to get far more "hyper masculine" and violent<sup>3</sup>. Flores' discussion continues by talking about how hip hop has changed and grown in popularity and even popped up in other cultures. Flores concludes by saying that as the genre grows there will still be artists looking to maintain hip hop as a voice for social change. Flores argues that just because an artist identifies with gangsta rap does not mean they are an inauthentic label product, but in some specific cases there were artists using the aesthetic for monetary gain.

## **The Standard Template of a Rapper**

At the inception of the genre and in the years after a template and set of values organically formed. Many of the top MCs fit this template. This thesis aims more to examine what would be labeled as an MC back in the 70's and 80's. There was never a true list or rulebook but a general understanding of the expectations for a hip hop MC were that they displayed a high level of wordplay and rhyming and could rap on beat. There are rappers with many different nationalities, religious views and all sorts of different traits. There exists one identifiable characteristic that is the same among all well respected MCs: they do not try to be

---

<sup>3</sup> Flores, Lucien J. 2012. "Hip-Hop Is for Everybody: Examining the Roots and Growth of Hip-Hop." *Inquiries Journal* 4 (05). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1686/hip-hop-is-for-everybody-examining-the-roots-and-growth-of-hip-hop>.

something they are not. Simply put, they make music that is a pure expression of self and in most cases, no one in hip hop will come at you. This is not to suggest that it is unacceptable to incorporate elements of theatricality. Del the Funky Homosapien created an entire fictional world on Deltron 3030, and that was beloved by fans for its immense creativity and storytelling. However, Del doing so is far different than an artist like Vanilla Ice lying about his background as a kid from the suburbs to gain additional respect from his peers. There are exceptions to this, like the much forgotten hip hop duo Kid n' Play, who made a sanitized and PG version of rap despite having a challenging upbringing. These two rappers were brutally attacked in a rap beef with Luke from 2 Live Crew. They mainly faded as the market for their style of music was steamrolled by the juggernaut that was gangsta rap. In terms of the more optional characteristics, a focus on emotion through lyricism, or a focus on emotion through overall sound. If you are a rapper who is more focused on being an elite lyrical MC, there is a natural level of competitive spirit that comes with that.

### **Evolution of Hip Hop Styles**

The earliest form of hip hop was solely meant for party music. Conscious rappers were an offshoot of hip hop which began in the late 80's with acts like KRS One. Once these rappers' music began to gain notoriety and popularity was when there became an unspoken cultural responsibility for lyrical MCs to spread useful political messaging. KRS One influenced many east coast legends, as well as artists like Ice Cube and 2pac. 2pac influenced an entire generation, spearheaded by Kendrick Lamar. Conversely, the "party" style of hip hop has been present throughout the evolution of hip hop. It began with the original DJs at parties in the Bronx and expanded to the Afrocentric rhymes of A Tribe Called Quest and eventually their influence led to other more artistic acts like MF DOOM and Kanye West. The artists who were influenced by

Kanye West are guys like Kid Cudi, Travis Scott, Future, etc. Though the sonic aesthetic of these artists may be very different from what longtime hip hop fans want to hear they still represent the lineage of this style of art. Where they lack lyrical subject matter they make up for it with crisp production and club anthems that have dominated the charts in the 2010's and now the 2020's. Most importantly, these artists do not wear costumes, they exist as themselves. Travis Scott was born into a crime riddled area in South Houston but moved to a middle-class suburb around the age of 6. Travis Scott has never tried to claim to have any sort of gang related background, nor has he claimed any hip hop supremacy. Travis Scott has never claimed to be the best lyricist. He is authentic as a rapper because he represents another great artist in the lineage of Houston hip hop. His music may reference DJ Screw or other legends from his area but these are faithful to who Travis Scott is as a person. It is hard to make a template that can encompass 50 years plus of hip hop history but the bottom line is that hip hop has always been a fun blend between conscious storytelling and music to dance to.

### **Overview of Authenticity**

Hip hop music originally comes from Black American, Latino and Jamaican cultures. In the early days of hip hop the underlying factors that are most crucial to authenticity were race and economic status. Being authentic meant displaying yourself truthfully through your music as a form of self expression. Throughout hip hop history, there are many artists deemed as authentic by fans.

The following artists provide examples of how authenticity is mobilized through music. Nas showed his authenticity through first person stories of his hard times in New York. Biggie proved his authenticity through achieving a balance between emotionally vulnerable music in addition to stories from the streets. A Tribe Called Quest took a different approach in favor of an

Afrocentric form of music that was authentic in its own way because the members of Tribe all stayed true to their own values. 50 Cent leveraged getting shot as a justification that his tough guy persona in his songs translates to real life. These are not the only four ways to establish authenticity, they are effective examples that display how good artists have been able to be authentic in a manner that is genuine.

*Example One: "New York State of Mind" by Nas*

On the track "New York State of Mind" Nas tells a cautionary tale about violence in New York where he grew up and expresses his anxiety for his life when living there. He does not claim to be the kingpin or in some position of power. He tells the story from his perspective. This claim to authenticity is established from his origins in the place where hip hop was invented. When listening to his music it is clear that Nas is deeply rooted in New York which adds to the impact of his music. Nas rapped from his own perspective based on his experiences. In the song, he raps:

"So hold your stash 'til the coke price drop  
I know this crackhead who said she gotta smoke nice rock  
And if it's good, she'll bring you customers and measuring pots  
But yo, you gotta slide on a vacation  
Inside information keeps large n\*\*\*\*\* erasin' and their wives basin'  
It drops deep as it does in my breath  
I never sleep, 'cause sleep is the cousin of death  
Beyond the walls of intelligence, life is defined  
I think of crime when I'm in a New York State of Mind"

Nas describes in visceral detail what the New York State of Mind feels like. Nas' description sounds bleak and desolate. Through his vivid description of the issues plaguing the area where he was brought up it establishes his music as authentic to the listener.

*Example Two: "Everyday Struggle" by Biggie*

Biggie employed a different strategy than Nas. Biggie took the aggression up a notch, while also opening himself up as a vulnerable person. This stark contrast establishes authenticity through relating to the listener. With tensions rising between the east and west coasts and gangsta rap dominating the billboard charts, artists tried to create an image of themselves that was associated with power and wealth. On "Everyday Struggle," Biggie raps about his problems:

"I don't wanna live no more  
Sometimes I hear death knocking at my front door  
I'm living everyday like a hustle  
Another drug to juggle, another day, another struggle"

Biggie opens up emotionally, mentioning his dwindling will to live. Once the idea of the "gangster" began, hip hop shifted and the idea of authenticity became a much more nuanced debate. People questioned if these artists were all that they said they were and if the music could hold up if they were not. Biggie furthered his vulnerability by allowing people to see his deepest insecurities on songs like "Suicidal Thoughts" where he talks about wishing his Mom would not have given birth to him. He was able to balance being honest about his life with being incredibly intimidating with songs like "Who Shot Ya" which mocked Tupac's paranoia about the cause of his being shot 5 times while leaving the studio on November 30th, 1994. He represented a movement within hip hop about being honest and introspective while also not being afraid to rap about his life on the streets. This duality was equal parts intimidating and relatable for listeners.

*Example Three: "Excursions" by A Tribe Called Quest*

A Tribe Called Quest challenged the idea of authenticity with a far more Afrocentric style of music. They address their African roots, and address events in the US far less than a rapper like Nas would. This would seem to many to be contradictory to common standards of

authenticity but the important thing is that their music was genuine to who the members of Tribe were. Their music was different from what was popular at the time featuring jazz influence rather than the more abrasive beats that the gangster rap artists were using at the time. On “Excursions”

Q Tip (the lead rapper of A Tribe Called Quest) raps:

“Listen to the rhymes, cuz its time to make gravy  
If it moves your booty, then shake, shake it baby  
All the way to Africa a.k.a. The Motherland (uh)  
Stick out the left, then I'll ask for the other hand”

Rather than writing aggressive lyrics to come off tough this song references Africa as the motherland and contains far different subject matter than the rest of the mainstream. Their Afrocentric aesthetic represents a movement within hip hop towards a more indie sound where artists could express themselves freely. A Tribe Called Quest’s music also represents the idea that rappers do not need to have a gangster persona to be authentic. Gangsta rap was a popular movement, but it can also be reductive because it can perpetuate racial stereotypes when the aesthetic is used for the wrong reasons.

*Example Four: “Many Men” by 50 Cent*

On “Many Men” by 50 Cent now revered as one of the best rap songs of the 21st century, 50 Cent raps about his experience getting shot and surviving. 50 Cent branded himself as a tough guy and his strategy to add authenticity to his brand was through many aggressive diss tracks on mixtapes with his rap group “G Unit” on his way to popularity. On his debut album *Get Rich or Die Trying* he featured the song “Many Men.” In the third verse of the song he raps the iconic bars:

“In the Bible, it says what goes around, comes around  
Hommo shot me, three weeks later he got shot down  
Now it's clear that I'm here for a real reason  
'Cause he got hit like I got hit, but he ain't fuckin' breathin”

In these lines, 50 references the person who shot him and talks about his belief in being kept alive for holy reasons and his enemies life being taken in a divine act of karma. This establishes his authenticity as a rapper because it displays a physical toughness that can back up the claims he makes in his songs.

### **The Problem with Fake Gangsters**

On The Roots third album, *Illadelph Halflife* there is a song titled “What They Do,” in which the group threw subtle shots at rappers who imitate the gangster lifestyle to sell more records. This is significant because Black Thought (the group’s lead MC) is not known for being a rapper who often disses. They did this by creating a scene visually similar to the song “One More Chance” by Biggie. The intention of this reference was to satirize rappers trying to be like Biggie to sell records not make fun of Biggie himself. On an interview with Talib Kweli in 2023 Black Thought mentioned that at the time of release Biggie actually thought the record was directed at him. Talib Kweli cleared up that it was not a shot at Biggie and poses to Black Thought:

“For me as a fan, “What They Do” is making fun of fake gangsters, industry gangsters, people who was putting on this gangster image to sell a product for the music business, when I think of N.O.R.E, N.O.R.E. spent a lot of time in jail as a juvenile. Biggie is well documented, his street escapades are well documented. So me as a fan, I never took it like you was dissing people like that.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Talib Kweli. n.d. (371) Black Thought Tells The Story Of Biggie Thinking That The Roots Dissed Him | People’s Party Clip - YouTube. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOiDzisbMlw>.

Black Thought confirmed Talib's suspicions to be true and clarified that the satirical elements of the music video were solely directed at people who were imitating an aesthetic based upon an experience that they did not have. Doing so was offensive to other rappers who had lived the experience that "industry gangsters" tried to capitalize on.

### **Artists/factors that led to shifts in the boundaries of hip hop**

There was a large shift collectively in hip hop after the deaths of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls in 1996-7. Though gangsta rap was able to maintain its popularity there was also an increase in the popularity of other styles of hip hop.

#### *Kanye West and Backpack Rap*

Kanye West, who has tarnished his legacy in the last 4 years, was one of the most important and influential figures over what hip hop would eventually become. Kanye West started his career as a producer for Jay Z and other New York artists before rapping himself. With Kanye West's background he did not match the typical rapper template. Rather than being from one of the main coastal cities he was from the Chicago suburbs. Kanye West appealed to an entirely new demographic as he popularized the form of rapper dubbed as the "backpack rapper" which had been growing in popularity throughout the 90's. A "backpack rapper" is a term that people used to use to describe a rapper who made socially conscious music and stayed true to their own experiences through a more artistic style of rapping, which provided a stark contrast to the gangsta rap that was so big during the late 80's and 90's. Kanye worked on multiple occasions with Talib Kweli, one of the original backpack rappers.

Kanye pioneered sounds never before utilized and most famously had one of the first successful uses of autotune on his 4th record, *808's and Heartbreak*. Fans revered this style because it juxtaposed emotional lyrics with the cold, emotionless sound of the reverb filled

autotune. This sonic breakthrough inspired an entire generation of rappers who took the autotune sound to another level as the foundation for subgenres now known as “cloud rap, melodic trap, and emo trap.” This encompasses artists like: Kid Cudi, Drake, Future, Travis Scott, Young Thug, Lil Uzi Vert, Juice WRLD, The Weeknd, Childish Gambino, Chance the Rapper, Playboi Carti and many more. In combination with a less regionalized hip hop scene with many artists existing in a digital space from anywhere in the world, it made hip hop more accessible than it had ever been before.

### *The Fall of the Gatekeeper*

In the 90’s and prior, to become a popular rapper you had to either be discovered first hand by a label, or be approved by someone like Sean “Diddy” Combs. Diddy’s original role in hip hop was to be a gatekeeper, someone who had industry connections and someone who was aware of what artists were growing in word of mouth popularity. Diddy and the other gatekeepers were in charge of evaluating upcoming hip hop talent to sign to a label contract. This empowered many middle men existing between primarily white label corporations and the rappers themselves. In the modern era these original gatekeepers have ceased to exist. It is easier than ever to be an independent artist due to the potential for self promotion on the internet. In the modern digital space people who would not have been allowed into hip hop in the past are able to get their music out there. Rather than people like James Prince who were more involved in the culture, in the internet era, the gatekeepers of hip hop are people like Adam22, or Adin Ross, who really don’t have a lot to add to a nuanced hip hop discussion. These are individuals who are famous mainly due to influencer status, and are easily manipulated behind the scenes for monetary gain. Despite them, there are others who do care about the genre and have reasonably large social media followings like FD Signifier, Justin Hunte, or Anthony Fantano. Regardless,

due to the nature of their content being more thought provoking and lacking buzzy headlines, these individuals will never receive the same level of internet attention as those who aim to get it.

### *Eminem and the explosion of white hip hop fandom*

Many factors led to hip hop becoming more commercially successful, but the other one that is relevant to discussions of authenticity in a commercialized era is Eminem. Prior to Eminem's popularity, there had been moments where white rappers had moments of fame. Vanilla Ice had the number one single *Ice Ice Baby*, though his career declined quickly after that song and he was never able to sustain success. Vanilla Ice lost credibility because people discovered he had been lying about his background. Rather than growing up with a street background like he claimed, Vanilla Ice was actually from an affluent white suburb in Texas. The Beastie Boys had a large influence as one of the most legendary music groups in any genre. Their music was a blend of hip hop, punk, rock and other genres which partially disqualifies them from being discussed as a quintessential hip hop group. Eminem was hip hop's first white megastar. A common narrative used to attack Eminem was that he only had fans because he was white, not skilled, and even that he was a "poser" in hip hop appropriating Black music. There certainly are parallels to the career of a star like Elvis, given how popular Eminem's music was.

Eminem provided a very interesting case for why he deserved to be seen as authentic. Eminem satirized whiteness with the now famous character "Slim Shady." Eminem used the Slim Shady persona to make fun of white stereotypes and even confounded this with his iconic nasally delivery.<sup>5</sup> Eminem has been the topic of significant academic discourse, including the book *Everything but the Burden*, written by Greg Tate. Tate wrote, "Eminem has not arrived at

---

<sup>5</sup> Loren Kajikawa, "My Name Is": Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race" and "Conclusion," in *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 118–149. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.

Black culture...he has arrived at white culture with an authentic performance of whiteness, influences by a historical concept of Blackness.”<sup>6</sup> Eminem consciously subverted the narratives used against him from the moment he stepped up to the microphone. Eminem honed his skills early in his career by rap battling at open mic’s in Detroit where he grew up. Eminem notoriously grew up with a single mother addicted to drugs, and experienced a difficult childhood. These factors together permitted Eminem’s entry into the hip hop scene along with a cosign from legendary producer Dr Dre.

Eminem was also never afraid to speak his mind about important political topics. Prior to Donald Trump being elected as president in 2016 Eminem did a freestyle talking about the political state of the country and heavily criticized what Trump stands for. In an interview with BET, discussing Eminem’s freestyle, legendary Wu Tang Clan rapper Redman said “he’s not Black he’s white we all know that but he has power, and he used his power on that BET cipher to make a statement for us as well as a people...and anyone should respect that man for that.”<sup>7</sup> His existence alone reset the norms of who could be authentic.

The way Eminem impacted hip hop was twofold. He opened the door for more white artists and the already expanding white fanbase for hip hop exploded. Eminem’s sophomore album *The Marshall Mathers LP* has the biggest first week sales to this date, with 1.76 million copies sold in the first week. Eminem captivated a white audience that was looking for new music to listen to. Bakari Kitwana wrote a book titled *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*, which provides great discussion about the fandom of hip hop in the 90’s and 2000’s. The book

---

<sup>6</sup> Tate, Greg. *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*. Harlem Moon, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Redman. “Redman Reacts to Eminem's Freestyle.” *BET*, BETNetworks, 19 Oct. 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo\\_GLkvRSis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo_GLkvRSis). Accessed 7 June 2022.

primarily discusses the relationship between the white listener and music that began from largely Black artists, but for music to become commercialized it has to receive attention from fans so this book adds to relevant discourse about a demographic of hip hop fans. A key point that Kitwana argues is that young Black people have often been the demographic that sets the trends of what is seen as cool among people, and this worked hand in hand with hip hop, thus making hip hop very cool.<sup>8</sup>This coincided with a growing boredom and alienation among white youth in the 90's who dealt with an increasing rate of households with two parents working, making these young white boys and girls feel independent, thus, making them identify with some of the themes present in popular hip hop music. This growing fanbase expanded hip hop with labels signing more artists than ever, and the music continuing to reach new heights on billboard charts. In the same way that rock n roll resonated with and radicalized the generation prior, hip hop had an unshakable hold on the 90's youth.

### **Tension and Competition in hip hop**

Since the day hip hop became commercial, there has always been some form of tension. Originally, there was tension between regions, then tensions between styles and subgenres and there has always been tension over what it means to be a rapper. There is tension between different cliques of current artists, and tensions between artists from previous generations of hip hop who do not approve of the music being released today. An important distinction must be made as in every genre of music, people often reject new sounds as they age. This tension mainly comes from ideological and philosophical differences. The other aspect that adds to the tension in hip hop comes from the fact that most of the best MCs want to be the best rapper alive, in the

---

<sup>8</sup> Bakari Kitwana. 2005. Why White Kids Love Hip Hop.

same way that a football player wants to be the greatest at their position. This competition surely exists in other genres, in that an artist like Taylor Swift will release countless editions of the same album to achieve a high number of sales. Nevertheless, pop artists are often more focused on their own sales and accolades rather than competition with peers for sport.

### *The Control Verse*

This is something that runs most strongly in hip hop, and is exemplified with Kendrick Lamar's verse on the 2013 Big Sean track "Control." This was one of the most iconic moments in hip hop through the 2010's because it marked a moment in which an up and coming rapper told other artists to their face that he wanted to be better than them. In the verse Lamar rapped:

I heard the barbershops be in great debates all the time  
Bout who's the best MC? Kendrick, Jigga and Nas  
Eminem, Andre 3000, the rest of y'all  
New n\*\*\*\*s just new n\*\*\*\*s, don't get involved  
And I ain't rockin no more designer shit  
White T's and Nike Cortez, this is red Corvettes anonymous  
I'm usually homeboys with the same n\*\*\*\*s I'm rhymin' wit  
But this is hip hop and them n\*\*\*\*s should know what time it is  
And that goes for Jermaine Cole, Big KRIT, Wale  
Pusha T, Meek Millz, A\$AP Rocky, Drake  
Big Sean, Jay Electron', Tyler, Mac Miller  
I got love for you all but I'm tryna murder you n\*\*\*\*s  
Tryna make sure your core fans never heard of you n\*\*\*\*s  
They dont wanna hear not one more noun or verb from you n\*\*\*\*s  
What is competition? I'm tryna raise the bar high  
Who tryna jump and get it? You better off tryna skydive

In this verse, Kendrick Lamar directly states that despite his existing friendships with his peers, he wants to be musically superior to them and he wants them to want the competition just as

much as he does. Kendrick declares the bar sky high and rhetorically asks who wants to jump and get it. He puts himself in the same class as legends like Eminem, Jay Z, and Nas. This song was met with a significant response.

Not everyone took the song the way Kendrick intended with many rappers being upset that Kendrick suggested they get better. In an interview with Hip Hop Nation, Pusha T stated, “It’s the sport of hip hop, and I looked at it like man you know he shouted out his peers, he shouted out his peers and he was like yo I want to take something from your fanbase, Mac Miller’s fanbase, you know I want to take all of that. When is that not...when is that not the mission?”<sup>9</sup> Conversely, Drake felt differently about it, saying in an interview with Billboard magazine, “He didn’t come in there on some wild, ‘I’m in New York, fuck everybody.’ I almost wish he had come in there on that shit because I kind of lost a little bit of respect for the sentiment of the verse. If it’s really ‘fuck everybody’ then it needs to be ‘fuck everybody’. It can’t just be halfway.”<sup>10</sup> This message landed differently depending on the artist, but some appreciated that type of friendly competition more than others. In reality, Kendrick has no interest in legitimately murdering those artists but in terms of being more dominant as an artist, he does and according to the historical precedent of hip hop, he should. Much of the tension in hip hop in general is based around this friendly competition and is a large reason as to why most rappers are willing to settle a beef over a song.

---

9 Hip Hop Nation. 2013. Pusha T Says Kendrick Lamar Thanked Him For Understanding “Control.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c858WS3n6Bc>.

10 Ugwu, Reggie. 2013. “Drake: Kendrick Lamar Is ‘Not Murdering Me, At All, In Any Platform’ (Exclusive).” Billboard (blog). August 30, 2013. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/drake-kendrick-lamar-is-not-murdering-me-at-all-in-any-platform-5679938/>.

## Chapter 2: Philosophical undertones to the modern music industry

### The Culture Industry

Many of the problems running rampant in the entertainment industry in the modern day, were things that philosopher Theodor Adorno foreshadowed in his writing *The Culture Industry* which was published in 1947. The music that Adorno speaks about is mainly in reference to the classical and jazz scene at the time. Be that as it may, many of the ideas Adorno proposes apply to what has happened in the modern music industry as a result of late stage capitalism. In the early pages of the chapter regarding entertainment, Adorno writes, “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together.”<sup>11</sup> Adorno theorized that in a capitalist society, over time the arts (among other things) would be homogenized. Adorno believed that if media and entertainment were to all be controlled by mega conglomerates it would be harmful to art. Adorno was nervous about the potential for popular music to become infected with sameness to the point that anything you would hear would be bland and inoffensive music. For many people, consuming art in the first place is an attractive hobby because it permits one to engage with another person's expression of self, whether that be through film, music, painting or many other mediums for art. Adorno wrote, “The culture industry has finally posited this imitation as absolute. Being nothing other than style, it divulges styles secret: obedience to the social hierarchy.” Thus, the way to effectively fit into the social hierarchy perpetuated by the culture industry, is to subscribe to it. In the modern day, this would mean co-opting the same sorts of sounds that everyone else is doing, or appealing to a specific cultural trend.

---

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. 1947. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

## **Ideological implications from music**

Adorno's points can directly be applied to the modern music industry. In *The Culture Industry*, Adorno wrote, "To this extent the claims of art are always also ideology. Yet it is only in its struggle with tradition, a struggle precipitated in style, that art can find expression for suffering." Though it is not obvious for all artists because they may not acknowledge it, musical aesthetics do come with ideological stances. Take the music of hip hop legend MF DOOM as an example. MF DOOM hung his hat on his ability to make music from the perspectives of characters that he created, even going as far as to release albums under separate names. By doing this, he limited the sales of his music and created a situation where in order to engage with his art, you have to seek it out and appreciate it for what it is. This is a perfect example because the rules of engagement with DOOM clearly imply that writing matters and that creativity is of the utmost importance. According to classic theories of ideology from Adorno, acknowledging ideology renders it ineffective. Though this aligns with the mysterious approach of MF DOOM, it contrasts what is popular among hip hop artists who speak their mind in detail. I argue that Adorno thinks this because of the form of the music he was analyzing at the time. Adorno wrote his original work about Jazz music, which generally does not have vocals. In hip hop, rapping is the primary form so it is sensible that a rapper would articulate the underlying ideology in their music, especially in the context of resisting an opposite ideology.

## **The 'Indie Rap' Mentality**

To further this point, consider the ideas of Christopher Vito, who wrote about the ethos of independent rappers in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Vito wrote, "Independents often criticize major record label culture, citing the commodification, exploitation, and corporatization

of hip-hop as major problems.”<sup>12</sup> This exemplifies the style of music that MF DOOM made, and clearly articulates the issues that rappers striving for “pure” hip hop had with some of the mainstream rappers. Vito continues to elaborate on these tropes, writing:

“While these tropes of gangster rap resembled street culture, corporations have ossified these tropes into albums to be created and consumed by the masses. Independent performers add that many rappers today often talk about being hardcore and gangster because that appeals to whites in the mainstream. Concurrently, they claim that these acts are not “hard” but rather create a façade to sell records.”

The critique attributed to “independent rappers” referenced by Vito accurately portrays sentiments by many of the most respected MCs like MF DOOM or Mos Def, who reject the inauthentic usage of the gangster persona in order to create a product.

Vito mentions his understanding of authenticity, saying “The term authenticity represents a claim that artists have kept the culture alive by keeping it real despite the corporatization of the business.” The definition provided by Vito aligns with the analysis provided here, in that being authentic to the “pure” version of hip hop is intended to keep a specific set of values alive in the genre.

### **Simon Frith and defining Pop Music**

Simon Frith wrote a chapter in a book titled *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* called *Pop Music*, which attempts to explain what pop music is. Frith's ideas display why hip hop being turned into pop is bad. Similar to Adorno, when trying to define pop Frith wrote, “It is music produced commercially, for profit, as a matter of enterprise not art. Defined in these terms, ‘pop music’ includes all contemporary popular forms-rock, country, reggae, rap, and so on.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Vito, “Just Say No to the Majors: Independent Hip-Hop Culture,” in *The Values of Independent Hip-Hop in the Post-Golden Era*, 45–69. London: Palgrave, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Frith. n.d. “Pop Music.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*.

The form of hip hop is rapping, and Frith explains that pop can dissociate the form of a genre from its starting point itself. Any musical form can be taken by pop but what this implies is that pop is a stripped down version of whatever the form originally was. Not all hip hop is political, or needs to be political. However, there is a large portion of hip hop that is, and pop music is inherently apolitical which creates a tension between hip hop and pop. This tension has existed for a long time between hip hop artists as they balance trying to make money while also making what they deem to be genuine musical expression. Frith continued, “Pop does not have a specific or subcultural, communal market/culture. It is designed to appeal to everyone. Pop doesn’t come from any particular place or market off any particular taste.” This directly contradicts the main values of hip hop. Hip hop was not originally designed to appeal to everyone. Hip hop originally existed without trying to appeal to anyone other than the people who were at the physical location of the party who wanted to dance. Frith furthers this notion by saying, “Pop is not driven by any significant ambition except profit and commercial reward. Its history is a history of serial and standardized production and, in musical terms, it is essentially conservative.” Where some hip hop music is conscious of the world around it and politically charged, pop aims to soothe for profit. Because the pop landscape is so lyrically and sonically homogenized, hip hop becoming pop would effectively take away everything that makes it hip hop.

### **Regression of the consumer**

Adorno also forecasted what he called “the regression of listening” which functionally transitions the listener into a passive consumer of a product, rather than an individual consuming art. For a lot of mainstream hip hop, this is the case. Commercial acts often release massively bloated projects, and listeners pick and choose which songs to add to their playlists like they are going shopping in the mall. This style of listening directly contradicts the early form of hip hop,

in which fans either consumed the music live, or had to purchase it directly on a CD or vinyl record from the store, and then would digest the music as a succinct album. In the physical media era, artists gained no further money from a longer album, as the cost of the CD was the same. There existed no streaming incentive to pacify listeners. These bloated albums are a direct result of music being so heavily commodified. The longer an album is that an artist releases the better the streaming numbers will be, which is a big deal due to how small of a share many of the most popular music streaming websites give their artists.

In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, he wrote "The change in the function of music involved the basic conditions of the relation between art and society. The more inexorably the principle of exchange-value destroys use-values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment."<sup>14</sup> In simpler terms, fans believe they are still enjoying their favorite chart topping track but in reality we are all consuming a product that is being sold to us by the culture industry. As it pertains to hip hop, it is important to recognize that this commodification is precisely what rubs a lot of the early rappers the wrong way. The original foundation of hip hop was entirely separate from this homogenization of listening because hip hop was not even on record label executives' radars. Despite this, hip hop was commercialized quickly after that and the original form of hip hop is certainly not what artists advocating for "pure" hip hop want. Adorno continued to say "The un compelling and superficial nature of the objects of refined entertainment inevitably leads to the inattentiveness of the listeners." Once again, this system of music directly contradicts everything that hip hop stands for according to some artists. This is what creates such immense tension over hip hop as a cultural project. The

---

14 Theodor Adorno. 1970. *Aesthetic Theory*.

genre with some of the most lyrical substance should not be subjected to listeners not paying attention.

These notions from Adorno are only furthered by examining the appalling similarities between the most popular hip hop music being released to fans. When a listener turns on a hit commercial rap album, the odds are in favor of hearing Future, 21 Savage, Young Thug, or other popular artists like them. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of those artists, but it displays the bigger picture issue of a homogenized form of hip hop. It is a formulaic method of creating music that labels push for to ensure higher sales. Many of these artists are immensely talented, but the problem is with the lack of variance rather than any lack of talent. Consider how many rappers have copied the formula of “Lil” with Lil Pump, Lil Tecca, Lil Durk, Lil Baby, Lil Uzi Vert, Lil Peep, Lil Yachty, and more. This furthers my belief in Adorno’s theory that much of mainstream music has been meticulously combed through by labels and people in the industry to ensure an inoffensive and passive experience for the listener.

### **Music as a political entity**

Adorno correctly foreshadowed what the music industry has become. It must be established that there is a benefit to thought provoking music in the first place for fans. In Adorno’s perfect world, fans would engage with the art of their choosing by thinking critically about it and not let it function as background noise. This coincides with Attali’s claim that music has political value in that music functioning with symbolic meaning is intended to be engaged with on a critical level. Though not centered around hip hop specifically, the book *Noise* by Jacques Attali, published in 1977, speaks to some very valuable themes that can be applied to discourse regarding hip hop. The primary point is that music can be reflective of social change.

That alone demonstrates the power that hip hop holds in its ability to connect with people. In the first chapter of the book Attali summarized one of his points as follows:

“Today, it is unavoidable, as if, in a world now devoid of meaning, a background noise were increasingly necessary to give people a sense of security. And today, wherever there is music, there is money. Looking only at the numbers, in certain countries more money is spent on music than on reading, drinking, or keeping clean”<sup>15</sup>

Attali poses a similar sentiment to Adorno, suggesting that music has become background noise for people that can be capitalized on for the sake of giving people security through repetition.

Attali emphasizes the importance of noise as a vehicle for power saying:

“All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms”

Attali correctly points out that music holds great power, which is why it can resonate so much with people. This is something Attali and Adorno would have agreed on, as Adorno strongly critiqued art lacking substance, “The less the culture industry has to promise and the less it can offer a meaningful explanation of life, the emptier the ideology it disseminates necessarily becomes.” This notion coincides with Attali’s proposal that music is meaningful, because when the culture industry removes the meaning from the art, there is nothing left for the fans to glean from it.

Attali’s point is furthered by the real life example given by Michael Eric Dyson in his book *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-Hop*. Dyson writes, “For instance, when Solidarity was legalized in Poland in 1989, some Polish protestors blasted NWA’s “F- tha police” to express their outrage at oppressive social and political forces. These Polish brothers and sisters had likely not been to Compton but Compton came to them, by means of a sound and

---

<sup>15</sup> Jaques Attali. 1977. *Noise*.

a fury and a force that found perfect articulation in lead rapper Ice Cube's vocals."<sup>16</sup> As Dyson points out, Compton is nowhere near Poland geographically but the ideas present in hip hop genuinely resonate with people.

### **Edouard Glissant and the concept of Reversion**

Edouard Glissant was a Caribbean philosopher who wrote at great length about the implications of Colonization. His work pertained to those living in the Americas prior to it being discovered by Christopher Columbus, but his ideas can be applied to hip hop. According to Glissant, there are two primary coping mechanisms to push back against the cultural integration forced upon colonized people by their oppressors. The two primary ways that people in a colonized place react are what Glissant calls "Reversion" and "Diversion." Glissant explains reversion as, "Reversion is the obsession with a single origin: one must not alter the absolute state of being. To revert is to consecrate permanence, to negate contact."<sup>17</sup> Reversion functions like something like nostalgia but to a larger scale. Reversion is when a group of people share the idea that there existed a purer version of their origin that must always remain untainted, especially in response to colonial rule. For hip hop, this would be believing in the golden era of hip hop being in the 1980's. Glissant describes diversion saying "Diversion is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it then must search elsewhere for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself." Diversion is less straightforward than reversion, it is more of an emotional coping mechanism in response to oppression through colonialism. Hip hop is not a physical place but it has been metaphorically

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael Dyson. 2010. Know What I Mean? Reflections on Hip Hop.

<sup>17</sup> Edouard Glissant. 1989. Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays.

colonized through *The Culture Industry*. Hence, these two responses to colonization can both be applied to hip hop. Reversion encapsulates the attitude from many of the older hip hop artists who want to maintain the original values of the genre. In Glissant's essay, he ultimately decides that reversion and diversion are not enough to maintain cultural integrity in the way that people in a colonized place want. This applies in a hip hop context as well, in that this resistance to a commercialized form of hip hop has created tension but a "pure" form hardly exists which is why this resistance does not fully work.

For example, examine the career of Mos Def, who is widely respected as one of the most respected rappers of all time. The highest a Mos Def album has ever charted on billboard is 110th. Mos Def has the skill to adhere to the norms of the pop rap subgenre and make catchy thoughtless music but he did not do this. Mos Def exemplifies Glissant's notion of reversion because he hardly rejects anything that is not the "pure" form of hip hop that he knows and loves. Mos Def has spoken on this exact subject, in January 2024 on the Cutting Room Floor Podcast when asked if he considers Drake a hip hop artist, Mos Def replied, "Drake is pop to me. In the sense, like, if I was shopping in a Target in Houston and I heard a Drake song, it feels like a lot of his music is compatible with shopping."<sup>18</sup> To many this may seem to be a classic example of an older generation misunderstanding and therefore disrespecting a newer one, nowhere in the clip is there anything based in generations. Mos Def echoes exactly what Adorno cautioned people about nearly 80 years prior. To be defined as hip hop, Mos Def implies that you cannot be someone whose music exists primarily as a commodity, the music has to be an expression of self. Later in the same interview, while talking about Drake, he says, "Buying and

---

<sup>18</sup> Yasiin Bey on Drake. *YouTube*, uploaded by The Cutting Room Floor, January 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zweuggu9IUQ>.

selling, where's the message that I can use?" By saying this, Mos Def is directly saying that the music lacks substance, and is truly intended for a commercial audience.

Mos Def is not the only legendary rapper who has echoed this sentiment. GZA, a legendary rapper who was a part of Wu Tang Clan, wrote an article about how hip hop has changed, and when talking about what hip hop used to be said:

“Bottom line is they all had messages, but nowadays it’s changed. You’ve got shorties talking gangster stuff — they put music out about that and they’re not really about that life. And then you bring that energy to you and it changes the dynamics of the industry. We don’t have songs like “Self Destruction” or “We’re All In The Same Gang” anymore. Rappers aren’t grabbing you anymore, it’s not pulling me in. What can I get from talking about my car? It’s irrelevant. It’s not about the art form anymore. I think it was Chaka Khan who said, “I would sing for nothing because this is what I love to do.” It was never about money for me.”<sup>19</sup>

GZA directly states that he was in love with the artistry of hip hop, and did not become a rapper for money. GZA points out that it used to be more common for rappers to have strong messaging in their songs, but the influx of money incentivized upcoming rappers to move away from that style of music. Similar to Mos Def, GZA has a “pure” version of hip hop that he refers to here, and they both blame money as the culprit.

### **The ‘Hip hop is dead’ narrative**

For as long as hip hop has been popular, there has always been the “hip hop is dead” narrative based primarily on its growing commercial success and a lack of the original purity of the genre. 19 years ago, in 2006 Nas released a full studio album titled Hip Hop is Dead. On the title track, Nas rapped “Everybody sound the same, commercialize the game/Reminisce when it wasn't all business/If it got where it started/So we all gather here for the dearly departed.” In

---

<sup>19</sup> GZA. 2017. “GZA Speaks: The Lost Art of Lyricism.” *Cuepoint* (blog). May 19, 2017. <https://medium.com/cuepoint/gza-speaks-the-lost-art-of-lyricism-ee84510e7268>.

these bars, Nas points out a similar critique as Adorno and Attali, suggesting that the commercialization of hip hop has led to very redundant music. Six years before that, on the song “Too Late” on *Reflection Eternal* by Talib Kweli released in the year 2000, he raps “Nowadays rap artists coming half-hearted/Commercial like pop, or underground like Black markets/Where were you the day hip-hop died?.” Once again, an example of a legendary rapper suggesting that hip hop is too commercial and has thus lost value. Six years before that, in 1994, Common released “I Used to Love H.E.R.” On the song, Common uses a woman who he had a relationship with as a metaphor for his dying love for hip hop. Common raps about how the relationship changed as hip hop grew in popularity and moved to the west coast and out of just the northeast and midwest region. In the later part of the song, Common raps “I might've failed to mention that this chick was creative/Once/the man got to her, he altered her native/Told her if she got an image and a gimmick/That she could make money, and she did it like a dummy/Now I see her in commercials,/she's universal.” The examples are endless, but the trend is clear. This narrative is undoubtedly a part of hip hop. Since the days of what many fans consider “old school hip hop,” rappers have been complaining about the commercialization of the genre impacting the creativity and aesthetic merits of the music.

Saying “hip hop is dead” sounds very morbid and dramatic, but this narrative is actually incredibly important. Without people advocating for the original ideas of hip hop, by enacting Glissant’s definition of reversion, those thoughts could cease to exist. It may not always be said as bluntly as “hip hop is dead” but in the modern day the genre has to have people policing it who are fighting for the values holding the genre intact. After Kendrick Lamar took home the second grammy for *Not Like Us*, he said in his acceptance speech:

“This is what it’s about man because at the end of the day nothing more powerful than rap music. I don’t care what it is, we are the culture. It’s gon always stay here and live forever. And tell the young artists, like my man Punch say, I just hope you respect the art form. That’s all. Respect the art form, get you where you need to go.”<sup>20</sup>

Though Lamar is not being hyper specific in his critiques here, his message rings loud and clear: respect what the genre is or you will not succeed in obtaining respect amongst the people who have symbolic power. Lamar is also being professional in this context given he was at an awards show, but he is essentially reiterating the themes from the *Not Like Us* song. He very kindly sent a very strong message to young hip hop artists that hip hop is to be taken seriously.

### **Concluding Philosophical Ideas**

Returning back to Adorno’s original idea, the current music industry contains significant parallels to what he foreshadowed in his writing. The music industry takes advantage of the pacified consumer and this tendency has been working against hip hop since the moment it became commercialized. Not every beef begins or ends with this as the main ideological backdrop, but to some degree, tensions over what is “real” are an effective and commonly utilized tool by rappers when engaging in sonic warfare. In the internet age, it is easier than ever to resist becoming a commodity for a major music distribution label to sell. Gatekeepers used to stand in the way but now artists can freely build a fanbase online as long as they genuinely resonate with people. There exists more opportunity to be authentic, hence why this topic has been so heavily discussed the last few years. This thesis does not aim to attack artists in the commercial sphere but will examine artists who do so in a manner that could be perceived as disingenuous and inauthentic. There are strong ties between the lack of authenticity and what

---

<sup>20</sup> Recording Academy / GRAMMY dir. 2025. *KENDRICK LAMAR Wins Song Of The Year For “NOT LIKE US” | 2025 GRAMMYS Acceptance Speech*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqqAnsm4agc>.

leads to rap beef. Through Adorno's understanding of the music industry, we can obtain a depth of understanding why authenticity matters so much in what has indisputably become a commercial juggernaut in the music industry. Synthesizing the relevant points from Adorno, Attali, Glissant, and Kitwana, yields the following conclusion that continues to the next phase of analysis: music is a powerful entity with political power. The music industry as a whole has been heavily commodified, which has led to a larger audience in hip hop with a substantial increase in white fans and blurred the lines of what is "real" and what is not. Despite this, there are artists who fight for what they believe to be the "purest" form of hip hop.

## **Chapter 3: The history of rap beef and three common types of attack**

### **Rap Beef Origins**

One of the many things that makes hip hop unique is rap beef. Rap beef is when two or more artists come to some disagreement, and rather than settling the score with physical violence, both parties embark on a musical fight. In many of the examples, the conflicts have escalated to physical violence, which is frowned upon. The verdict of who wins these feuds has traditionally been the court of public opinion, and after some time one of the two parties often concedes.

The origin of these beefs stems from gang culture, in which every attack demands an equally if not more violent response. Live rap battling, started in 1981 from Kool Moe Dee and Busy Bee Starski freestyling over the beat from a DJ and insulting each other in front of a crowd. This rap battle contains all three of the themes that will be elaborated on further in this section. This also contains an element of childish humor that is intended to be funny in the same way the youth makes “Yo Mama” jokes. Fans watching this event live were highly entertained. Then, in 1984, a group called U.T.F.O released the song “Roxanne, Roxanne” which featured four male MCs rapping about a woman who was opposed to their sexual advances. In response, 14 year old Lolita Shante Gooden freestyle rapped a response produced by Marley Marl called “Roxanne's Revenge.” The song sparked a flurry of other responses from rappers who wanted to get in on the fun and this is now known as hip hop’s first beef. Roxanne's Revenge started what we now call the “Roxanne Wars,” where many other rappers started replying to Roxanne Roxanne as well. This beef may not have gotten as vicious as the others, but it set the precedent going forward that lyrical sparring was not going to go away. It would go on to become a staple in hip hop due to the popularity of these songs and how engaging they were for fans. In the years and decades

following there have been countless diss tracks released, for a myriad of reasons. These feuds often start for varying reasons and are all unique in their own way, but there are noticeable rhetorical trends that occur frequently.

The following three subsections explain the three primary methods of attack that are common in rap beefs, and support this with data collected on many of the most noteworthy conflicts in hip hop history.

### **Theme One: Misalignment between musical expression and true self**

This theme holds the most ideological importance in beef containing any sort of cultural undertone. Often, a rapper will weaponize something about his or her opponent that they believe is being misrepresented to fans to build their image. For example, a white kid from the suburbs could become a rapper but in order to be seen as authentic, there just has to be some level of transparency and self awareness in their music. It would be seen as offensive and cultural appropriation for that same kid to make music imitating a rapper like Nas because they would not have the same background as Nas. Due to hip hop's origins as something that inner city kids in New York used as an expressive output for the dire socioeconomic situation in the south Bronx, it is fundamentally unacceptable to try and profit off this background unless you have genuine cause to. If this hypothetical rapper were to engage in rap beef their opponent would most likely utilize this theme to dismantle them. This contains philosophical undertones because it aligns closely with Adorno's critique of the culture industry because situations where this inauthenticity is weaponized is generally the result of profiting off this inauthenticity to the point where it is offensive.

In the battle between Drake and Kendrick Lamar, the headlines have all been about Kendrick's accusation of Drake being interested in women below the age of 18. But the primary

message in Lamar's diss tracks is that Drake does not belong in the hip hop culture. Kendrick points out a misalignment between Drake's actual life and background and the character he portrays from the genre. This matters very little in most genres, as many artists don't even use their real name. Unlike other genres, in hip hop the most important aspect of an artists persona is that it is expressive of who they really are. Not to say that its unacceptable to act cool or play up your edge for the camera. These are all perfectly acceptable marketing tactics many artists have used to boost their image. The concern is full scale identity reconstruction. When Drake first broke onto the hip hop scene, it was with hit tracks like "Best I Ever Had" or "Over" and these songs were widely accepted due to his ability to both rap and sing. He was enjoyed by many hip hop fans but he ran into a problem, the realization he was not receiving respect among the hardcore hip hop community. In a 2011 Interview with Vlad TV, well established radio personality Charlamagne Tha God spoke to his disdain for Drake:

"Personally, [I think] he's a corny guy. He's just a corny dude. In that new headlines video he looks extra corny. It's like Drake, why you thuggin now? Why you dressed all in Black? Why you got on Black gloves? Why you got a whole bunch of dudes around you dressed in Black? And he has the most non threatening looking goons I have ever seen in my life. Like seriously, they look like a flash mob that's about to run up in H&M and take everything. None of them look like a threat. And then he's singing in headlines about catching bodies, "you gon make me catch a body like that, you gon make somebody around me catch a body like that, and you know don't do it because when he go to jail we all go through it and you know Drizzy gon pay it." What you mean pay it? You mean pay for bail? Pay for the hit? That's not you Drake"<sup>21</sup>

He was viewed primarily as a pop rap artist who was highly capable but was from Toronto and didn't really fit into mainstream American hip hop culture. Everyone except for Drake himself was happy with his place in the hip hop landscape. Drake wanted more. In the early 2010's he

---

<sup>21</sup> djvlad. 2011. Charlamagne: "Drake is a Corny Guy." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1avdthbzt-Q>.

elected to bring none other than Kendrick Lamar, A\$AP Rocky, and others with him on his tour for the Take Care album. This shift marked when he became obsessed with getting recognition as a real hip hop artist. His behavior shifted, he sang less, he claimed a knowledge of gang life, and used guns in his music videos, like what Charlamagne publicly condemned. This falsification is where he crossed the line in the eyes of many. He portrayed an identity for the world that was not his own. He appropriated the aesthetic of many successful American rappers to try and receive accolades. His actions were wrong simply for the sake of questionable motivations. Drake's actions were offensive and shows his overall lack of awareness, and displays exactly how that can be weaponized. Kendrick Lamar articulated it perfectly. In verse 3 of "Not Like Us," Lamar raps "You not a colleague, you a fucking colonizer." This epitomizes both Drake's attempt at an American aesthetic and exactly how a rapper like Lamar can mobilize this critique in a meaningful way. By portraying him as someone colonizing the genre, it shows the key differences between Lamar and Drake. Lamar, born and raised in Compton, California, has never claimed to have partaken in gang violence, his music talks about his experiences as someone trying to escape a notoriously dangerous area, which makes his claims against Drake far more symbolically meaningful.

### **Theme Two: Musical and/or lyrical creativity**

The most common type of attack in a rap beef is an attack on musical creativity. Generally speaking, this is often a starting point early in a beef. There are times it is intertwined with sub themes of regionality, especially early in hip hop when each coast had a distinct sound. Most rap beefs begin as a surface level competition, and can go deeper than that depending on how far both parties involved feel the need to go.

Early on in the beef with Tupac Shakur and Biggie, they were throwing small shots back and forth about which region between the two coasts is superior musically. This is representative of this pillar of beef. Rappers do not generally sing or play instruments. The percussive element to their music is what they convey with their voice. Over time, this has led to an expectation from the hip hop fandom as a whole that rappers must have some level of lyrical or musical creativity. There are plenty of artists within the hip hop realm that are not considered lyrical geniuses, but still considered under the umbrella of hip hop because of the ways they express themselves through their music. In a rap beef, this topic is usually more prominent on the more light hearted songs that happen prior to the nuclear stage. This method of attack aligns with Simon Frith's view of pop music. Rappers utilizing this theme to attack in a rap beef are often criticizing music for being basic, which is a well established feature of pop.

Take Meek Mill's *Wanna Know* and Pusha T's *Infrared*, both of which were aimed at Drake and they both threw shots at Drake's ability to compose his own lyrics. This is a crucial value for someone like Drake who wants to be seen as an elite MC. Meek Mill placed an audio clip of another artist laying down some lines on one of Drake's most iconic songs, and Pusha T rapped "The Lyric pennin was equal to Trump's winnin/The bigger question is how the Russians did it/It was written like Nas but it came from Quintin." Both of these songs make reference to Quintin Miller, a writer who has been ghostwriting for Drake for years.<sup>22</sup> These criticisms of Drake are meaningful because they both come from rappers who write their own lyrics. This theme encompasses any sort of critique stemming from an attack on skill and relates most to rap battling as an activity for young rappers trying to improve their skill and notoriety.

---

<sup>22</sup> C Vernon Coleman II. 2023. "Drake Ghostwriter Quentin Miller Claims He's Never Officially Been Paid for Writing Drizzy Songs." XXL Magazine. January 5, 2023. <https://www.xxlmag.com/quentin-miller-never-paid-drake-songs/>.

### **Theme Three: Nuclear Lyrical warfare**

A common thread through any and all hip hop conflicts, is that they eventually end because one or both of the two MCs involved release music that is incredibly aggressive with the sole intention of hurting the other rapper involved. These bars go past what is considered traditional wit, and simply aim to smear the opponents public image through any means necessary. This is what I define as “nuclear lyrical warfare.” There usually is no philosophical implication in nuclear warfare. This happens when the content of the diss songs shifts from friendly competition to something far more sinister. Many hip hop beefs begin through small lyrical jabs, and oftentimes do not even progress into full scale madness. There does not exist a defined set of rules on what is deemed “too far” but generally once that threshold has been passed that is when things go nuclear. Oftentimes a beef starts with small insults and escalates until it reaches the nuclear point. There is no philosophical undertone to this method of attack, it exists solely for the sake of winning a battle.

A common thread that is observable in regards to the nuclear transition is that oftentimes one rapper will mention another rappers family or close friends. This is the point of no return. After the release of *Infrared* by Pusha T, which took shots at Drake for ghostwriting, Drake fired back with *Duppy Freestyle*, a catchy rap where Drake took shots at Pusha T’s career and legacy- all of which are standard practice for a diss track-until Drake said his wife’s name: Virginia Williams. What ensued from that was one of the most seething and vicious diss tracks the hip hop world has ever seen: *The Story of Adidion*. Partway through the song, Pusha raps “Since you namedropped my fiance/Let them know who you chose as your Beyonce.” The purpose of this line in the context of the song was that Pusha T was about to reveal that Drake had a child with an adult film star that he had been hiding from the world. At the time, this was an absolutely

momentous reveal and the song continues to question Drake’s Blackness as well as make fun of one of his label mates for having a terminal illness. Though Pusha T was nearly instantaneously declared the winner, some questioned if he had actually gone too far. Though Pusha T was telling the truth about Drake’s unknown child, sometimes this is not the case. When attacking using the nuclear strategy, what is actually true takes a backseat to what can be said to make the other artist look as bad as possible in the eyes of the public. This is the method that varies the most from beef to beef.

The following table is a historical catalogue displaying a simplified form of the results and strategies utilized to win in each respective beef. The winner column was decided based upon a combination of analysis of the songs involved in each battle, in addition to the general narratives spoken to from hip hop media, artists, and other fans. Any battle that does not have a consensus winner among fans was labeled as a “Toss Up,” meaning that it is still debated by fans. In most cases, battles end definitively when one of the rappers involved releases a song powerful enough to sway the public accordingly. The three thematic columns are based directly on their aforementioned explanations. The other category pertains to any noteworthy aspects of the beef that mandates an explanation not seen in the rest of the tangible or throughout this thesis. The intention of this table is to display that the strategies commonly used in rap beef that have been proposed are indeed relevant in many of the most well known and discussed beefs in the history of the genre.

<b>Year(s)</b>	<b>Artist 1</b>	<b>Artist 2</b>	<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Winner?</b>
1981	Kool Moe Dee	Busy Bee Starski	YES	YES	YES	Kool Moe Dee
1984-5	U.T.F.O	Lolita Shante	NO	YES	YES	Lolita Shante
1987-2002	DJ Quik	MC Eiht	YES	YES	YES	DJ Quik
1989-91	Ice Cube	NWA	NO	YES	YES	Ice Cube

1990	2 Live Crew	Kid n Play	NO	NO	YES	2 Live Crew
1990-3	2 Live Crew	Dr Dre	YES	YES	YES	Toss Up
1991-4	Eazy E, Dresta	Dr Dre, Snoop Dogg	YES	YES	YES	Eazy Z
1994-7	Ice Cube	Common	NO	YES	NO	N/A, resolved
1995-6	2pac	Biggie	YES	YES	YES	Toss Up
1996	2pac	Mobb Deep	YES	YES	YES	Toss Up
1996-2001	Lil Kim	Foxy Brown	YES	YES	YES	Toss Up
1996-2002	Jay Z	Nas	YES	YES	YES	Nas
1997-8	LL Cool J	Canibus	YES	YES	YES	Canibus
1998-2005	Eminem	Canibus	YES	YES	YES	Eminem
1999	Sole	El-P	YES	YES	YES	El P
1999-Now	50 Cent	Ja Rule	YES	NO	YES	50 Cent
2000	50 Cent	Ghostface Killah	NO	NO	YES	N/A, barely escalated
2000-2	Eminem	Suge Knight	YES	YES	YES	Eminem
2002-4	Eminem	Ja Rule	YES	YES	YES	Eminem
2002-5	Eminem	Benzino	YES	YES	YES	Eminem
2005-7	The Game	G Unit	NO	YES	YES	The Game
2005-2012	Jeezy	Gucci Mane	NO	NO	YES	Toss Up
2005-Now	50 Cent	Rick Ross	YES	YES	YES	50 Cent
2009	Jay Z	Autotune	YES	YES	NO	N/A
2010-2	Jeezy	Rick Ross	YES	YES	YES	Toss Up
2013-24	Kendrick Lamar	Drake	YES	YES	YES	Kendrick Lamar
2014	Jeezy	Freddie Gibbs	YES	NO	YES	Freddie Gibbs
2016	Meek Mill	Drake	YES	YES	YES	Drake
2018	J Cole	Lil Pump	YES	YES	NO	J Cole
2018	Eminem	MGK	YES	YES	YES	Eminem
2018	Pusha T	Drake	YES	YES	YES	Pusha T
2021-4	Megan Thee Stallion	Nicki Minaj	NO	YES	YES	Megan Thee Stallion

2024	Rick Ross	Drake	YES	YES	YES	N/A, resolved
------	-----------	-------	-----	-----	-----	------------------

Table 1: BEEFS TABLE

Theme 1 is an attack on authenticity through inauthentic expression of self. Theme 2 attacks skill and creativity. Theme 3 is nuclear lyrical warfare which attacks as a person to smear. The winner in addition to the yes/no columns were decided based on general narratives and anecdotal evidence. This table is meant to show the general trends from famous beefs, not to be an encyclopedia.

When looking at the data collected from these trends, it is very clear that at least two and most often three of the themes suggested do appear in rap beefs. Symbolically this means that often the rapper who is better suited to utilize these themes can win the battle. By organizing beef strategy into three distinct categories it established a faculty of understanding for the biggest rap battles in hip hop history. By further analyzing these battles it permits an understanding of how attacks on authenticity are mobilized and why these beefs are so significant in the first place. Not every beef in the table contains resistance to the Culture Industry as a philosophical undertone, but that is a part of many of them and remains something that rappers continue to resist.

## Chapter 4: Beef case study

This section will provide a lyrical breakdown one of the most vicious rap beefs in history. The lyrical breakdowns and career summations display how disputes over authenticity led to the dismantlement of Drake of these artists through lyrical warfare. By going through this beef it displays the accuracy of this methodology for understanding conflict in hip hop by using framework to make the ideological conflicts more legible. These beefs provide examples of how the rhetoric utilized during a beef can explain the ideological conflicts present between artists. The Drake vs Kendrick Lamar beef is still ongoing and has been the most highly publicized beef in hip hop history. Drake and Kendrick Lamar are opposite individuals who perfectly encapsulate the primary themes of this project.

### Drake Career Overview

Drake's career and upbringing is very different from Kendrick Lamar. Drake is from Toronto, Canada. His rise to fame did not come through music. Drake's fame came from a lengthy acting career as a from 2001-2008 on the Canadian teen drama show *Degrassi High*. Drake's father Dennis Graham was also a musician from Memphis who played the drums. His mother, Sandra Graham was an English teacher and florist. As a child, Drake lived in the working class region on the west end of Toronto. When he was six years old, he moved to Forest Hills, which is a middle-class suburb located in a different area of Toronto. His breakout musically was in 2009 and 2010 with hit singles like *Best I Ever Had*, *Forever*, *Successful*, *Over*, *Find Your Love*, and more. Drake began as a hybrid between rap and R&B, and his music had shifted greatly since then. Drake has made collaborative projects with Future and 21 Savage and many well received rap projects. Drake has also made a house music album, with *Honestly Nevermind*, and has garnered a significant amount of accolades and wealth through his music.

Throughout his career, he has been involved in several rap beefs, aside from the most recent heavyweight bout against Kendrick Lamar.

Most notably, in 2015 and 2018 Drake competed against Meek Mill and Pusha T. Meek Mill accused Drake of using ghostwriters (people who help with lyrics that are not credited). Kendrick was asked in an interview with Rolling Stone if it is ok to have ghostwriters, and provided an insightful reply: “It depends on what arena you’re putting yourself in. I called myself the best rapper. I cannot call myself the best rapper if I have a ghostwriter. If you’re saying you’re a different type of artist and you don’t really care about the art form of being the best rapper, then so be it. Make great music. But the title, it won’t be there.”<sup>23</sup> This explains why so many rappers have taken issue with Drake for using ghostwriters. Drake simultaneously claims to be the best rapper, while also not writing everything himself. This is contradictory to the norms that are well established by the other top rappers. Meek Mill was unable to turn that fact into a very compelling song and he lost that battle to Drake. The two eventually reconciled and made a song together titled “Going Bad.” The beef with Pusha T did not end as favorably for Drake. After years of subliminal messaging throughout the 2010’s, Pusha T released “Infrared.” On Infrared, Pusha T insults Drake for his use of ghostwriters and pandering to white audiences, rapping “So I don't tap dance for the crackers and sing Mammy/Cause I'm 'posed to juggle these flows and nose candy.” This established the rhetorical point of view that Pusha T would utilize during their beef. Pusha T makes reference to his history as a drug dealer and contrasts that with Drake being performative for white audiences. Infrared provoked Drake into releasing “Duppy Freestyle.” On Duppy Freestyle, Drake accused Pusha T of riding the coattails of Kanye West

---

<sup>23</sup> Hiatt, Brian. “Kendrick Lamar: The Best Rapper Alive on Bono, Mandela, Stardom and More.” Rolling Stone, July 26, 2024. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kendrick-lamar-the-rolling-stone-interview-199817/>.

and never becoming popular as an individual. Drake broke one of the unwritten rules of rap beef on Duppy Freestyle by mentioning Pusha T's wife, Virginia Williams. In an interview with *The Next Level Magazine*, Pusha questioned his motivations for saying her name saying, "Why would you mention my fiance? Like...No women, no children. What we doing?"<sup>24</sup> Pusha T has made it clear that he was very surprised by that line, because at that point in the beef they were not at a nuclear phase.

The ensuing track, "The Story of Adidon" released by Pusha T was an enormous loss for Drake. The track uses an unnerving photo of Drake in Blackface as the cover. Drake defended the photo saying that it was taken during his acting days as an art piece condemning Blackface.<sup>25</sup> Though this defense is likely true, prior to his beef with Pusha T the public had not seen this photo so it still came off incredibly insensitive given the history of Blackface. The song then revealed to the world that Drake had been hiding a child whom he planned to unveil during an Adidas promotional campaign. Drake never responded with another official diss track and it was universally accepted that he lost the beef. Pusha T did a media run discussing the battle, and explained many of his issues with Drake in even clearer detail. In the same interview with *The Next Level Magazine*, Pusha said "Like, you are silent in all Black issues, Drake. You really are. You are really, really silent. I don't hear about anything, you don't stand for nothing, you don't say nothing about nothing, you don't. It's just what it is. You have all the platform in the world, you were so passionate back then, no you weren't." This critique is precisely the reason that

---

<sup>24</sup> The Next Level Magazine, dir. 2018. Pusha T Talks about Drake's New Child and Explains Meaning behind Whitney Houston Bathroom Pic. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaDx3lkcpGA>.

<sup>25</sup> Joe Coscarelli. n.d. "Drake Addresses Blackface Photo Used for Pusha-T Cover Art." *Magazine*. The New York Times. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/31/arts/music/drake-Blackface-photo-pushat.html>.

many of the hip hop legends take issue with Drake. Drake utilizes a Black aesthetic for monetary gain without addressing anything meaningful in his music. As Pusha T said, Drake does not stand for anything. Pusha T's issues with Drake tie into Simon Frith's definition of pop music, in that pop music contains no substance and that Drake has merely been using the form of rapping rather than being an example of a purely hip hop artist.

### **Kendrick Lamar Career Overview**

Kendrick Lamar is a rapper from Compton, California that broke out early in the 2010's with his mixtape *Overly Dedicated*, and his debut record *Section .80*. Early in Kendrick's career he was discovered by Dr. Dre and went on tour with Drake himself for Drake's tour following the *Take Care* album. Kendrick Lamar is a rapper that fits the traditional mold of a "pure" hip hop artist. In his acceptance speech for winning the Grammy for his 2022 album *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers*, he stated "All we ever wanted was to be the biggest underground artist of all time." Being "underground" in hip hop refers to artists who do not conform to typical commercial aesthetics. Kendrick has gone on record many times with this attitude, and it displays his dedication to maintaining hip hop as an art form. He aligns strongly with the west coast aesthetic. Lamar's music prioritizes lyricism and songwriting, something that has become less common in the modern hip hop landscape. Anecdotally, Kendrick is looked at by many older fans as a rapper who raps within the wrong generation. Kendrick represents Glissant's writing about reversion, in that his music aligns with the "pure," original form of hip hop. Kendrick Lamar's music provides unique moments for the listener with deeply moving and personal moments. Throughout his career, Kendrick has rapped about his upbringing, Black exploitation in the music industry and his own struggles with fame. He has received numerous accolades as one of the best rappers for the quality of his music, rather than proclaiming himself

as the best rapper. There are defining moments that illustrate why Kendrick Lamar is so unique and represents something that has become very rare in the genre. After Kendrick's 2017 hit album DAMN, he took a 5 year hiatus before releasing his most polarizing album Mr Morale and The Big Steppers. This album featured Kendrick at his lowest, explaining his journey to an improved and healthier state of mind. Some fans complained that the album was boring, though it was generally well respected by critics for its unique production and artistry. During Kendrick's hiatus, Drake became the unquestioned most popular rapper, with three number one albums on Billboard in that span.

### **Track One: "First Person Shooter" by Drake, J Cole**

In October 2023 Drake released his album titled *For all the Dogs*, which contained the song First Person Shooter that many cite as Kendrick's green light to go after Drake. Prior to the song's release Drake asked Kendrick and J Cole to provide features, and Kendrick said no. The three of them being on a song together would have been a big deal because during the 2010's they were seen as the "Big 3" of that era of hip hop.<sup>26</sup> The song ended up with J Cole and Drake.<sup>27</sup> On the song J Cole says "Love when they argue the hardest MC/Is it K-Dot? Is it Aubrey? Or me?/We the big three like we started a league, but right now I feel like Muhammed Ali." This turned out to be a pivotal moment in what would eventually become a large conflict. Fans of Drake and J Cole loved this song as it showed unity from at least two members of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Andre Gee, Jessica McKinney, Jordan Rose, and Erik Skelton. n.d. "Ranking the 'Big 3' Every Year Since 2010." Complex. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.complex.com/music/a/andre-gee/ranking-big-3-kendrick-drake-j-cole-every-year-2010>.

<sup>27</sup> Andrews, Elias. 2024a. "Kendrick Lamar Refused To Appear On Drake's 'First Person Shooter.'" HotNewHipHop. May 3, 2024. <https://www.hotnewhiphop.com/796478-kendrick-lamar-refused-to-appear-on-drake-first-person-shooter-hip-hop-news>.

“Big 3” of the 2010’s era. Many fans overlooked Kendrick’s absence from the song because a collaboration between these two was exciting for people.

### **Track Two: “Like That” by Future, Metro Boomin, Kendrick Lamar**

In the Spring of 2024 Kendrick responded to the bars from Drake and Cole with a surprise verse on Future’s album *We Don’t Trust You*. In his verse on the billboard hit *Like That*, Kendrick rapped:

Fuck sneak dissin', first person shooter (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
I hope they came with three switches (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
I crash out, like, "Fuck rap, " this Melle Mel if I had to (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
Got two T's with me, I'm snatchin' chains and burnin' tattoos  
It's up, lost too many soldiers not to play it safe  
If he walk around with that stick, it ain't Andre 3K  
Think I won't drop the location? I still got PTSD  
Motherfuck the big three, n\*\*\*a, it's just big me  
N\*\*\*a, bum, what? I'm really like that (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
And your best work is a light pack (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
N\*\*\*a, Prince outlive Mike Jack (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
N\*\*\*a, bum, 'fore all your dogs gettin' buried (he was once a thug, he was, he -)  
That's a K with all these nines, he gon' see Pet Sematary (he was once a thug from around the way)

In this verse, Lamar throws numerous shots back at Drake and J Cole. Kendrick directly states the name of the song he was responding to with First Person Shooter which set the tone for the verse. Most importantly, he disregards the idea that the “Big 3” is a real thing and declares himself the undisputed best among them. He then throws shade at Drake’s catalogue and creates a comparison between the two of them and Michael Jackson and Prince. This comparison was clever and clearly bothered Drake because Michael Jackson is revered for the same thing Drake is, smash commercial hits. By aligning himself with Prince and Drake with Michael Jackson he

is implying that the music with more substance will stand the test of time. In the last two bars of the verse, Kendrick utilizes clever wordplay in reference to Drake's album title having dogs in it to say that he is going to "bury" Drake. The reaction to this song was huge and fans across the world wondered if Drake specifically would respond because Kendrick aimed the verse more at him than J Cole.

### **Track Three: "Push Ups" by Drake**

Drake's song *Push Ups* leaked just weeks later, as his first official diss towards Kendrick. The song is catchy and sends witty shots at Kendrick about his height, his label, and his status as a rapper in the "Big 3." The song criticizes Metro Boomin for producing the beat for *Like That*. The most important takeaways from this song are the themes Drake uses to attack Kendrick. He makes no effort to attack Kendrick's authenticity and claims that there are other artists above him. Drake goes on to say that Kendrick will never be able to catch up to his popularity and sales. Early in the track, Drake raps:

You better do that motherfuckin' show inside the bity  
Maroon 5 need a verse, you better make it witty  
Then we need a verse for the Swifties  
Top say drop, you better drop and give 'em 50  
Pipsqueak, pipe down  
You ain't in no big three, SZA got you wiped down  
Travis got you wiped down, Savage got you wiped down  
Like your label, boy, you in a scope right now

Drake touched upon a common theme among Kendrick's biggest critics. Kendrick's willingness to make a song with commercial pop artists like Taylor Swift is a pop megastar, goes against Lamar's usual dedication to hip hop. This was one of the only moments in the beef where Drake critiqued Kendrick on the grounds of inauthenticity. By pointing out his willingness to make a

commercial record with Taylor Swift, it portrays him as a rapper willing to make pop music. This line would have held significantly more weight coming from someone who does not have as many pop hits as Drake does. If Pusha T had said that line to Kendrick it would have been more impactful because of the ethos that is presented in Pusha T's music. Drake further suggests that he too feels disrespected by hearing Kendrick mentioned in the "Big 3." Kendrick and Drake both have music distributed through UMG (Universal Music Group). Drake suggests that Kendrick may not be receiving enough money for his music, in that his label may have him tied to a bad contract. He also flips the Michael Jackson bar from *Like That* back on Kendrick saying "What's a Prince to a King he a son, N\*\*\*a?" *Push Ups* was a solid first official track by Drake that involved some clever lines but nothing scathing that would give him a definitive victory in the battle.

#### **Track Four: "Taylor Made Freestyle" by Drake**

Days later, upon the official release of *Push Ups*, Drake released the next song with it titled *Taylor Made Freestyle*. In this song, Drake applied an AI vocal filter of 2pac's and Snoop Dogg's voices with the intention of messing with Kendrick. Strategically, it was a clever maneuver. It was an unorthodox and attention grabbing move that clearly upset Kendrick. In spite of that, it was received poorly in the hip hop community because there is no reason to exploit the voice of a legend due to the dichotomy of competing rhetoric between Kendrick and Drake. While many people expected Snoop Dogg to condemn this song, he reposted it, seemingly amused by it. Snoop Dogg was later asked on the Bootleg Kev Podcast how he felt about his own voice being used on the song, and replied, "I don't get in nobodies beef. I'm usually the one who ends the beef. But if it's out of my reach I step out and allow 2 men to get an

understanding.”<sup>28</sup> For Snoop, he felt like despite it being his voice on the song, the fallout of it was between Drake and Kendrick, so it was not his place to involve himself. This is where Drake started to enact his strategy that he would use during this beef.

There is a historical narrative about Drake having an affinity for younger women. There is also concrete proof of Drake engaging in unacceptable behavior, like the video from one of his concerts where he kisses a girl below the legal age limit even after she told him that she was not 18 years of age.<sup>29</sup> Drake was clearly aware of this and played into it rapping “Talk about him liking young girls its a gift from me.” By proactively addressing the issue of his preference for younger women Drake potentially thought it would take away the punch when Kendrick would inevitably mention that in a song. Drake then switches back to his own voice, and adds pressure and urgency for Kendrick to respond. He raps “You trynna let this shit die down, nah not this time n\*\*\*a you following through.” He finishes the song by saying “You better have a quintuple entendre, some shit I don't even understand.” From this point on, it was clear that Drake was trying to take the wind out of the sails of Kendrick’s reply to force him to rush it and drop it sooner.

### **Track Five: “Euphoria” by Kendrick Lamar**

11 days later, Lamar replied with his own full length diss track *euphoria*. The song starts with a very calm Kendrick who is establishing the grounds on which he plans to battle. He predicts Drake’s strategy saying:

---

<sup>28</sup> Bootleg Kev, dir. 2024. *Snoop Dogg on Kendrick Calling Him Out on “Wacced out Murals” & Drake Using His Voice Through A.I.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqvoWOUZHdM>.

<sup>29</sup> Snapes, Laura. 2019. “Drake Kisses 17-Year-Old Fan on Stage in Unearthed Video Clip.” *The Guardian*, January 7, 2019, sec. Music. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/07/drake-kisses-fan-17-ogden-theater-denver-colorado-2010>.

“I can even predict your angle  
Fabricating stories on the family front because you heard Mr. Morale  
A pathetic master manipulator I can smell the tales on you now  
You not a rap artist you a scam artist with the hopes of being accepted  
Tommy Hilfiger stood out but Fubu had never been your collection.”

These bars represent the foundation with which Lamar launches his attack. To most people, the scam artist bar is just a regular insult but to Drake this is something that cuts very deep. Drake has always been discussed as a hip hop outsider among dedicated hip hop fans. Drake has yearned for hip hop acceptance and it is not something he has been subtle about. In an interview with DJ Semtex in 2009, Drake was on record saying:

“For the fans and hip-hop who feel like Drakes not really hip-hop it’s like well, in this world like I’m gonna close this thing you’re probably gonna get to hip-hop so just let me infiltrate. Let me infiltrate that pop world and at least you know if the song is catchy or has melody to it and that’s not what you like, at least you know those verses I’m gonna spit my heart out you know, regardless no matter what type of song it is. So that’s kind of my goal right now”<sup>30</sup>

Drake has clearly heard this narrative for a long time now and has wanted to “infiltrate” the genre to garner any extra respect he can get. Kendrick cleverly doubles down on this line by suggesting that Drake did not grow up wearing Fubu, a brand very popular among Black youth.<sup>31</sup> The verbal assault continues with more jabs at Drake’s artistry and people in his crew. Kendrick Lamar eventually addresses Drake and J Cole together, saying “There’s 3 goats left and I see 2 of them hugging and kissing on stage.” Another very important line, as he is scolding them for their failure to subscribe to the competitive nature of hip hop. Later in the song, he raps:

---

<sup>30</sup> DJSemtex. 2009. DRAKE INTERVIEW WITH DJ SEMTEX [SO FAR GONE]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYovMs2a5pc>.

<sup>31</sup> Niall Smith. n.d. “For Us, By Us – Why the Brand FUBU and Other Black-Owned Fashion Businesses Are So Important.” The Culture Crypt. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.theculturecrypt.com/posts/why-the-brand-fubu-and-other-Black-owned-fashion-businesses-are-so-important>.

This ain't been about critics, not about gimmicks, not about who the greatest  
It's always been about love and hate, now let me say I'm the biggest hater  
I hate the way that you walk, the way that you talk, I hate the way that you dress  
I hate the way that you sneak diss, if I catch flight, it's gon' be direct  
We hate the bitches you fuck, 'cause they confuse themselves with real women  
And notice, I said "we, " it's not just me, I'm what the culture feelin'  
How many more fairytale stories 'bout your life 'til we had enough?  
How many more Black features 'til you finally feel that you're Black enough?  
I like Drake with the melodies, I don't like Drake when he act tough

This is the most crucial set of lyrics in the entire track. Kendrick very clearly articulates why Drake bothers him so much. He calls him out for his aesthetic. Saying he hates the way he walks, talks, and dresses. This is a direct shot at Drake using the Black American aesthetic as his own despite no background in this area. Kendrick continues critiquing his way of sneak dissing in records as the more honorable way to call someone out is by being direct. He throws in a small jab at Drake's taste in women, which was confusing for fans at the time but becomes more relevant later in the beef. He then goes back to Drake's Blackness, suggesting his music is "fairytales" that Drake uses to feel more Black. Kendrick suggests that back when Drake was carrying himself as an R&B singer it was more appropriate. When Kendrick mentions "what the culture feeling," it is a direct reference to other hip hop artists and fans that have felt something was off about the way Drake presents himself. The culture that Kendrick refers to is the "pure" version of hip hop culture that existed prior to hip hop being industrialized. Kendrick wants to maintain that culture and he sees the elimination of Drake as a step in the right direction. Towards the end of the song, Kendrick then establishes his final primary angle against Drake, the contrast between their lifestyles. Kendrick alludes to Drake wanting to get dirt on Kendrick then slams him for not parenting his son and raising him with morals and integrity. Kendrick Lamar

takes parenting and being a role model seriously. He had been doing prior to the beef rather engaging in behavior that would be bad enough to be potential dirt for Drake.

### **Track Six: “6:16 in LA” by Kendrick Lamar**

Kendrick waited just three days after the release of *euphoria* to release *6:16 in LA*. This song was only released on Instagram, which many suggested was to match Drake’s chronic online behavior. The song itself takes a very different approach than what Kendrick did on *euphoria*. The track serves mostly as a true warning shot meant to scare Drake into rethinking if he really wants to push the beef further than it was. The song starts with Kendrick mocking Drake’s timestamp records (a classic in his discography) by rapping lyrics about surface level things one can achieve by obtaining wealth. By attacking Drake’s materialistic mindset and contrasting it with his own desire for a strong family it furthers the notion that Drake is an artist belonging to Adorno’s Culture Industry.

He then transitions into conversing with God about what he is about to do. He expresses a desire to be immortalized in music history, and raps that if he needs to go to war he is willing to do so because even in the event that he fails, he is always learning. The song gets particularly interesting when Kendrick poses a question to Drake saying “Have you ever considered that OVO is working for me?” It is unknown whether or not this is true but given the fact that Lamar to have a source feeding him information, it is believable that someone at Drake's label (OVO) could have turned on Drake and informed Kendrick. He continues saying “You must be a terrible person, everyone inside your team is whispering that you deserve it.” These accusations create feelings of isolation and mistrust for Drake about the people in his inner circle. Kendrick calls back to his hint from *euphoria* about Drake trying to pay for dirt on him saying “It was fun until you put money in the streets, then lost money and came back with no receipts/Im sorry I live a

boring life, I love peace, but war ready if the world is ready to see you bleed.” Only Drake knows if he spent money to learn dirt on Kendrick. There was a post on X (formerly known as Twitter) saying that Drake tried to pay Kendrick’s ex-girlfriend for dirt on him that Kendrick’s ex retweeted but a retweet is not enough evidence to believe that with certainty. If he did, this would be a massive red flag that Kendrick did have sources inside of Drake's crew giving him the upper hand in their beef. The song concludes with Kendrick utilizing the Michael Jackson reference again saying “Before you figure that you're not alone ask what Mike would do.” This line alludes to Michael Jackson’s death and suggests that Drake could be in for a similar fate. A common conspiracy theory is that Michael Jackson had a suspicious death, so the line is meant to make Drake feel unsettled. The song effectively creates a narrative that Kendrick is one step ahead.

### **Track Seven: “Family Matters” by Drake**

Later that same day, Drake shocked the hip hop world and responded with *Family Matters*. The reception to this song was incredibly divisive because it contains a number of witty jabs at Lamar and other rappers, while also exposing some of Drake's misunderstandings about why Kendrick Lamar had a problem with him in the first place. In *Family Matters*, Drake raps:

Out here beggin' for attention, n\*\*\*\*, say please  
Always rappin' like you 'bout to get the slaves freed  
You just actin' like an activist, it's make-believe  
Don't even go back to your hood and plant no money trees  
Say you hate the girls I fuck, but what you really mean?  
I been with Black and white, and everything that's in between  
You the Black messiah wifin' up a mixed queen  
And hit vanilla cream to help out with your self-esteem

This illustrates Drake's biggest criticisms of Lamar, and some of the attitudes from Drake that reflect why many have been turned off of his music. In the first 4 lines of the section above, he tries to call Kendrick a performative activist, someone who preaches progressive values and ideas but lacks the follow through to make those statements meaningful. Drake suggests that Lamar claims Compton as part of his identity but does not actually make impactful contributions to help people from Compton. The line saying that Kendrick raps like he wants to "get the slaves freed" was glossed over by Drake's fans. Many hip hop fans were disgusted by this rhetoric. There is no line in the beef that is more disrespectful towards the history of hip hop. In a genre rich with history of conscious rappers who make an effort to spread awareness of systematic challenges faced by Black Americans, Drake demonstrates a lack of understanding while contrasted with Kendrick Lamar who prides himself on making music that inspires people. The line illustrates clearly that Drake aligns with pop values, in that he makes music lacking substance. A conscious rapper would not criticize Kendrick from this angle. It begs the obvious question, what is wrong with rapping with the intention of freeing enslaved people? Drake could conceivably defend this line by saying that it was intended jokingly to say that Kendrick is pretentious. I reject this idea because Kendrick himself generally comes across as very down to earth and prides himself on being a family man who loves hip hop. The pretentious label is more applicable to Kendrick's fans who are notorious for being opposed to any rapper who does not match Kendrick in terms of substance. However, it still displays how tone deaf he is towards Black issues. There is a stark contrast between Kendrick, who talks in depth about big picture racial ideas and Drake who dislikes him for doing so.

Drake continues the theme of Kendrick pandering to white audiences saying, "Ay, Kendrick just opened his mouth/Someone go hand him a Grammy right now." Drake makes fun

of the notion that Kendrick is doing anything artistically worthy of receiving the level of critical acclaim that he does. The song comes to a crescendo with Drake's allegations towards Kendrick's relationship with his wife. Drake raps, "When you put your hands on your girl/Is it self-defense 'cause she bigger than you?" The same allegation appears later in the song, rapping:

"They hired a crisis management team  
To clean up the fact that you beat on your queen  
The picture you paint, it ain't what it seem  
You're dead"

People reacted very strongly to these allegations and questioned if Kendrick had committed some form of domestic abuse against his fiancé. In Kendrick's entire career he has never alluded to having issues with domestic abuse, nor have there ever been rumors he has committed any act of that nature. The closest incident that many fans speculated that Drake could be referencing was an alleged incident that Kendrick hit a woman in Hard Rock hotel room in 2014. When asked about the alleged incident on The Breakfast Club in an interview from 2014, Kendrick replied "that's foolishness. That's the most ignorant stuff I've ever heard. On my name. The person who made that up owes an apology." This was not mentioned again until the beef when fans were trying to figure out what Drake could be mentioning. There has not been proof of any incidents of violence with Kendrick. However, the line was successful in making listeners think twice about whether or not Kendrick is as innocent as he portrays. Drake doing so exemplifies the theme of nuclear warfare.

### **Track Eight: "Meet the Grahams" by Kendrick Lamar**

The buzz about Family Matters diminished immediately when Kendrick released "Meet the Grahams" within an hour of the release of Family Matters. Meet the Grahams remains one of the most discussed moments of the battle with harsh allegations and dark subject matter. Meet

the grahams solely utilizes nuclear lyrical warfare and criticisms of inauthenticity to attack Drake. The song is split into four verses, directed at Drake's son Adonis, his parents, Drake himself and an alleged secret daughter that Drake has been hiding. The most controversial part of the song addressed Drake's potential daughter and the allegation that Kendrick assaulted his wife physically are under the umbrella of a nuclear attack. These attacks are meant to smear the artists names, without proof and are consistent through historical precedent. Fans on both sides of this battle commonly invalidate Family Matters, or meet the grahams because of these egregious allegations. Both tracks have significantly more to them than just those allegations. In the first verse of meet the grahams, Kendrick formally apologizes to Drake's son Adonis for the repulsive behavior of his father. He then raps "Be proud of who you are, your strength come from within Lotta superstars that's real, but your daddy ain't one of them." Kendrick alludes to one of the primary criticisms of Drake, that he is inauthentic to himself. Kendrick suggests that Adonis does not have to mirror this behavior and that he can find strength within himself to live his life as a fulfilled and virtuous young man. The verse addressed to Sandra and Dennis Graham, Lamar continues his attack on Drake's relationship with his Blackness, saying "Dear Dennis, you gave birth to a master manipulator /Even usin' you to prove who he is is a huge favor." Much like what Pusha T accused Drake of, Kendrick agrees with the notion that Drake hung around his dad publicly for the sake of proving his validity as a Black man. The song gets truly dark and goes further down the rabbit hole of accusing Drake of engaging in and promoting sexual misconduct.

He raps:

He got sex offenders on ho-VO that he keep on a monthly allowance  
A child should never be compromised and he keepin' his child around them  
And we gotta raise our daughters knowin' there's predators like him lurkin'  
Fuck a rap battle, he should die so all of these women can live with a purpose

Kendrick calls Drake out for exposing his child to people who are morally reprehensible due to their sexual misconduct. This has been proven true as one of Drake's primary friends Baka is a registered sex offender. Lamar further suggests Drake should die so that women can live safer and more equitable lives. After verses directed to his family members, the final verse addresses Drake directly in a brutal attack on Drake's ideology, and identity:

But you fucked up the moment you called out my family's name  
Why you had to stoop so low to discredit some decent people?  
Guess integrity is lost when the metaphors doesn't reach you  
And I like to understand 'cause your house was never a home  
Thirty-seven, but you showin' up as a seven-year-old  
You got gamblin' problems, drinkin' problems, pill-poppin' and spendin' problems  
Bad with money, whorehouse  
Solicitin' women problems, therapy's a lovely start  
But I suggest some ayahuasca, strip the ego from the bottom

Kendrick reiterates the ongoing idea that mentioning family in a rap beef is unacceptable and questions why Drake would attempt to smear anyone's name but Kendrick. Kendrick suggests that Drake's problems stem from abandonment issues from not having a two parent household which is why Drake tries so desperately to fit in. He continues and directly calls out the things he does not approve of, like Drake's frequent gambling, drug, and money issues. Kendrick alludes to Drake needing to reset his ego through ayahuasca, a drug known for healing peoples past trauma. Kendrick continues on the next verse:

I try to empathize with you 'cause I know that you ain't been through nothin'  
Crave entitlement, but wanna be liked so bad that it's puzzlin'  
No dominance, let's recap moments when you didn't fit in  
No secret handshakes with your friend  
No culture cachet to binge, just disrespectin' your mother  
Identity's on the fence, don't know which family will love ya

The skin that you livin' in is compromised in personas  
Drake is having an issue knowing where to fit in which is Kendrick's grand narrative that he speaks to in each song. This narrative is powerful because of an abundance of evidence that it is true. It also represents the theme of inauthenticity in that Drake has been willing to bend his own identity for the sake of approval of others. Despite trying to rationalize Drake's behavior with empathy, Kendrick cannot fathom why Drake provides such a performative caricature of what it means to be a rapper. Lamar continues the verse rapping:

Take that mask off, I wanna see what's under them achievements  
Why believe you? You never gave us nothin' to believe in  
'Cause you lied about religious views, you lied about your surgery  
You lied about your accent and your past tense, all is perjury  
You lied about your ghostwriters, you lied about your crew members

Without subtlety Kendrick Lamar begs Drake to show the audience who he really is. Kendrick implies that we have been consuming for well over a decade is a manufactured act. Kendrick Lamar combats Drake's jabs over the social messaging behind Lamar's music, stating his music lacks the substance to have a meaningful impact with fans. Lamar even calls his accent a lie, something that Drake has been known to switch around.

### **Track Nine: "Not Like Us" by Kendrick Lamar**

After the viciousness of meet the grahams, people naturally assumed that Kendrick had already won the beef, or that Drake would address what Kendrick said. Within 24 hours of meet the grahams, Kendrick doubled down and released his next song, Not Like Us. Kendrick's critics had been saying throughout the beef that his songs were lyrically dense, and even though his pen game was at its peak the songs were not catchy enough to win the battle. This opinion was echoed by Drake fans because his rap beef victory was from him making a catchy song with "Back to Back" directed at Meek Mill. Further, the cover art for Not Like Us is a google maps

photo of Drake's house with sex offender symbols displayed over it, implying the nature of his offenses. "Not Like Us" begins with a producer tag from DJ Mustard, a popular producer from Los Angeles, California. Kendrick raps, "What's up with these jabroni-ass n\*\*\*\* tryna see Compton?/The industry can hate me, fuck 'em all and they mama." A jabroni refers to a very foolish person.<sup>32</sup> Kendrick questions why these "jabronis" are trying to see Compton, suggesting that Drake and his crew are tourists in his region. Kendrick continues to say that he is content being hated by the music industry, which related to earlier notions of The Culture Industry. Kendrick often goes against the grain, and does not subscribe to all of the rules of the industry as Drake does. Kendrick continues aligning with the thematic strategy of "Nuclear Warfare" as the lyrics were intended solely to make Drake look bad. Kendrick rapped:

Say, Drake, I hear you like 'em young  
You better not ever go to cell block one  
To any bitch that talk to him and they in love  
Just make sure you hide your lil' sister from him  
They tell me Chubbs the only one that get your hand-me-downs  
And Party at the party playin' with his nose now  
And Baka got a weird case, why is he around?  
Certified Lover Boy? Certified pedophiles  
Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, Dot, fuck 'em up  
Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, I'ma do my stuff  
Why you trollin' like a bitch? Ain't you tired?  
Tryna strike a chord and it's probably A minor

This verse accuses Drake of liking younger girls, which is illegal. Kendrick continues questioning the people Drake allows around his son Adonis. Baka, is short for Baka Not Nice

---

<sup>32</sup> "Dictionary.Com | Meanings & Definitions of English Words." 2025. Dictionary.Com. May 13, 2025. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/jabroni>.

who started working for Drake as a security guard and eventually signed with his label. In 2014, Baka was accused of assaulting a woman and forcing her into prostitution. The prostitution charge was dropped but he served 6 months in prison for assault and firearm charges.<sup>33</sup> Given Baka's background, Kendrick publicly questioned Drake's allegiance to such an individual. The next line takes aim at Drake's album *Certified Lover Boy* by flipping the title into yet another line about pedophilia. Kendrick then used a clever double entendre to push his narrative that Drake is into younger women. Kendrick says he is trying to strike a chord, stating his intent to offend Drake or that he could play a chord in a musical context. Kendrick then suggests the chord could be 'A minor' in a literal musical sense of referencing someone under 18 being a minor. This verse effectively communicates Kendrick's pure disdain for Drake as a person. The most obvious yet overlooked aspect of *Not Like Us*, is the hook (and title) of the song. If Kendrick's entire war against Drake could be summed up into three words, it would be *Not Like Us*. This phrase which Kendrick repeats in the chorus of the song displays the theme of inauthentic self expression. The phrase also makes it abundantly clear that there are some people doing hip hop the right way and many doing the opposite. Kendrick is creating a separation between people who are like Drake, and the rest of "us." Figuratively, "us" refers to people who are genuine, thoughtful and not harmful of other people. The next verse continues with Kendrick rapping:

---

<sup>33</sup> Joe Price. n.d. "What Is Baka Not Nice's 'Weird Case' Kendrick Lamar Refer..." *Complex*. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.complex.com/music/a/backwoodsaltar/what-is-baka-not-nice-weird-case-kendrick-lamar-drake-diss>.

“You think the Bay gon' let you disrespect Pac, n\*\*\*\*?  
I think that Oakland show gon' be your last stop, n\*\*\*\*  
Did Cole foul, I don't know why you still pretendin'  
What is the owl? Bird n\*\*\*\* and burnt bitches, go  
The audience not dumb  
Shape the stories how you want, hey, Drake, they're not slow”

Kendrick questions why Drake thought that *Taylor Made Freestyle* would be an intelligent thing to release, with fans being irritated with the use of AI to replicate the voice of 2pac. Kendrick briefly alludes to J Cole and questions why Drake would have crowned him a member of the big 3 on *First Person Shooter*, only to separate himself from him once the beef started. Kendrick plays to the audience once again, suggesting that the audience is too smart to believe whatever narrative that Drake wants to present. In the third verse, Kendrick raps:

Once upon a time, all of us was in chains  
Homie still doubled down callin' us some slaves  
Atlanta was the Mecca, buildin' railroads and trains  
Bear with me for a second, let me put y'all on game  
The settlers was usin' townfolk to make 'em richer  
Fast-forward, 2024, you got the same agenda  
You run to Atlanta when you need a check balance  
Let me break it down for you, this the real n\*\*\*\* challenge  
You called Future when you didn't see the club (Ayy, what?)  
Lil Baby helped you get your lingo up (What?)  
21 gave you false street cred  
Thug made you feel like you a slime in your head (Ayy, what?)  
Quavo said you can be from Northside (What?)  
2 Chainz say you good, but he lied  
You run to Atlanta when you need a few dollars  
No, you not a colleague, you a fuckin' colonizer

These lines continue to represent the theme of being inauthentic. Kendrick responds directly to the lyrics about freeing slaves from *Family Matters*, referencing the history of enslaved african americans in the United States. Kendrick points out the absurdity of a hip hop artist doubling down on that trauma and vilifying another artist for making politically charged music. Kendrick makes a parallel between settlers of old towns and Drake, suggesting that Drake was willing to profit off Black art. Kendrick names 6 artists specifically: Future, Young Thug, Lil Baby, 21 Savage, Quavo and 2Chainz. These are all artists who have worked extensively with Drake. Future and 21 Savage both have full collaborative albums with Drake, and the other 4 have countless songs with him. All of these artists exist under the same style of music known as southern trap which became very popular in the 2010's. Kendrick accuses Drake of stealing bits and pieces from each of them to boost his own brand, with zero intention of genuine collaboration.

### **Track Ten: "The Heart Part 6" by Drake**

*Not Like Us* was met with heaping praise. For many people the release of *Not Like Us* marked the end of the battle. Kendrick had so much momentum that there was no way Drake could possibly reply to it. The day after *Not Like Us* dropped, Drake released *THE HEART PART 6*, which is a reference to a series of songs titled *The Heart* by Kendrick. At that point, Kendrick's most recent entry was *The Heart Part 5*, which he released in 2022. On *THE HEART PART 6*, Drake defends against allegations of his affinity for younger women, and tries to flip multiple of the narratives back on Kendrick. Drake raps:

You waited for this moment, overcome with the desperation  
We plotted for a week, and then we fed you the information  
A daughter that's eleven years old, I bet he takes it  
We thought about givin' a fake name or a destination  
But you so thirsty, you not concerned with investigation  
Instead you in that Venice studio, it's a celebration  
You gotta learn to fact-check things and be less impatient

In this verse, Drake makes an enormous claim, that he had actually been feeding Kendrick information the entire time through the mole that Kendrick claimed to have within Drake's circle. Drake suggests that Kendrick approached the beef too hastily and therefore made a mistake because the information was all untrue. This is an example of the nuclear strategy as well. Drake continues:

What about the bones we dug up in that excavation?  
And why isn't Whitney denyin' all of the allegations?  
Why is she followin' Dave Free and not Mr. Morale?  
You haven't seen the kids in six months, the distance is wild  
Dave leavin' heart emojis underneath pics of the child

Drake brings up the lack of public response from Kendrick's wife Whitney who Drake claimed Kendrick has assaulted in his past. Drake insinuates that Kendrick's children may not be his own, suggesting that his wife has a relationship with Dave Free who is Kendrick's manager. The next few lines caught many fans by surprise, with Drake rapping:

This Epstein angle was the shit I expected  
TikTok videos you collected and dissected  
Instead of bein' on some diss-direct shit  
You rather fucking grab your pen and misdirect shit

Drake claims that he expected to be accused of liking young girls. He indicated that Kendrick is just using buzzy headlines to misdirect fans rather than a direct diss. Drake references TikTok videos that Kendrick may have collected, in reference to the women who came out publicly

against Drake on TikTok, saying he acted inappropriately to them before they were the legal age of consent. In the next verse, Drake made one of the only true mistakes of the battle, rapping:

My mom came over today, and I was like, "Mother, I—  
Mother, I—, mother—," ah, wait a second  
That's that one record where you say you got molested  
Aw, fuck me, I just made the whole connection  
This about to get so depressin'  
This is trauma from your own confessions  
This when your father leave you home alone with no protection, so neglected  
That's why these pedophile raps and shit you so obsessed with, it's so excessive  
They actin' like it's so aggressive, but you just never known affection  
I don't wanna diss you anymore, this really got me second-guessin'

The main problem with this verse is that Drake hinges it on a fundamental misunderstanding of the song it references. On the 2022 album, *Mr. Morale and the Big Steppers*, there is a song called “Mother I Sober.” The song dives deep into Kendrick’s trauma from his childhood as he raps about his mom being sexually abused and how that shaped the man he would become. In the song, he is questioned by family members if he was molested in any way, which he declines truthfully multiple times. Kendrick does not claim to have been on the receiving end of sexual assault. Drake misinterpreted this, and believed that Kendrick had been molested. Drake tries to use that as the reason why Kendrick has been so insistent on pushing the narrative that Drake is inappropriate to younger women. Drake attempts to pretend like he feels bad for Kendrick and hints at wanting the beef to be over. Drake continues to defend against this behavior, saying: “If I was fucking young girls, I promise I'd have been arrested/I'm way too famous for this shit you just suggested.” Take Sean “Diddy” Combs for example, who existed in the public eye for nearly 30 years from the early 1990’s to 2023 before being exposed for illicit sexual activity. There is

plenty that happens in celebrity circles that people, authorities included, know nothing about.

The defense against that narrative continues with Drake rapping:

Only fuckin' with Whitneys, not Millie Bobby Browns, I'd never look twice at no  
teenager  
I'm a fucking hitmaker, dog, not a peacemaker  
Yeah, bullets that I'm stuffin' in each chamber, your ass in extreme danger  
Stop buyin' views and bot comments,  
you may as well keep the paper  
Shit you 'bout to need for later  
I give a fuck about your streamin' data  
You could drop a hundred more records, I'll see you later

One of the people who Drake has been most commonly accused of mistreating, was none other than the *Stranger Things* star, Millie Bobby Brown.<sup>34</sup> The two met when Millie Bobby Brown was 14 years old. Millie Bobby Brown has gone on record saying she and Drake would spend one on one time together. They would have texting conversations about boys that she was crushing on. Drake felt the need to use her name in defense as a way to acknowledge the relationship. To finish that verse, Drake suggests that Kendrick had been paying for automated bots to stream his songs to artificially inflate the numbers and make it look like Drake was losing worse than he was.

### **The legal aftermath of the beef**

The end of the flurry of diss tracks being released was with Drakes, *THE HEART PART 6*. Kendrick Lamar won the battle against Drake. This was set in stone after *Not Like Us* but *THE HEART PART 6* combined with Drake's behavior was the nail in the coffin. Drake responded to

---

34 Lissente Lanuza Saenz. 2025. "What to Know About Drake's Controversial Millie Bobby Brown Friendship That Allegedly Inspired Kendrick's Diss." Yahoo Entertainment. February 11, 2025. <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/know-drake-controversial-millie-bobby-192302873.html>.

this loss by doing something that is completely unprecedented. On November 21st, 2024, he filed a lawsuit against his label UMG, and many streaming platforms stating that they artificially inflated the popularity of Not Like Us in order to ruin the Drakes reputation which he cited as defamation. This move was received with utter disgust as this has never happened in the history of hip hop. Drake engaging in legal action after a rap beef further shows his dissociation from typical hip hop culture. There is no historical precedent to judge this action based on. Rappers have been attacking each other over songs since the 1980's and this is the first time that anyone has ever taken a legal route against their opponent in a situation not involving physical violence. Drake's decision to do so received significant criticism from many people in the hip hop world. One of the most outspoken figures about Drake's decision to file his lawsuit was Joe Budden, a former rapper turned podcaster. When discussing the lawsuit, Joe Budden said "I'm saddened as a diss track king, as a n\*\*\*\* who loves to get on the mic and tell lies about my opponent. Horrible things get said [in rap beefs], man. I just don't like the Karen play-both-sides, the aggressor and the victim."<sup>35</sup> Joe Budden points out the hypocrisy of Drake simultaneously being the aggressor and the victim, similar to the sentiment from fans.

The lawsuit's existence also directly contradicts Drake's self defense from *THE HEART PART 6*. Early on Drake was online daily begging for a reply from Kendrick. His good friend DJ Akademiks was posting daily on X (formerly known as Twitter) counting the days with no response to Kendrick. Subsequently, Kendrick did release music and won the battle. If Drake had really fed Kendrick information like he claimed, it would not be logical for him to then sue on the grounds of that information being detrimental to his career. If Drake had fed Kendrick fake

---

<sup>35</sup> Andy Bustard. 2025. "Joe Budden Claims 'Karen' Drake Is Ruining Hip Hop With UMG Lawsuit." HipHopDX. January 20, 2025. <https://hiphopdx.com/news/joe-budden-drake-umg-lawsuit-ruin-hip-hop>.

information there would have been proof. Drake pushed that narrative to give his fans something to believe in, knowing he had already lost the battle. The lawsuit goes to further illustrate what Kendrick has been saying about him the entire time. He lacks a fundamental understanding of certain unspoken cultural rules that people who honor the genre understand.

### **The Pop Out Concert**

On June 19th, now the holiday known as Juneteenth, Kendrick Lamar performed a concert in Los Angeles, called “The Pop Out.” In the weeks leading up to this performance after the announcement, fans were excited to see what was planned. On the song *Not Like Us*, Lamar rapped “Sometimes you gotta pop out and show n\*\*\*\*\*s.” Due to that line, the consensus was that the concert would serve as a victory lap in which Lamar would perform his diss tracks on Drake. This event featured the likes of 25 other west coast hip hop artists as openers, some of which being superstars like Tyler, The Creator, Steve Lacy, DJ Mustard, and even his old peers from TDE with Jay Rock, Ab Soul, and Schoolboy Q. The intention of this show was clear, unite the west coast and bring pride to the region, thus making an artist like Drake feel even more out of place in the hip hop community. The pivotal moment of the whole show was at the end, when Lamar played *Not Like Us* five consecutive times in a row. The entire stadium seemingly united around Lamar, singing the song word for word so loud that it is audible in the recorded version of the concert. The Pop Out was a symbolic moment for Lamar, showing his triumph in grandiose fashion. This was effective symbolically because Drake is incapable of hosting this type of event. The closest thing he ever did was the OVO Fest but that was closer to a traditional music festival than bringing a whole city together at a specific time.

## Track Eleven: “Watch the Party Die” by Kendrick Lamar

There was a small period of peace over Summer 2024, until Kendrick released yet another song titled *Watch the Party Die*, just 3 days after he was announced as the Super Bowl halftime show headliner. The song generated a couple days of buzz but due to the subject matter of the song it was not discussed as thoroughly as some of his other releases. The title itself is vindictive and implies the end of something, and when diving into the lyrics of the song it appears to be a call for a complete upheaval of what hip hop has become. Lamar never released the track on streaming services, solely as a post on Instagram, which I believe to be intentional because it makes itself visible to the target audience, people like Drake and his crew of influencers like Adin Ross or DJ Akademiks. Unlike the songs released throughout his beef with Drake, this song does not take aim at a singular individual. Kendrick critiques what hip hop culture has become and implores the listener to genuinely consider the issues plaguing what the hip hop scene has turned into. In the first verse of the track he raps:

Burn the whole village, we start over, it's really that time  
Why reason with these n\*\*\*\* if they can't see the future first?  
Why argue with these clowns if the circus is well at work?  
Just walk that man down, that'll do everyone a solid  
It's love, but tough love sometimes gotta result in violence  
If you parade in gluttony without givin' truth to the youth  
The graveyard is company, just tell us what casket to choose  
They party more than bitches, tell me, what are you working for?  
They glorify scamming, you get chipped over this credit card  
Influencers talk down 'cause I'm not with the basic shit  
But they don't hate me, they hate the man that I represent  
The type of man that never dickride 'cause I want a favor

From the start of the verse, the message of the song is clear. Kendrick refers to “burning the whole village” in reference to rebooting the hip hop scene. He questions himself for trying to talk

to the perpetrators of what he views as the problem, calling the hip hop scene a circus. Kendrick then reiterates that what he did to Drake was out of love for hip hop, thus he had to inflict lyrical violence towards him. Kendrick scolds the general populous of rappers who offer no substance to their young listeners and instead choose to brag about their material possessions. The line directed at influencers does refer to a specific person but messages that disingenuous hip hop coverage exists for the sake of monetary gain is clear. Kendrick finishes verse one saying: “How many bitches harder than a lot of you n\*\*\*\*\*/Would trade all of y'all for Nip, I can't be proud of you n\*\*\*\*.” This line expresses his continual discontent with his peers. He is not proud of a certain group of rappers and implies that there are underrepresented female rappers who are putting out more quality music than their male counterparts. Kendrick also references Nipsey Hussle, a hip hop legend from the west coast who died tragically in a shooting in Los Angeles. He continues these sentiments, rapping:

“No more pillow-talkin' chumps startin' neighborhood wars  
Dirty-mackin' bitches because your spirit is insecure  
The flashy n\*\*\*\* with nasty decisions usin' money as a backbone  
I want his head cracked before he's back home  
The radio personality pushin' propaganda for salary  
Let me know when they turn up as a casualty  
I want agony, assault and battery,  
I see a new Earth  
Filled with beautiful people makin' humanity work  
Let's kill the followers that follow up on poppin' mollies from  
The obvious degenerates that's failing to acknowledge the  
Hope that we tryna spread, if I'm not his vote  
Then you need to bring his fuckin' head, or film that shit in hi-res”

The song gets more visceral saying that there needs to be an end to wars starting from pillow talking. This could be seen as a reference to Drake and Future beefing over a woman who was

spreading information between them. Kendrick continues his tirade against influencers in hip hop media. He implies there are people who are on artists payroll to push positive propaganda about their music. Kendrick wants to create a new earth, where people who work hard and are independent are at the top, rather than insecure followers. He continues themes from earlier in the song, rapping:

Terrace Martin said I'm mentally with layers, true  
I flood the market with my best regards, I paid your dues  
And so it's up, if you ain't one of ours, it's bad news  
My n\*\*\*\* Jay Estrada said I gotta burn it down to build it up  
That confirmation real as fuck, it ain't too many real as us  
Lockin' in to what I trust, lookin' outside

The kids live tomorrow 'cause today, the party just died

Kendrick declares himself a layered thinker, acknowledging his large output of recent music.

The next line appears to be a reference to *Not Like Us*, saying if you aren't someone who belongs with him it is bad news for you. Kendrick finishes the song with a chilling line saying that the kids can live because the "party" just died. 'The party' seems to refer to the new form of hip hop. Kendrick calls for the end of that and says that it has to be taken to the ground before a superior form of hip hop can arise from the ashes.

### **Track Twelve: "Wacc'd out Murals" by Kendrick Lamar**

Kendrick's 2024 run did not stop with *Watch the Party Die*, he released his latest album GNX in late 2024. The album encompasses a wide variety of subject matter. A large portion of the content is about the feud with Drake or hip hop in general. The opening track: *wacc'd out murals* calls out the hypocrisy and jealousy that his success has created, and continues to draw a thematic line in the sand over what is good within hip hop.

All this talk is bitch-made, that's on my Lord

I'll kill 'em all before I let 'em kill my joy  
I done been through it all, what you endure?  
It used to be fuck that n\*\*\*\*, but now it's plural  
Fuck everybody, that's on my body  
My blick first, then God got me  
I watch 'em pander with them back-handed compliments

Kendrick establishes the primary themes of the song and the album GNX, continuing to emphasize his willingness to burn down what hip hop has become in order to create a better future. Kendrick implies his conflict was just him and Drake, but has expanded to have a problem with everybody who does not align with his viewpoint.

Miss my uncle Lil' Mane, he said that he would kill me if I didn't make it  
Now I'm possessed by a spirit and they can't take it  
Used to bump Tha Carter III, I held my Rollie chain proud  
Irony, I think my hard work let Lil Wayne down

The Lil Wayne bar was shocking because there are very few rappers who would be brave enough to call out a legend. In this case, Kendrick references Lil Wayne being upset over not being picked to be the headliner for the Super Bowl halftime show in New Orleans where he is from. Lil Wayne took it as a slight that Kendrick performed in his city rather than celebrating what that means for hip hop in general. In a post on Instagram Lil Wayne said “So, like I said, it broke me and I’m just trying to put me back together.”<sup>36</sup> Lil Wayne eventually came around after him and Kendrick spoke with each other, but that was a long time after Lil Wayne’s initial outburst. Kendrick emphasizes that he was a fan of Lil Wayne’s music when he was younger, and loved his album “Tha Carter III.” He now feels like his success has let him down.

---

<sup>36</sup>Gil Kaufman. n.d. “Lil Wayne Admits Super Bowl Halftime Snub ‘Broke’ Him: ‘It Hurt a Lot.’” Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/lil-wayne-super-bowl-halftime-snub-broke-him-hurt-kendrick-lamar-1235774697/>.

Whatever though, call me crazy, everybody questionable  
Turn me to an Eskimo, I drew the line and decimals  
Snoop posted Taylor Made, I prayed it was the edibles  
I couldn't believe it, it was only right for me to let it go  
Won the Super Bowl and Nas the only one congratulate me  
All these n\*\*\*\* agitated, I'm just glad they showin' they faces  
Quite frankly, plenty artists, but they outdated  
Old-ass flows, tryna convince me that you their favorite

In these lyrics, Lamar expresses frustration with one of the legends of the genre for supporting the side that represents what Kendrick stands against. Shortly after the release of the album, Snoop Dogg took to X (formerly known as twitter) to apologize to Lamar, declaring him the king of the west coast. Kendrick points out that Nas was one of the few rappers willing to congratulate him for his achievement of being selected to perform at the Super Bowl.<sup>37</sup> The following line could be a reference to many of the people who sided with Drake during the beef. The specific individual is less important than the principle, which is that many rappers who may be jealous they didn't achieve what Kendrick did sided with Drake out of spite, rather than favoring what is good for hip hop.

Where you from? Not where I'm from, we all indigenous  
Against all odds, I squabbled up for them dividends  
Against all odds, I showed up as a gentleman  
I done lost plenty friends, sixteen to be specific  
Put that on my kids' children, we gon' see the future first  
They like, "Dot big trippin'," I just want what I deserve  
What bridge they done burnt? All of them, it's over with  
I'm doin' what COVID did, they'll never get over it

---

<sup>37</sup> Complex Music [@ComplexMusic]. 2024. "Nas Salutes Kendrick Lamar 'Always Inspired by My Brother KL. Keeping the Essence of This Shit Alive and at the Forefront. Salute King!' <https://t.co/rhp2jfmoCT>." Tweet. *Twitter*. <https://x.com/ComplexMusic/status/1860382427044048913>.

The first line rhetorically asks the listener where they are from and Kendrick sticks with the ongoing rhetoric of “we” saying that his people are indigenous to the rap game. The line has a double meaning, as Kendrick is also referencing himself being from Compton and Drake being from Canada. Kendrick continues to say that he showed up ready for war, a reference to his battle with Drake where he began in a very respectful manner before eventually tearing him down. Kendrick mentions the friends he’s lost through the years and he cautions the people who have burned the bridge with him, because he feels very driven to carry out his vision to create the future of hip hop. Kendrick finishes this verse by saying that people will never get over what he has done.

Ain't no sympathy here, this shit's hilarious  
It's a lot of opinions but no power to carry it  
2025, they still movin' on some scary shit  
Tell 'em quit they job and pay the real n\*\*\*\* their severance  
Don't insult my intelligence, I'm not just for the television  
Teleport to Bullis Road and dig up all my relatives  
Okay, n\*\*\*\*, let's settle it, these n\*\*\*\* been fake loyal  
Since y'all pandering to choose a side, let me do it for you  
Okay, fuck your hip-hop, I watched the party just die

These lines clearly define what Kendrick thinks of the current attitudes on social media towards hip hop and where he fits into that. Kendrick says that there are a lot of weightless opinions being stated publicly. There are people speaking on hip hop who have platforms to do so despite having no understanding of what to say. For example, popular streamer Adin Ross appeared on the Full Send Podcast, and said “Personally, I believe Drake came out on top in that beef. Kendrick made the hit song ‘Not Like Us,’ but it's all lies.”<sup>38</sup> Not only is the Full Send Podcast

---

<sup>38</sup> FULL SEND PODCAST, dir. 2025. *Adin Ross Goes IN on Kendrick vs Drake Beef and Reveals His Relationship with Barron Trump!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hFoYDACPQM>.

not a reputable source for hip hop news, Ross is ignoring a known feature of many rap beefs: artists will do anything to get the win, including lie, which Drake did as well. Kendrick suggests that these people should have their jobs taken from them and that he does not exist for “television.” By saying that he does not exist for television he implies that he is more than just mindless entertainment. Kendrick reiterates his origins being from Compton, through reference to Bullis road which has a cemetery near it. Kendrick shows disgust for people pandering and volunteers to draw a line in the sand himself and declares that the type of hip hop he does not support needs to end and references his track *Watch The Party Die*.

You n\*\*\*\* live in denial

Ay, fuck anybody empathetic to the other side, I vow

A bitch n\*\*\*\* love bitch n\*\*\*\*\*, they exist with 'em in style

These lines continue Kendrick’s tirade against people who support Drake. The most simplistic of the three lines is the most crucial. Kendrick is saying that a rapper who acts like a “bitch n\*\*\*\*” will associate with other people like them. Kendrick notes that the shared aesthetics of people who are unoriginal and make the same meaningless music exist together in style.

Don't let no white comedian talk about no Black woman, that's law

I know propaganda work for them and fuck whoever that's close to them

The n\*\*\*\* that coon, the n\*\*\*\* that bein' groomed, slide on both of them

This line created a one sided social media beef between Kendrick and Andrew Schulz, a comedian. Schulz set Kendrick off with insensitive comments he made on his podcast. Schulz talked about the effects of dating a Black woman, and said, “They shave their hair because they start losing it. Because he's so stressed to be around this Black girl complaining all the time. They grow their beard because they need a cushion when they get slapped. I think the Black

girlfriend effect, it might be a protective instinct.”<sup>39</sup> These comments were criticised by many, as it perpetuated the stereotype of the angry Black woman that is racist and harmful. As a result, Kendrick declared it law that white comedians should not be permitted to make jokes of this nature. Kendrick continues, mentioning people who spew propaganda and describes them as people who “coon” which is a racist word for a racist caricature of a Black person that has evolved into a term used to describe a Black person who leaves their dignity behind for monetary gain.

### **Kendrick’s Super Bowl halftime show**

Kendrick Lamar’s historic 2024 run ultimately led to him being announced as the Super Bowl halftime show. In the weeks leading up to the event, the discourse surrounding the event was primarily centered around whether or not he would stick to his hits or if he would continue to rap the diss tracks on the biggest stage in America. Fans were kept in the dark other than one nugget from Lamar in his interview leading up to the performance, where he cited “storytelling” as the thing fans should expect to see. Upon the beginning of the performance, Lamar’s fans were excited but not surprised to see movie star Samuel L Jackson dressed as “Uncle Sam.” Uncle Sam is an infamous military character utilized by the US Government for recruitment. From the beginning of the performance, it was clear that Lamar wanted to tell a story. Uncle Sam starts by welcoming Kendrick to “the great American game” and the field itself had 4 squares each with the shape of a button on the PlayStation controller. After his welcome from Uncle Sam, Kendrick rapped sections of two different songs before Uncle Sam interrupts and tells Kendrick that he is being too loud and too ghetto, and questions if he knows how to play the

---

<sup>39</sup> Riyah Collins. 2024. “Podcast Duo Sorry for Jokes about Black Women.” September 17, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce81yy7l39mo>.

game. This represents a key moment in Lamar's narrative because it establishes a tension between Kendrick and the forces of America that have an idea of what they want him to be. Kendrick responds by playing one of his biggest commercial hits of all time, HUMBLE. He showed that he can play into the game by giving the people what they want. While doing this, his backup dancers who were all dressed in the colors of America formed a flag around him, creating some of the most poignant imagery in the entire performance. The dancers were separated into two halves, creating the image of a divided America around Lamar. After continuing to rap for a moment while in the middle of this flag, Lamar and his dancers aggressively move towards the camera while he rapped roughly the first minute of his first Drake diss track euphoria. While once again being interrupted by Uncle Sam, he points out that Kendrick has "brought his boys," and deducts a life from him, calling it a "culture cheat code." At this point in the performance I think the messaging is pretty clear. Uncle Sam was intended to represent the countries desire to box in Black artists and use them for their entertainment as long as it does not cross any boundaries, hence why the Uncle Sam character tells Lamar he is being too ghetto. For Kendrick, playing the great American game is conforming to racial standards. He then transitions into a slower and more melodic set of songs with former TDE Labelmate SZA. After he wrapped up his songs with SZA, Uncle Sam returns to the stage and applauds Lamar for keeping it calm and giving America what it wants. As he is beginning to say "do not mess this up," Lamar reappears suddenly and in the span of a back and forth with his dancers introduces Not Like Us with the following lines "It's a cultural divide Imma get it on a 40 acres and a mule this is bigger than the music/Yeah they tried to rig the game but you can't fake influence." Many people were unaware of the 40 acres and a mule reference, as it is not a commonly mentioned thing. After the conclusion of the Civil War, freed slaves were promised 40 acres and a mule. To

this day, it is one of the biggest broken promises in the history of the American government. After the Civil War, Union General William Sherman promised to give emancipated enslaved african Americans 40 acres in his Special Field Order 15. The order would have taken 400,000 acres of land on the coast from South Carolina to Florida.<sup>40</sup> Mules were not part of the original bill, but it was offered to help transportation. However, this bill was short lived and acting President Andrew Johnson overturned what would become 640 billion dollars today worth of land back to the white owners. Kendrick brought this up because it is one of the most egregious examples of the government treating Black people poorly and it perfectly suits the narrative that his show was built around. The line following it points out the systematic racism that sets up a “rigged” game for Black people, but even despite that there is no way to diminish the power of what Kendrick represents.

### **Drake since the beef**

Based upon consensus from fans, scholars, and other musicians Kendrick has achieved a symbolic victory over Drake. Kendrick was able to articulate flaws about Drake to an extent great enough to damage his reputation as a rapper. Drake’s return to a style of music featuring more pop less rapping in early 2025 with his album *Some Sexy Songs 4 U*. It displays a level of discomfort with his own style compounded by his commitment to a tour in Australia during the Super Bowl. Reconciliation between Drake and Kendrick is unlikely. Kendrick’s existence will continue to make it challenging for Drake to exist in the hip hop landscape.

---

<sup>40</sup> Hannah Packman. 2020. “Juneteenth and the Broken Promise of ‘40 Acres and a Mule’ - National Farmers Union.” June 19, 2020. <https://nfu.org/2020/06/19/juneteenth-and-the-broken-promise-of-40-acres-and-a-mule/>.

## Recap of the beef

The beef between Drake and Kendrick Lamar proved to be nothing short of legendary. The beef exhibits the three primary techniques used in rap beef established in this thesis. These techniques represent criticisms that have branched off from Adorno's idea of the Culture Industry, in addition to the other philosophical undertones creating tension in hip hop. Drake attacked Kendrick for making inferior music, and sought to tarnish his name by starting a rumor that Kendrick had assaulted his wife. Kendrick attacked Drake through all three of the common themes, starting by questioning his skill as a rapper on Euphoria by bringing up Drake's history of using ghostwriters. Kendrick popularized the narrative that Drake likes young women with multiple lines on both *meet the grahams*, and *Not Like Us*. He also psychologically analyzed him to bring to light the inauthentic aspects of his music by questioning his allegiance to hip hop values (theme). Due to such rich ideological conflict, this beef will be studied for years to come as part of an ongoing culture war between different styles of artistry.

## **Section 5: Concluding thoughts & the future of hip hop**

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The strong thematic elements that have been present in hip hop beefs since its inception draw conclusions as to the importance of these conflicts, and what they mean going forward. The beefs between rappers matter because hip hop comes from a unique origin of inner city kids using music as an expressive art form to have fun and speak about what was happening in their communities. The genre had not been commodified as something that labels could market and sell, which gave the top tier rappers a specific ethos directly tied to their skill and devotion to the ideological pillars of the forefathers. As hip hop has grown in popularity, there are acts in each generation that genuinely care about the history before them, as well as acts who are there to maximize profits and set records, even if it compromises their art. Many conflicts have arisen as a result of this, creating a narrative in every generation of hip hop that the young stars have to raise the quality of the music. The beefs highlighted represent examples of times in which the stakes of the battles have been centered around differing ideologies and the winner of these battles often sets the precedent for the genre. Hip hop is like sports in this way, in that the winner dictates the terms going forward and sets the standard. With my system of understanding and interpreting these beefs, fans can better understand why they often skyrocket into the utter decimation of opponents, and why they matter so much to the artists involved. Like any genre that has become popular in the history of music, there will always be artists who are in it for the money, and that is unavoidable. It also leaves those artists vulnerable to critique by the people who represent the classic means of being a rapper, and the opinions of those will always be held in a higher regard, as their music is the least artistically tainted by the immense wealth that a popular musician can receive. There exist cases of artists like Drake who will claim a spot on a

throne over artists who have attacked their careers in a different way than he has. This beef between Kendrick Lamar and Drake will serve as an inflection point in the genre for years to come, because there has never been a feud at the magnitude at the level of this one that sparked so much discourse into all the components of what it means to be a rapper. Yet, one artist can only do so much. Kendrick pointed out for hip hop fans precisely what is wrong with his main for Drake, and what is wrong with hip hop media. Ultimately, the fans steer the direction of hip hop with what they listen to and who they give a platform to. Hip hop will never reach a point as “pure” as what Mos Def and GZA reference again, because it has become so popular. Yet, it can still get better. Fans listening to artists who do not solely aim for streaming numbers would further discourage artists from aiming to make as marketable of music as possible. Supporting the YouTube channels or reading hip hop coverage from independent media outlets gives a platform to people who genuinely care about hip hop and want to see the most talented artists get recognized. Most importantly, not giving attention to people who cover hip hop in aggregate like Adin Ross who are only trying to create viral clips for the sake of monetary gain would go a long way to encourage those type of influencers to talk about other things. These are all ideas that Kendrick alluded to on Watch the Party Die and it would take a combined effort from fans, artists, and media alike to bring hip hop to the place that he wants it to be.

### **Places for future research**

Future academic research could center around whether the radical nature of the original form of hip hop is even possible. In this day and age when every artist is producing a commodity (to some degree) it makes it hard to believe that the radical element can ever be fully reclaimed as it originally was. That strikes the question, what does it mean for hip hop to continue to exist in the modern era? Will it slowly just become a musical form rather than an entire culture and

ideology? In the internet era things move very quickly. Beefs happen faster than they ever have before, and with the historic victory achieved by Kendrick Lamar there is a lot left to unfold. Many of the biggest beefs in hip hop history fade in and out and with that precedent it is a fair assumption that the battle between Kendrick and Drake will continue in ways people do not expect. The lawsuit that Drake is attempting to complete against Universal Music Group will be a historic victory for either side. If Drake wins it will limit what rappers can say in beef at the risk of being sued or getting their label sued. If UMG wins it will further destroy Drake's reputation and the rules of what can be said in beef will not change either way. Either result will promote more research on where hip hop stands when that happens. One of the things being discussed by fans is the question: what's next for hip hop? Many Kendrick fans have declared hip hop to be back, though to this point there is not a gratuitous amount of evidence showing that. The best evidence for this notion is Joey Bada\$\$ releasing a song after the beef titled *The Ruler's Back*. The song comprises braggadocious raps stating the East coast's superiority over the West. The song quickly received responses from multiple West Coast artists like Ray Vaughn, sparring back with Joey. If this is representative of what is to come, it looks like a hip hop renaissance in some capacity is on the way.

## Bibliography

- Andre Gee, Jessica McKinney, Jordan Rose, and Erik Skelton. n.d. "Ranking the 'Big 3' Every Year Since 2010." *Complex*. Accessed May 13, 2025.  
<https://www.complex.com/music/a/andre-gee/ranking-big-3-kendrick-drake-j-cole-every-year-2010>.
- Andrews, Elias. 2024a. "Kendrick Lamar Refused To Appear On Drake's 'First Person Shooter.'" *HotNewHipHop*. May 3, 2024. <https://www.hotnewhiphop.com/796478-kendrick-lamar-refused-to-appear-on-drake-first-person-shooter-hip-hop-news>.
- Andy Bustard. 2025. "Joe Budden Claims 'Karen' Drake Is Ruining Hip Hop With UMG Lawsuit." *HipHopDX*. January 20, 2025. <https://hiphopdx.com/news/joe-budden-drake-umg-lawsuit-ruin-hip-hop>.
- Bakari Kitwana. 2005. *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*.
- Bootleg Kev, dir. 2024. *Snoop Dogg on Kendrick Calling Him Out on "Wacc'd out Murals" & Drake Using His Voice Through A.I.*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqvoWOUZHdM>.
- Brian Hiatt. n.d. Kendrick Lamar on "Humble," Bono, Taylor Swift, Mandela. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kendrick-lamar-the-rolling-stone-interview-199817/>.
- Buschendorf, Christa, ed. 2017. *Power Relations in Black Lives: Reading African American Literature and Culture with Bourdieu and Elias*. 1st ed. Vol. 17. *American Culture Studies*. Bielefeld, Germany: transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839436608>.
- Christopher Vito, "Just Say No to the Majors: Independent Hip-Hop Culture," in *The Values of Independent Hip-Hop in the Post-Golden Era*, 45–69. London: Palgrave, 2019.
- C Vernon Coleman II. 2023. "Drake Ghostwriter Quentin Miller Claims He's Never Officially Been Paid for Writing Drizzy Songs." *XXL Magazine*. January 5, 2023.  
<https://www.xxlmag.com/quentin-miller-never-paid-drake-songs/>.
- Complex Music [@ComplexMusic]. 2024. "Nas Salutes Kendrick Lamar 🤝 'Always Inspired by My Brother KL. Keeping the Essence of This Shit Alive and at the Forefront. Salute King!' <https://t.co/rhp2jfmoCT>." Tweet. *Twitter*.  
<https://x.com/ComplexMusic/status/1860382427044048913>.
- Dictionary.Com | Meanings & Definitions of English Words. 2025. Dictionary.Com. May 13, 2025. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/jabroni>.
- DJSemtex. 2009. DRAKE INTERVIEW WITH DJ SEMTEX [SO FAR GONE].  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYovMs2a5pc>.

- djvlad. 2011. Charlamagne: “Drake is a Corny Guy.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1avdthbzt-Q>.
- Edouard Glissant. 1989. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*.
- Flores, Lucien J. 2012. “Hip-Hop Is for Everybody: Examining the Roots and Growth of Hip-Hop.” *Inquiries Journal* 4 (05). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1686/hip-hop-is-for-everybody-examining-the-roots-and-growth-of-hip-hop>.
- FULL SEND PODCAST, dir. 2025. *Adin Ross Goes IN on Kendrick vs Drake Beef and Reveals His Relationship with Barron Trump!*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hFoYDACPQM>.
- Gil Kaufman. n.d. “Lil Wayne Admits Super Bowl Halftime Snub ‘Broke’ Him: ‘It Hurt a Lot.’” Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/lil-wayne-super-bowl-halftime-snob-broke-him-hurt-kendrick-lamar-1235774697/>.
- Greenburg, Zack O’Malley. n.d. “The Man Who Invented Hip Hop.” Forbes. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/2009/07/09/afrika-bambaataa-hip-hop-music-business-entertainment-cash-kings-bambaataa.html>.
- GZA. 2017. “GZA Speaks: The Lost Art of Lyricism.” *Cuepoint* (blog). May 19, 2017.  
<https://medium.com/cuepoint/gza-speaks-the-lost-art-of-lyricism-ee84510e7268>.
- Hannah Packman. 2020. “Juneteenth and the Broken Promise of ‘40 Acres and a Mule’ - National Farmers Union.” June 19, 2020. <https://nfu.org/2020/06/19/juneteenth-and-the-broken-promise-of-40-acres-and-a-mule/>.
- Hip Hop Nation. 2013. Pusha T Says Kendrick Lamar Thanked Him For Understanding “Control.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c858WS3n6Bc>.
- Hiatt, Brian. “Kendrick Lamar: The Best Rapper Alive on Bono, Mandela, Stardom and More.” Rolling Stone, July 26, 2024. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kendrick-lamar-the-rolling-stone-interview-199817/>.
- Jaques Attali. 1977. *Noise*.
- Joe Coscarelli. n.d. “Drake Addresses Blackface Photo Used for Pusha-T Cover Art.” Magazine. The New York Times. Accessed May 13, 2025.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/31/arts/music/drake-Blackface-photo-push-t.html>.
- Joe Price. n.d. “What Is Baka Not Nice’s ‘Weird Case’ Kendrick Lamar Refer...” Complex. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.complex.com/music/a/backwoodsaltar/what-is-baka-not-nice-weird-case-kendrick-lamar-drake-diss>.

- Lissente Lanuza Saenz. 2025. "What to Know About Drake's Controversial Millie Bobby Brown Friendship That Allegedly Inspired Kendrick's Diss." Yahoo Entertainment. February 11, 2025. <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/know-drake-controversial-millie-bobby-192302873.html>.
- Loren Kajikawa, "'My Name Is': Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race" and "Conclusion," in *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, 118–149. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
- Marino, Michael P. 2016. "Chicago Hustle and Flow: Gangs, Gangsta Rap, and Social Class." *Popular Music and Society* 39 (3): 385–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1114332>.
- Michael Dyson. 2010. *Know What I Mean? Reflections on Hip Hop*.
- Niall Smith. n.d. "For Us, By Us – Why the Brand FUBU and Other Black-Owned Fashion Businesses Are So Important." The Culture Crypt. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.theculturecrypt.com/posts/why-the-brand-fubu-and-other-Black-owned-fashion-businesses-are-so-important>.
- Orejuela, Fernando. *Rap and Hip Hop Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Recording Academy / GRAMMYs, dir. 2023. *KENDRICK LAMAR Wins Best Rap Album For 'MR. MORALE & THE BIG STEPPERS' | 2023 GRAMMYs*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvtUnq7MT2E>.
- Recording Academy / GRAMMYs dir. 2025. *KENDRICK LAMAR Wins Song Of The Year For 'NOT LIKE US' | 2025 GRAMMYs Acceptance Speech*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqqAnsm4agc>.
- Riyah Collins. 2024. "Podcast Duo Sorry for Jokes about Black Women." September 17, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce81yy7l39mo>.
- Redman. "Redman Reacts to Eminem's Freestyle." *BET*, BETNetworks, 19 Oct. 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo\\_GLkvRSis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo_GLkvRSis). Accessed 7 June 2022.
- Simon Frith. n.d. "Pop Music." In *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*.
- Snapes, Laura. 2019. "Drake Kisses 17-Year-Old Fan on Stage in Unearthed Video Clip." *The Guardian*, January 7, 2019, sec. Music. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/07/drake-kisses-fan-17-ogden-theater-denver-colorado-2010>.
- Talib Kweli. n.d. (371) Black Thought Tells The Story Of Biggie Thinking That The Roots Dissed Him | People's Party Clip - YouTube. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOidZisbMlw>.

The Next Level Magazine, dir. 2018. *Pusha T Talks about Drake's New Child and Explains Meaning behind Whitney Houston Bathroom Pic*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaDx3lkcpG>.

Theodor Adorno. 1970. *Aesthetic Theory*.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. 1947. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Tukufu Zuberi. n.d. "Birthplace Of Hip Hop | History Detectives | PBS." Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/birthplace-of-hip-hop/>.

Tate, Greg. *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*. Harlem Moon, 2003.

Ugwu, Reggie. 2013. "Drake: Kendrick Lamar Is 'Not Murdering Me, At All, In Any Platform' (Exclusive)." *Billboard* (blog). August 30, 2013. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/drake-kendrick-lamar-is-not-murdering-me-at-all-in-any-platform-5679938/>.

Yasiin Bey on Drake. *YouTube*, uploaded by The Cutting Room Floor, January 2024.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zweuggu9IUQ>.

#### *Recordings Cited*

50 Cent. 2009. *Many Men*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D3crqpCIPY>.

A Tribe Called Quest. 1993. *Excursions*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZWS6CITutY>.

Big Sean, Kendrick Lamar, and Jay Electronica. 2013. *Control*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xufJHc2EdBA>.

Common. 1994. *I Used to Love H.E.R.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eodCa4P5BsQ>.

Drake. 2018. *Duppy Freestyle*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr\\_QLv1TPcY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr_QLv1TPcY).

2023. *Drake - First Person Shooter (Audio) Ft. J. Cole*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRs2o36a1Us>.

2024a. *FAMILY MATTERS*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkXG3ZrXlbc>.

2024b. *Push Ups*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKH9p19PRLA>.

2024c. *Taylor Made Freestyle*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1f6Ny\\_aXx4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1f6Ny_aXx4).

2024d. *THE HEART PART 6 - DRAKE*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJeY-FXidDQ>.

Future, Metro Boomin, and Kendrick Lamar. 2024. *Like That*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9bKBAA22Go>.

Kendrick Lamar. 2024a. *6:16 in LA*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T42TkZW6pc8>.

2024b. *Euphoria*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPqDIwWMtxg>.

2024c. *Meet the Grahams*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QiF19Dc7D0>.

2024d. *Not Like Us*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6eK-2OQtew>.

2024e. *Wacced out Murals*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwUQ\\_5iV9pY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwUQ_5iV9pY).

2024f. *Watch The Party Die*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zISYJ-bT7DQ>.

Kurtis Blow - Topic. 1980. *The Breaks*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulBhSNEkMrM>.

Nas. 1994. *N.Y. State of Mind*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI8A14Qcv68>.

2009. *Hip Hop Is Dead*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAKxjTRV6ms>.

Pusha T. 2018. *The Story of Adidon*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0lQC\\_fScFo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0lQC_fScFo).

Reflection Eternal. 2000. *Too Late*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYBdM4tbZAI>.

Roxanne Shante. 1985. *Roxanne's Revenge*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2FgT85g-rI>.

Run DMC. 1986. *RUN DMC - Walk This Way (Official HD Video) Ft. Aerosmith*.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B\\_UYYPb-Gk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B_UYYPb-Gk).

Sugarhill Gang. 1979. *Rapper's Delight*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcCK99wHrk0>.

The Notorious B.I.G. 1994. *Everyday Struggle*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz5o4EjCNLg>.

The Roots. 1996. *What They Do*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_qzacv8dtb4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qzacv8dtb4).

UTFO. 1985. *Roxanne, Roxanne*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEjISINKR24>.