

Documenting Drill Music: Understanding Black Masculine Performances in Hip-Hop

By: Demetrius Green
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Chair: Dr. Germaine Halegoua

Dr. Michael Baskett

Prof. Kevin Willmott

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The thesis committee for Demetrius Green certifies that this is the
approved version of the following thesis:

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Chair: Dr. Germaine Haleboua

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Abstract

When it comes to analyzing stereotypical representations of black masculinity in contemporary media, commercial hip-hop and the imagery associated with many of the artists is filled with caricatures of black men. The images are often a negotiation between the record label who distributes and finances the music and the artists who perform these negative tropes. On one hand the record labels cater to mainstream audiences that are familiar with negative imagery of black men and women. On the other hand, many of the artists are performing tropes of black masculinity that are linked to the social spaces and the codes of black masculinity in their environment. This linkage between hip-hop performances and the social context that perpetuates these performances is often blurred in the commercial hip-hop video.

This study will employ drill music videos to analyze the linkage between space and black masculine performances in hip-hop. Drill music videos' modes of production are similar to those found in documentary films and allows us to draw inferences about artists' performances in relation to the social space where they are filmed. Bill Nichols' *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* is used as a key text when contextualizing drill music performances. Along with documentary theory, this study will use concepts presented by Michel Foucault that analyze systems of confinement and their role on producing drill music performances. The study begins with an exploration of what drill music is, a comparison with commercial hip-hop and the social context of Chicago that constructs black masculine performances. These points of emphasis culminate in my case study of one of the most prominent drill music artists, Chief Keef.

Acknowledgements

Frank Green Sr., or as we called him, “Bud”, my great grandfather, was the closest thing I had to a father or grandfather. When I was five years old he passed away after a battle with cancer at the age of 86. I was raised by two beautiful black queens, Jami Green, my mother and Helen Green, my grandmother. We lived with Bud, in the house that he owned, until he passed away. I recall various details about him such as his love for white rice, his baby blue 1982 Chrysler Imperial, his genuine compassion that he had for everyone and his respect in the community. He was my first introduction to a black man in American society and subconsciously was what I strived to be like. As I grew older I found out more about Bud that contextualized so many of my own life experiences. I found out that he didn’t know how to read or write, he had only received a 3rd grade education, he spent a large majority of his teenage and adult life working on fields and that he left Itta Bena, Mississippi in the days of the Jim Crow South with his wife, Cardelia Green, to pursue a better life in Illinois.

There is so much more that I can say, but Bud, you and your legacy showed me that despite the limitations that society places on black men and women, we are to never let them destroy us mentally. Despite every factor that suggests that I should not be in this position that I am today, I, Demetrius Green, received a master’s degree at the age of twenty-four and I know it would not have been possible had it not been for all your endurance and sacrifices for this family. I pray that one day my legacy and image of black masculinity can transcend generations and impact someone positively like your life impacted mine. This degree is for you. I love and miss you, Bud.

-Demetrius

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Drill music is a subgenre of hip-hop in Chicago Illinois, that took the world by storm with its unique documentary-esque music videos during the years of 2011 and 2012 (Caramanica). There is little to no scholarship that focuses on drill music which is surprising considering that it has been subject to many critiques by journalists and media outlets for its representation of extreme violence amongst African American men (Delerme). Some critics blame drill music for perpetuating the ongoing violence amongst black men in Chicago while others realize that drill music is the byproduct of a larger systemic crisis. Aside from trying to influence more scholarly work on drill music and the artists who perform it, this thesis will ask how we can use documentary theory to analyze black masculine performances in hip-hop music videos, specifically in the case of drill music, to better understand the larger social contexts within the videos.

Black Masculinity & Black Masculine Performances in Popular Entertainment

There is not a single, concrete definition of what black masculinity is. However, one common understanding of black masculinity is that it is secondary to white masculinity. Because black men cannot access the same spaces and opportunities that white men can, they must define their own masculinity based off their denied access to patriarchy (Curry; White; Shabazz; hooks; Majors and Billson; Staples; Neal; Lemelle Jr.). As Robert Staples says, “I see the black male as being in conflict with the normative definition of masculinity. This is a status which few if any, black males have been able to achieve. Masculinity as defined in this culture, has always implied a certain autonomy over and mastery of one’s environment (Staples 2).” Mastery over environment is an essential characteristic of masculinity and there are many factors that have led to its denial for black men. Essentially to understand and theorize black masculinity, one must

analyze the ways in which black males find mastery over their environment in ways that demonstrate their inability to find a mastery of their environment through conventional methods of masculinity.

Drill music and hip-hop music videos are rich in content for understanding performances of black masculinity but the performances that are found in the videos can also be linked to the performances found in the representations of black men in popular media throughout American history. These representations have a direct relation to slavery and the subjugation of African Americans. As Ronald L. Jackson says, “the social assignment of Black bodies to an underclass is a historical conundrum that has multiple origins, two of which are the institutions of slavery and the mass media (Jackson II 9).” Donlad Bogle suggests that mass media has perpetuated five common negative tropes of black men and women: toms, coons, mammy, mulattos and bucks. Each of these five characteristics represent the ways in which whites viewed African Americans. These representations date back to the early 1800’s when white stage actors would paint their faces black and portray African Americans in a negative manner during minstrel shows (Bogle). These minstrel shows were extremely popular and toured across the United States feeding audiences negative representations of what it meant to be black. Essentially, these white actors created caricatures of what it was to be African American to the mainstream world and when radio and motion pictures began to develop these same tropes followed replacing the white actors with black actors.

Statement of Problem

One of the most perplexing things about contemporary representations of African American males is that they are seemingly upheld and perpetuated by them, especially in the case of hip-hop. As Dates and Pease argue,

“Some African Americans, along with the White decision makers who control the media industries are making money – and a lot of it – in a wide spread use of television and motion pictures that defines Black people in ways that are more destructive than ever seen. What we see in the media of the 1990s are modern-era minstrel shows (sitcoms), movie thrillers, rap music and music videos that celebrate misogyny and violence and that communicate parodied images of Black men, shucking and jiving con artists who joke about pathological behaviors and criminality, while playing the role of Black “bucks” to a White America (Dates and Pease 81-82).”

Dates and Pease insists that these representations are essentially recreations of past stereotypes that were used to reduce the black male body to an image that could be ridiculed in order to support the ideology of white superiority over the black race. In the case of hip-hop, these tropes and negative stereotypes are what authenticates performances of blackness. For many artists and record labels there is a goal of authentication through stereotypical and deviant imagery of black men that one must fulfill to be well received in the music industry. This goal of authentication makes it harder for audiences to see how black men use these negative tropes as a way to regain a sense of masculinity that has been stripped away from them.

Typically, when scholars theorize black masculine performances in hip-hop they tend to undermine the role that the linkage between performances and social context found within the music videos plays (Jackson II; Kitwana; Bowser; Rose; White). It would be a false claim to state that hip-hop scholars are oblivious to the social conditions that construct deviant black masculine performances. In fact, hip-hop scholars often critique mainstream media just as much as they do hip-hop for its representations of black masculinity. However, the problem lies within

the representations found in many commercial hip-hop videos that blur the line between performances and the space that the performance stems from. The commercial hip-hop video is any video that is produced under the jurisdiction of a record label or some type of corporate influence. Record labels oversee distribution, marketing and maintaining a certain image of a hip-hop artist. As Jack Banks says in his analysis of the role that record labels play in music videos,

“The labels’ general objective with video is, of course, to increase the retail sales of their artists music through widespread distribution of the artists’ videos on music television shows as well as other sites, like nightclubs and music stores which display music clips on monitors. However, the record companies use videos in more specific ways to help develop their artists. Video clips establish and cultivate a certain image for an artist. (Banks 5)”

An artist’s image or brand has always been imperative to how an artist was viewed and recognized. Unfortunately, in many cases the artists’ image is under the jurisdiction of the record label who plays a large role in framing the artist’s videos to their liking. Commercial hip-hop videos are governed by the record label that produces them. This allows for the video to be embedded with whatever meaning the record label wants it to have. The song may have a specific social context, but it is an exaggerated representation of the song and the social context of the song. These videos are often void of any social significance to a larger systemic issue and if they are not void of them, the largely exaggerated representation undermines what little significance that the video has. Consequently, criticisms of commercial hip-hop rarely include a deep textual analysis of the music videos resulting in critiques that focus more on the lyrics.

Significance of Study

Black masculine performances in drill music videos are directly related to the social context or the environment from which they come from. Drill music and documentary theory are

important to this study because of the way that they allow us to make inferences on the social contexts that are found within the videos. When analyzing drill, documentary theory gives us a framework that allows us to understand the role that space and place plays on the drill artist and we can see how both interact and influence one another.

There are several reasons for using documentary theory to analyze drill music. The first reason is that there are parallels between documentary and drill music production. Drill music videos have a documentary style of production. The videos are produced using handheld cameras, on location sets and natural lighting. It is important in documentary and drill music that the camera operator is always ready to record the subject because it captures natural reactions of the subject in their environment. In many cases, drill music videos share the same qualities of an observational documentary. An observational documentary is one of four modes of documentary that theorist, Bill Nichols presents to help us better understand the roles and effects of documentary (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*). The observational documentary just like the drill music video allows the subjects to perform in a natural way with their surroundings that tells us something about their performance and its relation to the social space. As Nichols says,

“Observational cinema, therefore, conveys, the sense of unmediated and unfettered access to the world. The physical body of a particular filmmaker does not seem to put a limit on what we can see. The person behind the camera, and microphone, will not draw the attention of the social actors or engage with them in any direct or extended fashion. Instead we expect to have the ability to take the position of an ideal observer, moving among people and places to find revealing views (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* 43).”

What Nichols describes as an observational documentary is essentially what drill music is. Drill videos allow us to see a different image of the world due to its documentary style of production that is linked to space of where the performers are located. As Nichols also says, “In

documentaries we find stories and proposals, evocations or descriptions that help us see the world anew (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary: Second Edition 43).” This is not to say that drill music is more real or authentic than commercial hip-hop. In fact, if we were to juxtapose the performances of black masculinity found in drill music alongside those found in commercial hip-hop videos we would conclude that the artists are both performing with a goal of authentication in mind. Ultimately, it is a performance for the camera no matter how we look at it and the participants are performing. However, as Nichols suggest, through documentary we are able to see the world anew and view a subject in their environment in a different way that allows us to make inferences on the subject. This concept of observational documentary is the key theoretical framework in analyzing drill music videos and their intersection with the social space.

This thesis will explore black masculine performances in drill music to display how they are connected to the social context and the denial of masculinity for black men. By analyzing drill music through a documentary framework, we are able to see a new image of black masculine performances in hip-hop. This thesis will also explore how a subgenre of hip-hop can fall under the umbrella of commercial hip-hop. Chapter 2 describes what drill music is and how it differs from commercial hip-hop by explaining where it originated from and the characteristics of those who perform drill music. What we will see in this chapter is the prototypical drill artist. This includes the characteristics of the neighborhood that he is from, his gang affiliations and a brief example of how he performs in videos. This chapter will explain how drill music is produced and distributed. The way in which it is produced and distributed exemplifies how drill music is different than commercial hip-hop. This chapter also shows the significance of space and place in drill music and its relation to black masculine performances. Since there is no

scholarship that focuses on drill music, it is imperative that this chapter paints a picture of what drill music is.

The third chapter will discuss the social space of Chicago and how this space functions to confine the black males who occupy it. This chapter highlights the way that social space is influential in performance and how it makes certain performances necessary for survival. This section will use several drill artists as an example to better illustrate the theory of the panopticon that was presented by Michel Foucault. This section defines the social space of Chicago to add a theoretical background to our understanding of the space where drill music is produced.

The fourth presents a case study on Chief Keef that uses textual analysis to analyze his videos. The previous chapters lay the foundation for this chapter. All of the elements that were discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 can be seen within this chapter. The analysis of Chief Keef's videos illustrate the way that his music is related to the social context in which it's produced and the different meaning that manifests in the meaning when the artist is reconnected with the spatial and social origins of his performance. This chapter will also illustrate the life cycle of a subgenre of hip-hop before it is commercialized. The concluding chapter will reiterate why it is essential to understand the role that the social context plays on black masculine performances in hip-hop videos and offer possible future topics of study.

Methodology

The primary methodology used in this thesis will be a textual analysis of drill music videos. A textual analysis is useful to the study of drill music because it allows us to see the deeper meanings behind the performances. Since drill music performances are closely related to the environment from which they come, the textual analysis will relate the performances that are

seen in the videos to the larger social context of Chicago and performances of black masculinity. The textual analysis methodology will be used to analyze the representations, structure and style found within the music videos that are not directly visible or explicitly referenced.

Throughout this thesis there are references to secondary texts that inform my key case study of Chief Keef's music videos. These texts include other drill music videos and the lyrics along with references to commercial hip-hop videos and the lyrics. These textual analyses are used to illustrate certain aspects of drill music, black masculinity and the intersection of performance and social context. For my main textual analysis I will analyze four videos. These four videos were chosen based on the way that they illustrate the life cycle of drill music. The first and second video are compared while the last two are analyzed individually.

The first two videos are *Hustle Hard (2011)* by Ace Hood, a commercial hip-hop rapper who is not associated with drill music and *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix) (2011)* an interpolation of the song by S.Dot, Edai and Chief Keef. These two videos illustrate the differences and similarities between drill music and commercial hip-hop. Also, it allows us to see the differences in representation of black masculine performances. The second video is Chief Keef's *Don't Like (2012)*. This video displays the characteristics of drill at the height of Keef's career and the way that authenticity is developed in this performance. One of the most significant attributes about this video is the fact that it is related to a larger social context which is illustrated by certain aspects of the video. The final video is Chief Keef's, *Fuck Rehab (2014)*. This video illustrates what happens when the drill artist becomes a commercial artist after they sign to a major record label and how this changes their image, and how their goal of authentication is achieved in their performance.

Review of Literature

Bill Nichols's *Representing Reality Issues and Concepts in Documentary* is one of the key texts in which this thesis bases its theoretical framework. Nichols presents four modes of documentary that are the dominant forms, expository, observational, interactive and reflexive (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* 32). Two of these modes, expository and observational, are applicable to our understanding of commercial hip-hop and drill music. Expository relates to the way that the filmmaker intervenes in the production and creates their own interpretation of the scenario that is being portrayed. This concept parallels what happens when we look at the production of commercial hip-hop videos. The observational mode of documentary in the context of drill music shows how the lack of the filmmaker's influence can provide us with a specific performance that tells us more about the subjects of the video and their relationship to space.

The concept of authenticity is important when we analyze drill music. The way that drill artists authenticate their black masculinity in their performances is what separates them from the commercial hip-hop's goal of authentication. *Walter Benjamin's The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* will be used in this thesis to show how some commercial hip-hop videos lose their relation to time and space, or aura, as Benjamin describes it, when the performance is moved out of its social context. Benjamin argues that a work of art is mechanically reproduced when it lacks an aura or a referent to a specific historical context. Just as a painting of the *Mona Lisa* carries a relation to a certain time and space and is unique, drill music is related to a particular time, space and history that is embedded in the video. An example of a mechanically reproduced work of art would be a printed picture of the *Mona Lisa*. Just as the reprinted copy is taken out of its context of the original painting and placed in another, so is

the commercial hip-hop video. Although Walter Benjamin is using the concept of mechanical reproduction to illustrate the mass reprinting of original pieces of artwork, here it will be used to illustrate how a commercial hip-hop video loses its aura when it is stripped of its relation to time and space similarly to the mechanically reproduced piece of art.

Space is a recurring concept within this study and is frequently mentioned. Hip-hop has a large connection to race, space and place. Murray Forman's *the 'Hood Comes First: Race Space and Place in Rap and hip-hop* highlights the way that space is represented within hip-hop performances. Forman addresses that there is a deeper meaning within hip-hop that can be evidenced by understanding the social space and the role of record labels, but this concept is often ignored in hip-hop studies. As he says,

“Even more conspicuous is the limited analytical rigor applied to describing and explaining the influential role of the music industry throughout rap's history. Considering the abundance of research on rap, there has been a relative paucity of critical study on facilitating or constraining factors within the popular music industry that have, in various ways and at various times, aided or restricted it's development (Forman XX).”

Forman addresses the shortcomings of the literary canon of hip-hop studies and claims that there is a void in hip-hop studies that does not thoroughly analyze the music industries influence on the removal of the social context in hip-hop. Forman shows the gap in scholarship about hip-hop in which my textual analysis of drill music hopes to contribute to filling.

The social space of Chicago has a large connection to the suppression and confinement of African Americans males. This confinement is evidenced in many of the performances found within drill music. Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punishment* is a key text that helps us understand the space of Chicago that produces black masculine performances in hip-hop. Specifically, in his book Foucault presents the concept of the panopticon. The panopticon is a model of prison surveillance and confinement that is found inside of the prison but also expands

outside of it. To Foucault, prisons aren't just spaces that suppress bodies, but they also produce bodies and control them through constant surveillance and enclosure. This concept relates heavily to drill music and the way that drill music artists have been confined by society and their performance has been produced by this confinement and surveillance. Foucault's ideas will help illustrate the way that the social space of Chicago produces performances of masculinity that are found in the performances of drill music videos.

Rashad Shabazz also elaborates on the concept of the prison being a model of suppression that works outside of the prison system in his book *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. In his book he provides a geographic study of race and gender. His book is a specific case study of Chicago from the 1890s to the 1990s and how systemic racism and tools of oppression have created a system that works to confine those who live there, similarly to the prison industrial complex. This confinement that drill artists live within essentially fuels their need for deviant behavior. Many of the same aspects of confinement that Shabazz illustrates are found in drill music. For instance, Shabazz talks about the way African American males were largely incarcerated and while in prison turned to gangs to restore the safety and power that had been stripped of them. Gangs are one of the most defining characteristics of drill music and they function in drill just as they do in prison. Shabazz's case study concerning the history of confinement and suppression in Chicago help this study identify the way those confinements are still present today and affect the black males who live in these social and spatial contexts.

Shabazz and Foucault evidence the confinements that are found within a specific space and the politics of these confinements. In Richard Majors and Janet Billson's *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, Majors and Billson present us with the ways that black

males cope with the confinement of social spaces. The cool pose is a coping strategy that black males use to assert themselves within society. The book covers a range of topics that stretch from gangs to family. In drill music many of these cool poses can be found within the music videos and relate directly to the social space.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this thesis there will be several terms that I frequently refer to. One of the first terms will be authenticity. Authenticity is a stamp of approval. Something that is authentic must be declared authentic by an authority. In the case of many hip-hop artists authentic blackness is defined by the tropes that have permeated through mass media. The record companies in commercial hip-hop are the authenticators of hip-hop. Although drill artists perform the same tropes that we see in commercial hip-hop, their authenticators are different. Drill music artists' authenticity is defined by their relationship with their environment and their relationship to the social context that surrounds their music in their performance. The concept of performance is also important to understand. Performance refers to how one acts in their environment or whatever space they are in. When it comes to a subject being filmed on camera it can dramatically alter a performance, especially when the director plays a role in directing the performer. Drill music videos are not directed by a professional director but there is a performance going on within the videos and this performance tells us something about the subject and their relation to the space in which they are interacting with. Space is essential in this study. Social context or social space refers to the environment or space that plays a role in a person's actions or performance. The social context in drill music is Chicago. There are many aspects of Chicago that play a role in drill music and they are evidenced through the performances in the video. Understanding the social context allows us to understand some of the

responses that black males have when they are denied masculinity and how it is indicative of the conditions of their environment. Masculinity, particularly black masculinity is one of the most important terms to this study. As I mentioned, black masculinity does not have a single definition, but it pertains to the roles, behaviors, and characteristics that a black man is expected to live up to in response to the denial of patriarchy. In popular media the standards of black masculinity are often closely related to past stereotypes of blackness that were created by white men to reinforce the notion of white superiority. While the media plays a large role in the construction of black masculinity and creating the standard of it, the social context that is often removed in representations plays an even larger role. Essentially this project will display the connection of the social context to black masculine performances in hip-hop through drill music videos.

Chapter 2: Reconnecting Social Context to Hip-Hop through Drill Music

Lil Jojo

On April 27th, 2012, an eighteen-year-old drill music artist by the name of Joseph “Lil (Little) JoJo” Coleman released a song and video entitled *3HunnaK (2012)* (300 K). Lil Jojo raps the lyrics “these niggas claim 3hunna but we BDK,” meaning Black Disciple Killer. Other than the lyrics, the song is not original. The instrumental and cadence of *3HunnaK* is the same as the instrumental and cadence found in a song by one of the most recognized drill music artists, Chief Keef, who the song is also targeted towards, entitled *Everyday (2012)*. The song and video are an explicit taunt directed at Chief Keef and affiliates/members of the gang “300” which is a neighborhood faction of the Black Disciples Gang that Keef is affiliated with. This video is unlike typical commercial hip-hop videos seen on television. The setting of the video seems to be on location in Chicago alternating between interior shots of a house and exterior shots on an indecipherable block. The lack of an organized film set shows us that this video was not constructed on a large budget. Everyone in the video is a young African American male and there are no women present. The young men in the video, including Jojo, are all members of 069 Bricksquad, a neighborhood faction of the Gangster Disciples located on the 69th block of Englewood, hence the number 069 in the name. All the young men in the video seem to be between the ages of 16 through 25 and many of them are wielding firearms aiming them towards the camera as Jojo raps. The quality of the video seems as though it was negligible during production which leads one to believe that many of the firearms in the video were not props but were owned by the people who carried them. The resolution of the video is grainy, the audio track is often unsynchronized with Lil Jojo’s mouth and many of the shots are out of focus. These components allow one to infer that the purpose of this video was not to entertain or

visually satisfy mainstream audiences like the commercial hip-hop video, rather it was a message to a very different audience, a tool used to humiliate and intimidate the rival gang members who oppose them.

At 4:13 PM on September 4th, 2012 Lil Jojo tweeted out his location on the 69th block of Englewood in Chicago on the social media platform, Twitter (@OsoArrogantJojo). 5 hours later at 9pm Lil Jojo was shot on the same block that he tweeted about and was pronounced dead on the scene (Gorner and Kot). At around 2:24 AM on September 5th, 2012 in a now deleted tweet, Chief Keef, tweeted “Its Sad Cuz That Lil Nigga JoJo Wanted To Be Just Like Us #LMAO (Nostro).” Keef would later go on to say that his account was hacked but the feud between him and JoJo became highly publicized after JoJo’s death and offered people a glimpse into the social spaces of Chicago that many young black males inhabit. People began to realize that drill music and the videos that are created reflect a larger and much deeper systemic crisis plaguing young black men that are rooted from these spaces. This example of Lil Jojo and the circumstances surrounding his death that included, an extremely low budget video used to humiliate rival gang members, the posting of his location on the internet and the close-knit gang performance within the video are primary characteristics of drill music and the connection that it has to social context of Chicago that will be explored in this chapter.

This chapter will introduce literature and concepts that highlight the connection of black masculine performances in drill music to the social context of Chicago from which they come from. Ultimately this chapter will be an example of the way that drill music provides a different type of performance than the ones found in commercial hip-hop videos. One that is connected to the social context of Chicago.

This chapter is split into four sections. The first section will introduce drill music, where it started, the characteristics of the people who are involved in it, and the significance of studying it. The second section of this chapter will focus on the modes of production of drill music videos. This section on modes of production helps us see the difference between drill music videos and the prototypical “commercial hip-hop” video and segues into the third section. This section juxtaposes drill music and commercial hip-hop. It will provide an explanation on how the commercial hip-hop video functions and the criticisms around it. Also, it will show how a subgenre of hip-hop can fall under the umbrella of commercial hip-hop. As we will see, one of the biggest differences between commercial hip-hop and drill music is the way in which space is portrayed in the videos. The final section will analyze the social context of Chi-Raq (a nickname for Chicago) and how it functions within drill music video.

Drill Music

Drill music is a subgenre of hip-hop that originated in the poverty-stricken districts of Chicago, Illinois, primarily in the districts on the south side of Chicago during the years of 2011-2012. Many of the residents in these inner cities are African American. During 2011 the U.S. census reported that out of the 9.5 million metropolitan residents of Chicago there were about 1.7 million black residents (Bureau). Many of the drill music artists’ ages range between 15 to 21 years-old. The poverty rate of Chicago for people of all races who were under 18 years old was at 21.6 percent. Of that 21.6 percent, African Americans who were under eighteen years old accounted for 41.2 percent of those in poverty. These statistics are relatively important in understanding drill music because they reflect socioeconomic disadvantages of the drill artists. These numbers are also significant because this time frame was also when drill music emerged.

HOMICIDES AND POVERTY RATES IN CHICAGO, BY CENSUS TRACT³⁰

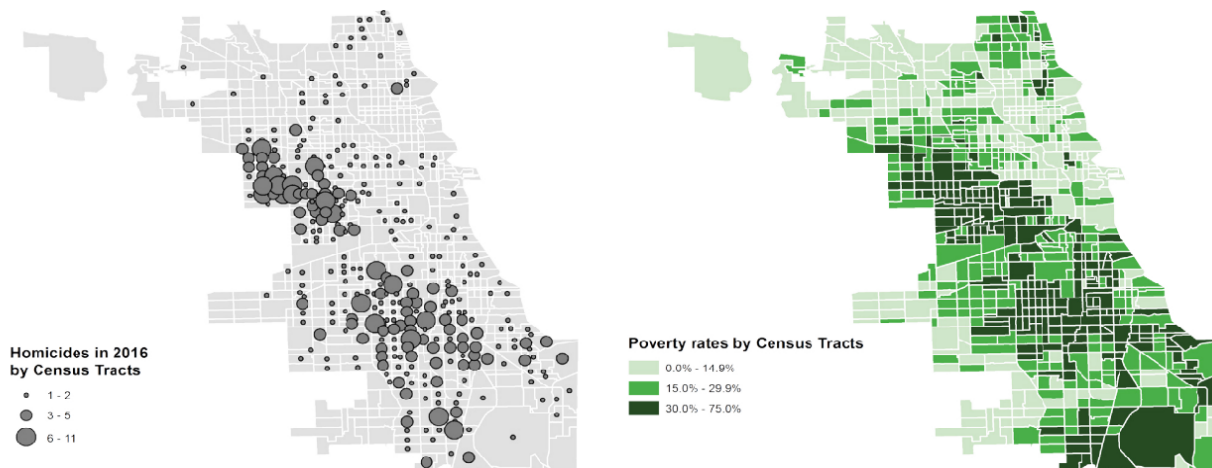


Figure 1: A map of Chicago that displays the 2016 poverty and homicide rates by area. Image from (Heartland Alliance)

Figure 1 displays a map of Chicago and the centers of poverty and homicides within each district during 2016. The green spaces indicate districts where the poverty rate is between 15-29 percent while the black spaces indicate where the poverty rate is between 30-75 percent. The homicide numbers almost directly reflect the same areas where there are cases of poverty. As we can see poverty and homicides occur disproportionately on the south and west sides of the city with extreme cases happening specifically in concentrated areas. While the extreme cases of poverty and homicides that occur on the west side of Chicago are alarming it will not be the focus of this analysis because of its lack of representation through hip-hop videos. That isn't to say that there aren't hip-hop artists from those areas but none of their music or videos provide us with enough content to analyze the music videos relation to the space. Drill music is exclusively a subgenre that occurs on the southsides of Chicago.

One of drill music's most defining characteristics is its usage of extremely local and personal narratives that are encoded within the song lyrics and videos. As we saw in the case of Lil Jojo, his performance within his *3HunnaK* video was indicative of the space and circumstances that surrounded him. The lyrics and video had a social significance to the personal life of the artist in the way that it portrayed his disdain for his rivals. This significance was directly related to an existing feud between Jojo's gang, 069 Brickboyz also known as Brick Squad, and the rival gang, 300. As Jojo raps in the song, "Durk say (said) "Fuck Brick Squad," so I can't wait to catch him (Lil Jojo)." This line is directly targeted towards a drill artist from 300, named Lil Durk. The line references a song by Lil Durk in which he disrespectfully called out Lil Jojo's gang (Lil Durk). While it is unknown why the feud initially began between the two gangs, this instance displays the encoded meanings within the narratives of the song and videos and what they personally mean to the artists who perform them.

Drill music artists use their music as a tool to assert themselves against rival gang members and as a vehicle of humiliation to refer to opposing neighborhood gangs often mocking rival gang members deaths or bragging about crimes they have committed against other gangs. In *3HunnaK*, Jojo claims that he cannot wait to catch Lil Durk meaning that he is ready to cause physical or great bodily harm to him evidenced by the title of the song *3HunnaK* or *300 Killer*. In this way drill music is not about creating an image for entertainment purposes as much as it is about maintaining a social image through the music and videos. Lil Jojo was verbally attacked, and it was his duty to defend his neighborhood and gang.

Despite his attempts to assert himself through his music, his life came to a tragic end at a young age. There are many artists in drill music whose career was cut short due to death or imprisonment such as, RondoNumbaNine, LA Capone, Young Pappy, Lil Marc and many more. This is a major characteristic within drill music lyrics and videos. For example, most of the homicides in Chicago are a result of gun violence (CBS). In almost all of the videos there are guns present and or there are hand gestures that mimic firing one.

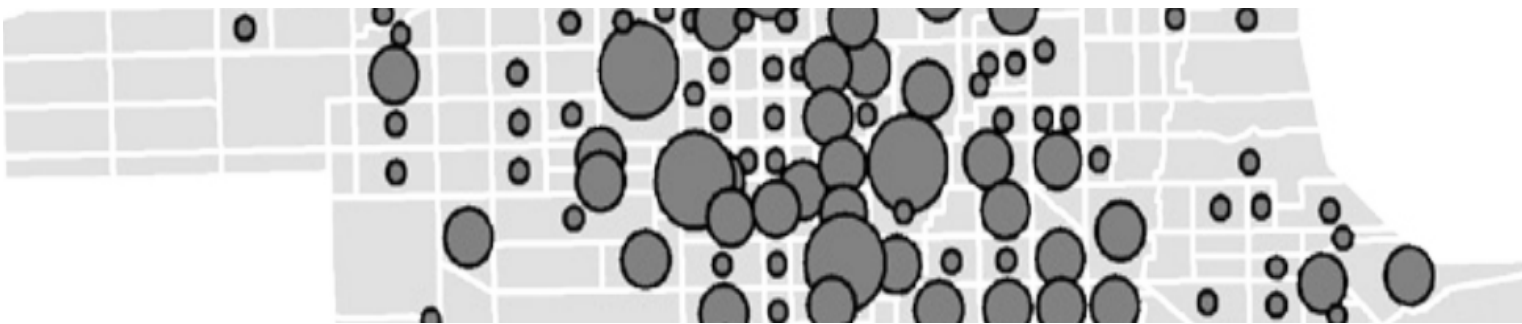


Figure 2: A close up view of the homicide chart from the blocks of 51st Street through 75th Street of Chicago (Heartland Alliance)

Figure 2 provides us with a closer look at the homicide chart from **Figure 1**. **Figure 2** shows the homicide numbers in the epicenters of drill music, 51st Street to 75th Street. These are the primary locations of drill music artists and where much of the music comes from. The violence in which they perform within their videos is essentially a reflection of the violence around them.



Figure 3: A map of Chicago neighborhoods from 51st Street through 75th Street with stars representing the 069 Brick Squad (Yellow Star) 300 (Black Star). (Image from: https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/doit/general/GIS/Chicago_Maps/Citywide_Maps/City_Neighborhoods_1978_11x17.pdf)

Figure 3 is a more detailed map of 51st Street through 75th Street that includes two stars that show the proximity of 069 Brickboyz and 300. The two rival gangs are separated by a matter of a few blocks. This trend is recurrent in drill music as many artists who are affiliated with the drill music scene belong to gangs that are separated from each other by the systemic configurations of their neighborhood. These systemic configurations are heavily represented in drill music and are primary components in the drill identity as we saw in the case of Jojo who created a song and video that served no other purpose other than discrediting a rival neighborhood gang. Their hip-hop performance is directly linked to their circumstances within their environment. In this way drill music encapsulates a first person detailed account of the real-life atrocities that many young black males inside of an oppressive system face unlike any other form of hip-hop. In the following sections I will attempt to highlight the differences and

similarities between black masculine performances of drill music and performances in the commercial hip-hop videos that are the focus of hip-hop scholarship.

Production of Drill Music Videos

An important characteristic that distinguishes drill music from other forms of hip-hop is the way in which it is produced and distributed. The production and distribution systems of drill music adds to the authenticity of the videos. In drill, all the music videos are produced by independent videographers using DSLR cameras and uploaded globally through the video sharing website, YouTube. Take for instance the career of the well-known Chicago based videographer, Duan “DGainz” Gaines. Gaines is responsible for a large amount of drill music videos. Gaines had no professional training in video work other than his work with drill music videos (Drake). For many of his early works during the emergence of drill music, he used a Canon Rebel T1i. The small makeup of DSLR cameras allowed for Gaines to capture footage with ease, relying heavily on the autofocus feature. Gaines also produced many of the instrumentals and recordings for many of the drill artists during its emergence. One video in particular, *I'm a Hitta* (Hitter) (2011) by Lil Durk, is a prime example of how drill music videos and songs come together and are distributed. As Gaines says about the video in an interview,

“I took all my studio equipment over to Durk’s house and we recorded the song. I don’t think we finished it the first day, so I went back over there and we finished the song [a second day]. When we were playing the song everybody was coming in and going crazy. Like, ‘Damn, that shit is a hit.’ So then I wanted to do like a little preview video to it just to let people hear a preview of the song. So we shot like a two-minute quick video, with just three scenes. And we just blew up. When I put it out everybody was just going crazy (Drake).”

In the video, there is no lighting set up other than the natural light coming from the light inside of the house where they shoot, there are no props and there is only one setting throughout

the entire video. Being that Gaines was the producer of the instrumental, engineer of the song and the director of photography for video the time it took getting the final product was minimized. In all music genres, the music video is usually done much after the song has been created and even after the video is recorded the editors take their time in carefully constructing the final product (Banks). Drill music does not follow this model of production. As evidenced in the passage by Gaines, the quick turnaround time of production was essential in getting people to react and enjoy the video. He intended for the video to be a “quick video” to accompany the song and get people to see a visual. Just like all of Gaines videos, *I'm a Hitta* was uploaded to his YouTube account and the song and accompanying mixtape were uploaded to mixtapes sites such as DatPiff and LiveMixtapes. Mixtapes are essentially free albums from artists who are not signed to a record label and do not generate a profit. The sites were pivotal to drill music because it allowed for the artists to upload their music without having to worry about the logistics of the hip-hop industry. Drill artists could then share the songs and videos worldwide through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook that other people who listened would also share. As we can see from the modes of production and distribution, drill music had zero corporate influence.

Scholars, Desmond Patton, Robert Eschmann and Dirk Butler state that, “Social media allows anyone to reach a broad audience. Viral videos become widely popular, seemingly overnight without corporate marketing. Social media has taken hip-hop’s place as the medium through which individuals are able to ‘keep it real’ (Patton, Eschmann and Butler 58).” Drill artists did not have any ties to record labels nor did they rely on outside video productions. This independence from the corporate influence and jurisdiction on the product was a defining characteristic of drill music and is what attributed to its anti-corporate success.

Drill Music versus Commercial Hip-Hop

In hip-hop there are many different sub-genres. A few include alternative hip-hop, west coast hip-hop, east coast hip-hop, gangsta rap, mumble rap, trap music and many others that have their own styles and characteristics to them. “Gangsta rap” is one of the most controversial and critiqued sub genres of hip-hop. Out of all the subgenres, drill music has strong resemblance to gangsta rap. Benjamin Bowser explains the term gangsta rap by saying, “Gangsta rap is distinct from all other rap in its focus on violence, gun use, consuming and selling drugs, and killing others (Bowser 67).” Violence amongst black people is almost always represented as having occurred because of hip-hop, particularly gangsta rap. (Slay). Geraldo Rivera, a frequent guest on Fox News and former talk show host, best exemplifies this notion in his 2015 interview with the Huffington Post where he says, “Hip-hop has done more damage to black and brown people than racism has in the last ten years (HuffPost Live).” This is one of the primary misconceptions of black masculine hip-hop performances. Many of the commercial hip-hop performances are so distanced from their site of origin and lack a connection to the larger social context that to some critics it serves no purpose other than to perpetuate destructive behavior.

At first listen, one may conclude that there is no distinction between drill music and gangsta rap. Before drill music became a distinguished genre in 2011 the word “drill” was a term that many young black Chicagoans used to refer to gun violence. As Chicago hip-hop artist G Herbo, who disassociates himself from the genre, states in an online interview, “The term drill means to shoot somebody, to kill somebody. If you go on a drill, you going to shoot a gun that’s where the term drill came from. So, drill music is violent music, music to go kill somebody to, basically (GwininFilms).” This passage exemplifies the way that drill music is an embodiment of actual violence. In a sense this passage shows us how drill music is a result of the space in which

the artists inhabit. Hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose would probably argue that drill music has no social significance because it does not directly oppose the problematic elements of the violence that plagues Chicago. She claims that, “Gangstas and hustlers were not invented out of whole cloth by corporate executives: Prior to the ascendance of corporate mainstream hip hop, these figures were more complex and ambivalent. A few were interesting social critics (Rose 2).” In this passage she indicates that although many artists portrayed a gangsta image they still spoke on social issues and expressed their critiques and for this reason were valuable. However, now that the image of the gangsta has been so commodified that the gangsta image as a whole has zero significance to a larger social context. As she says,

“The problems facing commercial hip hop today are not caused by individual rappers alone; if we focus on merely one rapper, one song, or one video for its sexist or gangsta-inspired images we miss the forest for the trees. Rather, this is about the larger and more significant trend that has come to define commercial hip-hop as a whole. The trinity of commercial hip hop (gangsta, pimp, ho stereotype) has been promoted and accepted to the point where it now dominates the genre’s storytelling worldview (Rose 8).

Rose’s contextualization of the commercial hip-hop stereotypes is similar to the tropes of black men and women that Donald Bogle introduced. Just as negative stereotypes of black men were created and perpetuated through television and media, commercial hip-hop created an image of black masculinity that permeated throughout the genre, especially in the case of the gangsta image. Rose suggests that at one time the gangsta image was much more complex and had a deeper relationship to the social space that he was in. However, this social awareness would later be overshadowed by the caricature of the deviant black male that so closely resembled past stereotypes of black men. Drill music is not excluded from performing these tropes. In fact, one can argue that drill music artists perform these tropes more than any commercial hip-hop artist would. The most significant aspect of drill music artists’ performances of black masculinity is that it is used to satisfy the artists’ ideologies about themselves. Drill

music displays the tropes of mass media and how they are internalized and become lived realities outside of the music and performances in videos. While drill artists are perpetuating these negative images of black men, the goal of authentication is not solely based on the success of their representation of black masculinity in mass media.

For instance, “gangsta rap” artists, like drill artists, also use their music to assert themselves and humiliate other artists. The key difference lies in the capitalistic motives of the music that undermine the significance of the performance. “Diss Records”, as they are referred to in gangsta rap, are songs that are released by an artist to insult or disrespect another artist. They are often heavily publicized in the mass media and used as a marketing tool to generate a large following for an artist by record labels. Unlike drill music, diss records and the videos that accompanied them in Gangsta rap were corporate investments. Take for instance the iconic feud between hip-hop artists 2Pac and the Notorious B.I.G during 1996 (Watts 723). The two artists are quintessential figures of the gangsta rap genre. In June of 1996, 2Pac released a song and video entitled *Hit Em Up (1996)* three months before he would be murdered. The song is a direct verbal attack against the Notorious B.I.G. and all the people that he is affiliated with. In the song 2Pac claims that he had sexual relations with the B.I.G.’s wife, that he will make B.I.G. feel his wrath and will shoot B.I.G. when he sees him. Just like many cases in drill music, the problem between the two artists stemmed from a larger event that was largely related to space. In 1995, while in New York City at a recording studio in which B.I.G. was also present, 2Pac was shot five times by two unknown assailants who he believed were affiliates of B.I.G. (Westhoff). 2Pac was a prolific artist from California while B.I.G. was a staple of New York hip-hop. New York and California were the power houses of hip-hop music. 2Pac and B.I.G.’s feud was not only a feud that determined who was the better artist but was a feud that determined what coast was the

true power house of the hip-hop industry. Being that B.I.G. was such a prominent figure in the New York hip-hop scene, 2Pac felt as though B.I.G. had some involvement in the shooting or at least knew about it. To add insult to injury a month after the shooting B.I.G. released a song entitled *Who Shot Ya* (1995). The single was released on a B-Side of one of the singles from B.I.G.'s *Ready to Die* (1994) album and was not featured on the original album. While B.I.G. claimed that the song and incident had no relation to one another the way that it was marketed and released directly after the shooting led people to believe that there was some type of connection between him and the incident (Dukes). Therefore, 2Pac felt that it was essential to assert himself through humiliating B.I.G.

What makes this performance so much different than those in drill music is the context in which the performance is constructed and distributed. As Sturken and Cartwright state, “The meaning of images, however can change dramatically when they move across these different social contexts (Cartwright and Sturken 40).” For example, in a behind the scenes clip of the *Hit Em Up* video we see the artificial construction of the video (Calibre Music & Film). There is a director, director of photography, lighting set ups, a green room. Within the video, there is an actor who impersonates B.I.G. whom 2Pac torments throughout the video. The setting of the video takes place on a white cyclorama. The video shoot is clearly on a large budget. All these factors found in the composition of the video indicate that aside from the song being used as a tool to humiliate another artist, its purpose was to make a commercial profit. The commercial context changes our interpretation of the authenticity of the song, making it appear as the feud was a ploy to make a profit. Unlike drill music, where the internet and social media platforms are the primary modes of distribution, smaller record labels must rely on distribution deals from larger corporations for their music to be distributed and played on radio (MacDonald). In this

case, 2Pac was an artist on the independent record label Death Row Records but Death Row Records was under a distribution deal with Interscope records, a larger record label who garnered around 90 million dollars as a record label in 1993. (Gantt). In a distribution deal there is an immense amount of pressure to sell records. As Heather MacDonald says, “With a distribution deal, you only make money on what you sell, and your label is responsible for manufacturing and promotion. If you make a lot of money, you get to keep it all. But if you lose a lot of money on the album, then the losses all come from your pocket (Macdonald).” The construction of a large buzz for an album is essential in recouping the money that was invested into an artist’s album. People could sympathize with 2Pac’s distrust of the Notorious B.I.G. after being shot but what baffled critics was the way that the song was a commercial driven response. Just like Notorious B.I.G.’s *Who Shot Ya, Hit Em’ Up* was not included on 2Pac’s 1996 album *All Eyez on Me (1996)* but was released months later on the B-Side of a single from the album. As J.R. Reynolds says in a 1996 article,

“2Pac’s hate-filled bravado on “Hit ’Em Up,” a track that is not on his current album, only reinforces damaging false perceptions of hip-hop and rearms uninformed zealots, such as C. DeLores Tucker, to do increased harm to those reality rappers who constructively serve as true “ghetto CNN correspondents.” This leads to the question of why black radio would play such a destructive song. It’s obscene that stations have apparently become so wrapped up in garnering ratings and reputations that they would air such audio garbage (Reynolds).”

Reynolds frustrations are with the way the song and video romanticize delinquent black masculine performances and how record companies and radio stations promote it for a profit. Reynolds is also frustrated with the way that 2Pac, who is heralded as a “reality rapper” that speaks on social issues, would participate in such a destructive performance. Fueled by real events, the song and video glorify the destructive performances by taking it out of the context in which it happened and producing an aesthetically pleasing and entertaining version of the event.

Hit Em Up is a prime example of how events with a social significance can be taken out of the social context and made into commodified version of itself that completely alters our interpretation.

Labels often construct a superficial image of black masculine hip-hop performances due to their motives to make money. Any artist who performs the characteristics of what Bowser deems “gangsta rap” is attempting to exploit hip-hop for commercial purposes. He says “commercial rap, especially gangster rap, is not hip hop and is, in fact, opposed to hip-hop. Gangster rap should not be viewed as identical to hip hop. The music itself, as well as the hip-hop philosophy and movement, will be compromised in the long term if gangster rap continues to be associated with it (Bowser 99).” The earlier quotes from Rose and Reynolds, and this quote from Bowser all refer to the commercialization of hip-hop through gangsta rap as a compromise to hip-hop’s ability to report and critique the systemic issues plaguing the black community. Although gangsta rap has a social significance the performances are commercialized, and the underlying contexts of the music are removed just as we saw in the case of 2Pac’s *Hit Em Up*. Gangsta rap like most commercialized forms of hip-hop are almost always removed of the social context that fuels the performance and leads one to overlook the way that space intersects with deviant black masculine behavior.

Chi-Raq

Murray Forman writes about the way space brings meaning to what people do in his book the *‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and hip-hop*, by saying,

“The “where” of experience has a powerful influence over the social meanings derived from the experiences themselves, for just as our actions and mobilities bring space into cultural relief, so, too, does socially produced space bring meaning to our actions. The

category of space compromises the social arena in which individuals reproduce or challenge their experiential boundaries of action and interaction (Forman 23).”

Forman’s observation relates to the way Chicago plays a central role in drill music. As previously stated in the earlier sections, the neighborhood in which the drill artist lives in plays a role in constructing the music and the performances in the video. The social context of Chicago has a strong connection to the identity of the performers. Drill artists refer to Chicago as “Chi-Raq”, a combination of the names of the city of Chicago and the Middle Eastern country, Iraq. The name stems from the number of homicides in Chicago since 2001 being significantly higher than the number of casualties for U.S. troops who were stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 (McCarthy). For example, the social context of Chi-Raq is exemplified in drill music artist, Lil Reese’s *Traffic* (2013). Lil Reese, who is also a member of 300 raps alongside fellow gang member and music affiliate, Chief Keef. The video composition is structured the same as we see in most drill music videos. There are around twenty to thirty people who surround the artists as they perform, there is seemingly no type of professional set up and they all are in one central location in Chicago. What gives us a sense of the intersection between space and performance are the lyrics within the song that accompany the visual in which Lil Reese raps,

We ain’t really with that talking, bitch we love that action

I lost so many niggas, turned into a savage.

And real life no movie shit, bitch we clapping (shooting).

Where I’m from? It’s Chi-Raq, you get left as a tragic (Lil Reese).

In the lyrics he points out that he loves controversy and that because of his loss of so many friends he is now a deviant within society. Forman in the earlier passage indicated that the “where” of experience played a significant role on the experience. Chi-Raq encourages

detrimental black masculine performances and has conditioned those who live there to be unaffected by it. Lil Reese even asks us a question and responds to it by saying, “Where I’m from? It’s Chi-Raq,” as if it is preconceived knowledge that his identity and his behavior is a normal characteristic of Chi-Raq. To him his destructive choices are not a problem, but they are what gives him his identity in the space that he is in.

Drill music artists validate their authenticity through the social context of Chi-Raq. They use the negative situations as markers of authenticity. Hip-hop scholar Kembrew McLeod mentions the need for authenticity within hip-hop by saying, “For many, keepin’ it real means not disassociating oneself from the community from which one came - the street. Moreover, it means emphasizing one’s ties to the community (which partially explains why so many hip-hop artists mention the name of their neighborhood in their songs) (McLeod 142).” Drill music embodies and represents the violence and murder that Chi-Raq is plagued with and it also challenges the confines that society has placed upon them by using the unfortunate circumstances as a tool of achieving self-identity. Richard Majors and Janet Billson in their book *Cool Pose the Dilemma of Black Manhood*, present a concept called the “cool pose” that explains the need for black males to create a destructive identity to survive in a restrictive society (Majors and Billson 2). The cool pose is largely related to authenticity. As Theo Van Luween states, “Authenticity’ can also mean ‘authorized’, bearing a genuine signature, or stamp, or seal of approval. In the end, something is authentic because it is declared authentic by an authority, whether or not scientific methods or historical scholarship have been used in deciding on it (Theo 393). As Van Luween states there must be an authoritative figure that must validate authenticity. There are two validators of drill music performances. One is the image of black

men in mass media and the second is drill artists who have defined their masculinity based off of their oppressive social context in Chi-Raq.

Conclusion

There are a lot of similarities and differences between drill music and commercial hip-hop. The topics that are found in drill music and commercial hip-hop, specifically gangsta rap, are almost identical. The differences lie within the video productions, distribution, social context and purpose of the videos' production. Despite the similarities, the contrasts within the videos create a different context which allow for different readings of black masculine performances. Drill music has a direct correlation to a specific social context of Chicago unlike most commercial hip-hop videos that create an image black masculinity that is removed of its social significance.

This chapter has pointed out what separates drill music from commercial hip-hop, and how the performances found within the videos intersect with the social space of Chicago. This next chapter will dive deeper into the social space of Chicago and provide a theoretical framework for understanding how this space produces performances.

Chapter 3: Social Context of Chi-Raq.

In the previous chapter I explained the defining characteristics of drill music and how the space of Chicago, or Chi-Raq, intersects with the performances of black masculinity within drill music. Here, I will take a different approach. This chapter will seek to explain the social space of Chicago and how it constructs the social realities for the black males who perform in drill music. This section introduces theories of the panopticon by Michel Foucault and the white gaze by George Yancy in relation to drill music and the space of Chicago. This chapter will also be used to outline how the social and spatial context of Chi-Raq is a system that functions to restrain those who live in it.

Drill Music, Murder and Incarceration

Two primary examples of the way that the social context of drill music can hold back those who live in it are the fates of two drill music artists Clint “RondoNumbaNine (Rondo Number Nine)” Massey and Leonard “L’A Capone” Anderson. Both artists were up and coming rappers in the drill music scene whose short-lived careers were derailed due to imprisonment and murder. On February 24th, 2014, while he was 17 years old, RondoNumbaNine was involved in the murder of Javan Boyd from Chicago. While no one knows the actual reason for the murder, the Chicago Tribune reported that the murder was believed to be a retaliation for death of another gang member who belonged to Rondo’s gang, 600 (Williams-Harris). He is currently twenty-one years old serving a thirty-nine-year prison sentence for the crime. Unlike Rondo, L’A Capone was the victim of gun violence. On September 26th, 2013, after walking out of a studio recording session, L’A Capone was shot to death in an alleyway by three assailants who were later identified as rival gang members of L’A. He was seventeen years old at the time (Rodriguez).

Deviant behavior often comes at the expense of a person's freedom or life. However, the social space that surrounds artists like L'A and Rondo constructs deviant black masculine behaviors that are necessary for survival. The social space in which these performances flourish has a direct link to the prison industrial complex. For many black males, being imprisoned has already been a lived reality and has become ingrained into the fabric of their mind. This concept is largely related to Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon and the systems of surveillance and control. Foucault claims that systems of confinement, like prisons, are not only tools of suppression but they are also tools of production (Foucault). In drill music, the environment that they are in functions like a prison that suppresses those in it from ever reaching a status of freedom or authority thus forcing them to construct a masculine performance that is linked to deviant behavior. Rashad Shabazz describes prison masculinity by saying, "Masculinity in prison – or prison masculinity- is a complex contradictory performance of masculinity within carceral institutions such as jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities (Shabazz 86)." Prison masculinity is a response to the denial of freedom. Shabazz insists that strategies that are used for containment of black males become the standards that are upheld outside of the prison and become valued. For African-American men, especially in the case of drill music performances, prison masculinity has much to do with reclaiming power and control that has been stripped from them just as it has been stripped away in prisons.

A Native Son of Chi-Raq

Many scholars who study deviant black masculine performances often reference Richard Wright's seminal literary work *Native Son* and the main character Bigger Thomas (Brunious (Brunious; Lemelle Jr.; Neal; Shabazz)). These scholars tend to focus on the way Bigger Thomas performs in society and how it relates to the way in which the space he was in shaped the need

for his deviant behavior. While I will not dive into a full of analysis of Bigger Thomas and *Native Son*, I believe it is important to note the similarities in Bigger Thomas' character and black masculine performances in drill music as it will help us understand the social context of Chicago and how it creates deviant behavior through confinement and subjective white gazes.

Native Son was published in 1940 and the setting takes place during that same time on the Southside of Chicago, Illinois. During this time Chicago was known for its heavily restrictive segregation policies that targeted only African Americans and the large influx of black migrants who came from the Southern states in search of a better life in the North. As Rashad Shabazz states, "Restrictive covenants made housing outside the confines of the Black Belt illegal and inaccessible, using contract law and deed restriction to keep Blacks out of certain Chicago neighborhoods and concentrating them in one place in the city (Shabazz 40)." The confinement of African Americans and reclaiming of masculinity through deviancy are central themes in the story of Bigger Thomas. The narrative captures the way that space plays a role in black identity construction. *Native Son* stands out from other books about African American males in the way that it incorporates the unconscious mind of the main character exposing his fears and inner repressed emotions. Bigger Thomas is a twenty-year old African American who lived in the Black Belt (name given to Chicago's segregated black neighborhood). He lived in a detestable kitchenette, a one room apartment, with his brother, sisters and mother. After his father passed away his family was forced to move into the affordable kitchenette apartment. Bigger disliked working for whites and doing menial jobs but to help his mother he took a job as a grounds keeper with a white family, the Daltons. The Dalton family owned the apartment complex in which Bigger, his family and hundreds of African Americans lived in. Throughout the novel, Bigger constantly reiterates to his friends that he feels like something bad is going to happen to

him because of his interactions with whites even though there are no white characters that physically impose danger on him throughout the novel.

Bigger lacks the ability to assert himself. He is constantly reminded of his inferiority through his living conditions, menial jobs and the poor people who he interacts with. For him this completely diminishes his sense of masculinity and his feeling of value within society. However, one event alters his identity forever after Mr. Dalton asks him to drive his daughter, Mary, to a speech on a Chicago campus. To his surprise, Mary instructs Bigger to pick up her boyfriend and drive them to a secret communist meeting against her father's wishes. This puts Bigger under immense stress. He knows better than to defy Mr. Dalton and white authority, yet he also does not want to anger Mary who could potentially cause a problem for him. Despite his fears, Mary opens up to Bigger about how she is against the segregation of blacks and that the communist party that she is in attempts to fight against the capitalistic power structure that has detained people like him. Although she treats Bigger like an equal, his fear of whites is too great to even believe her genuineness. The trip only gets worse for Bigger as Mary becomes intoxicated before they get home. When they finally reach the Dalton house, Mary is too intoxicated to walk inside the house and up the stairs. Being as silent as possible he carries her up the stairs and puts her in her bed but as he does this Mary's blind mother comes into the room. Afraid that Mary will say something and expose that he is there, he puts a pillow on her face to keep her quiet, unaware that he is smothering her to death. When Mary's mother leaves, Bigger realizes what he has done and is forced to take action to protect himself because he knows no one will believe that he was not intentionally trying to kill her. He takes the lifeless body down stairs into the basement and forces the body inside of the house's furnace. Realizing

that the head won't fit, he cuts it off with a hatchet and forces the remains inside. He then takes her purse and removes a wad of money out of it.

The rest of the story consists of Bigger devising a plan to implicate Mary's boyfriend, but it eventually backfires, and he is sent to jail where he awaits the death penalty. While there are many events that happen after the murder, including the murder of his girlfriend, they are not essential in our understanding of how the story of Bigger Thomas ties to black deviant performances found inside and outside of drill music. What is important to note is the way in which Bigger felt after the murder took place and how this created an appetite for more deviant behavior. As Richard Wright wrote from the perspective of a narrator in the book, "He had done this. He had brought all this about. In all of his life these two murders were the most meaningful things that had ever happened to him. (Wright 224-225)." For Bigger, the murders were not intentional, but they made him feel good. This was not because he found pleasure in the act of murdering someone, but he found pleasure in the fact that he had some type of power over the people and space that literally contained him. When we look at the fate of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* we can see parallels to the fates of RondoNumbaNine and L'A Capone. In all three of these instances the social contexts defined how the three performed in society which ultimately led to imprisonment and or death. Although Bigger Thomas is a fictional character and we do not have access into the internal logic of RondoNumbaNine and L'A Capone, by understanding the way that space is used as a tool of control and power we can make valuable inferences on the deviant black masculine performances in drill music.

The Space that Creates: the Panopticon and the Subjective White Gaze

What the story of Bigger Thomas displays is how spatial structures can serve as remnants of racism and subjective white gazes without a physical body being present. It also shows how

deviance works as a form of resistance to those power structures in efforts to reclaim masculinity. The social space of Chi-Raq operates as a confinement space that is under constant surveillance. This forces many of the African American males who live in these spaces to perform deviant behavior that is directly oppositional to the space. Elijah Anderson in his book *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* calls this defiance, oppositional culture, and says it is a necessary code of the streets. As he says, “They (African Americans) do so to preserve themselves and their own self-respect. Once they do, any respect they might be able to garner in the wider system pales in comparison with the respect available in the local system; thus, they often lose interest in even attempting to negotiate the mainstream system (E. Anderson 313).” The spaces in which these drill artists inhabit function to keep them detained and obedient. By being so confined by their spatial structures and lacking the ability to ever be recognized and valued in American society, deviant performance is essential in assertion of self. These elements of confinement relate largely to the concept of the panopticon that Michel Foucault introduced to us in his book *Discipline and Punish*. Mark Sturken and Lisa Cartwright describe the panopticon by saying,

“The design features a concentric building composed of rings of cells, at the center of which stands a guard tower. This tower has windows and listening ducts that allow the guards to watch over and listen in on prisoners in the cells without themselves being visible or audible in return. Because the guard’s tower’s inner chamber cannot be seen from the cells, inmates can never confirm the guards presence (Cartwright and Sturken 109).”

For Foucault the model of the panopticon not only functions as a model of control but it also functions to make people internalize being controlled and produces certain behaviors. The panopticon is an implicit deterrent often going unnoticed like the non-visible guard who sits at the watch tower. It is used to strip away any source of agency. When this concept is applied to black masculinity there are even more layers to the subjugation. As bell hooks writes, “In

patriarchal culture, all males learn a role that restricts and confines. When race and class enter the picture along with patriarchy, then black males endure the worst impositions of gendered masculine patriarchal identity (hooks X). As hooks suggests, patriarchal masculinity already comes with its own set of standards and restraints. However, these restraints are enforced even more when it comes to black males. The denial of patriarchy is one of the most obvious ways to identify the gazes placed upon black bodies. For many African American males, the inescapable white gaze is present at birth. It subjects many black men and creates a space where they must perform in certain way to find any type of value within themselves as men. As George Yancy states about the white gaze,

“Here is a case where the Black body is condemned before it even acts; it has always already committed a crime. According to Davis’s interpretation of those hardcore anticrime advocates, the Black body is not born free, but is imprisoned by ideological frames of reference that reduce the Black body ontologically to the level of the criminal. Even in the womb, the Black body is already against the law (Yancy 6).”

As Yancy is stating the black body has already been marked within society as deviant. It is not marked by a physical being but by social structures that have been placed on them.

600 as a Site of Confinement

Because many young black men have already been marked as a deviant and confined at a young age there is often need to find a sense of belonging somewhere. Gangs are one of the most defined characteristics within drill music. Gangs are a result of the limited opportunities to find a place in society. Frederic M. Thrasher highlights the early history of gangs in Chicago during the year 1929 in his case study, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, claiming,

“The lure of the gang is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the gang boy is in the adolescent stage which is definitely correlated with gang phenomena. Although this period has no exact limits for any individual, it includes broadly for the boy the years from twelve to twenty-six. It is a time of physical and social development -interstitial

period between childhood and maturity. Its duration is generally marked by conflicts consequent to the larger social milieu which represents a new world for the emerging child. If these new needs for expression are not provided for by the conventional agencies, they will be met in other ways (Thrasher and Short 66).”

By limiting the ability for a young man to grow and develop in society, he is often left with no choice but to resort to gang activity. Although this study was conducted in 1929, Thrasher raises valid points about gang culture in Chicago that can be applied to modern day Chicago gangs.

RondoNumbaNine and L’A Capone were both members of the Black Disciples gang in Chicago, Illinois. As Loretta Brunious says about the number of recorded gangs in 2002, “There are approximately 40 major active street gangs operating within the Chicago area. Structure depends on size of membership and the extent of illegal activity the gang is involved with (Brunious 182).” During the early 70’s and 80’s gangs operated as a large social club. They had their own rules and guidelines that all members followed and they all identified with their gang before anything else (Knox). Today the value systems and organization of Chicago gangs are quite different. Instead of being identified by one of the forty different gangs in an organized crime fashion, members are now classified by their neighborhood and gang affiliation (Chicago Crime Commission). Rondo and L’A’s affiliation to the Black Disciples is secondary to their affiliation with their neighborhood known as “600” or “Steve Drive”. The neighborhood is located on 600 South Prairie Avenue which is where the name “600” is derived. The name “Steve Drive” is a reference to one of the fallen gang members from the neighborhood. These factors are what characterize the neighborhood and because the meanings behind them are so personal, it serves as a model of allegiance for the members. Instead of having hundreds of members, neighborhood gangs are composed of around 20-40 members at a given time (Chicago Crime Commission). During the 70’s-80’s, Chicago gangs served as collective organizations with

hundreds of members who all were on one accord. These gangs were more organized and had leadership. If your gang was rivaled with another gang then you were also a rival to that entire gang no matter what (Knox). Essentially gang participation is about safety and protection which mirrors the prison system. As Shabazz states about Chicago gangs, “They were able to do this because of prison – the violence, in particular – forced men to find avenues of safety. Gangs were key in this because membership could insulate individual prisoners from the violence of prison (Shabazz 86).” Shabazz’s quote relates to Foucault’s theory about the prison system not only containing bodies but also producing bodies that are molded by confinement. The same practices of survival that are found in prison show us how those same practices are needed outside of the prison. As Foucault says,

“In the classical period, there opened up in the confines or interstices of society the confused, tolerant and dangerous domain of the ‘outlaw’ or at least of that which eluded the direct hold of power: an uncertain space that was for criminality a training ground and region of refuge; there poverty, unemployment, pursued innocence, cunning, the struggle against the powerful, the refusal of obligations and laws, and organized crime all came together as chance and fortune would dictate; (Foucault 300)”

Drill music artists are essentially the “outlaw” that Foucault is referencing in this passage. Foucault’s passage explains the role that space plays in giving the “outlaw” a negative domain in which they find meaning. In the same way that the prison system works to keep people contained and controlled so does the individual neighborhoods that drill music artists live in. It is a complex contradiction. On the one hand it is what ultimately destroys the people who live there but is also the one place that they feel that they belong to and have a mutual connection to those that live there. The neighborhood gang is similar to Benedict Anderson’s concept of an imagined community. Imagined communities give people a sense of a mutual connection with one another which allows the spread of nationalistic views (B. Anderson). Although the neighborhood gang

is different than the nation-state, the confinements of the neighborhood create a sense of mutual connection just like the imagined community. As Janet Billson and Richard Majors claim, “The gang member’s frustration develops out of a long history of social and economic neglect (Majors and Billson 50) . Unfortunately, the gang member’s frustrations are taken out on other gangs that surround them. This is because of the significance that the space plays in them authenticating their masculinity. This is an example of Foucault’s claim that confinement not only works to control but to also produce. The space in which they live in is essentially the marker of their manhood because it is what has produced them. When someone takes away from this space or attempts to devalue the significance of it, it is essential to protect it at all cost. For instance, drill music artist, 600 Breezy, who is also a member of “600” with Rondo and L’A says that most of the blocks that surround them are blocks with different factions of the Gangster Disciples and many people in his neighborhood are affiliated with the Gangster Disciples (Say Cheese TV). 600 Breezy was originally a Gangster Disciple because his dad raised him to be one despite living in a Black Disciple neighborhood. He eventually changed gangs because of a murder of his best friend. As he says,

“The biggest thing to me that really made me get into being BD (Black Disciple) was when they (A neighboring Gangster Disciple crew) killed my homie Devon. We called peace, they called peace with us and then they killed him the next day, the GDs (Gangster Disciples) did. I grew a hate for them bro because I held him in my arms. You know what I’m saying? His last moments (Say Cheese TV).”

Gangs in Chicago have shifted from being an organized crime group that used deviant behavior to claim a status in patriarchal society. Today, they are much more complex and centered on preserving the authority of the space around them that they forge a connection with.

There are many elements in society that shifted gang culture into what it is today in Chicago. Unlike today, the distribution of drugs was a central part of gang activity in Chicago

especially during the 80s (Shabazz). Drug dealing is a form of deviant behavior used to exert masculinity. However, drug dealing is a different type of exertion. It is used to create capital to claim a spot within patriarchal society through capitalism. Methods of control like Ronald Reagan's "War on Drugs" policy, which exponentially affected African Americans and Latinos, increased methods of surveillance on the poorer inner-city communities increasing FBI antidrug funding from 8 million dollars to 95 million dollars between 1980 and 1984 (Alexander 48). The increased surveillance allowed African Americans to be enclosed in the spaces they were in. As Michel Foucault says, "Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself (Foucault 141)." As surveillance increased this enclosure was made stronger as it placed African Americans under a constant gaze. This increase of surveillance was responsible for many of the gang leaders being incarcerated thus leaving many young members with no guidance (Shabazz). As the leaders were being detained during the 90's and early 2000s, the social context of Chicago through housing regulations and gentrification of neighborhoods began to change spreading many of the disenfranchised African Americans across the city (Popkin). As Shabazz says, "Poverty, a failed education system, and the dismantling of the city's housing projects – which dispersed gangs throughout the city – spread poverty and carceral power horizontally. The long history of housing restriction and the loss of industrial jobs are explanations that help us to understand Chicago's outgrowth of violence (Shabazz 96)."

As Shabazz reiterates, the social factors that affected the social context of Chicago laid the foundation for violence and destructive black masculine behavior. Gangs set the standard of living for the African American males who were involved with them. Elijah Anderson refers to these standards as "the code of the streets (E. Anderson)." The "code of the streets" are survival

tactics. They are like the cool pose in the way that they are both tools for black men to function in society through their dysfunction. The code of the streets includes never letting yourself look weak, being ready to die for your image of masculinity and doing whatever must be done to prove that you are toughest person in your neighborhood and against rival neighborhoods.

Conclusion

All of this information that has been presented speaks to the way that space plays an essential role in constructing performances of black masculinity. Gang culture in Chicago has a complex history that is tied to systematic disadvantages for African Americans. As Shabazz says, “The inability to access these culturally dominant narratives of masculinity against the backdrop of poverty and containment can make seemingly mundane objects like control of a street corner or a sign of disrespect a cause for physical altercation (Shabazz 84).” Because of the limited access to upward mobility many African American males must find value in deviant behavior. For those who perform drill music, the ability to have power is only gifted to those who can exert their power and performance over the space that they are in. This chapter reveals to us the ways in which confinements and deviant behavior can become the norm for black masculinity.

The next section of this chapter will be the case study of Chief Keef and his videos. Chief Keef was the face of drill music that was able to extend beyond the confines of his city and thrust into the commercial Hip-Hop world. This textual analysis will use all of these concepts that were provided in these previous two chapters in order to make a case about Chief Keef and his performances in drill music.

Chapter 4: Chief of Chiraq: Textual Analysis of Chief Keef



Figure 4 Picture of Chief Keef at age 17 (image from <https://www.tinymixtapes.com/news/chief-keef-produce-young-chops-next-mixtape>)

Keith “Chief Keef” Cozart, also referred to as, Sosa (in likeliness of the famous Chicago Cubs baseball player, Sammy Sosa) is a dark-skinned male who stands at about 6’0. He has long black dreadlocks that covers his face. Chief Keef is very soft spoken and carries an expression on his face as though he is disconnected from reality and in his own world similar to that in **Figure 4**. During the time of his rise to mainstream success he was 16 and 17 years old.



Figure 5 Picture of Chief Keef at age 17 (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/dec/03/chief-keef-dedication-review>)

In many of his videos he often does not have a shirt on and when he makes public appearances he is dressed in designer clothing and accessories such as the True Religion denim jacket and large aviator shades that he wears in **Figure 5**. If we were to judge him by his music and by his performances in music videos, we would assume that he is much older than he looks. However, his persona and carefree nature reveal his youth and values evidenced in a 2013 interview where he is asked about rumors that he is 17 years old in which he replies “No, I’m 300 (McCrudden).” His response is directly related to his gang as if to say that he has no identity outside of it.

Chief Keef is a member of the Black Disciples but his neighborhood that he identifies with is “O Block” and he is closely affiliated with the gang, 300. This is a key factor in Chief Keef’s performances in his videos because it is where his identity lies. As I mentioned in the first chapter each block or neighborhood carries its own set of principles and history that essentially characterizes and subjugates those who live there and participate in the gang. The actual name of the block in which Chief Keef lived on was the 6400 block of South Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but the “O” in “O Block” is a reference to the first name of a fourteen-year-old gang member

who lived in the neighborhood and was murdered. As the Chicago Sun-Times reports, “19 people shot on O Block between June 2011 and June 2014. That makes it the most dangerous block in Chicago in terms of shootings in that three-year period. (Main).” Chief Keef’s persona and performances are a direct embodiment of where he is from and it is evidenced by his performances within his music and videos which will be explored throughout this chapter.

In the previous chapters I introduced what drill music was and the social space that produces the performances that can be found within drill. In this chapter I will show how these aspects come together into one performance within the music videos of drill music artist, Chief Keef. Chief Keef represents drill music and he is also a representation of the space of Chicago that many young black males are confined by. He is also a primary example of how the underground genre of drill music emerged into the forefront of commercial hip-hop in 2012. The perceptions and critiques that surround Chief Keef are quite different than those that surround other hip-hop artists. For instance, Chief Keef is regarded as one of the most influential artists in hip-hop (Turner). Multiplatinum hip-hop artist, T.I., comments on the impact that Chief Keef has on the genre by saying,

“I feel like he represents a part of America,” T.I. told MTV News. “He represents a part of the youth in America that ain't really got a voice right now. We looking at 'em, and we're seeing the results of their actions, but we ain't really listening to 'em, and I think you gotta have a representative of each generation in order to understand what they dealing with (Markman, T.I. Say Chief Keef Gives A Voice to 'Youth In America').”

T.I. points out the way that Chief Keef is the voice of the people who have had their voices stripped away. He is a reminder of the frustrations of the oppressed youth whose unbridled anger is expressed in their every movement. Everything about Chief Keef illustrates the connectedness of his performance to the space in which he came from. What is ironic about Chief Keef’s praises are that they are very similar to his critiques in the way that they both are based on Keef’s

representation of space. Award winning Chicago rapper, Rhymefest, exemplifies this duality of perceptions by saying,

“Chief Keef is a “Bomb”, he represents the senseless savagery that white people see when the news speaks of Chicago violence. A Bomb has no responsibility or blame, it does what it was created to do; DESTROY! Notice, no one is talking about the real culprits, the Bomb maker or the pilot who is deploying this deadly force (Labels, Radio Stations). Its easier to blame the bomb. Bombs are not chosen for their individual talents, they are tools used for collateral damage. To think of the persona of Chief Keef as a person would be the first mistake, he will more then likely come and go without us knowing much of anything about his personal pains, struggles, great loves and ambitions beyond rap. He is a spokesman for the Prison Industrial Complex. Every corporation is expected to grow at least 4% each quarter, many prisons are privately owned with stock being traded on the open market. If these corporations were to do commercials, jingles and promotions who would they hire (Smith)?”

In both T.I. and Rhymefest’s comments we see how representation of space, specifically Chicago, is what makes Chief Keef such a spectacle. Rhymefest has been an artist and advocate of stopping violence in Chicago for a large part of his career which may be a reason why he viewed Chief Keef with such displeasure (Williams). The scary thing for Rhymefest was not that Chief Keef was portraying a false narrative about the deviancy of black men in Chicago but that he was representing it in a commercially driven context. It is important to note that during this time when these comments were made the then 17-year-old Chief Keef had just signed a \$6 million-dollar record deal to Interscope Records, the same label that distributed 2Pac’s music before his death. MTV reports, “According to the report, the two deals can bring Keef more than \$6 million in earnings if certain sales goals are met — and that's not counting the income he could potentially earn from future royalties (Markman, Chief Keef's Interscope Deal Revealed to be Worth \$6 Million).” While it is uncertain, this fear of the direct embodiment of the unbridled Chicago youth being commercialized is perhaps what led Rhymefest to critique Keef claiming that he was just a bomb being deployed by music corporations to destroy black youth.

Rhymefest's critique shows how the social context of a performance can change the way it is perceived. When we look at Chief Keef's performance outside of the context of the record label in his earlier videos that were free of corporate influence we see a different meaning in his performances. In this chapter, I will focus on three music videos from Chief Keef and provide a textual analysis of each. These videos will be analyzed through a documentary theory framework. The first video *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix) (2011)* featuring Chicago drill artists, S.Dot, Edai & Chief Keef, is a cover of a song of the same name, *Hustle Hard (2011)*, by hip-hop artist, Ace Hood. This analysis will focus on the ways in which the two videos compare and what these differences mean when we look at drill music as an anti-commercialized product. The second video to be analyzed is Chief Keef's breakout single *Don't Like (2012)*. The video is rich for analyzation because it completely counters the formula of commercial hip-hop videos, yet it thrusting him into the mainstream audience's eye garnering over twenty million views on YouTube. This section will show the way that space is embedded into the video and what meanings we can draw from the performance. The last video that will be analyzed is Chief Keef's *Fuck Rehab (2014)*. This video will serve as an example of the negotiation of representation between artist and record label. The video is a stark contrast to Chief Keef's earlier videos and it highlights how changing the social context within the video gives us a completely different representation and interpretation of the performance.

Chief Keef's music videos can serve as examples that encourage us to question many of the criticisms that surround black masculine performances in hip-hop for several reasons. Firstly, Chief Keef's initial music videos in his rise to fame were independently produced. This is not to say that they are filmed by him, but the videos are counterculture to the traditional commercial way of making hip-hop videos that are created with the cooperation of a record labels. This

difference opens up new ways of interpreting hip-hop performances and some of the ethical issues that arise during production. All of his initial videos have characteristics of a documentary film. For this reason, this study will rely heavily on concepts and ideas from documentary theory primarily from Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. The second reason Chief Keef is an important figure to analyze is the way in which his videos encapsulate the social context in which his music is derived.

Policing Chicago & Chief Keef's Black Male Image

On July 25th, 2015, 30 miles from the city of Chicago in Hammond, Indiana a benefit concert for a 13-month-old toddler and 22-year-old male who were slain in a drive by shooting in Chicago was abruptly ended by police officers. The victims of the shooting were both close associates of the rapper Chief Keef and the event was organized on behalf of him and others to raise money for the victim's family. The concert was initially slated to be staged in Chicago but as soon as the concert was announced, Chicago City Hall contacted the mayor of Hammond, Indiana and ordered for the concert to be canceled stating that the show "posed a significant public safety risk" (Quinn and Parker). The mayor of Hammond, Mayor McDermott, stated that, "I know nothing about Chief Keef... All I'd heard was he has a lot of songs about gangs and shooting people — a history that's anti-cop, pro-gang and pro-drug use. He's been basically outlawed in Chicago, and we're not going to let you circumvent Mayor Emanuel (The Mayor of Chicago) by going next door (Coscarelli)." The concert included a lineup of several popular artists including, Lil Bibby, Jacquees, Tink, and Riff Raff along with Chief Keef. Although Chief Keef could not be in attendance during the benefit concert, he partnered with a company that allowed for him to stream a prerecorded hologram image of himself. During the performance that was captured on a YouTube video, the host of the event announces Chief Keef to the stage

and the crowd begins to cheer hysterically as if the artist is physically standing in front of them. The Chief Keef hologram says to the audience of about 2,000 people, “If you got goals, achieve them. If you got dreams, believe them. Stop the violence, stop the killing, stop the nonsense and let the kids grow up (NICKYFILMS).” After his statement he begins to perform his most popular song *Don't Like (2012)* but it is abruptly cut short after less than two minutes. The video ends with a swarm of police officers telling everyone to leave the premises and a perplexed crowd of concert attendants exiting the venue.

The policing of the hologram image reveals to us the ways that black masculine hip-hop performance is only acceptable when it is understood as a performance and not a direct representation of an existing issue. By embodying the characteristics of his environment, Chief Keef becomes the image of his environment and carries the myths fears and assumptions that go along with it. Chief Keef is directly linked to the social space of his Chicago neighborhood along with the violence that plagues the city, evidenced by the mayor of Hammond, Indiana’s reasoning for canceling the concert. Mayor McDermott also indicates that he is not against rap music but someone like Keef who raps about drugs, gangs, and violence is not welcomed. However, this statement is contradictory. On January 28th, 2017, Twista, a Chicago artist from the late 90s and early 2000s headlined a performance in Hammond, Indiana (Pete). Unlike Chief Keef many of Twista’s song do not address topics that are exclusively related to Chicago, but he does mention violence, gangs and drugs in various songs. For example, in his song, “*I Ain’t That Nigga (2007)*,” Twista talks about how he is not in a gang, but he is close acquaintances of people who are. In one of the lyrics he even says,

And I got plenty of friends and relatives that still be all up in tha (the) mix

Out chere (here) up in tha streets', well f**k this rap shit nigga,

I got guns you ain't gonna (going to) do shit

I ain't gonna be frontin (fronting) and fakin (faking) and actin petite all in my music...

Not uh, that's too lame

When it's on it's on, I pop a nigga, when you gone you gone,

you finna (fixing to) be wiped off the earth like a memory... What's dude name? (Twista)

As we can see in Twista's lyrics, they carry the same elements of what Mayor McDermott deemed as unacceptable, but he still could perform in the town. The difference is that with Twista, we cannot connect his lyrics and performance to a specific social context that extends beyond the music but in Chief Keef's music we can. This is largely because of the way in which the drill music videos add a different social context to the hip-hop performances through their documentary style of production in the videos. Bill Nichols defines a documentary film by saying, "Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary: Second Edition 14)." The quote demonstrates how documentary styles of productions present us with an image of that is directly related to the historical world. With Chief Keef, his mere image is a direct embodiment of the unbridled Chicago youth who must be contained. He is a perspective and participant of a situation that plagues an actual space. As Mark Anthony Neal states, "The most "legible" black male body is often thought to be a criminal body and/or a body in need of policing and containment – incarceration – is just a reminder that the black male body that so seduces America is just as often the bogeyman that keeps America awake at night (Neal 5)." What Neal is getting at is that the same deviant black

face that is a spectacle in mass media is also the same black face that needs to be contained or policed. The hologram is policed because it is more than just a performance, rather it is the deviance of Chicago outside of its social context. While I will not get into a thick description of Twista's performance within his music videos, the next section will continue this sections comparison of commercial hip-hop video performances and drill music video performances and apply a documentary theory framework to help better understands the performances in both.

Hustle Hard

The lesser known video by S.Dot, Edai & Chief Keef entitled *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix)* (2011), is significant to our understanding of drill music performances in relation to commercial hip-hop performances. This video is significant because it is not an original song, rather it is an interpolation of a song by the same name by Miami rapper, Ace Hood. The two songs both have the same instrumental, or the melody behind the vocals, the same cadence, but have different verses and a different chorus. In the original song's chorus Ace Hood raps, "same old shit, just a different day/out here trying to get it, each and every way (Ace Hood)." In the drill remix's chorus, Chief Keef raps, "Out here on the block, each and every day/ drilling with the guys, out here getting paid (S.Dot)." The drill remix is more personal than the original in the way that it states their place on the block and the activities that take place on this block. As we can see, sonically the two songs have very minute differences. Both the songs are about many of the same themes which include doing whatever that can be done during hard times to pay the rent, feed their families and provide for their loved ones. However, the difference lies within the way that the videos represent the song and artists.



Figure 6 Still Image of Chief Keef in *Hustle Hard (drill Remix)* (2011)

The S.Dot, Edai and Chief Keef video begins with an out of focus camera cutting between shots of African American males walking past the camera in front of a brick wall. The camera is shaky indicating that it is being handheld. These young men who are walking back and forth between the camera are obviously between the ages of 14-20. They are also clearly the inhabitants of the neighborhood or affiliates of it, evidenced by the way that many of them are all throwing hand gestures to the camera. These hand gestures symbolize their gang affiliation to the Black Disciples Gang and disrespect to rival gangs. Immediately before the scene cuts to the performance of the song, the camera briefly cuts to an image of a street sign that displays the street name, E 60th St. 6000S. This shows that they are in the 600 gang's neighborhood. The next sequence of shots cuts back and forth rapidly between the street sign and a wide shot of S. Dot standing in front of a building rapping the chorus of the song. The building looks as though it is an apartment complex, and this is the location of the video for the entire song. S.Dot is dressed in a black Aeropostale jacket and is surrounded by 15 to 25 people. Only one of these 15 to 25

people are female, and the rest are males. In the video we can see a young RondoNumbaNine and 600Breezy standing behind the rappers as they perform. There is no structure or cohesiveness to the shots seeming as though the shots are randomly cut together. The shots are almost all wide shots or begin as wide shots and zoom in to medium shots of the artist who is rapping. The b-roll are clips of the artists and the people around them doing hand gestures towards the camera and mouthing the lyrics to the song.

Chief Keef in his performance stands in front of an apartment complex dressed in a white V-neck t-shirt, beige cardigan, and a black beanie hat with about 10 to 15 people around him. Chief Keef is 15 years old at the time and presumably the young men around him are all approximately the same age. They are all dressed the same, many of them have the same dreadlock hairstyles and they all do the same hand gestures as Chief Keef does while he is performing his verse of the song. Most notably the gun hand gesture. There is a sense of unity within the performance. Halfway through the drill remix video, the video unexpectedly cuts to footage of police officers coming to shut down the video shoot due to a disturbance call. The video then cuts to a title card that reads “Dey (They) couldn’t stop the drill,” and the original video resumes playing.



Figure 7 Still Image from Ace Hood's *Hustle Hard* (2011)

Ace Hood's *Hustle Hard* (2011) video is much more choreographed and structured as far as camera placement, background images and cast positions than the drill remix. The video opens with a wide shot of a blue sky with two tall parallel buildings on both sides. The camera begins to pan down slowly revealing Ace Hood walking on a street towards the camera. On both sides of him, there are different people interacting with each other on the streets. To the right of him are two African American males sitting on bikes and further back behind them are a group of about eight people standing in front of the building that we saw when the camera panned downwards. Towards the left of him are two police officers non-verbally communicating with a black man in a tank top who is apparently having a non-verbal confrontation with them. Everyone except the police in the video are black. While the camera is panning down, we hear an off -screen monologue being read by Ace Hood saying, "Every hood got they own hustlers, but this is the hustlers anthem. Hustle hard (Ace Hood)." The song then begins to play as he walks directly in front of the camera, composing a medium shot from his body up to his head. Once he walks towards the center of the camera the song immediately begins to play signifying that his starting position and pace walking towards the camera were strategically planned. We see that

Ace Hood is dressed in a white tank top with a diamond necklace on and his long black dreadlocks are styled and tied to the back out of his face. As soon as the verse begins the camera immediately pans to Ace Hood's right side with him still predominately in the frame and we see a better view of the men on the bikes and the people who were standing by the building. In perfect synchrony with the song, the camera pans to the left side which shows three black kids standing and watching Ace Hood while the police still argue with the man with the white tank top behind them. The camera continues to pan left and right throughout the entire video and with each pan it reveals a different scenario that is a representation of the lyrics from the song. For example, he says "(my) baby need some shoes (Ace Hood)." The lyric is juxtaposed with a black woman who is standing with an infant that has no shirt or shoes and she is struggling to hold the child shown in **Figure 7**. Each image behind Ace Hood are different representations of impoverished African American life. For instance, there are black men who are being harassed by the police, single mothers who are holding their children, children playing in the streets, black men partying with alcohol, riding away in getaway cars and various other aspects that are often associated with the impoverished African American experience. The pan cuts to shots of men and half-dressed women sitting in expensive cars as a symbolization of wealth. Throughout the remainder of the video the setting remains in the same location with Ace Hood never moving out of the medium shot in front of the camera. However, the weather conditions in the video are manipulated to make it appear as if it is raining and snowing to indicate the passage of time and Ace Hood's wardrobe changes accordingly to the accommodate the weather.

The original version of *Hustle Hard* (2011) by Ace Hood juxtaposed to the drill remix of the song highlights the ways in which songs can have the same meaning but the imagery associated with both can completely distort our perception of the narrative within the songs. It

also shows how drill music is different in terms of performance and connection to the environment. Ace Hood's *Hustle Hard* (2011) is obviously a staged performance and this is what ultimately devalues its social significance to the narrative in the song. Ace Hood is not the subject of his lyrics of his song. He is completely removed from the life in which he raps about evidenced by his positioning in the center of the camera in front of the changing scenarios. In his video there are actors who are acting in staged events of the rapped scenarios. Ace Hood is framed to be the narrator of the social space in which he raps about, evidenced by his positioning in the camera and the off-screen voice over within the beginning of the video. This video uses these constructed reenactments to simulate authenticity for the subject within the performance. Tricia Rose explains how some commercialized representations of blackness are detrimental to the perceptions of black people by saying, "By reflecting images of black people as colorful and violent criminals, drug dealers, and sex fiends, this defense is intended to protect the profit stream such images have generated; at the same time, however, it crowds out other notions of what it means to be black and reinforces the most powerful and racist sexist images of black people (Rose 137)." The framing of Ace Hood's video undermines the true significance of these images that are behind him. The video unethically uses these issues of African Americans for the gain of authenticating the videos social context.

Bill Nichols talks about the artificialness of a documentary film when there is too much control held by filmmaker in his book on documentary theory, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary Film*. Nichols says, "In reenactment, the bond is still between the image and something that occurred in front of the camera but what occurred for the camera. It has the status of an imaginary event, however tightly based on historical fact (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* 21)." Ace Hood's *Hustle Hard*

(2011) video exemplifies an event that is a reenactment and that is imaginary. The video is thus framed in a way that undermines the significance of African American struggles for the personal gain of the subject.

One of the biggest ethical issues in documentary lies in the motives of the filmmaker and their representation of the social subjects. For example, In *Nanook of the North* the filmmaker, Robert Flaherty directed his social subject, *Nanook*, in order to capture an ideal performance out of him that displayed Flaherty's positioning on the subject. As William Rothman says in his analysis of the ethics of the film, "Although *Nanook* accurately illustrates aspects of its protagonist's way of life, its primary goal is not to contribute to a body of scientific knowledge of human cultures; it is far from an ethnographic film in the current -sense, for its own purposes, the film underplays the complexity of the social structures, different from ours, specific to *Nanook's* culture." This is essentially what *Hustle Hard's* (2011) director of the video is guilty of. Instead of representing the content of the song lyrics in a way that showcases the problems in African-American communities, it displays it as an imaginary event that is distanced and has no effect on the subject that the video is about. This minimizes the significance of problems in the African American communities.

When looking at *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix)* (2011) we see an entirely different type of black masculine performance and authentication. Evidenced by the length of my description of the videos, there is a lot less going on within the drill remix video. There are no props, no cars, no actors, other than the people that surround the performers, nor any type of editing continuity within the video. One of the biggest differences between this video and Ace Hood's is the distance between the subject and the social space that is being performed in. When Chief Keef's

verse comes on, he is centered in the frame just as Ace Hood was, but he is in close proximity to the people who are behind him shoulder to shoulder as shown in **Figure 6**.

There is no separation or distinction between him and those around him. They are all similarly dressed and are all around the same age group. This solidifies his place in this space as participant rather than an observer or narrator. There is presumably no distance between Keef and the space in which he is in. This lack of distance adds to the context of the song lyrics that are being rapped. For example, Chief Keef raps in the song, “You fuck with me, my niggas put you six feet (S.Dot).” In the performance Keef is legitimizing his claims through the proximity of his gang and his gun hand gestures that are pointed towards the camera. Although this performance does not validate any of his claims that say that his friends will murder someone, it does show the way that the performance is intertwined with the space and that they have a deeper connection to the ideology and perspective of the subject.

Another key difference in this video is the quality of it. The low budget construction of the video is indicative of the conventions found in documentary film that include, location shooting, non-actors, hand-held cameras and natural lighting (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary: Second Edition xi). These elements of production are what allow for a deeper reading of the social actor’s performance as Nichols says, “For many documentaries, the ability to respond to events that do not unfold entirely as the director intends, to, that is, “real life,” plays a central role in the organization of the crew and in its working methods (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary: Second Edition xiv).” Perhaps the most exemplary moment in the video of the documentary form is when the video randomly cuts to the clip of the police coming to break up the video shoot. In the video two African American police officers, one male and one female are seen instructing the young men to leave or go somewhere away from the apartment

building in front of which they are filming. In the background you can hear one of the participants in the video whispering, “CPDK” meaning “Chicago police department killer.” This scene represents the way in which black bodies are constantly policed and the way in which they respond to this policing. Ace Hood’s video used actors behind him to authenticate his performance. Chief Keef’s video and performance is authenticated by the actual environment and the way that he and his entourage resist the structures that attempt to suppress them. As I indicated in the previous chapter, the social space of Chicago works to confine those who live in it. However, this same confinement is what is used as a tool of self-assertion specifically here in the case of the *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix) (2011)* video. As John Fiske says in his writing “*The Culture of Everyday Life*,

“The social order constrains and oppresses the people, but at the same time offers them resources to fight against those constraints. These constraints are, in the first instance, material, economic ones which determine an oppressive disempowering way, the limits of the social experience of the poor. Oppression is always economic. Yet the everyday culture of the oppressed takes the signs of that which oppresses them and uses them for its own purpose (Fiske 158).”

Fiske points out the way in which the confinements that restrain a person can be used for a purpose that benefits those who are oppressed. In this case the police footage adds to the authenticity of the drill music video and the claim that “Dey couldn’t stop the drill.” This resistance to restraints is one of the most prominent themes found within drill music video performance and will be explored more thoroughly in the next section when analyzing Chief Keef’s *Don’t Like (2012)* video.

Don’t Like

During the month of March 2012, Chief Keef was finally being recognized by mainstream hip-hop audiences with his music video *Don’t Like (2012)* and independent mixtape, *Back from the Dead (2012)* released on March 12th 2012. *Don’t Like* was one of the lead singles

featured on *Back from the Dead*. The online music criticism site, Pitchfork, gave the mixtape a 7.9 out of 10 rating. They also commented on the music saying that as sociology, the mixtape reinforces just how and why violence is rooted in underclass communities, and though Keef has already been blamed for its perpetuation, at the age of 16, he's still years away from fully understanding the context in which his music exists (Sargent).” Critics were beginning to realize the way that this young artist was much more than just a typical gangsta rapper, rather his music had a much larger significance that could be seen within his performances.

Don't Like featuring fellow drill artist, Lil Reese was Chief Keef's most popular video and is what lead him to signing the \$6 million-dollar deal with Interscope Records in June 2012. (Markman, Chief Keef's Interscope Deal Revealed to be Worth \$6 Million). A Chicago based digital newspaper reported that on December of 2011, Chief Keef was arrested for aiming a firearm at a police officer. Although he was not sentenced to jail because he was a minor, he was ordered to be on house arrest and it is during this time in which he recorded the video for *Don't Like* (Konkol). It is also important to note that there are two versions of *Don't Like*. The original video was uploaded to the videographer DGainz's YouTube channel on March 11th, 2012 where a large majority of drill music videos can be found. The video was uploaded from March 2012 to July 2012 garnering about 29 million views in the short time of being uploaded before being removed (DGaines1234). On July 30th, 2012 the video was re-uploaded to Chief Keef's YouTube account (ChiefKeefVEVO). However, the video was quite different than the original. All the guns, profanity and drugs were taken out of the re-uploaded version. Also, in the description section of the video, it now featured an Interscope Records copyright stamp. The true motives behind removing the song from DGainz's YouTube page are uncertain, but one can suspect that it was a corporate move to try to soften the image of Chief Keef to better

accommodate his newfound commercial audience. This analysis will focus on the original video that was removed but then re-uploaded by a fan page on YouTube.

As previously mentioned, Chief Keef was on house arrest when the video was filmed so the setting of the video takes place within one central location. This is presumably where Chief Keef has been confined due to his house arrest. The primary location of the house where the video is shot appears to be a living room. Within the first second of the video a large parental advisory image fills the frame and then dissolves into a motion graphic of the videographer, DGainz's logo. The song starts off with close up shot of the producer who created all of the instrumentals for Chief Keef's *Back From the Dead* mixtape, Young Chop. The video then cuts to reveal Chief Keef in a black V-neck t-shirt, standing in a dimly lit kitchen, smoking a marijuana filled cigar, smiling and bobbing his head as the intro of *Don't Like* plays in the background of the video. The next sequence of shots are a montage of B-roll that display all of the people who are located in the house. They are smoking and throwing hand gestures that signify their gang affiliation. The video has many of the same documentary elements that we saw in the *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix) (2011)* such as, a handheld camera, natural lighting, location shooting and non-actors. Unlike the *Hustle Hard (Drill Remix)* video, this video has a much higher quality. The images are less out of focus and there is more continuity within the editing of

the video. The shots are almost all medium and close-up shots possibly due to the lack of space within the house.



Figure 7 Final Shot from Chief Keef's *Don't Like* (2012) video



Figure 8 Opening scene that DGainz references in his quote from *Don't Like* (2012)

The first line of the chorus says, “a fuck nigga, that’s that shit I don’t like (Chief Keef).” As the chorus continues Chief Keef and the people in the house are closer together. There are about ten people inside of the house who are all smoking, throwing hand gestures to the camera and dancing to the music. There are no females present throughout the video and most of the young men have their shirts off. No one is dressed extravagantly. In Chief Keef’s second verse we begin to see the young men including himself wielding pistols and pointing them towards the camera. The final shot of the song is represented in **Figure 7** showing Chief Keef and the members of the gang who are in the house hugging each other and dancing to the music as the song fades out.

Aesthetically there is not much content within the video that can be analyzed but there are many textual meanings embedded in the performance in the video that shows us the social

significance of the performances in relation to where they are being filmed. As I illustrated in Chapter 2, the social space where drill music comes from in Chicago functions as a space of surveillance and confinement that produces certain performances. This video is prime example of how drill music videos document and represent the social significance of the relationship between subject and space. The entire video functions as an observational documentary. DGainz's explanation of his method of filming allows us to see the connection between observational modes of documentary and drill music. He says,

“I remember him playing the music and I looked over, I see Keef and them over there boppin’ and I’m like yeah, they’re finna start. I just push record, and they got to going crazy. They didn’t even know I was recording at first. If you watch some of the scenes when him and SD are shaking hands, shaking their dreads, they didn’t know I was filming. At the beginning of the video I was on the other side of the room just pointing the camera. That was like the best scene in the video because it was so natural, they didn’t even know I was filming them. Then he turned, saw I was filming and he started interacting with the camera (Drake).”

DGainz's method of non-intervention allows for the subject to perform more accurate representations of their performance of the space in which they are in. Bill Nichols describes an observational documentary as, “The observational mode stresses the non-intervention of the film maker. The films cede “control” over the events that occur in front of the camera more than any other mode (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* 38).” **Figure 8** shows a still image of the scene that DGainz refers to in which Keef shakes hands with SD. This image is powerful because this scene is a natural interaction of the subject and it illustrates the closeness that is found within the gang. Despite the confinements that are placed on Chief Keef, the intimate hand shake symbolizes that both him and SD will always have each other's back through any circumstance. The gang is a family. **Figure 7** is also a representation of how the gang provides safety and power. The image looks as though it is a family photo. The young

men in the frame are smiling and hugging one another while one of them holds a gun. Despite the negative conditions and circumstances that surround them they are happy because together they are strong, and they are protected. Richard Majors and Janet Billson capture this symbolism that the gang represents by saying,

“Joining a gang is a way to organize and make sense of the marginal world of the inner-city neighborhood. It is a way to direct anger and create excitement and entertainment. The gang can become a family that offers belonging, pride, respect and empowerment that may be absent in the home and denied by society. The gang member is symbolically stating, “I may not be able to depend on you, society, but I can count on these guys (Majors and Billson 50).”

The main objective of this video is to demonstrate authority over confinement. The gang members have been totally exiled by society but their power lies with one another. Their image is not important to them. They don't need to be dressed in fancy clothing, be in fancy cars or have partially dressed women in their videos to exert their masculinity or prove their authenticity. What matters to them is each other and the power that they have as a unit. This performance is not only a performance for a music video, but it is a performance of survival which reflects the deeper social context that surrounds the performance.

Fuck Rehab

With the success of his *Don't Like* (2012) single and his *Finally Rich* (2012) album that was released through Interscope on December 18th, 2012, Chief Keef was now thrust into the commercial hip-hop world. Just as one would imagine, once he was signed to a record label the observational documentary methods of video production that helped connect his performance to the larger social context of his environment were taken away and replaced with corporate driven representations of fictional events. Chief Keef's, *Fuck Rehab* (2014) best illustrates this disconnect.

In 2013, at the height of his career, Chief Keef had several run-ins with the law that all had to do with him violating his probation. The first incident occurred in January 2013 because of a video posted by Pitchfork that showed Chief Keef at a gun range firing a weapon. This was a direct violation of his probation and resulted in him being sentenced to 60 days in jail. The second incident happened when he was pulled over for going 55 mph over the speed limit while driving under the influence of marijuana. After this second incident the court ordered that he spend 90 days in a rehab facility (DNAinfo Staff). On February 20th, 2014 he was released from rehab and upon his release indicated that he would be moving from Chicago to live in Los Angeles (Thompson). *Fuck Rehab (2014)* featuring Big Glo, Chief Keef's cousin, was his first release after his stint in rehab.



Figure 9 Still image of Chief Keef being detained in rehab in his *Fuck Rehab (2014)* video

The video opens with a montage of shots of Chief Keef doing random things in a dimly-lit room. For example, he is shown filling a cigar with marijuana in it, laying down, pointing a gun towards the camera, scrolling through his phone and smoking. The room that he is in looks like a minuscule recording studio. The clips alternate between him sitting in a chair and sitting on a small couch. In the clips he is wearing a white t-shirt, jeans and a large diamond necklace. His shirt constantly changes between the white t-shirt and a black t-shirt. As the song approaches the chorus the clips are rapidly intercut between each other in perfect synchronization to the tempo of the music. Immediately preceding the chorus, the video cuts to a wide shot of a white male in a leather jacket and aviator sunglasses standing in front of his car. The man gets a call on the phone and the video cross cuts back and forth between a black male on a couch in what looks to be a living room. The black male on the couch tells the white male that there is a kid who escaped from rehab and the white male agrees to go pick him up and bring him in. The shot then cuts back to the montage of Chief Keef as he raps the chorus saying, “Fuck Rehab (4X) (Chief Keef)” While he is rapping, the video intercuts between him in the room performing and him being kidnapped and forced into rehab. The remainder of the video features Chief Keef finding his way out of rehab and performing the song. The final shot that we see of the video is of a black title card that reads, “to be continued.”

The observational mode of documentary found in Chief Keef’s *Don’t Like* video allowed us to see the significance in what was being said in the music and what was being done in the performance. Elizabeth Cowie says that, “While the observational documentary reproduces a lived reality of events and actions in the real time of their occurrence, the spectator sees this as a part of the world, juxtaposed to other remembered realities (Cowie 173).” What made Chief Keef’s prior performances significant was the way that these specific performances existed in

time and space as historical referents to actual events. His connection with the gang, gun violence, legal troubles and his confinement due to house arrest were all embedded within the video which added a layer of authority and authenticity to the subject's performance and the video. *Fuck Rehab* is stripped of the authenticity and authority because of its narrative structure and fabrication of an event. The video was an enactment of events that never happened. Although Chief Keef was released from rehab a month prior to the video, the narrative of the video does not have an actual historical referent.

This video is similar to Walter Benjamin deemed as a mechanical reproduction. To Benjamin a mechanical reproduction was any form of artwork that lacked an authenticity that comes from the space, time and history of the object, or as he called it, the aura (Benjamin). A prime example of how authenticity and authority are removed from art lies within the differences between an actor's performance in the stage play and a film. Benjamin says that,

For the aura is bound to his presence in the here and now. There is no facsimile of the aura. The aura surrounding Macbeth on the stage cannot be divorced from the aura which, for the living spectators, surrounds the actor who plays him. What distinguishes the shot in the film studio, however, is that the camera is substituted for the audience. As a result, the aura surrounding the actor is dispelled-and, with it, the aura of the figure he portrays (Benjamin 31).

Benjamin points to the fact that authenticity is produced by the space and time in which it is in. An actor in a stage play is not acting like one would for a camera. The actor on stage is embodying the character who he or she is portraying in front of an audience that may not be the same as the last. Therefore, the performance is always fresh and something new. Although Chief Keef's videos prior to *Fuck Rehab* are filmed for the camera, the aura in Chief Keef's performances are embedded into his videos because of the way that the performance is connected to the larger temporal and social context. In *Fuck Rehab* the performance is disconnected from

the aura. Throughout the videos narrative, he tries to escape from rehab after being forcefully taken. *Fuck Rehab* is a song that is directly targeted towards an institution of authority rather than a specific gang or person. Despite the song lyric's direct opposition to rehab, Chief Keef's performance in the video suggests his vulnerability to authority. In his earlier videos we were able to see his rejection of authority in his performance primarily because of the way that his gang was so close to him at all times. There constant gang hand gestures, flashing of guns toward the camera and proximity to one another provided viewers with the aura of power that Chief Keef had in his space. Now that he is removed from his space, that power is removed from him. In *Fuck Rehab* there is only one scene where there are three people that surround Keef and for a large majority of the video, Chief Keef is alone in the frame. The gang that defined Chief Keef is no longer around him and the sense of protection that Chief Keef once had from authority and rivals is no longer present. Finally, the last aspect of this video that suggests that it is similar mechanical reproduction is the way that this video allows Chief Keef to be seen with guns, drugs and uses profanity unlike the second version of *Don't Like* that was uploaded to his YouTube channel. One can assume that because *Fuck Rehab* is a similar to a mechanical reproduction in the way that it does not have a connection to a larger temporal or social context, performances of black male deviancy are acceptable to commercial audiences. Benjamin makes it clear that mechanical reproductions are commodities of mass culture (Benjamin 33). Andrew Goodwin says, "Mass culture is the extreme embodiment of the subjection of culture to the economy; its most important characteristic is that it provides profit for the producers (Goodwin 44)." Essentially this relates back to the way in which commercial hip-hop videos detach the subject from the social context of the performances to maximize profits.

Conclusion

The analysis of Chief Keef's success prior to his removal from the social context of Chicago shows us that although the music may have themes that are considered negative, we cannot excuse the role that space plays on the people that inhabit it. Many hip-hop artists are removed from the place in which their performance stems from and when their videos are produced by record labels they lose their historical and social context. Chief Keef and his performances of black masculinity do not suggest that drill music is a better representation of black masculinity than commercial hip-hop, rather it suggests that there is a deeper context that relates to the oppression of black men that is often removed from the videos because of the commercial influence. In drill music videos like Chief Keef's we can see how deviancy is internalized and appropriated in a way that allows for the oppressed artists to find value and identity from negative circumstances.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The title of this project is *Documenting Drill Music: Understanding Black Masculine Performances in hip-hop*, but hopefully at this point it is apparent that in order to understand black masculine performances hip-hop we must first understand the social context of the videos. Since its initial inception, hip-hop music took negative circumstances and used them as a tool of uplift against the standards of patriarchal masculinity that they were denied to African-Americans. Hip-hop not only gave people a sense of identity and a place of belonging but it also gave them a platform in which their voices could be heard. Unfortunately, when corporate influence became involved in hip-hop it allowed for the perpetuation of some of the most egregious representations of black men and women since the days of minstrelsy in the 1800s.

As I have explained, the black masculine performances found in drill music are not different than the ones we see in commercial hip-hop, but they do tell us something specific about the role that space plays on the construction of black masculinity. Social spaces like Chi-Raq exist all over the United States, with their own set of codes and standards of black masculinity. While not every hip-hop artist may have a connection to their social space as Chief Keef or other drill music artists do, their performance of black masculinity is rooted from the internalization of stereotypes and social systems that confine black men and women. Essentially drill music is an appropriation of the dominant black male representation of hip-hop but used in their own context of defining their own masculinity. drill music is a resistance to the dominant deviant performances of black masculinity in a unique way that reveals the oppressive systems that influences the performances in hip-hop. It is my hope that this study leads one to question the social context of hip-hop music and attempt to understand black masculine performances and their relation to these social spaces.

In this thesis I have pointed out how changing the social context of a hip-hop video dramatically alters our interpretation of the events that are portrayed. As discussed in the preceding chapters, drill music is both different yet strikingly similar to commercial hip-hop. Not contextualizing commercial influence is one of the key problems with scholarship that surrounds hip-hop music videos and is the root of much of the discourse that criticizes the social significance of certain figures in hip-hop, for example the gangsta rapper. This chapter demonstrated the way that drill music started as a unique form of hip-hop that had no commercial influence. This is important because much of the scholarship that critiques hip-hop claims that an artist is not just commercial because he or she is signed to a record label, but because that the content that they make has no significance and perpetuates deviant black masculine behavior. With drill music we get an opportunity to see a gangsta rap-esque image without the commercial influence on the music and videos. It displays the large role that the social context plays on deviant black masculine behavior.

By analyzing hip-hop videos in a documentary theory framework, we can make certain claims that help us understand the politics of the videos. Documentary theory is essential in our understanding of the performances in drill music. As Bill Nichols says, “Documentaries take shape around an informing logic. The economy of this logic requires a representation, case or argument about the historical world. (Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* 18).” drill music performances are arguments from the position of a subject in a space that work to inform us about the world.

Time, place and historical referent are essential to a works authenticity. drill music videos are directly linked to the place that they are created in because of the way that the subgenre is a product of the social space. The social constraints that surround the black men in Chicago’s

epicenters of drill music are what fuel the performance. These restraints force the black males to respond in ways that assert their power and masculinity. Many of these restraints on black men are largely related to the prison industrial complex. Rashad Shabbaz and Michel Foucault both explain that the surveillance and control that is found inside of the prison is also found outside of it as well. In the case of drill music many artists have constructed a complex contradictory sense of belonging towards their social space that functions like a prison but also being are directly opposed to it and the authority that is behind it. As Anthony J. Lemelle Jr. writes in his book *Black Male Deviance*,

“black males form a position of opposition that results directly from their social experiences, which undermine the normal methods of institutional control. For example, prison has lost effectiveness among many black males fundamentally because it is presumed a priori in the black community that its men will at one point or another become involved with the criminal justice system (Lemelle Jr. 42).”

In drill music the performances that we see are linked to the opposition of social authority. The artists who perform deviant black masculine behavior are simply attempting to find ways to assert themselves against the back drops of a society that has worked to keep them contained and controlled.

Future Research

This research project analyzed drill music performances from the years of 2011 to 2014, however this project could have easily expanded into a much larger project that focuses on the career Chief Keef from the beginning of his career to the present day. Chief Keef was later dropped from his record deal with Interscope by the end of the year in 2014. He would later sign to an independent label, RBC Records, which is an independent record label. According to their website,

“RBC Records is an independent Hip Hop/Rap Label and Artist Services company specializing in digital marketing and distribution. Our current roster includes Gucci Mane, Chief Keef, Tech N9ne & Strange Music, E-40, Run The Jewels, and many more. RBC’s goal is to empower the artist to develop their profile by giving them the freedom to control their music and their masters. Our team will guide their music to the masses via physical retail outlets, digital retailers and streaming services (RBC Records).”

While I am not entirely sure what an independent record label does or how it operates. It would be insightful to see what role that they play in the production of the music videos. They claim to give artists the freedom to control their music but there must be some type of stipulations to them having this freedom. Technically before Chief Keef signed to Interscope he was already an independent artist and he was able to distribute his music to a widespread of audiences around the country. Another point of analysis would be to see how Chief Keef’s performances differ now that he is free from the corporate record label but outside of the social context that confined him while he was in Chicago. Chief Keef’s performances in this newfound space could provide us with an understanding of black masculine performances outside of the social space that they are from. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Chief Keef moved from Chicago to Los Angeles. This is a completely different space than where he was when he was in Chicago and his persona is a lot different than it was when he was a 17-year-old teenager.

After drill music rose to popularity, we began to see a lot of drill music style videos from people who were outside of Chicago. Just like the performers in drill music, these performers were all young men under the age of 18. One of the most notable drill music style videos was Bobby Shmurda's *Hot Nigga* (2014) the song was a viral sensation gaining over 400 million views on YouTube. The video features the same exact elements that were found in drill music videos. The only difference is that Shmurda is located in New York instead of Chicago. Another viral sensation that adopted the drill music video formula was *The Race* (2017) by Dallas, Texas rapper, Tay-K. Similar to how Chief Keef's run in with the law that influenced the video, Tay-K had a warrant for his arrest and while on the run he recorded the video for *The Race*. The video is a direct reference to the social context of his life. In both of the examples of the two drill music style videos, both of the artists who perform these songs are currently incarcerated. While I will not go into the specifics, these similarities may highlight a trend in videos that display authentic social space being linked to imprisonment.

drill music is also mimicked in the global context as well. In London, England there is drill music scene that is almost identical to the one found here in the United States. Both drill music scenes are the same thing. Rival gangs mock each other, disrespect authority and put their lived experiences within the songs that they are performing. The London drill music scene is directly related to the violence that occurs there and many of the performers are incarcerated or dead. Future studies could use this model that I presented in this study to understand the social space of London and see how performances in the videos are linked.

Lastly there are Documentary style videos that are commercially produced. One of the most interesting recent documentary style videos is Canadian rapper, Drake's *God's Plan* (2018). In the video Drake receives \$1 million for a video shoot budget from his record label. Instead of

paying for a large video production, the video consists of him walking around Miami giving stacks of money to random people who are on the streets. Being that this video is commercially funded it would be interesting to see where this video would be situated in hip-hop studies and what does it say about commercial hip-hop using documentary modes.

In this thesis I hope to have sparked some interest in using documentary theory to back up claims about the link between hip-hop music and social context. hip-hop has been criticized for its neglect of using its platform and music to represent and critique the systemic factors that have plagued many African Americans. However, in drill music we can see how artists who are in their environment exemplify resistance to societal norms and in doing so make critiques about the society through their performance.

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