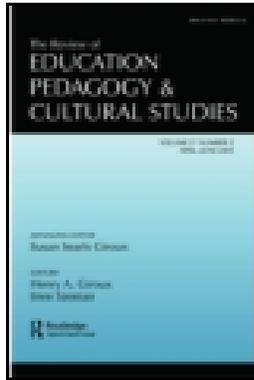


This article was downloaded by: [University of California Santa Barbara]
On: 13 April 2012, At: 11:44
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,
UK



Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies

Publication details, including instructions for
authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gred20>

Scared Straight: Hip-Hop, Outing, and the Pedagogy of Queerness

Marc Lamont Hill

Available online: 20 Jan 2009

To cite this article: Marc Lamont Hill (2009): Scared Straight: Hip-Hop, Outing, and the Pedagogy of Queerness, *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 31:1, 29-54

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714410802629235>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages

whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Scared Straight: Hip-Hop, Outing, and the Pedagogy of Queerness

Marc Lamont Hill

In 1989, a rumor swept through the streets of New York City with remarkable speed and lethal intensity. Various radio outlets, underground magazines, and unnamed sources were reporting that Big Daddy Kane, one of hip-hop culture's most respected and popular artists, was dying of AIDS. According to the rumors, Kane had confessed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that he contracted HIV through sexual intercourse. Although the rumor proved to be entirely fabricated, it nonetheless marked a critical moment in hip-hop history. In addition to creating undue concern about the health and life of one of hip-hop's towering figures, the incident marked the first public "outing" in hip-hop history.

Given the dominant belief that HIV/AIDS was a gay disease, public attention quickly shifted from Kane's health to his sexuality: Did hip-hop have its first gay MC? Was he gay or bisexual? Did he catch the disease from another rapper? These and other questions chased the rumor throughout the city's boroughs and into urban spaces throughout the country. Further enhancing and complicating the rumor was its apparent irony. In addition to being a lyrical giant, Big Daddy Kane was hip-hop's playboy extraordinaire. With good looks, braggadocious lyrics, a flashy persona, and even a pimp-like name, Kane's very identity signified a carefully crafted and extravagantly performed masculinity. After the rumors began to circulate, however, Kane's image was placed in serious peril. Hip-hop's Goliath of masculinity had been slain by a disease presumably preserved for "punks," "fags," and "queens."

In an effort to salvage his image and protect his career, Kane responded to the rumors by vigorously denying their accuracy and reiterating his heterosexuality. Perhaps the best example of this came on his 1993 track “Give It To Me,” where he raps

Like with that HIV rumor they tried to toss
 But I’m so good with the women that if I ever caught AIDS
 A woman doctor’d find a cure just so she could get laid
 So never fear my dear, just come on over here
 I practice safe sex, with girls I lay next
 In other words, the J-hat’s on the head
 Cause I’m too sexy for AIDS like Right Said Fred¹

Before the release of the song, Kane also appeared in various public venues, such as a 1990 Harlem voter registration drive, declaring his status as an HIV-negative heterosexual.² In June 1991, Kane posed partially nude for *Playgirl* magazine and appeared in Madonna’s controversial 1992 photo book, *Sex*. Although the rumors eventually subsided, Kane’s career never fully recovered from the ordeal.

Despite the untruthfulness of the Big Daddy Kane rumor, its construction, dissemination, and response in many ways foreshadowed several key aspects of contemporary hip-hop culture’s relationship with sexual identity. Specifically, the rumor provided explicit proof that queer identities did not fit comfortably within the cultural logic of the hip-hop world. Also, it prefigured more recent public conversations about the sexual identities of hip-hop culture’s most prominent citizens. Lastly, in addition to intensifying the already vicious antigay climate within mainstream hip-hop culture, the ordeal demonstrated how hip-hop polices its sexual boundaries through sophisticated practices of surveillance. Through these practices, the hip-hop community is able to sustain the myth of universal heterosexuality through its constant attempts to locate, isolate, and, most importantly, “out” the gay citizen. The threat of outing, or publicly exposing a person’s non-heterosexual identity, has facilitated the development of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate within hip-hop culture. Within this atmosphere, the queer hip-hopper is forced to remain in the closet out of fear that his “sexual business”—sexual orientation, partners, proclivities, etc.—will be publicly exposed.

While the threat of outing is considerable for both male and female artists, the stakes are particularly high for male rappers. Whereas female artists like Queen Latifah and MC Lyte are able

to achieve professional success despite perennial questions about their sexual orientation, no such possibility exists for the male MC. This is not to suggest, however, that women occupy a privileged position within hip-hop culture. On the contrary, women are merely beholden to different controlling images, such as the temptress, the mammy, the whore, or the baby momma, all of which delimit possibilities for identity development and performance within the rap world.³ In addition to constraining artistic performance, these discursive strictures inform and reflect a broader public pedagogy that calls into question the very notion of a fully human Black female subject.

Still, as the case of Big Daddy Kane demonstrates, the perception of fractured masculinity, which is an inevitable consequence of outing, serves as a professional death sentence from which there are few routes of redemption or recovery. Unlike the aforementioned female MCs who are able to craft a functional and profitable professional identity within mainstream hip-hop culture, male MCs whose sexual identity is questioned are subjected to forms of marginalization and abuse that alienate them from the mainstream hip-hop community.⁴

In this article, I examine the politics of outing within hip-hop's public sphere. In particular, I explore how contemporary American hip-hop culture sustains hegemonic conceptions of masculinity through a variety of outing practices. Through these practices, which include but extend beyond traditional notions of outing, we are able to preserve falsely obvious notions of uniform heterosexuality while denying the legitimacy and viability of queer subjectivities within mainstream hip-hop culture.

HOMOPHOBIA IN HIP-HOP

In order to understand the significance and power of hip-hop's outing practices, it is important to examine the context in which they are situated. Like the larger social world, much of mainstream hip-hop culture reflects a collective fear, disdain, and outright hatred of gay and lesbian bodies. Moreover, these homophobic sensibilities translate into concrete forms of oppression, violence, and discrimination for those who openly identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. It is this homophobic sensibility that often protrudes from the work of some of hip-hop culture's most celebrated figures.

Ironically, given its extraordinary discomfort with queer identities, the hip-hop community has made considerable use of gay and lesbian contributions since the early stages of its development. Like other sites of Black cultural production, queer bodies have always been indispensable but typically silent partners in hip-hop's cultural infrastructure. Within mainstream hip-hop culture, openly gay men and women literally work behind the scenes as choreographers, song writers, make-up artists, hairstylists, set designers, fashion experts, and other such roles stereotypically attributed to gay and lesbian culture. Like the Black church, however, the division of labor that enables such participation is predicated upon a tacit (and sometimes explicit) code of silence in response to various homophobic and heterosexist discourses.⁵ It is this exploitative arrangement that enables hip-hop to sustain its hypermasculine veneer while benefiting from the talents of those who compromise its legitimacy.

Rap lyrics operate as one of the most prominent and accessible sites for transmitting antigay beliefs and values within hip-hop culture. While it can be argued that all forms of popular music are pervasively heteronormative—that is, they presume, reinforce, and ultimately demand unquestioned heterosexuality—explicitly homophobic discourses are lyrically overrepresented within hip-hop culture. Consider, for example, the bodies of work for hip-hop's most commercially successful artists in the twenty-first century. With few exceptions, such as Outkast's Andre 3000, who also challenges hip-hop's cultural and aesthetic logic through his often-androgynous appearance and unconventional music, hip-hop's most popular artists over the past five years have consistently deployed antigay rhetoric within their music. For example, top-selling rappers like Nas, Jay-Z, Nelly, 50 Cent, Eminem, Ja Rule, and DMX have all used terms like "faggot" and "homo" to disparage gay and lesbian people, as well as emasculate real and imagined enemies.⁶ More recently, rap artists have even deployed homophobic slang like "pause" and "no homo" after uttering words that could be (mis)construed as homoerotic in order to preemptively defend themselves against allegations of homosexuality.⁷

Explicitly homophobic messages are not, however, limited to mainstream rap music and artists. Even hip-hop's ostensibly "conscious" sector, often considered the last refuge for progressive thought and activism within hip-hop culture, is replete with explicit antigay messages.⁸ At the height of the political rap era during the

late 1980s and early 1990s, the progressive agendas of political rap artists such as Public Enemy, X-Clan, Paris, and Sista Souljah were strongly informed by radical Afrocentric, Black Islamic, and crude Black Nationalist ideologies that were openly hostile to queer identities. As a result of these positions, homosexuality was viewed as a consequence of spiritual malevolence, political conspiracy, or European hegemony.⁹

Current leaders of hip-hop's progressive wing have also challenged the legitimacy of gay identity within their corpuses. Rappers like Common and Mos Def have consistently included antigay signifiers such as "faggot" within their songs, although Common has become increasingly open to the viability of gay identity beginning with his *Electric Circus* album.¹⁰ Lauryn Hill, hip-hop's queen lyricist and self-appointed moral stewardess, suggests in her 2002 single "Adam Lives in Theory" that bisexuality is a consequence of American decadence and moral decline rather than a legitimate and functional identity.¹¹

Perhaps the most significant and apparent indicator of hip-hop's pervasive homophobia and heterosexism is the virtual absence of openly gay and lesbian people within mainstream rap circles. While hip-hop's underground is occupied by avant-garde groups like Deep Dickollective (which received national coverage in the *New York Times*), Disposable Heroes of HipHoprisy, and Rainbow Flava, openly gay rap groups have received scant attention from major radio stations and record labels. With the exception of New York rapper Caushun, who signed a recording deal with Def Jam subsidiary Baby Phat Records in 2004 but has yet to release an album, no openly gay rapper has been signed by a major commercial hip-hop recording label.¹²

THE POLITICS OF OUTING

The homophobic context in which hip-hop artists and fans are situated facilitates the development of its various outing practices. The term outing emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century to describe the act of exposing people who were "in the closet," or secretly engaging in gay, lesbian, bisexual, or otherwise non-heterosexual lifestyles.^{13,14} Despite the relative youth of the term, the act of pulling people out of the closet is as old as the Western world itself. It is important to note that this section is not intended to

provide an exhaustive genealogy of outing in the West, as such a move would exceed the intellectual aims of this article.¹⁵ Rather, this brief overview is intended to provide an historical backdrop with which to contextualize and interrogate current outing practices.

As far back as ancient Greece and Rome, outing was a practice used to expose individuals who violated society's codes of sexual conduct. Despite relatively liberal sexual codes (even by today's standards), homosexual congress was permissible only under certain conditions.¹⁶ Male citizens who operated outside of these sanctioned sites of sodomy were publicly identified and dismissed as "vulgar" and subjected to an array of social stigmas attached to perceived unmanliness. Additionally, those who engaged in what was considered sexual misconduct such as "homosexual prostitution, adult male passivity, effeminacy in dress, gait, and speech, and orgiastic excesses" were subject to public censure, gossip, and innuendo.¹⁷

In the modern era, several public sex trials led to the outing of several high profile public figures. In 1895, Oscar Wilde stood trial and was subsequently convicted and imprisoned for "gross indecency" after it became known that he had sexual relations with Lord Alfred Douglass. In 1907, the Harden-Eulenburg affair and its accompanying courts-martial and trials, marked the first major public outing of the twentieth century. The scandal was based on accusations by journalist Maximilian Harden of homosexual conduct between Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld (the Kaiser's closest friend) and General Kuno Graf von Moltke. The affair, which was designed to undermine Eulenburg's considerable political influence, became the biggest domestic scandal of the German Second Empire.¹⁸ Furthermore, the scandal led to one of the first public discussions of homosexuality in Germany.

In America, outing reached its maturity in the midst of the post-World War II homosexual rights movement. At the same time that real and suspected communists were the targets of witch hunts, gay and lesbian citizens in the late 1940s and 1950s were also subjected to intense speculation and harassment. In many cases, these two identities were collapsed into what gay scholar Larry Gross calls the "commie-queer bogeyman."¹⁹ By labeling gays and lesbians as both sex perverts and threats to national security, the American government, under the influence of Senator Joseph McCarthy, was able to justify the firing of hundreds of

government employees for suspicion of homosexuality. In 1949 alone, ninety-six people were fired from the State Department for sexual perversion.²⁰ Additionally, numerous closeted gays and lesbians quietly resigned from their positions in order to avoid being outed. Through real and imagined technologies of sexual surveillance, as well as highly punitive sanctions for outed individuals, the United States government reinforced the heteronormative boundaries of the public sphere.

The deaths of several prominent men such as Rock Hudson to HIV/AIDS in the latter part of the twentieth century prompted a new, postmodern form of outing. Hudson, whose status as a Hollywood matinee idol and sex symbol during the 1950s and 1960s was virtually unparalleled, maintained a heterosexual public persona complete with an arranged marriage to secretary Phyllis Gates. After his death in 1985, however, Hudson's life and sexual identity came into serious question after it became known that he died of a "gay disease."²¹ This revelation prompted further investigation, which revealed that Hudson, along with his manager Henry Willson, meticulously fashioned Hudson into the prototype of all-American masculinity in spite of his "true" identity.²²

The late twentieth century marked a critical change with regard to the politics of outing. No longer was outing a practice reserved for heterosexuals attempting to leverage information for deleterious purposes. Suddenly, outing became a political strategy deployed by gays and lesbians themselves. Larry Gross notes

The exposure of closeted homosexuals was long a favored tactic of social control threatened and employed by [LGBT] enemies. The adoption of outing as a political tactic has challenged their ability to determine the meaning of gay identity and the consequences of its visibility.²³

As Gross states, the practice of outing enabled gay and lesbian individuals to sustain greater control over the ways in which queer identities are publicly discussed.

By exercising a degree of control over who is outed, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community has been able to spotlight the hypocrisy of many antigay public figures that secretly engage in the very acts that they condemn. For example, Ted Haggard, a staunchly antigay minister, Bush advisor, and leader of the religious Right, was outed right before the 2006 midterm elections by Mike Jones, a gay prostitute and drug dealer with whom

Haggard reportedly had a three-year sexual relationship. When asked why he outed the preacher, Jones claimed

People may look at me and think what I've done is immoral, but I think I had to do the moral thing in my mind, and that is expose someone who is preaching one thing and doing the opposite behind everybody's back.²⁴

In a separate interview, he further explained his decision to come forward:

I made myself cry and I made myself sick. I felt I owed this to the community. What he is saying is we are not worthy, but he is.²⁵

In a less opportunistic outing effort, gay activists Keith Boykin and Jasmyne Cannick mounted a 2005 campaign to publicly out prominent Black ministers as a means of exposing the hypocritical nature of their antigay rhetoric. On his website, Boykin explains his request for outing information:

From New York to Los Angeles, black LGBT people have been the backbone of the black church. Through this network, we've discovered that many homophobic black pastors lead secret lives outside the church. We're not naming any names, yet, but if you know something to help us confirm the information from our sources, we'd like to know.²⁶

In an interview with the *Washington Blade*, Cannick further explains the reason for their controversial decision by articulating the contradictions between Black preachers' homophobic eschatology and their lived practices:

If you chose to speak to thousands of people and tell them that I'm going to hell, then I have a right to challenge you. It's time we really did something to push the envelope and get a conversation started.²⁷

Although their outing campaign yielded thousands of responses, both positive and negative, neither Boykin nor Cannick has publicly outed anyone to date. Nevertheless, the controversy surrounding their threats indexes the level of contention surrounding the ethics of outing within the Black community.

Within Black public life, the practice of outing has taken a vastly different historical form. Not only have few closeted Black men and women been outed, openly gay figures such as civil rights leader Bayard Rustin have been shielded from public

scrutiny regarding their sexual identities by having their roles obscured by straight leadership.²⁸ Others, such as Luther Vandross, have had little public attention paid to their sexual identities until after their death.²⁹ As Mark Anthony Neal argues, these forms of protection are designed to promote racial solidarity, as well as promulgate the image of the “StrongBlackMan,” which is predicated upon hypermasculinity, misogyny, and compulsory heterosexuality.³⁰

In recent years, however, outing has played a greater role within the Black public sphere. In addition to the gay rapper rumors, gossip journalists like Wendy Williams devote considerable airtime to discussing the sexual identities and practices of numerous Black celebrities. Superstars like Usher, Henry Simmons, Eddie Murphy, Johnny Gill, and Tyson Beckford have all been accused of living secret sexual lives. In fact, such rumors are a nearly inevitable part of Black male superstardom, as nearly every major Black superstar must respond to gossip, lies, innuendo, and, of course, true stories about their sexual lives.

This brief account demonstrates that outing within hip-hop culture is not historically unprecedented. Rather, as in other historical moments, outing and the threat of outing have served to sustain particular forms of sexual surveillance that discipline, control, and punish individual bodies. Nevertheless, the particular form and fashion that the outing practices assume are linked to hip-hop culture’s unique historical circumstances and cultural rituals.

LYRICAL OUTING

In addition to rhetorically attacking and ridiculing openly gay and lesbian people, hip-hop artists also police the sexual boundaries of the culture by “lyrically outing” ostensibly straight MCs. Lyrical outing refers to the practice of calling an individual’s sexual identity into question through a variety of rhetorical maneuvers. Lyrical outing has been a central part of nearly all of hip-hop’s most celebrated feuds. Legendary rap battles such as KRS-One vs. MC Shan/Marley Marl, Jay-Z vs. Nas, and DMX/50 Cent vs. Ja Rule have all been pervaded by allegations of homosexuality. By having the threat of lyrical outing as a legitimate and likely possibility, queer MCs are not only silenced during potential rap

battles but also coerced to remain in the closet out of fear that they will be outed.

In many instances, lyrical outings are performed merely in order to gain the upper hand in a rap battle, rather than to create genuine speculation about another person's sexual identity. Under such circumstances, the artist's outing rhetoric is relatively superficial, playful, and largely unpersuasive. For example, in his battle with Jay-Z, Nas repeatedly attacked his opponent through lyrical assaults on his sexual identity. In his wildly popular battle rap, "Ether," Nas referred to his opponent as "Gay-Z" and his record label, Roc-a-Fella Records, as "Cock-a-Fella Records."³¹ He went on to suggest that the company's name surreptitiously signified Jay-Z's preference for having sex with men:

Put it togetha
I rock hoes, y'all rock fellas³²

Nas then, perhaps unwittingly, invokes the memory of the Big Daddy Kane affair when he adds

Rockefeller died of AIDS that was the end of his chapter
And that's the dude you chose to name your company after?³³

In actuality, Jay-Z's Roc-A-Fella Records label was named after the nation's first billionaire, John D. Rockefeller, who died in 1937 at the age of ninety-eight, nearly forty-five years before the first reported case of AIDS.³⁴ Nevertheless, Nas was able to implicitly substantiate Jay-Z's ostensible queerness by linking him to AIDS. On "Super Ugly," Jay-Z's venomously ad hominem reply to "Ether," Jay-Z replied in kind by suggesting that Nas had unwittingly participated in vicarious fellatio:

And since you infatuated with sayin' that gay shit
I guess you was kissin' my dick when you was kissin' that bitch³⁵

This practice of name-calling and dissing is directly linked to the African American rhetorical practice of signifying or "playin' the dozens," where verbal jousting is engaged in order to humiliate an opponent and generate laughter.³⁶ In cases like the Nas/Jay-Z battle, each rapper attempted to embarrass the other and amuse listeners by sonically outing the other through clever lyricism.

In the case of Nas and Jay-Z, it is important to note that neither rapper likely believed the other to be gay. In fact, in a pair of conciliatory postbattle interviews on BET and MTV, the duo dismissed their venomous exchanges as nothing more than a necessary consequence of rap war. Also, there is little evidence to suggest that the general public gave real consideration to the artists' lyrical allegations. Despite the seemingly endless string of public debates and analyses about the winner of the battle, no commentary was given about the sexual identities of Nas or Jay-Z. Instead, the entire exchange was viewed and dismissed as a harmless rhetorical exercise with little or no grounding in reality.

Despite the playful nature of their practices, Nas' and Jay-Z's use of lyrical outing as a battle strategy reiterated the inherently pejorative meaning of gay as a signifier within the hip-hop world. Each rapper's ability to deploy their rhetorical resources in order to "playfully" attack the other's sexual identity and consequent manhood served as a powerful ally to hip-hop's homophobic ethos. Similar to many Americans' everyday use of gay as an all-purpose negative signifier (e.g., "That movie was so gay!"), playful acts of lyrical outing are far from innocuous. Instead, they serve as a tacit reminder that gay and lesbian identities are highly problematic and ultimately unwelcome within hip-hop culture.

There are other instances within hip-hop culture where lyrical outing is not merely intended to provide entertainment but also to create genuine speculation about an artists' sexual identity. For example, following the messy breakup of gangster rap group NWA, founder Eazy E began to circulate rumors about Dr. Dre's sexuality. On "Real Muthaphuckkin Gs," the battle response to Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg's "Dre Day," Eazy E made several references to Dre's predilection for wearing lipstick during his time working with the World Class Wrecking Crew, a 1980s R&B group:

All of a sudden Dr. Dre is a G thang,
But on his old album covers, *he* was a *she* thang³⁷

In the accompanying video, Eazy E flashed several pictures of Dre wearing makeup and formfitting, sequined outfits that stood in stark contrast to the hardcore image that he portrayed as a

member of NWA. This visual juxtaposition was deployed to expose Dre as a fraud whose gangsta (and masculine) bona fides were challenged by his effeminized attire.

Unlike the Jay-Z/Nas battle, Eazy E's expressed intention was not only to win the battle but also to expose Dr. Dre's "hidden" sexuality. To be certain, it is possible that Eazy E did not truly believe his own claims, as his lyrical evidence was far from convincing. After all, Dr. Dre's Wrecking Crew attire, like much popular fashion in the 1980s, was appropriately tight despite its sharp divergence from post-1990s hip-hop style. By encouraging a presentist reading of Dre's sartorial choices, Eazy E blurred, perhaps deliberately, the lines between playful and serious outing. Regardless of his intentions, however, Eazy E's actions created strong speculation about Dr. Dre's sexual orientation, which extended beyond the sonic boundaries of the battle record.

Rumors about Dr. Dre's sexual identity never subsided after his lyrical outing at the hands of Eazy E. In fact, they later became fodder for future rivals Tupac Shakur and Marion "Suge" Knight following Dre's stormy departure from Death Row Records. At the conclusion of "To Live and Die in LA," Tupac punctuated the otherwise upbeat song with a subtle but noteworthy disclaimer:

California Love part motherfuckin' 2
Without gay ass Dre³⁸

On his often sampled battle rap "Realest Shit," Tupac took another lyrical jab at Dr. Dre's sexuality:

We shook Dre punk ass
Now he out of the closet³⁹

Ja Rule, who began to feud with Dr. Dre in 2003, echoed Tupac's claims in his single, "Blood in My Eye":

Who the fuck you callin' gay nigga
Must a been talkin to Em and Dre, nigga
Pour out a little liquor and rest in peace to Tupac Shakur
Cause you let us know that Dre was a queer before⁴⁰

To be sure, Tupac's lyrical allusions were also buttressed by Death Row Records owner Suge Knight's extra-lyrical allegations about Dre. In a series of interviews, Knight implied that he had

personal knowledge of Dre's same-sex affairs. In the November 2000 issue of *Gear Magazine*, he was even more explicit:

I can't stand [Dre]. People say I was cruel to call him a faggot but what's pissing me off the most is that he was dishonest about it. I don't have anything against gay people—to each his own. Back in the day, we would have parties and he'd pretend to be with all these women. Don't lie to somebody who is supposed to be your friend. That's why Eminem is trying to distance himself from Dre by rapping all this anti-gay shit. He doesn't want to be thought of as Dre's little white bitch.⁴¹

In an interview on *Thug Immortal*, a posthumous documentary about Tupac Shakur, Knight claimed that Tupac did not want Dre to stay with Death Row Records because of his alleged sexual relationship with a young man during his marriage to former Wrecking Crew singer Michel'le. Adding credence to the rumor was the fact that Michel'le later became Suge Knight's third wife, thereby suggesting that Knight had reliable inside information about Dre's personal life.

Ironically, many of the very same sexual rumors would soon follow Dre's biggest antagonists. Shortly after dying of AIDS-related illnesses on March 26, 1995, rumors about Eazy E's alleged closet homosexuality began to swirl. Although Eazy E publicly denied these claims prior to his death, insisting that he obtained the virus from one of the numerous women with whom he'd had sex and fathered children, rumors about the source of his illness persisted and intensified after his passing.⁴² Even Tupac, the poster boy for hip-hop's thug masculinity fetish, has never completely escaped sexual speculation due to his effeminate childhood mannerisms, as well as rumors that he was raped during his last stay in prison.⁴³

One of the more extreme and vindictive cases of lyrical outing occurred during Ja Rule's feud with rival rapper DMX. The two artists, who were once friends, became embroiled in a bitter beef in 2000 after DMX accused Ja Rule of copying his gravelly vocal style and shirtless appearance, a claim that many fans, rappers, and critics echoed. As the intensity of their feud grew, each rapper began to publicly expose potentially embarrassing aspects of the other's personal life. While Ja Rule focused on DMX's well-documented substance abuse problems, referring to him as "crack man," DMX upped the stakes and began to publicly question Ja Rule's sexuality.

At first, DMX's lyrical outings were of the playful, Nas/Jay-Z variety. Like other artists, he poked fun at Rule's penchant for singing the choruses on his records, referring to him as a "diva" in several interviews.⁴⁴ Given their ostensibly ludic nature, DMX's early allegations generated little concern among fans and insiders. Soon, however, DMX's verbal taunts appeared less fictive and more geared toward exposing a genuine "truth" about Ja Rule. During a radio interview with San Francisco's KMEL, DMX claimed that Rule had sex with men while high on "X," or the party drug popularly known as ecstasy:

Some nigga that was stylin' his clothes for one of them shows got him ecstasy'd up and fucked him. Ja-Rule is fuckin' niggas. I'm telling you dog! On my momma! The [stylist] told me that himself. You talkin bout me, you can't be serious! For all them homo niggas out there that want some dick, give ya man Ja-Rule some X and he'll fuck you.⁴⁵

On his diss record "Where the Hood At?," DMX echoed his claim with a vicious lyrical outing:

Fuckin with a nigga like me, D-to-the-M-to-the-X
 Last I heard, y'all niggaz was havin sex, with the same sex
 I show no love, to homo thugs
 Empty out, reloaded and throw more slugs
 How you gonna explain fuckin' a man?
 Even if we squashed the beef, I ain't touchin ya hand⁴⁶

Unlike the Nas/Jay-Z and Dr. Dre/Eazy E/Tupac battles, DMX attempted to marshal legitimate evidence against Ja Rule in full public view in order to both out and humiliate him.

Soon after, DMX's claims were corroborated by 50 Cent, Ja Rule's other nemesis, who at one point promised to put the aforementioned hair dresser on his commercial debut album, *Get Rich or Die Trying*. Eventually, 50 Cent elected to use comedian Alex Thomas to portray Ja Rule's alleged gay lover on the album skit. There are several possible explanations for this decision; perhaps the story was untrue, the hairdresser did not want to appear, or 50 and his handlers were scared of legal and/or personal repercussions. Regardless of the reason, his extravagant endorsement of DMX's claims further alienated Ja Rule from his fan base and helped to sustain a public conversation about Rule's sexuality.

Like Big Daddy Kane, Ja Rule's career never recovered from his public outing. Prior to his feud with 50 Cent and DMX, Rule had

sold nearly 17 million copies of his first four albums, each of which reached certified platinum (more than one million records sold) status. Since his vicious lyrical outing, he has yet to exceed gold (500,000 records sold) status. Even worse, Ja Rule has become a virtual punch line for many industry insiders due to his rapid loss of popularity and respect among the fans. While this devastating decline can be attributed to multiple factors, there is little doubt that the consistent and convincing conversations about his sexuality contributed to his professional demise.

THE SEARCH FOR THE GAY RAPPER

In 1997, *One Nut* magazine, the now-defunct Connecticut based hip-hop magazine, released a series of interviews with a famous rap artist who acknowledged that he was gay but insisted upon remaining anonymous. In the interviews, the rapper talked about the difficulties of hiding his sexuality from his homophobic rap peers. For example, he noted that his lover traveled on the road with him but had to pretend to be a member of the rapper's entourage. Most surprising to the hip-hop community and the general public was the rapper's claim that he was not alone in his secret life. On the contrary, he claimed that a large number of rappers currently in the industry were also closeted bisexuals or homosexuals.

That same year, gossip journalist Wendy Williams also announced that one of hip-hop's most famous artists was gay. Responding to the *One Nut* article, as well as other unidentified information about "a famous gay rapper with a lot of hits," Williams invited public speculation about the identity of the man she mockingly identified as "MC Ben Dover." Not to be outdone by the *One Nut* article, Williams read her own gay rapper missive, "Confessions of a Gay Rapper by Jamal X," over the airwaves. Like his anonymous peer, the pseudonymous Jamal X recounted stories of same-sex love, faux-friendships, and trusting girlfriends. X also emphasized the importance of drugs and alcohol as a means of justifying and forgetting their same-sex encounters. Although Williams admittedly created the segment to create a buzz among her listeners, the article created a bigger impact than even she imagined:

I read the article on the radio and the audience went wild—they ate it up! People wanted to know who the gay rapper was. My life has not been

the same since. I get stopped in the mall, on the street, and going to the bathroom while I'm about town has taken on a new meaning. For instance, girls follow me [until] their [sic] alone to ask 'Wendy girl, Who da gay rapper?'⁴⁷

In addition to bolstering the rumor mill, these two moments marked another critical moment in the hip-hop's history of sexual politics.

After these two incidents, numerous major print and television media outlets began to speculate about the identity of "the gay rapper." Suddenly, rap lyrics were analyzed for furtive homoerotic messages and rap entourages were carefully inspected for potential "passers." Numerous fans, journalists, and industry insiders began to circulate information that implicated various stars within the rap world. The many casualties of this sexual witch hunt included Russell Simmons, Mase, Jay-Z, Keith Murray, Erick Sermon, Method Man, and Redman. While many artists, like Sermon and Redman, vociferously denied allegations that they were the gay MC, others elected to respond with silence. Unfortunately, neither approach proved effective in curbing the hip-hop community's obsession with the gay rapper.

One of the most consistent targets of the gay rapper search was Sean "Diddy" Combs. Unlike many of his hypermasculine cohorts, Combs has long been known for his attention to style, willingness to mingle with openly gay fashionistas, and lack of antigay song lyrics. In addition to his "metrosexual" image—a term coined in the mid-1990s and normalized in the early 2000s to describe a new generation of fashion conscious, self-pampering men—persistent rumors during the 1990s about Combs' private life kept him near the center of the gay rapper conversation. The intense public focus on Combs' romantic and sexual relationships was largely due to Wendy Williams, who allegedly posted pictures of Combs and sidekick Mase in compromising positions on the Internet. Later, Williams announced that she had a videotape of Combs having sex with fellow Bad Boy Records rapper Loon. Although she never produced any evidence to support either of these claims, Williams' firing from Hot 97—which Williams' and other insiders attributed to Combs' intervention—added credence to the rumor among the general public.

Since 1997, the notion of a singular gay rapper has been exploited not only by mainstream media outlets but by the artists themselves.

No one has benefited more from this ideology than hairdresser-turned-rapper Caushun. Since his first appearance in 2001 on New York radio station Hot 97's Star 'n Buckwild Show, when he called the station and identified himself as "The Gay Rapper," Caushun has been the mainstream poster boy for the gay MC. Although he clearly was not the "real" gay rapper—at that point Caushun had not even secured a record deal much less achieved the level of success attributed to the alleged gay rapper—his ability to impress the shock jocks with his lyrical skills created sufficient buzz on which to capitalize. Since his Hot 97 debut, Caushun has been promoted in various media outlets, including *Vibe*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, MTV, and the *Village Voice* as "the first gay rapper."

Although he has emphasized in several interviews that he is simply "the first *openly* gay rapper," Caushun's failure to acknowledge the pre-existence of a queer hip-hop community and his willingness to self-identify and literally trademark himself as "*the* gay rapper" are nonetheless problematic. By outing himself, Caushun plays into hip-hop's exploitative politics in order to satisfy his own pecuniary interests. Further, by prominently positioning Caushun within the public sphere, hip-hop culture is able to allay its masculine anxieties surrounding gay identity. By fetishizing the individual gay rapper, hip-hop culture is able to sustain the falsely obvious notion that the queer MC is an outlier within an otherwise heterosexual milieu.

The search for the gay rapper represents another, less apparent form of outing within hip-hop culture. While lyrical outings place a spotlight on particular individuals, the perennial search for the gay rapper creates an environment in which everyone's sexual identity is called into question. By allowing the identity of the gay rapper to go unidentified—to date, the search for the gay rapper has produced no confirmed outings—the hip-hop community is able to engage in an endless witch hunt that forces everyone into a defensive posture.

HOMO THUGGIN' IT

At the same time that the search for the gay rapper has failed to yield any successful outings, the public birth of the "homothug" has exposed an entire community of queer hip-hoppers. Unlike lyrical outings or gay rapper witch hunts, which focus on famous

individuals, the public conversation about the homothug addresses neither celebrities nor individuals. On the contrary, the bulk of the homothug conversation has focused on outing ordinary queer men who simultaneously negotiate multiple and ostensibly competing identities. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, publications such as the *Village Voice* and *New York Times* have placed a spotlight on the once secret lives of the homothug community.

In many ways, the term “homothug” is misleading, since a person need not exhibit thuggish (i.e., illegal or violent) behavior in order to satisfy the conditions of a homothug identity. Rather, homothug refers to a gay or bisexual male who identifies with the hypermasculine accouterments of mainstream hip-hop. Like other hip-hop generation males, the prototypical homothug wears baggy jeans, doo-rags, throwback basketball jerseys, gaudy jewelry, and other such indices of hip-hop authenticity. In fact, the only difference between the homothug and the “normal” hip-hopper is the former’s same-sex desires. The term homothug, which was coined by antigay former Hot 97 shock jock DJ Star, was initially intended to connote a humorous irony. The comedic value of this irony rested upon the falsely obvious assumption that “homo” (queer) and “thug” (hip-hop) were competing identities that could never be fully reconciled. As such, the homothug often represents a human punch line, a walking contradiction that could be looked to for easy insults and quick laughter.

The notion of the homothug is grounded in the sexual politics of the “down-low,” also known as the DL. The term, which was initially popularized by R&B singer R. Kelly’s top selling 1996 single “Down Low,” came into its current popular usage within the African American public sphere near the beginning of the twenty-first century. While being “on the DL” (like its earlier manifestation, the “QT” or “quiet tip”) initially signified participation in any secret activity, it now refers almost exclusively to the practice of participating in male same-sex acts while representing oneself (and often self-identifying) as a heterosexual. This shift in meaning and increase in discussion about the DL has been precipitated by a growing public conversation within the mainstream media, as well as the African American counter-public sphere.

Animated by the publication of J. L. King’s sensationalist tome, *On The Down Low*, public discourse surrounding the down-low has largely been informed by a politics of terror that represents the Black penis as a “weapon of mass destruction.”⁴⁸ At the same

time that King's best-selling book garnered media attention, numerous network television shows (e.g., *Soul Food* and *E.R.*), daytime talk shows (e.g., *Jerry Springer* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*), and major periodicals (e.g., *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Essence*, *Ebony*) also devoted considerable space to "warning" African American women of the dangers of the down-low man as the primary transmitter of HIV and a threat to the mythically sacrosanct nuclear African American family. It is within this context that the homothug has been outed and constructed as a down-low man deeply ensconced within hip-hop culture.

As part of its outing practices, the popular media has defined the homothug in two equally problematic ways: *the trickster* and *the psychopath*. The trickster is viewed as a predator that uses the homothug identity as a mendacious articulation of bisexuality or homosexuality. By shrouding himself in hip-hop's hypermasculine aesthetic, the trickster is able to manipulate unsuspecting women and satiate the full range of his sexual desires. While the trickster is preoccupied with hiding his sexuality from others, the psychopath becomes a homothug in order to hide his sexuality from himself. In order to resist the acceptance of a gay or bisexual identity, the psychopathic homothug performs a hip-hop identity as a maladaptive coping strategy that ultimately places his partners in emotional and physical peril.

By publicly discussing the homothug in this fashion, two separate but interrelated ideas are promoted: (1) the homothug/down-low identity is an inauthentic cover for a more authentic gay/bisexual identity and (2) hip-hop culture is fundamentally incompatible with queer identity. The representation of the homothug as trickster and psychopath reflects the beliefs of many experts and everyday people who argue that the down-low, and by extension the homothug, is merely a front for a more authentic gay or bisexual identity. For example, Keith Boykin argues

The down low is popularly used to refer to men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay or homosexual. Maybe you've heard that concept before. Long ago, we called it "the closet." The term "down low" is just a new way of describing a very old thing . . . The phrase itself may be new, but the practice is as old as history.⁴⁹

While Boykin is correct to point out that the down-low does not signify a new set of practices or beliefs, he hastily dismisses the possibility that the down-low (and by extension the homothug) expands

our critical vocabularies in order to accommodate a more complex and nuanced understanding of sexual identity. As *Village Voice* writer Jason King argues

For some DL men, there is no “gay” essence to reveal, or a bisexual or straight one, for that matter. They may oscillate between male and female partners, but it would be a mistake to call such a brother a closeted bisexual, since it would imply that underneath the veil he’s settled on a stable gender identity. DL is not an identity but a performance. It may even be working toward that elusive phenomenon hip-hop heads call “flow.” Flow is when the MC locks his rapping into a groove, bringing the performance to a rhythmic, surging sense of balance.⁵⁰

Although King runs the risk of overstating the level of voluntarism involved in identity performance, he nonetheless offers a more fluid conception of male sexuality that is unavailable in the dominant belief that the homothug is nothing more than a closeted gay man.

Through the representation of the homothug as a gay man in denial, the mainstream hip-hop community is able to distance itself from the homothug based on his lack of perceived authenticity. This distancing can be linked to hip-hop culture’s obsession with “realness,” or the belief in a one-to-one relationship between what one says and what one does. This framework not only demands congruence between artistic expression and lived experience but also privileges a particular set of experiences that are deemed appropriate within the culture. For example, despite his artistic honesty, few hip-hop observers would say that Will Smith was a “real” MC. On the contrary, Tupac’s performances of reckless hypermasculinity are often deemed “real” by fellow rappers, critics, and fans despite their considerable contradictions. Through the rubric of realness, this perspective the homothug is positioned as a poser whose “true” self not only violates hip-hop culture’s code of compulsory heterosexuality, but also contradicts its shibboleth of “keeping it real.”

More fundamentally, the rejection of the homothug hinges upon the belief that hip-hop and gay are two irreconcilable identities. This notion is informed by the traditional hegemonic conception of gay men as soft, weak, and effeminate. Further complicating the issue is the essentialist belief in a singular “gay culture” that subsumes all queer men irrespective of race and class. Such an idea

allows White men, tight pants, and house music to serve as universal symbols of gay culture despite their frequent incompatibility with the cultural orientations of many Black gay men. These stereotypical cultural artifacts stand in sharp relief to the tough, strong, and masculine characteristics ascribed to the hip-hop thug. Although this idea is being challenged by more recent media representations of Black gay identity and culture such as *Noah's Ark*, *The Wire*, and *Real World Philadelphia*, which provide a wider range of possibilities for Black gay men within the public sphere, many Black men are still alienated by dominant conceptions of gay identity that do not cohere with the imperatives of their racialized identity. In addition to providing a more comfortable space for racial identity work, hip-hop culture provides an rich site for cultural expression. Like their heterosexual peers, many gay Black men have organic connections to hip-hop culture that are maintained through the homothug club scene. Through these clubs, homothugs are able to reconcile rather than choose between their racial and sexual identities.

THE WAGES OF OUTING

Hip-hop's politics of outing is a necessary consequence of the culture's contradictory disposition toward queer identity. As discussed earlier, this disposition is a signpost of hip-hop's simultaneous need for, rejection of, and obsession with sexual identities that do not cohere with its homophobic and hypermasculine cultural ethos. Despite its overt and pervasive homophobia, hip-hop practitioners frequently practice forms of masculinity that diverge from perceived norms. For example, all-male rap crews, numerous odes to lost friends, "homeboy hugs" (half-handshake/half-hug), and "niggas over bitches" mantras all index hip-hop's obsession with all-male relationships. Hip-hop's homosocial preoccupations often spill into the zone of the homoerotic, as in the case of men who "run trains," or participate in simultaneous and/or successive group sex acts with multiple men and one woman. Although the practice of running trains retains its heterosexual veneer by placing the female body as the exclusive point of erotic attention, its social value within the culture is directly linked to the level and quantity of participation and interaction among the men.

Though its outing practices, the hip-hop community is able to continuously ignore its own complex sexual ethic by keeping the focus on individual, anonymous, and, in the case of the homothug, aggregate queer bodies. By keeping the focus outward, the broader hip-hop community is able to ignore the fact that, like other cultural spaces, queer bodies and homoerotic practices are not only on the margins but also at the center of cultural production.

NOTES

1. Big Daddy Kane, "Give It To Me," *Looks Like A Job For . . .* (Warner Brothers/Wea, 1993).
2. *POZ Magazine*, October 1996, www.poz.com/articles/254_1816.shtml. (accessed March 1, 2007).
3. For a discussion of these controlling images see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000) and *Black Sexual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005). For an examination of womanhood in hip-hop, see Gwendolyn Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia, 2004).
4. At the risk of being redundant, I find it necessary to reiterate my assertion that hip-hop culture places equally, if not more, strict and dehumanizing limitations on female sexual identities. Nevertheless, various incarnations of the butch/femme subjectivity have a level of commercial viability and social acceptance within the hip-hop community that is completely unthinkable for queer male artists.
5. For a discussion of queerness within the Black church, see Kelly Brown Douglas, Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Black Church and Community, In Cornel West and Eddie Glaude (Eds.), *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 996–1017); bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1991); Cornel West, Christian Love and Heterosexism, In *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1999) 401–414; and Michael Eric Dyson, Homotextualities: The Bible, Sexual Ethics, and the Theology of Homoeroticism, In *Open Mike* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002). Hooks and West are particularly articulate about the moral contradictions inherent in using queer labor within the church (e.g., the gay piano player) while subjecting them to antigay discourses. Of course, this notion of contradiction hinges upon the assumption of a particular hermeneutical posture that enables one to question the belief that queer identity is antithetical to orthodox Christianity. As Douglas, West, and Dyson argue, such a reading is part and parcel of an appropriately historicized interpretation of antigay Biblical narratives, as well as a belief that Christianity's "love ethic," as espoused by Jesus in the New Testament, is superordinate to individual prohibitions or mandates.
6. My use of the term "emasculate" is not meant to suggest agreement with traditional heteronormative conceptions of masculinity that equate masculinity with heterosexuality. Rather, I intend to highlight the particular ways that narrow

conceptions of masculinity inform much of hip-hop's, and indeed the broader community's, internal discourse.

7. For example, a fairly innocuous statement like "I need you to stand behind me on this project" or "These nuts are a bit too salty" would be punctuated with "no homo" in order to prevent misunderstanding or deliberate distortion for the purpose of playful or serious ridicule. While the origins of "pause" are uncertain, "no homo" originated with rapper Cam'ron and his Dipset crew. In all likelihood, Cam'ron's use of the term was at least a partial reaction to frequent speculation and taunts from rival rappers and fans who found Cam's predilection for adorning himself in pink and purple clothing and cars to be sexually dubious.
8. In line with my neo-Gramscian approach to popular culture, I strongly dispute the notion that "conscious" hip-hop provides a transcendent sphere within an otherwise hegemonic culture industry. Such a notion hinges upon the invocation of a faulty (and elitist) modernist dichotomy between high and low culture—in this case mainstream vs. conscious rap music—that obscures the complex interplay between reproduction and resistance in all sites of hip-hop cultural production.
9. I use the term "radical" Afrocentric in referencing the extremist wing of the Afrocentric tradition. In particular, I am referring to the work of scholars like Leonard Jeffries and Francis Cress Welsing, whose work occupies the fringes of African centered thought and practice. Heterosexist ideologies are not exclusive, however, to Afrocentricity's margins. In his early work, such as the first edition of *Afrocentricity* (Temple University Press), Afrocentric pioneer Molefi Asante argued that homosexuality was a byproduct of European decadence rather than biological determination. Although many mainstream Afrocentrists have departed from this position—including Asante, who removed the claim from later editions of the book—the extremist wing of the Afrocentric school continues to shape the lyrics of artists like Public Enemy, Ras Kass, Nas, and Paris.

With regard to Black Islamic organizations, Minister Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, Silis Muhammad's Lost-Found Nation of Islam, and Imam Isa's Ansaaru Allah community all deployed fundamentalist readings of the Bible and Quran, particularly the book of Leviticus, in order to substantiate an antigay theology. Like the Afrocentrists, these groups argued that Black homosexuality was an extension of White "devilishment" (evil and unnatural behavior) that had been taught to Blacks through "tricknology," or knowledge that would undermine prosperity, peace, and full realization of Black humanity.

10. On his *Electric Circus* album, Common included the song "Between Me, You, and Liberation," where he suggests that his friend was liberated by coming out of the closet. Although his subsequent album, *Be*, did not discuss homosexuality, it nonetheless marked a critical departure from previous albums, where he routinely attacked gays and lesbians.
11. Lauryn Hill, "Adam Lives in Theory," *Unplugged* (Columbia, 2002). In the song, the Hill sings, "Eve was so naive, blinded by the pride and greed/Wanting to be intellectual/Drifting from the way she got turned down one day/And now she thinks that she's bisexual."
12. At the time of this writing, reports have confirmed that Caushun was dropped from Baby Phat and has yet to sign with another label. In 1998, public speculation arose about the sexual identity of female rapper Queen Pen, whose single

"Girlfriend" explicitly addressed the issue of lesbianism. Although most fans and critics assumed that Queen Pen was a lesbian, she refused to identify as such, telling the *New York Times* "I'm black, I'm a female rapper. I couldn't even go out of my way to pick up a new form of discrimination. People are waiting for this hip-hop Ellen to come out of the closet. I'd rather be a mystery for a minute." See *Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2000).

13. The earliest public usage of the term "outing" can be found in the 1990 *Time* magazine article, "Forcing Gays Out of the Closet," by William A. Henry III (*Time*, 29, January 1996, 67).
14. Although "the closet" is typically used as a metaphor to signify a surreptitious negotiation of queer sexual practices or desires, it also reflects the complex formations of knowledge and power that have historically constituted the closet. As Michael P. Brown argues, "The closet is a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men. It describes their absence—and alludes to their ironic presence nonetheless—in a society that, in countless interlocking ways, subtly and blatantly dictates that heterosexuality is the only way to be." For a deeper examination of the closet as an ideological and spatial metaphor, see Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Michael P. Brown, *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
15. For an exhaustive treatment of outing in the West, see Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, *Outing: Shattering the Conspiracy of Silence* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1994); Martin Duberman, *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Duberman, 1989); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1992).
16. Within ancient Greek society, sexual relationships between adult men were deemed socially unacceptable. However, pederasty, or same-sex bonds between adolescent boys and adult men, were not only socially permissible but considered integral parts of moral, social, and educational development. Although, as Foucault and others argue, sexual practices were not constitutive of social identity until the latter part of the nineteenth century, pederastic relationships were nonetheless governed by a heteronormative sexual calculus that forbade sexual attraction or enjoyment on the part of the *eromenos*, or adolescent boy. Also, the *erastes*, or adult male, was allowed to participate in sexual congress with an adolescent boy only if he were the insertive (i.e., penetrating) partner. Although scholars have argued that it is too reductive to ascribe the terms "dominant" and "passive" to the *erastes* and *eromenos* roles, there was an indisputable correlation between masculinity and penetration that helped to arbitrate the social and moral acceptability of sexual practices. For more about homosexuality in Ancient Greece, see Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) and William A. Percy III, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
17. Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, *Outing: Shattering the Conspiracy of Silence* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1994) 31.
18. Larry Gross, *Contested Closets: The Politics and Ethics of Outing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993).

19. Ibid., 13.
20. Ibid.
21. The idea that AIDS was a gay disease was not restricted to everyday discourse. Until 1982, AIDS was officially known as GRID, gay related immunodeficiency disease.
22. In addition to concealing Hudson's sexual identity, Henry Willson was largely responsible for the "beefcake" craze of the 1950s. See Robert Hofler, *The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson: The Pretty Boys and Dirty Deals of Henry Willson* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005).
23. Larry Gross, *Contested Closets: The Politics and Ethics of Outing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993) 6.
24. Interview with Denver Post quoted in <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/bush-ally-quits-evangelical-post-in-gay-scandal/2006/11/03/1162340050165.html>. Accessed on November 13, 2008.
25. www.keithboykin.com/arch/2005/09/26/is/_td_jakes_gay. (accessed March 1, 2007).
26. www.washblade.com/2005/9-30/news/national/pastors.cfm. (accessed March 1, 2007).
27. Of course, the anxiety around Bayard Rustin's sexuality by civil rights leadership was not merely self-induced nor unwarranted. Although Rustin served as an early mentor to Martin Luther King, his role as an organizer and strategist for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was minimized after Adam Clayton Powell threatened to spread a rumor that Rustin and King were lovers. For a fascinating examination of the relationship between Rustin's sexuality and political life, read John D'emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003).
28. For examples of posthumous discussion of Luther Vandross's queer identity, see Jason King's *Village Voice* essay, "Why Luther Vandross's Legacy Matters," www.villagevoice.com/music/0527,king,65563,22.html (accessed March 1, 2007) and Craig Seymour, *Luther: The Life and Longing of Luther Vandross* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2005).
29. Mark Anthony Neal, *NewBlackMan* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
30. Nas, "Ether," *Stillmatic* (Sony, 2001).
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. It is likely that Nas was confusing, either deliberately or unintentionally, John D. Rockefeller with Rock Hudson, who died of AIDS in 1985. Another less likely explanation is that Nas was referring to a local street hustler by the same name who died of AIDS.
34. Although it was a popular song in New York for nearly a month, "Super Ugly" never made it to an official album.
35. For discussions of the relationship between hip-hop and the signifyin(g) tradition, see Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).
36. Eazy E. "Real Muthaphuckkin G's" (Ruthless, 1998).
37. Tupac Shakur, "To Live and Die in L.A.," *Makaveli* (Interscope, 1996).
38. Tupac Shakur, "Realest Shit," *Makaveli* (Interscope, 1996).
39. Ja Rule "Blood in My Eye," *Blood in my Eye* (Def Jam, 2003).
40. <http://www.geocities.com/ambwww/enema.htm>. (accessed March 1, 2007).

41. As Phillip Brian Harper points out in his book *Are We Not Men?* (New York: Oxford Press, 1996), the issue of being HIV positive is largely subordinate to the question of *how* the virus is contracted. In the case of Magic Johnson, Harper points out that the support he received from the African American community was directly connected to his consistent declarations of heterosexuality and public performances of homophobic and patriarchal masculinity. It was this sensibility that informed Eazy E's emphatic and repeated declarations of hypersexuality.
42. Like many hip-hop rumors, the primary source for the story on Tupac was gossip journalist Wendy Williams. Of course, Tupac vehemently denied the rumors in multiple post-jail interviews, such as the one with Chuck Phillips that famously appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* ("I Am Not A Gangster" by Chuck Phillips, October 25, 1995). Pac later created the unreleased song, "Why U Turn On Me," where he raps: "Said I got raped in jail, picture that/Revenge is a payback bitch, get your gat/Fuck Wendy Williams and I pray you choke/ on the next dick down your throat, for turnin' on me."
43. <http://www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews/?ID=1164>. (accessed March 1, 2007).
44. <http://www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews/?ID=1164>. (accessed March 1, 2007).
45. DMX, "Where the Hood At?," *Grand Champ* (Def Jam, 2003).
46. <http://www.io.com/~larrybob/gayrap2.html>. (accessed March 1, 2007).
47. For a thorough examination of the factual inaccuracies, logical fallacies, and questionable motivations behind J. L. King's books, see Keith Boykin, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America* (New York: Carroll & Graff, 2005).
48. <http://www.thumperscorner.com/discus/messages/7242/2354.html?1107482549>. (accessed March 1, 2007).
49. www.villagevoice.com/news/0326,king,45063,1.html. (accessed March 1, 2007).
50. For a fascinating examination of Tupac's complexities and contradictions, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching For Tupac Shakur* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002).