

Hip Hop and the Law

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ined to be dangerous, too prompt in tomfoolery for expertness in the grim ways of
ing one out of a job or getting the better of one in a deal.

PHILOSOPHY OF LITERARY FORM 361 (1973).

14th Burke explains:

ference between the symbolic drama and the drama of living is a difference between
ary obstacles and real obstacles. But: the imaginary obstacles of symbolic drama
o have the relevance necessary for the producing of effects upon audiences, reflect
obstacles of living drama.

a note 15, at 312.

14. Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*
(94).

JEFF JEAN, *John 3:16, on Muggs Presents . . . The Soul Assassins* (Columbia 1997).

“Sexual Poetic Justice”: Hip Hop, Antiblack Desire, and Legal Narratives

Tryon P. Woods*

I. Introduction

Let us begin with a proposition: the study of black culture and history is central to an ethical reading of the law. From this starting point, we must then pull back to consider the ethico-political context in which black art, performance, social movements, and popular culture find expression, and in so doing, constitute the premise for freedom against which the law arrays itself. You cannot accurately interpret what you see, hear, or read in hip hop by simply looking at hip hop, and the same goes for the law: you cannot gain traction on what is happening in the legal arena merely by reading law or learning legal doctrine. Contexts, frameworks, and paradigms are everything in social analysis—at least insofar as ethical standards matter. For this reason, my emphasis here will be to position the critical study of hip hop and the law within an accounting of the materiality of antiblack sexual violence in which the modern world is grounded, especially as hip hop emerges through the transmutation of the state’s terroristic repression of black revolution in the 1960s–70s into the sexualized violence of the present prison industrial complex.

Toward this end, I first offer a context through which to read hip hop and the law. I then follow with an example of how to apply such an analytical framework, through a reading of Lil Wayne’s song “Mrs. Officer,” from his 2008 album *The Carter III*. In “Mrs. Officer,” Lil Wayne (Dwayne Carter) raps about getting pulled over by a female cop who then pulls him into her patrol car and makes him have sex with her. The song deploys a jarring subtext of state power on which to celebrate Lil Wayne’s sexual prowess. The women who desire Lil Wayne’s sexual attentions are cops; his macho boasting climaxes with the refrain, “Rodney King, baby, yeah. I beat it like a cop.” This explicit reference to a landmark event in the history of black struggle—the 1992 assault on motorist Rodney King, the subsequent acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers whose protracted attack on King was caught on videotape, and the uprising of inner-city Los Angeles in response to the verdict—paradoxically generated no controversy whatsoever. What does

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t mean that the most significant instance of police brutality in the post-civil rights era becomes, in "Mrs. Officer," not prelude to rebellion, but rather a chorus to sexual pleasure and conquest?

II. The "Post-Racial" Quarantine as Sexual Violence

A full answer to this question would begin with an inquiry into the history of black revolution and the political economic shifts that have occurred throughout its varied epochs. Of particular salience is the period of the 1960s–1980s, during which the black liberation struggle reached its revolutionary zenith, and was countered by deadly state repression, which proceeded apace with both anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and the restructuring of the capitalist economy and of the social welfare state domestically. Any analysis of hip hop today, then, must account for the ways in which the present state of affairs in hip hop culture is in large measure an effect of ongoing state violence against urban black communities and their concomitant structural dispossession—even if this antiblack violence appears as an intramural battle, reductively referred to as "black-on-black" conflict, or equally simplistically, as misogyny and homophobia.

The repression of black revolutionary struggle, through and beyond the murderous assaults of both black leaders and everyday folk, was designed to establish a legacy of intimate violence—and in this way was a clear indication of the erotic power presented in the black liberation movement. In the words of former political prisoner Dhoruba Bin Wahad, the BI's enterprise of subverting the civil rights movement—COINTELPRO—was nothing less than "a program of domestic warfare" in which the black family and black children were the ultimate targets.¹ The COINTELPRO dossier should be read alongside the history of plantation slavery. The absolute vulnerability of black family life in the face of COINTELPRO structurally analogous to the slave quarters. We must use both "private" and "home" under erasure when describing the black community since there is no sanctuary for black bodies because captivity is a constituent element of black life, whether under slavery, COINTELPRO, or the present prison industrial complex where the war on drugs and the police practice of hiding black homes and neighborhoods becomes the context for the rise of militarized policing and asset forfeiture laws that permit law enforcement to confiscate the features of the black domestic sphere without criminal conviction or due process.²

It is important to underscore that the acts of state violence, mayhem, and subversion during the era of COINTELPRO, although patently illegal, were systematically decriminalized, or one law enforcement agent or director has ever been held accountable for their actions during this period.³ In this way, COINTELPRO is but one of a litany of illustrations of how policing always precedes the law, not the other way around. The Supreme Court in the landmark case *Terry v. Ohio*, for instance, ultimately accepted as "reasonable" the most basic and time-worn of antiblack rationales for a police officer seizing a black person. Detective ICFadden's stated explanation for why he stopped and searched Terry and his companion on the street in 1966 was simple: "I didn't like them ... I was attracted to them." This assoning is classic negrophobia, the sexual neurosis of white supremacy. Negrophobia trails a disavowed desire for "immoral/shameful things" black bodies: "I didn't like them ... was attracted to them"—attraction/revision, desire/disgust. The Court accepted Detective ICFadden and the State of Ohio's negrophobia and henceforth it is known as the legal fiction of "reasonable suspicion." Whether it is "Terry stops" or anti-gang statutes, the law proactively enshrines what are in fact long-standing police practices.

This quick review of the historical context of legal and extra-legal force against black bodies brings us to a crucial understanding of the meaning of violence in the antiblack world, *our* world. Black bodies are subject to a structure of gratuitous violence, rather than contingent violence: meaning, black bodies are punished not for a transgression such as law-breaking (that would be *contingent* violence), but rather for simply existing—violence for violence's sake.⁴ In terms of the law of policing, gratuitous violence manifests as an inversion of how we're told policing is supposed to work. Supposedly, there is an alleged crime and the police then initiate an investigation that generates evidence that leads to a suspect. But police law permits the process to work in reverse: the police identify and "seize" a suspect and then work to generate evidence of a crime that might render their suspicion "reasonable" after the fact. For this reason, I call Court decisions such as *Terry v. Ohio* (1968), *Florida v. Bostick* (1991), and *Illinois v. Wardlow* (2000), among numerous others, the "jurisprudence of racial profiling": the creation of a body of law and methods for interpreting law premised on an antiblack racial construct.

For black people, then, punishment is neither contingent nor instrumental, but purely gratuitous and structural, and racial blackness has, more than anything else, marked the historical trajectory of its various modalities and operations across the better part of a millennia. Debates or proposals, including those promoted or endorsed by scholars of hip hop and law such as Paul Butler and André Cummings, or even the oft-cited Michelle Alexander, on how to reform punishment to make it work better for black people, utterly fail to consider this basic relationship between the police power and blackness.⁵ The problem here is both disciplinary and conceptual and bears heavily on how we analyze hip hop's relationship to law.

In 1837, the Supreme Court made its first full attempt to delineate "the police power" in *State of New York v. Miln*, a case concerning an immigration statute challenged on the grounds that it represented an unconstitutional regulation of foreign commerce. As is generally true in these leading cases on the police power, the problem is canonized solely in the annals of constitutional law as a feature of the debate over federalism. This perspective is the oversight of a disciplinary blindness that isolates black history from the study of law. In fact, the cases do not tarry in a re-divided sovereignty; rather, they unequivocally assert the indivisibility of sovereignty in situations where the public is potentially at risk. Federal versus state powers is beside the point: the relevant issue is *against what* is the police power mobilized?

Upholding the statute in *Miln*, Justice Barbour, writing for the court majority, argues for the "indefinite supremacy" of the police power. For Barbour, the police power possesses an "undeniable and unlimited jurisdiction over all persons and things."⁶ The court would restate this premise, in an early interpretation of the newly ratified Fourteenth Amendment, passed to protect recently emancipated slaves in the South, in the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (1873): "The power is, and must be from its very nature, incapable of any very exact definition or limitation."⁷ In these early formulations, the courts are echoing and extending the reasoning of the antebellum slave codes, such as in the North Carolina Supreme Court case of *State v. Mann* (1829) which held that the power of the master had to be absolute in order to "render the submission of the slave perfect," and that the inevitable abuses of power that come with such totalitarian authority must also be protected in order to guarantee the perpetuation of the institution of slavery.⁸

The courts are asserting that society owes its security to the police power, whose importance is evidenced by its resistance to representation and limitation. From the standpoint of the police power, then, blackness is imperceptible except as the danger it is presumed to pose to public welfare.⁹ And here we have the failure on the part of the

temporary legal scholars to conceptualize the police power from the paradigmatic position of blackness. While it is possible to debate the practices to which the power applies—from on-the-street racial profiling to penal policies such as three-strikes, drug-tending regimes, or even so-called administrative segregation within the prison—the *mer*'s existence has *never* been open to discussion. As Bryan Wagner puts it, “police tries to blackness not as practice but simply as a power.”¹⁶ To deliberate or prevaricate at its various practices, then, let alone to worry whether it is containable or susceptible to reform, is to both miss the point and to find oneself in the dead-end of a topic defined its foreclosure to deliberation.

III. “Ethics of Violence” and “Sexual Poetic Justice”

In terms of hip hop and the law, then, we must evaluate black expressive culture in it of this context of gratuitous violence and the police power. Greg Thomas calls it an ethics of violence¹⁷: black culture must be said to embody an ethics of violence that bles or encourages it to oppose, counter, and correct the antiblack violence in which world is steeped. In other words, it’s not that black people are or black culture is logically violent; rather, the world has been pathologically violent towards blacks over six centuries, and it is therefore unethical to issue *prima facie* indictments of k culture’s articulations of violence. Such expressions are properly understood in a orical sense as “counter-violence.”

Indeed, because the formation of the modern world took place through the sexual ation of black bodies—the Middle Passage and racial slavery—racialization, the ding of race and what that means in terms of power, occurs at the nexus of sex and ence. Thomas’ study of hip hop, therefore, describes what he calls “sexual poetic ice” in black expressive cultures as a doorway to rethinking black subjugation and re- ionary expression by undermining the eroticism that patriarchy invests in the rape omen and the sexual objectification of black bodies, thereby allowing a new eroticism merge from the violence of resistance, from its pleasures.¹⁸ For example, before sending omise note of revenge to “women abusers” everywhere, Lil’ Kim raps in “Cell Block go (He Had It Comin’)” with Queen Latifah and Macy Gray on the 2003 soundtrack e movie *Chicago*: “I’m not guilty, just tryna protect mine / It ain’t my fault he ran my knife twenty times.”¹² Whether the rebellious slave, the Black Panther Party armed elf-defense, the hip hop artist throwing sonic and metaphorical bombs, or the counter ace of sexual poetic justice, lyrical or actual—the main reason why counter violence-lack people is profoundly destabilizing to civil society is what it calls into question: gratuitous antiblack violence of the police power necessary for the coherence of our ty.

IV. Lil Wayne and Erotic Rebellion

Lil Wayne exemplifies this tradition of erotic rebellion I just outlined in numerous ects. The meanings and potential meanings in “Mrs. Officer” are both well buried hidden in plain sight, and in a playful and erotic insouciance, Lil Wayne enjoins a tion of humor, irreverence, and illicit eroticism in which black pleasure intersects , politics, identity, and power. Black youth subculture reconstructs dominant repre-

sentations of who they are in order to “remake” their image in popular discourse. Lil Wayne similarly appropriates and recasts stereotypes of black men as hypersexual beings with large penises (“my hands so big you thought I told ya to pull it over”) and insatiable appetites (“my face on every wanted poster”). Where Ice-T used to refer to himself as a “white woman’s dream,” a tongue-in-cheek conjuring, and at the same time, parodying, of the historical mythology of the black male’s sexual largess and prowess, Lil Wayne’s “gifts” or “skills” command the attention of *all* females, represented as the whole police force of “lady cops”: “I’m wanted by every lady cop all over.”

Following Carolyn Cooper’s study of Jamaican dancehall, Lil Wayne’s expression of hyper-sexuality, typically dismissed as vulgar, “obscene,” or apolitical, should itself be read as an intervention in state discourses of power. In the Jamaican context, this expression would be described in terms of the dancehall reference to “slackness,” which Cooper suggests should be understood as “an ideological revolt against law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency.”¹⁹ Moreover, Cooper sees “slackness” in terms of a specific conception of the erotic, as encompassing the aspirational desires of the economically marginalized, expressed both in terms of sexual desires and material desires: upward social mobility, with sexuality as both means and ends, but also signified by, of course, the “blingest of blings,” as she puts it. Lil Wayne’s “slackness,” in other words, comments on racialized tropes about commodifiable bodies while marshaling the body itself towards this end. The hyper-sexuality of Lil Wayne thus embodies aspirational desires and at the same represents an utter disdain for civil society’s rules overseeing material gain and upward mobility. Such slackness bespeaks an awareness in *the body* as to the meaning of blackness: his invisible humanity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his hyper-visibility, usefulness/desirability, for purposes of society’s profit and aggrandizement.

V. Lil Wayne and the Persona of Socio-Historical Violence

While “Mrs. Officer” represents erotic rebellion in these ways, it simultaneously serves as a vessel for reproducing state narratives of power that are, in the end, hostile to black liberation. “Mrs. Officer” skillfully participates in obscuring the stark reality of gendered violence, particularly for black women in relation to law enforcement, by situating women as the ground of value and power in the battles that men presume to wage against one another. In this way, “Mrs. Officer” aims for a degree of cross-racial male bonding in its viewing audience.¹⁴ The key to understanding this bonding is Lil Wayne’s urgency in suppressing the history of institutionalized sexual violence against black men. The most prominent, and mundane, example of this violence is the daily operations of policing against black and brown men, which in 1997 played out notoriously in New York City in the form of Abner Louima’s brutal hours-long gang rape and torture by at least a dozen NYPD officers—essentially, as Lil Wayne raps in “Mrs. Officer,” she pulled me over/pulled me out the rover/then she pulled me closer/threw me in the back of the car/put me in handcuffs start ripping my pants off...”—*this* racialized sexual violence by men on other men becomes impermissible knowledge.

Something interesting happens as a result of this repression, of what cannot be spoken—the sexual violence of the law. Lil Wayne and the black men in the video find empowerment *through* the law, as police officers, not *against* it, affirming that while hip hop and young black men in general constitute the prototypical (sexual) threat against which “civilization” must defend, the “gains” of the post-civil rights era are such that they also

aspire to the very venues of society and state geared towards their captivity.¹⁵ To *because of* the uniform, not *despite* it, blacks remain the objects, not the subjects, of racial narratives about policing; they are still the targets of the police power even while forming such power themselves. In this sense, then, Lil Wayne's presentation in "Mrs. Officer" of a criminalized blackness appears simultaneously as a (sexual) political problem he apparatus marshaled to its containment. The white male viewer is thus returned to safe place of self-identification and mastery, but at the same time has been able to engage in that commonplace white fixation with black male sexuality as something terrifying and dangerous. In short, what is happening in "Mrs. Officer," then, is that men are alternately fantasizing about and repulsed by the conquest of women of color, the conquest of black men, and their own conquest by black men.

It, again, none of this can be spoken. Indeed, it is a high un-representable, although relations are well documented historically, albeit mostly in literature rather than in law, or the social sciences. Indeed, Lil Wayne himself attempts to bracket out his personal sexual violation as a young boy, passing it off as entirely unremarkable in a scene from an unauthorized documentary, *The Carter*, released on the Internet in 2009. Lil Wayne jokes openly about being raped at age eleven, facilitated by a surrogate father, Baby. In the documentary, he goes on to tell Lil' Twist, at the time a ten-year-old member of Wayne's record label Young Money, "I loved it... I'm a do like Baby and them did me"—meaning that he is going to get Lil' Twist raped too.¹⁶ a subsequent appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on March 3, 2009, Kimmel asks Wayne if it is true that he lost his virginity at age 11. Clearly taken aback by the question, he first attempts to laugh it off, but then tells his story. Kimmel and his other guest evening, none other than the "respectable" television news anchor Charlie Gibson, Lil Wayne about the incident, construing it as proof of Wayne's intrinsic sexual excess, his unassailable manhood, and dismissing Wayne's concession that the experience harmful to him. From Paul D to Lil Wayne, from the slave plantation to the present -racial" hip hop marketplace, black sexual subjection is pleasurable to white male inators (and their audiences), endlessly malleable across space and time. Kimmel Gibson may appear to be relating to Lil Wayne through the valence of masculine ling, men who would overcome the possibility of male sexual victimization with ulinity's irrepressible sexual libido. And yet, Kimmel and Gibson note that the putative non bond with Lil Wayne—being men—is in fact a ruse: "I didn't know you could our virginity at eleven years old"... "We can't, but he did." Greg Thomas calls this gender conceals of empire¹⁷: white supremacy allocates manhood and womanhood ite bodies alone.¹⁷ Black existence is without analog, and despite recognizing that themselves being raped at age eleven would be bad, wrong, and indeed, grounds for one's criminal prosecution, Kimmel and Gibson find great mirth in Lil Wayne's ex- nce. In this fashion, Lil Wayne's effort to laugh off his victimization, to enjoy the e) masculine narrative that would crowd out any manifestation of structural violence, done, unwittingly reiterating Saidiya Hartman's prescient words about slavery: "every pt to employ the slave in a narrative ultimately resulted in his or her obliteration."¹⁸ ayne's laughter is the soundtrack of social death.

at Lil Wayne's rape came directly at the hands of an anonymous fourteen-year-old makes the absence of her consent no less significant. To consider this episode in both er lives in any terms other than coercion is to discount the modalities of force organizing & bodies in the modern world, wherein captive flesh is "available for all manner of ation and fantasy."¹⁹ Quite aside from the point that men (or boys) can indeed be ally victimized by women (or girls), the assaultive power of Lil Wayne's assaillant was,

at best, "a displacement of the organized violence consistently required of captivity and, further, a dissimulation of the institutionalized sexual power" of slavery and its afterlife.²⁰

In "Mrs. Officer," then, we could decipher the figure of the female cop in similar terms as prepubescent Lil Wayne's fourteen-year-old "rapist." Whereas the mediating role of the fourteen-year-old girl ostensibly softens the force of Lil Wayne's sexual exploitation by his surrogate father, the fact that the cop in "Mrs. Officer" is female mystifies the sexual violence of white supremacy. The woman cop (in other words, the fact that the police officer is female) is necessary to obscure the sexual desire of the white male spectator for the black male body; she is needed to soften the image (and thus mute the reality) of sexualized state violence against black bodies; she lends the black male power. Lil Wayne purports to turn surveillance by the state into a conquest of his own. The woman cop (the fact that the woman is a police officer) is requisite for obscuring the widespread realities of female victimization and making misogyny more palatable: as a cop, she deserves a beating or getting fucked or both; as a cop in the black community, she started it, asked for it; as a cop, she is not really female and he is not really using her as a sexual object (since state power is seen as synonymous with male authority, not female). Lil Wayne is attempting to delineate his subjectivity within the crucible of antiblack violence and sexual repression, carving out a space for the embodied performance of black eroticism, always and already illicit, dangerous, and subversive; yet, what I am suggesting is equally significant is how he counters state violence: by imagining a counter-violence which, mind you, is not in and of itself an ethical problem, but what we have seen here is that the counter-violence that Lil Wayne imagines requires successive layers of gendered and sexual repression—hardly what we mean by "sexual poetic justice."

VI. Conclusion: Reading Law Aesthetically

How can the study of hip hop as I have framed it inform the study and practice of Constitutional law? Policing and law are about culture—or, more to the point, a certain culture of politics in which antiblack violence is rigorously disavowed. We can see hip hop, then, as the aesthetic dimension to law's repression of this violence. Considered within its proper ethico-political context, black cultural expression reveals the contemporary culture of politics to be tendered in a collective antipathy toward the lived experience of black people, a political theater for the staging of discrepant structures of feeling arising from contrasting conceptions of suffering between black and non-black, and marked by a dexterous capacity to disavow the ethical force of black counterviolence and erotic rebellion. In the end, Lil Wayne's implicit cry to be free of being positioned psychically and materially outside humanity's distribution of values remains impermissible knowledge precisely because it is insatiable—it cannot be ethically remedied—under the present regime of antiblackness in which our society is grounded.

Endnotes

1. FBI documents declare: "The Negro youth and moderates must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teaching, they will be dead revolutionaries." FBI memo reproduced on the back cover, Dhoruba bin Wahad, Asata Shakur, and Mumia abu Jamal, *Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the War Against Black Revolutionaries* (Brooklyn: Semiotext(e), 1993).

2. Frank B. Wilderson, III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke, 2010), 127.
3. In fact, the covert, illegal activities of the FBI and other federal and local law enforcement agencies during this period, rather than be prosecuted, were legalized after the fact. By signing Executive Order 12333 on December 4, 1981, President Reagan authorized the CIA to conduct domestic counterintelligence operations, providing statutory authority for COINTELPRO-style activities. There is no record from this Executive Order to the USA PATRIOT Act signed into law in 2001. The provisions of Executive Order 12333 of Dec. 4, 1981 appear at 46 FR 59941, 3 CFR, 1981 Comp., p. 200. The USA PATRIOT Act is HR 3162, 107th Congress, 1st session, October 24, 2001.
4. In many ways, 2011 provided a tutorial in these discrepant forms of racialized violence. The tests in Wisconsin during the spring and then the 'Occupy' Wall Street movement across the country throughout the fall effectively garnered police violence: protestors were beaten, maced, pepper-sprayed, hit with rubber bullets, hospitalized, and detained (arguably in violation of numerous Constitutional guarantees regarding assembly, speech, search and seizure, torture, and so forth). But here's the rub: largely white protestors only galvanize police violence as punishment for attempting to interrupt operations of the capitalist economy. Or, more plainly: the police beat the worker because she is on strike. This is *contingent* violence. By contrast, black bodies attract police violence simply because they're there, going about daily life, perhaps feeding children free breakfast, as was the case with the Black Panther Party — this punishment is *gratuitous*.
5. See Paul Butler, *Let's Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice* (New York: New Press, 2010); andré glas pond cummings, "All Eyes on Me: America's War on Drugs and the Prison-Industrial Complex," *Journal of Gender, Race & Justice* 15(3) Spring 2012; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).
6. *State of New York v. Minn.*, 36 US 102 (1837); Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Politics of Power After Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2009), 10.
7. *Slaughterhouse-House Cases*, 83 US 36, 49 (1873).
8. Sadhya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 91.
9. Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 6–7.
10. Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 8.
11. Greg Yorks, *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil' Kim's Iconism* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 44. Thomas's extraordinary treatise on Lil' Kim emphasizes the local insights available from the perspective of an "ethics of violence" and "sexual poetic justice:" "mas connects Lil' Kim, and a select number of fellow female emcees and other hip hop artists, to a tradition of outlaw sexual poetic justice that includes blues songstresses such as Bessie Smith and Dinah Washington, as well as Black Power-era women like Joan Little, Satya Bukhari, and the (L)ayne Cortez.
12. Thomas, *Hip-Hop Revolution*, 44.
13. Carolyn Cooper, "Erotic Maroonage: Embodying Emancipation in Jamaica Dancehall Culture," unpublished paper form the Ninth Annual Glider Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University (November 1–3, 2007), 1.
14. Jared Sexton, "Race, Sexuality, and Political Struggle: Reading *Soul on Ice*," *Social Justice*, vol. no. 2 (2003), 34.
15. Sexton, "The Rise of Engagement: Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing," *American Literary Realism* 61.1 (2009), 49.
16. Amanda Hess, "Lil' Wayne Jokes About His Own Rape," *Washington City Paper*, January 12, 2010, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/sexist/2010/01/12/lil-wayne-jokes-about-his-own-rape/>.
17. Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes in Jazz* (Bloomington: Indiana, 2007), 46.
18. Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought": An Interview with Sadhya V. Hartman," by Frank Wilderson III, *qui parle* 13:2 (2003), 185.
19. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2008), 114.
20. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 113–114.

Lyrical Assault: Dancehall Versus the Cultural Imperialism of the North-West

Camille A. Nelson*

I have come to realize the power of music. We all remember the lyrics of some songs verbatim, despite the passage of time, recalling where we were, who we were with, and what we were doing when we first listened. Music crosses borders — it generates emotions and feelings which transport us to a different place and time. Moreover, music has insurgent sociopolitical power — among other things, it can rally the masses, encourage affiliations, and demarcate normative boundaries. As a vehicle of easily digestible messages, music not only entertains, but it speaks volumes even when played quietly. For these reasons, music creates lasting impressions. As with perspectives generated by other art forms, the impressions created by music can range from positive to negative. It is for this reason, specifically the power of music to concretize a lasting unfavorable impression, that I have become increasingly concerned about the opinions held by some in the North-West about my island home.

Recently, I found myself defending my country of origin, the place I think of as my cultural home, to my cherished friend. He and his partner were ruminating upon places to which they might travel as an out gay couple. They referenced Jamaican dancehall music as "hateful" and the reason for their reluctance to vacation in Jamaica. I had to admit, however, that in Jamaica, as in many places, being closeted was likely the easiest and safest strategy. While American tourists are privileged to some extent in Jamaica due to the currency and passports they carry, gay tourism has yet to become a niche market in Jamaica as it has elsewhere.

Indeed, recent media attention driven by skilled gay rights activists in the United Kingdom and the United States has brought much unwanted attention to the island previously known more for its beaches and rum than for social marginalization. Jamaica, a country whose musical productivity far outstrips its population, has come under the glare of the Western progressive gaze and been dubbed "one of the worst" countries with respect to homophobia due to the unsolved murders of two gay rights activists, dancehall lyrics promoting violence against homosexuals, and a culture perceived to be indulgent of anti-gay and lesbian proclivities.

In attempting to navigate this discussion with my friends, I realized that I was profoundly conflicted — I understood their positions, but wished it were not so. They knew vaguely

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