

## *Representations of*

# Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

*William Eric Perkins*

Fatherhood, and its image, have an important bearing on hip-hop's identity. The process of naming confers identity and gives the rapper an aura of authenticity and authority. One has to conform to that name, actualize it, make it real. Just as R&B and blues performers have taken names that give them distinct identities and personalities, so too have rappers. Some rappers have taken the father/daddy title, indicative of lionized strength, virility, authority, and the ability to dispense discipline. "Old school" rappers such as Big Daddy Kane, Daddy O, and Kool Daddy Fresh immediately come to mind, and two of the newest and biggest stars in contemporary hip-hop, Puff Daddy and Notorious B.I.G., a.k.a., Big Poppa, conform to that identity. Living up to one's name, as Biggie and Tupac Shakur did in life, gives them a respect that in death is unsurpassed.

Rap, since it is based on all previous musical forms and is rooted deeply in the cumulative African-American musical and verbal tradition, has made male/female relationships one of its foundations. The ways in which male and female artists have lyricized about relationships illustrate how sexual politics have been and still continue to be played out in hip-hop. As the "old school" princesses Salt-N-Pepa have illustrated in a number of their raps, sexuality and sexual expression exercise a profound impact on youth culture. For example in "Let's Talk About Sex" they call for open and frank dialogue:

*Let's talk about sex for now to the people or  
in the crowd*

*It keeps coming up anyhow*

*Don't decoy, avoid, or make void the topic*

*Cuz that ain't gonna stop it*

*Now we talk about sex on the radio and  
video shows  
Many will tell you anything goes  
Let's tell it how it is, and how it could be  
How it was, and of course, how it should be  
Those who think it's dirty have a choice  
Pick up the needle, press pause, or turn the  
radio off  
Will that stop us, Pep, I doubt it  
All right then, come on, Spin*

This rap contextualizes how male/female relationships are explored and constructed within the larger framework of hip-hop, and Salt-N-Pepa have set the tone for many rappers to deal with this subject matter.

In "Tramp," they turn the tables on men, posing the question to men who only want sex from a woman:

*On the first date, he thought I was a dummy  
He had the nerve to tell me he loved me  
But of course, I knew it was a lie, y'all  
He undressed me with his eyeballs  
Trying to change the whole subject  
Cuz everything he said pertained to sex  
So I dissed him, I said, you're a sucker!  
Get your dirty mind out of the gutter  
You ain't gettin' paid, you ain't knockin'  
boots  
You ain't treatin' me like no prostitute  
When I walked away, he called me a teaser  
You're on a mission, kid—yo, he's a  
TRAMP*

In "Chick on the Side," they again neutralize the double standards that men have for women:

*Oooo my, oooo my so-called fiance listen to  
what  
I say  
Whatever game you play, I play the same  
way  
So if you wanna go mess around and cheat*

*And you wanna romance between another  
girl's  
sheets  
Go ahead sweetheart, I expected that  
Cuz you're nothing but a cheap, little, stuck  
up brat  
Wherever you're at you want this and that  
You dirty rat, I'm not a welcome mat  
I got another lover, and I know he cares  
So smile child, but keep your crocodile tears*

The game, the chase, the conquest—Salt-N-Pepa provide a feminist reading of sex and sexuality as a substitute for courtship, all the while keeping the men on guard. They have established themselves on formerly male terrain ("Whatever game you play, I play the same way") as a form of empowerment to neutralize men who play the game.

Female rappers like Salt-N-Pepa provide an antidote to the sometimes venomous lyrics written by men, and though some of the female rappers have played into the "bitch and ho" stereotype (most notably the now disbanded Hoes With An Attitude and Bitches With Problems), it is the women rappers who are now ascendant, providing a neutralization of hip-hop's misogyny.

But Salt-N-Pepa possess a romantic side as well, showing that hip-hop is not all social commentary and ghetto reality. In "Whatta Man," they show a little tenderness:

*I wanna take a minute or two, and give re-  
spect  
much due  
To the man that's made a difference in my  
world  
And although most men are ho's he flows on  
the down low  
Cuz I never heard about him with another  
girl  
But I don't sweat it because it's just pathetic  
To let it get me involved in that he said/  
she said crowd*

## Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

*I know that ain't nobody perfect, I give  
props to  
those who deserve it  
And believe me y'all, he's worth it  
And here's to the future cuz we got through  
the past  
I finally found somebody that can make me  
laugh  
(Ha ha ha) You so crazy  
I think I wanna have your baby*

In just one of her raps, Queen Latifah also demonstrates the anti-bitch and ho position:

*tell me why when I walk past the guys  
i always hear, yo, baby?  
i mean like what's the big idea?  
I'm a queen, nuff respect  
treat me like a lady  
and, no, my name ain't yo and i ain't  
got your baby  
i'm looking for a guy who's sincere  
one with class and savoir faire  
I'm looking for someone who has to be  
perfect for the queen latifah, me  
("Fly Girl")*

In a late 1998 release, *I'm Bout It*, the Ghetto Twinz admonish men for their lack of personal responsibility, opting for making it on their own, using the "rap game" to get paid:

*Responsibility have you heard of it baby.  
I'm a strong chick and you will never worry  
me baby.  
I'm out here working it, writing them rhymes  
I'm  
twirkin' it,  
makin' that green deservin' it.  
Homeboy I know you heard of it.  
Your baby son is growin' up, baby's momma  
blowin' up.  
If I catch that tail I just might leave it  
swolled up.*

*Any boy can make a child takes a man to  
raise one  
Boy you just made one too stupid to raise  
one.  
And these youngsters thank you cold let  
them know you  
ain't shit,  
when it comes to this real shit.  
Responsibility he couldn't take,  
and that was one of those mean things that  
made him fake.  
You really think you's a man hey buster  
you's a lie.  
Strong women survive fake playas die (fake  
playas die).*

and the chorus recants:

*So many things to do, so many places to be  
it's my responsibility, responsibility  
So many things to do, so many place to be  
It's my responsibility, responsibility.  
("Responsibility")*

This rap illustrates that these "ghetto princesses" will not wait or beg for their men to take responsibility. They will do it themselves, without hesitation.

Male rappers maintain a more ambivalent pose in their relationships with women as reflected in hip-hop lyrics. Following are a selection of lyrics from a diverse group of male rappers showing their take on women and their own masculinity.

One of the pioneers in establishing the whole male bravado style of rap is the Seattle-based rapper Sir Mix-a-Lot, known for his flashy clothes and cars *à la* The Mack. In "A Rapper's Reputation," he paints a lyrical picture of conquering groupies:

*I'm rollin' in a Nine-Oh Van. California,  
that's my  
plan*



*Life Instructions*  
Photo by Helen M. Stummer

*Got memories Mixalot left in limbo, first  
stop  
Sacramento  
Here we go, hit a Club called Bentleys  
Want a skirt to git wit me, hit me  
There's a girl with a back like a Cadillac  
I walked up and got pushed back  
Her boyfriend tells her I'm a playa  
Dropped salt on a dope rhyme saya  
My reputation offends this man*

As he continues his road tour, he manages to subdue and conquer a number of female admirers.

The late gangsta rapper Ezy-E was one of the most misogynistic of lyricists. In "My Baby'z Mama," Ezy gives us a portrait of a relationship (in real life, with his girlfriend Michele) that revolves around abuse and irresponsibility; but it is this arbitrary exercise of power from which he derives his manhood:

## Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

*Fuck my baby's mama  
The bitch got drama  
And I'm not the one  
I should just knock her punk ass out  
while I'm in court payin' child support  
But when I gotta deal with the father and the  
steel  
and he's the type of nigga that a nigga's  
gotta kill  
Make me kick up a grip, I don't like her  
coz the bitch buyin' skirts instead of diapers  
Beggin' so much to hold hands it's startin' to  
look like cuffs  
I wish I never fucked*

In this verse, we also get a glimpse of what the term "bitch" means in hip-hop: a woman who shuns what is considered to be her traditional responsibility. In turn, "bitch ass niggaz" are men who are disloyal to the group, to the crew—those who have not earned respect. Feminizing the term "niggaz" indicates that the men are weak, lacking strength and courage.

In "Ruthless Villain," Ezy-E issues a boast on both his sexual prowess and his manipulation of the rap game:

*It's Ezy-E in the crowd  
But he's not in the 4  
I tell his money flow  
And he collects from his ho'  
All expenses paid  
For the rhymes that he made  
Got the trophies in the house  
For the girls that he laid  
Not a wimp he's a pimp  
Now of course he's the boss  
So keep your bitch out his face  
Or else she's gonna get tossed.*

In another verse by one of Death Row's last soldiers, Daz Dillinger provides a long soliloquy on having to deal with child support. One of the common perceptions by

young black men is that child support is a woman's vengeance, a retaliation against a male for not committing himself to a woman. He praises himself for trying "to do right" but becomes bitter and angry when child support charges have been filed against him:

*As I lay myself to sleep at night,  
I pray the lord my soul to keep, so I can try  
to do it right.  
There's no one else that I can turn to,  
I'm askin' a favor, oh just once.  
Oh Jesus Christ, Lord I'm askin' you.  
Gave to this world a young baby, know  
one's life is crazy,  
promise to live the righteous life of the path  
of my babies.  
Watch the clouds spread, and it shades my  
heart.  
The relationship fell apart.  
Don't know where it ended, sure can tell  
you how it started,  
she filed child support, and it's really cold  
hearted.  
I've been taking care of you and your kid,  
all of my life,  
mad at me 'cause I wouldn't make you my  
wife.*

Daz continues:

*Now I'm sittin' as she tries to get every-  
thing,  
from my house and my cars to my gold  
rings.*

And he concludes, bitterly:

*I did so much, to get so little,  
Paid more than the court asked of me.  
But loving no more, not even a parlay? And  
you want me to pay?  
It's not like it's for my baby, it's more like  
for you and  
your nigga,*

*Why you have to lie on me, and turn my  
child on me.*

(Daz Dillinger and Tha Gang, "Baby Mama  
Drama")

This rap summarized a set of dominant male attitudes that rotate around an aversion to accepting paternal responsibility—child support is revenge, it is being used by the mother to support another man, and the mother uses dis to turn the children against the father. Though Dillinger is eloquent in his plea for understanding and forgiveness, he refuses to change his behavior and accept responsibility.

Houston's Geto Boys have earned the ire of the establishment, being cited by both William Bennett and C. Dolores Tucker as instigators of violence toward women. In this verse, from "Gangster of Love," one can see how these rappers fuse the hardcore street sensibility to romance, attempting to establish their own masculinity in the process:

*Bitches look at me like I'm a faker  
Knowing goddam well  
I'm a muthafuckin' heartbreaker!  
I'll have them crying for months  
Cause I done fucked their best friends  
and put a whipping on their cunts  
They have their mothers to call  
But if you done fucked one mom  
Then you fucked them all*

Consider also Snoop Dogg's, "Pregnant Pussy," in which Snoop summons a paternal commitment only to have it end up in deviant sex:

*I guess you can call me a family man  
Cause I kept the bitch's baby every chance  
that I can  
I don't buy them clothes or diapers and shit  
But I like to feed their babies with my big  
black dick  
Cause I'm a tell you if you didn't know*

*You ain't did shit till you fucked a pregnant ho*

This objectification of women is a major concern in how hip-hop culture presents itself, and though these artists are extremely popular, we must recognize how hip-hop has designed its own internal regulatory mechanism, expressed in raps that represent another side of hip-hop, dealing with issues of sexuality, masculinity, and the relationships between men and women. These rappers, many of whom have a different consciousness, provide lyrical antidotes to the misogynistic lyrics of many so-called gangsta rappers. One of the groups, A Tribe Called Quest, illustrates how rappers can overcome the negative images of women portrayed in a sample of the lyrics I have examined. Their rap, "The Infamous Date Rape," was very popular on college campuses during the late eighties and early nineties. This rhyme provides us with a perfect example of how hip-hop can deal with issues—the very real problem of the sexual abuse of women—the general public claims it refuses to deal with, and do it in an idiom and vernacular that appeals to its audience:

*Listen to the rhyme, it's a black date fact  
Percentile rate of date rape is fat  
This is all true to the reason of the skeezin  
You got the right pickin but you're in the  
wrong season  
If you're in the wrong season, that means  
you gotta  
break  
Especially if a squad cries out date rape  
You be all vexed cuz she got it goin' on  
You don's wanna fight cuz you know that  
you're wrong  
But instead you rest your on the arm of the  
couch  
Envision in your head a great sex bout  
Worth opponent, all you wanna do is bone it  
You ask can you kick it, she says you can't  
stick*

## Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

Similarly, there are the philosophical twists and turns in Slick Rick's melodic, "Hey Young World," an old-school meditation on the perils of the street life, with an almost fatherly warning to the young:

*This rap here . . . it may cause concern it's  
broad and deep . . . why don't you listen and  
learn  
Love means happiness . . . that once was  
strong  
But due to society . . . even that's turned  
wrong  
Times have changed . . . and it's cool to look  
bummy  
and be a dumb dummy and disrespect your  
mummy  
Have you forgotten . . . who put you on this  
Earth?  
Who brought you up right . . . and who loved  
you since your birth?  
Reward is a brainwashed child goin' wild  
Bad company . . . now you been framed  
Your parents are hurting . . . hurting and  
ashamed  
You're ruining yourself . . . and your mummy  
can't  
cope  
Hey little kids don't follow these dopes*

Public Enemy's "Revolutionary Generation" summons the warrior spirit I have eluded to, challenging black men to remember the spirits of their mothers:

*They disrespected Mama and treated her like  
dirt  
America took her, reshaped her, raped her  
Nope it never made the paper  
Beat us, mated us  
Made us attack our women in black  
So I said sophisticated B, don't be one  
Not to heed the warning crack of dawn  
Or is it the dawn of crack?  
Stop the talk they say, but*

*We talk and say what's right or wrong  
Some way we wastin' time singin' a song  
You cannot count my Mama's tears  
It's not the past but the future's  
What she fears*

In yet another example of how rappers call on young men to accept responsibility for their children and parenting, Arrested Development penned a wonderful rap, "Mama's Always on Stage." Their repertoire posed a direct challenge to so-called reality rappers in that they summoned up a kind of "family values" restoration, calling on the ancestral past to provide a new cultural context for maturing young people. Though they enjoyed a short time span on the hip-hop scene, their first recording was considered a breakthrough. Notice how "Mama's Always on Stage" issue a call for responsibility:

*Hey, let me guess, you're bored  
Wanna get loose, attack the dance floor  
Cool, I'll hold her, you have a good time  
I'll keep your baby awake so baby sleeps af-  
ter nine  
This is reality, we need to turn our minds  
Brothers talking revolution, but leave their  
babies behind  
Well sister, he's a sucker, just leave 'em be  
The revolution is now up to brothers like me  
to step in cause your man stepped out  
The goal: To raise the children, no doubt*

Lead MC Speech raps about the "real" revolution, men acknowledging their responsibility.

Another challenge to that misogynistic and gangsta style was articulated by Paris, who in one of hip-hop's midterm classics meditates on the importance of the past in his "Days of Old":

*Or maybe even more of us will blame the  
white man*

*Before we understand now the problem's not  
him  
What I'm tellin ya is actual fact  
I ain't pro-human cuz all humans ain't pro-  
black  
Remember in your mind that there still exists  
a plan to bring down a black fist  
See the struggle is uphill, life's at a stand-  
still  
Jack popped Jill now he don't act real  
And every livin' moment got her singin' the  
blues  
Her sole provider can't afford the baby's  
shoes  
That's the cycle so many of us go through  
America's black holocaust continues  
and I just hope we wake up soon before we  
fold  
I miss the days of old*

*Damn . . . I miss the days of old.*

Paris's remembrances of the "days of old" center on men accepting responsibility as the foundation of stability, and it is the lack of that responsibility that continues to reproduce that cycle of poverty, sexual abuse, and single motherhood.

Of all the rappers who have become role models, if you will, for young, African-American, inner-city males, none is more important than Tupac Shakur. Defiant rebel, anti-authoritarian outlaw, promoter of the thug life, image translated into reality, Tupac was and remains the essence of hip-hop. Many of his rhymes present listeners with an array of contradictions that have never been resolved, but these raps provide us with some of the most poignant commentary on masculinity and fatherhood ever to be presented to the hip-hop market. In "Papa's Song," Tupac weaves a tale about his absent father and chides him for placing the burden of raising him on his mother. It is well worth repeating for the message it contains:

*Moms had to entertain many men  
didn't wanna do it but it's time to pay the  
rent again  
I'm gettin' a bit older and starting to be a  
bother  
moms can't stand me cause I'm lookin like  
my father  
Shall I stay or run away  
tell me tha answer  
moms ignores me and avoids me like cancer  
Grow up rough and it's hard to understand  
stuff  
moms was tough cause poppa wasn't man  
enough  
Couldn't stand up to his own responsibilities  
instead of taking care of me  
he'd rather live lavishly  
That's why I'll never be a father  
Unless you got the time  
it's a crime  
don't even bother*

Tupac's equation of paternal irresponsibility with "living lavishly" reminds us of how the image of the floundering, pleasure-seeking African-American male wallowing in that pleasure has created the kind of immorality and instability producing Paris's "black holocaust." Tupac has issued a call for young men, especially, to stand up to their responsibilities and repudiate the glamour and excesses of "the life."

In his eloquent rhyme, "Dear Mama," an ode to Afeni Shakur, Tupac again rants on his father's desertion of him:

*No ain't nobody tell us it was fair  
No love from my daddy cause the crowd  
wasn't there  
He passed away and I didn't cry, cause my  
anger  
wouldn't let me feel for a stranger  
I was lookin' for a father he was gone  
I hung around with thugs, and even though  
they sold drugs*



## Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

*They showed a young brother love*

TuPac reminds us how joining a posse or krewe functions as a sort of surrogate father for many young black men, and that surrogate paternity is grounded in showing "a young brother love," in a very masculine way, schooling him in the codes and rituals of the street, the cocaine game, and of course how to control and manipulate women.

In "Keep Ya Head Up," a brilliant ode on teenage pregnancy and the young male's role in it, TuPac offers a sagacious assessment of this peril afflicting inner-city African America:

*Some say the blacker the berry, the sweeter  
the juice*

*I say the darker the flesh then the deeper  
the roots*

*I give a holler to my sisters on welfare  
TuPac cares, and don't nobody else care  
And uuh, I know they like to beat ya down a  
lot*

*But don't cry, dry your eyes, never let up  
Forgive but don't forget, girl keep your  
head up*

*And when he tells you you ain't nuttin don't  
believe him*

*And if he can't learn to love you should  
leave him*

*Cause sista you don't need him  
And I ain't tryin' to gas ya up, I just call em  
how I see em*

*You know it makes me unhappy (what's  
that)*

*When brothas make babies, and leave a  
young mother  
to be a pappy*

*And since we all came from a woman and  
our game  
from a woman*

*I wonder why we take from our women  
Why we rape our women, do we hate our  
women?*

*I think it's time to kill for our women  
Time to heal our women, be real to our  
women*

*And if we don't we'll have a race of babies  
That will hate the ladies, that make the ba-  
bies*

*And since a man can't make one  
He has no right to tell a woman when and  
where to  
create one*

*So will the real men get up*

*I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your  
head up*

This is an astonishing lyrical melange, combining Malcolm's warrior spirit with a kind of thug-life feminism, and it reveals how much TuPac was concerned with the future of male and female relationships and the responsibilities of fatherhood. It is but one more confirmation of the tremendous diversity in hip-hop, on the one hand, and its fierce contradictions, on the other, and how these contradictions can play themselves out within one artist.

TuPac's sensitivity, eloquence, and quasi-feminist consciousness have been overshadowed by the "thug life" persona he created for himself; and his widespread popularity has been cultivated by this thug image. It is essential for us to show this other side of "Pac," the side that has never been glamorized or the subject of extensive media commentary, but one that concerns the everyday reality of men and women in the ghettos of America.

Now, as hip-hop approaches its third decade, its elder statesman LL Cool J has shown how one can grow, mature, and accept responsibility, all the while remaining "true to the game." His success and the price he has paid for the success are covered in his graphic and steamy autobiography, *Make My Own Rules*. As reported in *The Source*, LL's life has come full circle:



*Hanging Out*  
Photo by Helen M. Stummer

Ladies Love Cool James. Big American corporations love Cool J. People trying to make a buck love Cool J. Video directors love Cool J. But nobody loves Cool J as much as he loves himself. He wouldn't say so, but he'd be all modest and self-effacing, telling you he's just a family man trying to feed his kids; he's just an ex-player trying to love his wife; he's just a former hoochie-banging, porn-lovin', Moet-sippin', cocky muthafucka trying to come correct and set an example for the young kids. . . . "It's not an image. My shit is real. All I'm doing is trying to inspire young people hopefully in a positive direction by letting them know that family is important. . . ." LL is, after all, the closest thing we have to an icon. A stellar example

of how to endure, grow up and become an adult in the perpetually adolescent world of rap.'

LL's ascent and continued success are reflective of the redemptive power of hip-hop. Tupac could not capture that redemption in life, but LL has accepted his role as elder statesman and as father, marrying his longtime "round-the-way-girl" Simone, the mother of his three children, while becoming an advocate for paternal responsibility in the hip-hop nation. Tapping that power should be one of the highest priorities we have in bringing hip-hop to a wider audience. Indeed, LL's appeal could rekindle young men's desire to accept personal responsibility and paternity

## Fatherhood and Masculinity in Rap Lyrics

as cornerstones of building stable relationships with women and children.

As hip-hop matures, so too do its artists. One of the most important lyricists writing today is Chicago's own Common, who has elevated his lyrical style far beyond the outer reaches of the "reality rap" and "gangsta rap" that have been the most popular genres. In his "Retrospective for Life," he offers a "real" assessment of what fatherhood is and introduces the possibility of a real dialogue taking place between the sexes:

*Knowin you the best part of life, do I have  
the right  
to take yours  
Cause I created you irresponsibly  
Subconsciously knowin the act I was a part  
of  
The start of somethin, I'm not ready to bring  
into the world  
Had myself believin I was sterile  
I look into a mother's stomach, wonder if  
you are  
a boy or girl  
Turnin' this woman's womb into a tomb  
But she and I agree, a seed we don't need  
You would've been much more than a mouth  
to feed  
But someone, I woulda fed this information I  
read  
to someone, my life for you I woulda had to  
leave  
Instead I lead you to death*

*I'm sorry for takin' your first breath, first  
step, and  
first cry  
But I wasn't prepared mentally nor finan-  
cially  
Havin' a child shouldn't have to bring out  
the  
man in me  
Plus I wanted you to be raised in a family  
I don't wanna go through the drama of  
having a baby's mama  
Weekend visits and buyin' jeans ain't gonna  
make  
me a fatha  
For awhile bearing a child is somethin' I  
never wanted  
to do  
For me to live forever I can only do that  
through you  
Never I got to talk about them niggaz with a  
gun  
Must have really thought I was God to take  
the life of my son  
I could have sacrificed goin' out  
To think my homies who did it I used to joke  
about,  
from now on  
Ima use self control instead of birth control  
Cause \$315 ain't worth your soul  
\$315 ain't worth your soul  
\$315 ain't worth your soul*

As the tale moves on, Common continues:

*Seeing you as present and a gift in itself*

**There are more and more positive signs that the hip-hop generation is ready and willing to act in bringing issues of personal responsibility, fatherhood, and masculinity to the forefront.**

*You had our child in you, I probably never  
 felt what you felt  
 But you dealt with it like the strong black  
 woman you are  
 Through our trials and tribulations, child's  
 elimination  
 An integration of thoughts I feel about the  
 situation  
 Back and forth my feelings was pacin'  
 Happy deep down but not joyed enough to  
 have it  
 But even that's a lie in less than two weeks,  
 we was  
 back at it  
 Is this unprotected love or safe to say it's  
 just lust  
 Bustin', more than the sweat in somebody  
 you trust  
 Or is it we don't trust each other enough  
 And believe, havin' this child will make us  
 have to  
 stay together  
 Girl I want you in my life cause you have  
 made it better  
 Thinkin we in love cause we can spend a day  
 together  
 We talkin spendin the rest of our lives  
 It's too many black women that can say they  
 mothers  
 but can't say that they wives  
 I wouldn't choose any other to mother my  
 understanding  
 But I want our parenthood to come from  
 planning  
 It's so much in my life undone  
 We gotta see eye to eye, about family, before  
 we can have  
 one  
 If you had decided to have it in the situation  
 I wouldn't  
 run from  
 But I'm walkin', findin' myself in my God  
 So I can, discipline my son when I ride in  
 Not have a judge tellin me how and when to  
 raise my seed*

*Though his death was at our greed, with no  
 else to blame  
 I had a book of Afrikan names, case our  
 minds changed  
 You say your period hasn't come, and lately  
 I've been sleepy  
 So quit smokin' the weed and the beadies  
 and let's  
 have this baby*

Common's lyrical painting of a young couple coming to grips with having a child contains the entire universe of what young black people must deal with—their sexuality, birth control, abortion, grappling with making a decision on having or not having a child, gender roles, the huge responsibility of parenting, bucking authority, and finally making the decision.

If there were to be a hip-hop anthem on fatherhood, it would no doubt have to be Ed O.G. and the Bulldogs' "Be a Father to Your Child:"

*Be a father, if not, why bother, son  
 A boy can make' em, but a man can raise  
 one  
 If you did it, admit it, and stick with it  
 Don't say it ain't yours 'cause all women  
 are not whores  
 Ninety percent represent a woman that is  
 faithful  
 Ladies, can I hear it? Thank You.  
 When a girl gets pregnant, her man is gonna  
 run around  
 Dissin' her for nine months, when it's born  
 he wants  
 to come mourned  
 Talkin' that I'm sorry for what I did  
 And all of a sudden he wants to see his kid  
 She had to bear it by herself and take care of  
 it  
 by herself  
 And giving her money for milk won't really  
 help*

*Half of the fathers with sons and daughters  
don't  
even wanna take 'em  
But it's so easy for them to make' em  
It's true, if it weren't for you then the child  
wouldn't exist  
After a skeeze, there's responsibilities so  
don't resist  
Be a father to you child*

This should be our call to arms, the message behind the madness, what we should use to summon our young men to the table.

In concluding, we would do well to heed the warning issued in the MEE Productions (Motivational Educational Entertainment) report *Reaching the Hip-hop Generation*. The authors found, after conducting a number of focus groups with hundreds of young people all over the country, that messages must be targeted to men, since they are the foundation of hip-hop culture:

... central to this audience is the centrality of male culture to set trends and influence behavior. Hip-hop culture is heavily male oriented. The music of rap, the characters portrayed as role models, fashion styles, and even interactive methods are heavily geared to males within the culture. As a result, dramatic themes that depict male-oriented sce-

narios were most accepted. Even when we pushed in our sample on sexist depictions of male dominance, they were not offended. More surprisingly, in many instances, they agreed with the depictions. As a result, messages targeted to males often had a much wider appeal.<sup>2</sup>

There are more and more positive signs that the hip-hop generation is ready and willing to act in bringing issues of personal responsibility, fatherhood, and masculinity to the forefront. More and more signs abound. In the September 1998 issue of *Sister-2-Sister* magazine, the featured segment focused on hip-hop fathers. The headline read, "Don't Call Them Baby Daddies, They're Proud Fathers." The segment shows how these men can be sensitive, loving, and compassionate fathers, without compromising their mass-market, masculine personae.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

All lyrics have been taken from the web site, Original Hip-hop Lyrics at <http://www.ohla.com/>

1. Jeannine Amber, "I Need Love," *The Source*, No. 100 (1998), pp. 156-157.

2. *Reaching the Hip-hop Generation* (Philadelphia: MEE Productions, 1994), p. 25.

3. "Don't Call Them Baby Daddies, They're Proud Fathers," *Sister-2-Sister* (September 1998).