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ELEVEN | Intertextuality and Lineage in The Game's "We Ain't" and Kendrick Lamar's "m.A.A.d. City"

JUSTIN A. WILLIAMS

WHILE THIS VOLUME is testament to the fact that numerous genre cultures are highly intertextual, hip-hop culture arguably celebrates and references its influences more overtly and openly than other genres do. In addition to using preexisting material to new ends, many instances of hip-hop culture also demonstrate a self-consciously historical nexus that is performed both extra musically and within the recorded hip-hop texts themselves.¹ This chapter outlines and extends arguments that I initially considered in *Rhyming and Stealin'* (2013), which set out to show the many ways that hip-hop recordings demonstrate intertextuality: through digital sampling (in both beat and flow), stylistic allusion, reperforming "samples," emulating a production style, quotation of music or lyrics, vocal imitation of a rapper's style, or other techniques.

The primary case study in the chapter focuses on The Game's "We Ain't" (2005), as an example of the highly intertextual nature of hip-hop and demonstrates a specific intratextual instance of lineage construction within the West Coast gangsta rap subgenre. Specifically, I look at aspects of the song's "sonic signature" produced by Eminem, flow, peer references, and use of sampling in the chorus, all of which add to the construction of a Compton-based gangsta rap lineage. Both The Game and Kendrick Lamar extend the N.W.A.–Dr. Dre–2Pac–Eminem–50 Cent gangsta rap lineage² yet comment on that lineage in drastically different ways. Comparing and contrasting these two artists reveals the historiciza-

tion of gangsta rap and the evolving topical concerns of the genre as it continues further into the twenty-first-century pop music landscape.

History, Lineage, and Artistic Authority

To use an extended analogy with another, longer-established, musical tradition than West Coast gangsta rap, the construction of Western classical music history has included a semifictitious periodization (e.g., baroque, classical, romantic) alongside a canon of great composers and works. This canon has been largely male and Germanic, and as art music composition progressed into the twentieth century, composers such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky became increasingly concerned with their place in such a canon. Furthermore, an artist may emphasize certain aspects of that culture while neglecting others in the interest of being placed within the tradition. Homage to past artists as well as the relationship between mentor and student can easily become fodder for lineage construction. Artistic lineage does not just happen “naturally” but is largely a social construction. As Robert P. Morgan (1988, 65) writes, “One chooses the tradition one wants, or even creates a unique tradition for one’s own personal requirements. The past is not forced upon the composer, handed down by decree (or ‘testament’); he shapes it himself.” For Schoenberg, tradition is intertwined with a notion of “progress,” utilizing the idea that his compositional style was the “next reasonable and logical step” (Rosen 1975, 16) in art music creativity.³

Popular music has similar processes of canon, tradition, and lineage, although it seems that in the second half of the twentieth century in particular, these periods of music history have become shorter and shorter. Where historians once referred to a period of fifty or one hundred years or more in classical music, popular music often moves in microgenerations of anywhere between five and ten years. The 2007 BBC documentary *Seven Ages of Rock* and the twelve-part 2011 documentary series *Metal Evolution* (complete with family tree of bands and subgenres) point to the historicization and periodization of such repertoires. Musicians often acknowledge past traditions: for example, Eric Clapton and many others cite the influence of bluesman Robert Johnson in both interviews and song lyrics; his posthumous fame helps solidify his legend as one of the classic masters of the blues guitar (Rothenbuhler 2005). In country music, artists often align themselves with the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, or the posthumous success of Hank Williams (Peterson 2007). Pete Frame (1983) also provides an example of constructed lineage in

rock music. Jazz historiography has used the trope of a continuous history of great men with stylistic periods that emphasize continuity and direct transmission between these musical generations, just as a linear trajectory purportedly pervades Western art music history (DeVeaux 1991).

In some ways, the most striking parallel of lineage construction to the figures I discuss in gangsta rap may be that of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. Tia DeNora (1995) looks at what she sees as the construction of “serious music” around the characters of these three men. The story begins, in many ways, with the death of a young Mozart:

During the early 1790s and later, Mozart was hailed (initially in the Prague press) as “immortal Mozart” whose “death came too soon both for [his widow] and for Art”—as Constanze Mozart herself put it in the announcement of a benefit concert published in the *Weiner Zeitung* on 13 December 1794. . . . This posthumous rediscovery of Mozart revolved around imagery of the composer culled from his life before his genius had reached its fullest flower. The precise genus and species of that flower became the object of dispute, however, as Mozart’s posthumous prestige became a resource for the reputations of potential musical heirs. *In other words, association with Mozart became a way of articulating status claims.* (16; emphasis added)

According to DeNora, Beethoven and Haydn had a public and symbiotic student-teacher relationship in Vienna, and Beethoven forged connections with patrons and other members of society that helped him to be perceived as Mozart’s musical heir. Count Waldstein’s well-known farewell letter, written as Beethoven left to study with Haydn in Vienna in 1792, asserts that, “With the help of assiduous labor you shall receive Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands” (84). DeNora writes that others were looking for the heir to the “immortal Mozart,” and after Beethoven’s success, people began to fabricate stories that Mozart actually heard a young Beethoven play, allegedly commenting that he was the “man to watch.”⁴

In the hip-hop world, those immortal figures exist in the form of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G., canonical rappers who were involved in a West Coast–East Coast rap feud and died in 1996 and 1997 respectively, leading to a number of memorial processes (including memorial songs, posthumous albums, T-shirts, murals, and so forth). According to Kris Ex (2003, 156), “Even at this early date,” in the post-Tupac rap world, “there’s no shortage of would-be heirs to the throne of Thug Immortal.” As I have previously noted (Williams 2013, 103–39),

newer artists often digitally sample the voices of 2Pac and Biggie to contribute to their artistic posturing within a gangsta rap lineage: those who have done so include Jay-Z, Eminem, and 50 Cent. In this lineage, the 1980s group N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes) becomes a founding “classical” group, with Dr. Dre as mentor figure to others (Snoop Doggy Dogg [1993], Eminem [1999], 50 Cent [2003], The Game [2005], and Kendrick Lamar [2012]) (see table 11.1). Rappers use the symbolic immortality of 2Pac and Biggie to solidify their own status, providing what Van Wyck Brooks (1918) and more recently Lois Zamora (2007) have called “a usable past” for a number of purposes.⁵

The Game

Born Jayceon Terrell Taylor in 1979, rapper The Game grew up in Compton, Los Angeles. Like many black youth of Compton, he grew up with the realities that are typically explored in gangsta rap lyrics: the everyday violence of gang warfare (Crips versus Bloods), drug abuse, and crime. His highly anticipated debut album, *The Documentary* (2005), featured such star producers as Dr. Dre, Kanye West, Scott Storch, Eminem, Hi-Tek, and Just Blaze, and went on to receive double platinum status in the United States and sold five million copies worldwide.⁶

Unlike previous protégés of Dr. Dre (Snoop Doggy Dogg, Eminem, and 50 Cent),⁷ The Game, like his mentor, was from Compton. He had been a drug dealer, member of the Bloods gang (his mother was a Hoover Crip and father a Nutty Block Crip), and was recovering from gunshot wounds in the hospital (after waking from a three-day coma) when he decided to study classic rap albums and pursue a rap career (Reid 2005). A number of labels were interested (including Bad Boy Entertainment), but Dr. Dre’s label, Aftermath, won the contract, not least because The Game could work with his hometown hero. In 2005, The Game explained, “I opted for Aftermath since Dre was from Compton, I’m from Compton, you know. . . . I’ll keep the whole N.W.A legacy going. . . . That’s where I wanted to be” (Reid 2005). This was also important in that the West Coast gangsta rap scene had not produced a new artist with major national impact for more than a decade (Ahmed and Kondo 2015).

It is safe to say that The Game fits the archetype persona of a gangsta rapper: a former drug dealer and gang member who survived a number of gunshot wounds (as 50 Cent did) and lived to rap the tale. The album cover of *The Documentary* shows The Game sitting on car tires, shirtless,

Table 11.1. Los Angeles Gangsta Rap History

Year(s)	Event or Album Release
1940s–70s	• African American “Second Great Migration” to Los Angeles (South Central)
1965	• Watts Riots (Aug 11–17) • Black Panther Party, Brown Berets active in region
1970s	• Gang formation intensifies (including the Crips and Piru Bloods)
1985	• Toddy Tee’s releases “Batterram,” a rap song protesting police chief Daryl Gates’s decision to use tank-sized vehicles to run over homes in South Central Los Angeles suspected to be drug dealer residences.
1987	• Ice-T’s debut album, <i>Rhyme Pays</i>
1988	• N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes; members: Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, DJ Yella, MC Ren) releases debut album, <i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (Ruthless/Priority Records)
1989	• Ice Cube leaves N.W.A., releases solo album, <i>AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted</i> (Priority Records)
1991	• N.W.A. releases second and final album, <i>Efil4zaggin</i>
1992	• Los Angeles peace treaty between Crips and Bloods • 29 April—Los Angeles Rebellion (aka L.A. Riots) following the acquittal of the police officers in the Rodney King case • December—Dr. Dre’s solo debut, <i>The Chronic</i> (Death Row/Interscope/Priority Records); his production style ushers in the G-Funk era and shifts the mainstream rap focus on the West Coast
1993	• Dr. Dre produces Snoop Doggy Dogg’s debut album, <i>Doggystyle</i> ; it becomes first rap album to debut at No. 1 on <i>Billboard</i> Top 200
1995	• Tupac Shakur is released from prison and signs with West Coast Death Row Records • Tupac Shakur releases single, “California Love,” produced by Dr. Dre, featuring Dr. Dre and Roger Troutman
1994–97	• Shift from West Coast G-Funk gangsta rap prominence back to East Coast (New York City) • East Coast–West Coast feud between Bad Boy Records and Death Row Records
1996	• 13 September, Tupac Shakur murdered
1997	• 9 March, Notorious B.I.G. murdered
1997–99	• Shift to southern hip-hop and “bling era” mainstream
1999	• Dr. Dre produces Eminem’s major-label debut, <i>Slim Shady LP</i> (Interscope/Aftermath) • Dr. Dre releases <i>Chronic 2001</i>
2003	• Dr. Dre produces 50 Cent’s major-label debut, <i>Get Rich or Die Tryin</i> (Aftermath/Interscope/Shady Records)
2005	• Dr. Dre produces The Game’s <i>The Documentary</i> (Aftermath/Interscope/G-Unit/Shady Records)
2006	• The Game releases <i>Doctor’s Advocate</i> (Aftermath/Interscope/G-Unit/Shady Records)
2012	• Kendrick Lamar releases <i>Good Kid, m.A.A.d. City</i> (Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope)
2015	• Kendrick Lamar releases <i>To Pimp a Butterfly</i> (Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope)
2015	• August, worldwide release of <i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (directed by F. Gary Gray), biopic depicting the career of N.W.A. • 7 August, Dr. Dre releases third (and reportedly final) album, <i>Compton</i> (aka <i>Compton: A Soundtrack</i>), on Apple Music and the iTunes Store (CD release, 21 August) • The Game releases sixth major-label studio album, <i>The Documentary 2</i>

muscled, tattooed, and wearing gold chains, fitting the stereotypical image of black hypermasculinity associated with gangsta rap. The Compton link made it easier for The Game to extend a tradition of rap that reached national prominence with N.W.A. in the 1980s. In particular, The Game's lyrical references were the main component of constructing such links. I focus on "We Ain't" (track 11) from *The Documentary* as an example of the variety of intertextuality in hip-hop and as exemplary of the range and quantity of his lyrical references in addition to other stylistic features that link The Game with other rappers (e.g., Eminem's production). To paraphrase DeNora on Beethoven, The Game's association with rappers such as Dr. Dre, 50 Cent, and Eminem stylistically and lyrically became a way of articulating his claims to status.

The lyrical function of "We Ain't" introduces The Game as rap artist—he simultaneously boasts about how great a rapper he is while respecting those who came before him, in particular, the track's producer, Eminem (Marshall Mathers III). Eminem raps for the duration of verse 2, affirming The Game's greatness in lyrical content and declaring that his label mates "have his back." The track is in simple verse-chorus form (Covach 2005) in that it does not vary from its core harmonic structure (e minor) throughout with the exception of the introduction. The use of the synthesizer and drum machine to build the "beat"—used here as a term that encompasses all sonic material apart from the "flow" or rap—recalls Dr. Dre's and Eminem's production styles of the late 1990s and 2000s. The four-measure phrase in example 11.1 shows what Allan Moore (1993, 182) calls a "driving pattern" from rock music, albeit here in a synthesized form, in the "basic beat." (see table 11.2 for additional examples) The melody of the basic beat is mirrored by the chorus, sung by The Game ("We ain't goin nowhere so fuck you," repeated twice). The repeated notes in the bass can be found in a number of Eminem productions at this time, including "Crazy in Love" from *Encore* (2004), 50 Cent's "Patiently Waiting" and "Ghetto Gospel" (2004) from the posthumous 2Pac album *Loyal to the Game* (Williams 2013, 140–66). The driving pattern has infinite variations in rock music, and its synthesized variant maintains the stream of fixed-pitch eighth notes, although such a comparison does not account for variations in timbre, accent, and other features. Nevertheless, "We Ain't" still holds enough family resemblance to act as interobjective comparison material (Tagg 2012, 238), sonically associated with Eminem's production style at the time.⁸ A pattern associated with rock adds a "rock star" status to figures such as Eminem and The Game. And while this "rock star"/"driving pattern" link is possible,



Example 11.1. Basic Beat

the more immediately perceived element is that Eminem provides a sonic signature in his production that links himself with The Game.⁹

In addition to being noted for his skills as a rapper, Eminem emerged as a successful producer as his career developed,¹⁰ creating a distinctive “sonic signature” that can be found on many albums, including his own. According to the work of Mark Gillespie (2006, 31), a sonic signature refers to the ways a producer or a producer’s style can be identified in a recording: literally saying his/her name, recognizable sounds, rhythmic patterns, structural elements, orchestration and timbre, sound effects, or phonographic staging.¹¹ In this case, the similarities in Eminem’s production between “We Ain’t” and “Ghetto Gospel,” for example, include orchestration; timbre; structural, rhythmic, and melodic patterns; and other discrete and abstract sounds.

The link with Eminem is also forged by having Eminem guest rap on verse 2 of the song (see table 11.3). Having guest verses is not uncommon in rap, but certain parameters of Eminem’s delivery seem uncharacteristic to his usual flow. His voice is largely monotone, fixed on one pitch (with the exception of the word *which*), mirroring the one note of the

Table 11.2. “Driving Pattern” Examples

Element	Derived from
“Driving pattern” (Moore 1993, 182)	<u>Rock/Metal/Punk</u>
	Black Sabbath, “Paranoid” (1970)
	Deep Purple, “Smoke on the Water” (1972)
	Sex Pistols, “Anarchy in the UK” (1976)
	Van Halen “Jump” (1984) [in guitar under synthesizer riff]
	Megadeth, “Symphony of Destruction” (1992)
	<u>In Other Eminem and Dre Productions</u>
	“Patiently Waiting” (2003), “In da Club” (2003), “Crazy in Love” (2004), “Ghetto Gospel” (2004) (Williams 2013, 151–53)

driving pattern in the bass not so much in exact rhythm but in its fixed-pitch delivery. The purpose of Eminem’s downplayed delivery might be understood as not overshadowing the leading artist, who needs to be promoted as the “next big thing.” Links are also forged by the multiple references to the rapper and his alter egos Marshall Mathers, Eminem, and Slim Shady (see table 11.4) as well as a strong rebuttal from The Game in response to critics who believe Eminem to be a racist.¹²

In terms of the flow of “We Ain’t,” The Game has a moment of lyrical delivery that imitates the flow of an earlier Eminem track. It is the anapestic tetrameter alluded to in various places on the track but most prominent in verse 3: “[For tellin] me its hot, when its not, and you got, what you got, From them rocks on the block” (see table 11.5). This anapestic tetrameter is found on Eminem’s “The Way I Am,” which complements the beat of the 2000 single from *The Marshall Mathers LP* (“I sit back with this pack of Zig-Zags and this bag of this weed it gives me the shit needed to be . . .”).¹³

The first half of chorus is sung by The Game (in unison with the synth melody), again a stylistic trait akin to “rap crooners” 50 Cent and Eminem. Sung choruses were presented in earlier rap examples (in particular, Dr. Dre’s early 1990s G-funk production), but it was less common to have the star rapper sing the chorus (which of course has implications for the “pop” codes in mainstream rap and the subsequent authenticity of a rapper who uses a verse-chorus form). Elements such as flow, sonic signature, guest rap, and lyrical reference contribute to the solidification of a linkage between Eminem and The Game and do so in ways not dissimilar to the mentor-student relationship between Dr. Dre and Eminem at the start of his career.¹⁴

Furthermore, The Game’s first album is filled with a wide range of lyrical references, as if it were a webpage saturated with hyperlinks. One

Table 11.3. “We Ain’t” Form

Intro	
Verse 1	The Game
Chorus	<u>Part A</u> : The Game (sung)
	<u>Part B</u> : Eminem, Dr. Dre, Eminem (3 autosonic quotations)
Verse 2	Eminem
Chorus	<u>Part A</u> : The Game (sung)
	<u>Part B</u> : Eminem, Dr. Dre, Eminem (3 autosonic quotations)
Verse 3	The Game
Outro	

Table 11.4. Lyrical References

Parameter	Trope/Derivation
11.4.1 Peer References	
Aftermath (label) (00:11), (00:30), (4:17) (intro and outro)	Hip-hop genre tropes of mentioning place, label, other rappers.
Compton (place): (00:14), (00:27)	
“Straight out the muthafuckin streets of Compton ” (from intro)	Reference to album <i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (by N.W.A.)
“Classical LA, N.W.A. shit” (1:04–1:06)	N.W.A. as “classical” rap (history)
Eminem references: Marshall (00:35), 8 Mile (3:05), shady (3:08, 3:30), Eminem (3:13), Slim Shady (4:24)	Invoking lineage (Dre, Eminem/Shady, 50 Cent)
“Shady one of the greatest, like biggie and pac was” (00:49–00:52)	Invoking ancestors (Biggie and Pac)
“Me, him [Em], and 50 racin” (00:54)	
Dre (3:00, 3:26, 4:26) “Rappin on Dre hits” (1:04)	Mentions executive producer/mentor (Dr. Dre)
Michael [Jackson], (1:10) commenting on the media	
Jimi Hendrix (3:18)	
“ Lo get Dre on the phone quick” (2:58)	Lo =Angelo Sanders (A&R for Aftermath Records)
G-Unit (3:40, 4:29, 4:33)	G-Unit (50 Cent’s rap label and crew)
The Game (00:20), (4:22), end of each chorus (15 times total)	
11.4.2 Game : “Em just killed me on my own shit” (3:00)	Allosonic quotation from Nas’s “Ether” (2002) [when he insults Jay-Z: “Em killed you on your own shit,” a reference to “Renegade” from <i>The Blueprint</i> (2001)]
11.4.3 Biographical Details	
“When I’m tryin to feed my son” (00:38)	Trope of rapper biography/psychology and life struggle (Tupac and Eminem)
“Made momma proud that her son made it out” (00:44)	Wider biographical gangsta rap tropes of gangs and drug dealing, including The Game’s three-day coma following gunshot wounds in 2001.

critic wrote that The Game “believes that if he mentions a rap classic or classic rapper in every other sentence then he too will become legendary in the minds of confused fans who’ll mentally place him within those referenced ranks” (Pursey 2007, 34). These types of references (groups, artists, places, cities, record labels, albums, and producers) are extremely common in rap, though The Game arguably includes such references at an accelerated rate. Table 11.4 shows the number of references, including Dr. Dre’s record label (Aftermath), Compton, hip-hop martyrs Biggie and Pac, and other canonical figures of African American music

such as Jimi Hendrix and Michael Jackson.¹⁵ In the current context, The Game's reference to the "Classical LA, N.W.A. shit" is particularly intriguing, since it historicizes and periodizes the group as "classical" in terms of West Coast gangsta rap.¹⁶ Despite the frequency and repetition of numerous lyrical references to gangsta rap history, the most frequent reference is to The Game himself, with fifteen citations from Eminem and The Game combined.

There are allusions to earlier rap songs, such as when the Game raps, "Em just killed me on my own shit," a reference to the Nas's 2002 rap diss, "Ether," which insulted Jay-Z by stating that on "Renegade," a 2001 duet between Jay-Z and Eminem that Eminem produced, Eminem lyrically outplayed Jay-Z on his own album. The Game turns this around as a sign of homage and respect to Eminem. As is often the case in African American based music, The Game is Signifyin(g) on Nas's lyric, claiming it, and turning the insult into something positive (Gates 1989; see also Brackett 2000; Burns and Woods 2004).

There are larger tropes as part of the lyric and thematic references outlined in table 11.4 that I mention only briefly here. This includes the autobiographical details of struggle and hardship ("I'm tryin to feed my son") that first became prominent in 2Pac's work and then intensified in the lyrics of Eminem—what Kodwo Eshun (1999, -004) has called the "nauseating American hunger for confessional biography." Furthermore, listeners are often familiar with the extramusical biographical details of gangsta rap tropes such as The Game's history with gangs and drug dealing and bring that information to their interpretations of the track. Since rap music began as party accompaniment for dancing, the inclusion of a deeper sense of autobiography beyond name, location, and boasting of skills was a later development in rap lyrics.¹⁷

Thus far, most of my examples have been allosonic rather than auto-sonic (Lacasse 2000). I have chosen these examples partly to prove that not all discussion of borrowing and intertextuality in hip-hop should be limited to digital sampling. But digital sampling is a prominent technique within hip-hop and other genres, useful for myriad purposes: to save money on studio musicians, to "punch in" a chorus that sounds exactly the same in multiple places, to construct hip-hop beats with a palette of sounds, to create collage effects (e.g., the Bomb Squad), to use a voice of another artist (often a deceased rapper), and many others. I now point specifically to an autosonic (digitally sampled) example of rap borrowing that occurs in the second half of the chorus (analyzed in table 11.5).

The first sample in the chorus is from an Eminem-produced track,

“One Day at a Time,” a posthumous “duet” between 2Pac and Eminem from the film *Tupac Resurrection*. The second sample is from Dr. Dre’s “The Watcher” from 2001, and the third sample is from 50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting,” the Eminem-produced track that introduced 50 Cent to the commercial mainstream sphere. The Game modifies the line “You’re about the witness the power of fuckin’ 50” to “You’re about the witness the power of The Game.” This line also alludes to an earlier moment in rap history: Dr. Dre’s opening line from N.W.A.’s 1988 album *Straight Outta Compton*: “You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge.” The transformation of the line from the street knowledge of N.W.A. to the promotion of 50 Cent and The Game arguably mirrors a shift from the emphasis on social realism of ghettocentric spaces to the promotion of the individual within gangsta rap culture.

From a practical and legal standpoint, Aftermath/Interscope owns all of these samples, so it may be easier to reuse them without cost. But there is a conscious construction at work here. To digitally sample these songs

Table 11.5. Flow

Parameter	Derived from
11.5.1 Game’s flow [verse 1 (portions) and verse 3]—anapestic tetrameter (2 unstressed syllables followed by 1 stressed): “[For tellin] me its <u>hot</u> , when its <u>not</u> , and you <u>got</u> , what you <u>got</u> , From them <u>rocks</u> on the <u>block</u> ” (3:21–3:43).	Eminem’s “The Way I Am” (2000) (e.g. “I sit <u>back</u> with this <u>pack</u> of Zig-Zags and this <u>bag</u> of this <u>weed</u> it gives <u>me</u> the shit <u>needed</u> to <u>be</u> . . .”)
11.5.2 Rapper-sung chorus	50 Cent and Eminem verse-chorus forms
11.5.3 Eminem’s flow (verse 2)	Matches driving pattern of the beat (in fixed pitch) (see table 11.3 and example 11.1)
11.5.4 Chorus	
Autosonic quotations	
11.5.4a. Em: “This day, the game, will never be the same” (1:40–1:43)	11.5.4a. “One Day at a Time” (1:58) [Eminem from <i>Tupac Resurrection</i> , a posthumous duet]
11.5.4b Dre: “Things just ain’t the same for gangstas” (1:43)	11.5.4b. Dr. Dre—“The Watcher” (1999) from <i>Chronik 2001</i>
11.5.4c. Em: “You’re about to witness the power . . .” (1:50)	11.5.4c’ 50 Cent “Patiently Waiting” (2003) (2:43) from 50 Cent’s debut album <i>Get Rich or Die Trying</i>
	11.5.4c” N.W.A. <i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (1988) (0:01)
	[Dr. Dre: “You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge”]

and to textually signal that they come from another source (see Williams 2013, 7–9) are processes that not only fit within the framework of hip-hop aesthetics but also serve a specific purpose, placing *The Game* within the historical lineage of gangsta rap.

Kendrick Lamar

The next Dr. Dre protégé to reach national stardom after *The Game* was Kendrick Lamar (born in 1987 as Kendrick Lamar Duckworth). Like *The Game*, Lamar was born and raised in Compton and was signed to Aftermath and Interscope in 2012. His major label debut, *Good Kid, m.A.A.d. City* (2012),¹⁸ tells the story of a seventeen-year-old Kendrick Lamar who deals with gangs, peer pressure, nagging parents, and sexual desire for women. With his friends, he is K. Dot, a quasi-alter ego persona who drinks and smokes and gets into trouble with theft and gun violence, whereas inside, he is “good kid” Kendrick.¹⁹

This concept album largely focuses on one day in Lamar’s life. He gets robbed earlier in the story, and by the end of the day, he and his friends get drunk and try to retaliate, resulting in the death of one of his friends’ brothers. The second half of the album sees Kendrick reflecting on the dangers of life in Compton and his desire to get out and make something of himself.

The crux of this realization comes in “m.A.A.d. City,” where Lamar raps about previous encounters with death and destruction (“Brace yourself, I’ll take you on a trip down memory lane . . .”). Both beat and flow add to a sense of panic and stress as he recalls the first time he saw a dead body (when he was nine), having to duck while shootings were occurring during a meal with his family, and recounts the death of his cousin due to gang violence. The track also features MC Eiht from Compton’s *Most Wanted*, a figure and group associated with the G-funk era of West Coast gangsta rap in the early 1990s.

At the end of the fourth verse of “m.A.A.d. City,” Lamar states, “I live inside the belly of the rough / Compton, U.S.A. / made Me an Angel on Angel Dust, what,” as we hear a stylistic allusion to one of the most identifiable signifiers of the G-funk era, the high-pitched whine of a synthesizer. There are two large-scale manifestations of the “whiny synth” sound in G-funk and rap history: the first is a digital sample of the Ohio Players’ “The Funky Worm” (1972), while the second comprises synthesizer allusions to the song rather than exact quotation. A number of producers used the “Funky Worm” sample in a variety of ways, with N.W.A.’s “Dope

Man” (1987) serving as an early example.²⁰ Dr. Dre’s production with N.W.A. was primarily sample-based, but when he went solo, he switched to replaying source samples with a studio band (even when putting them through a synthesizer).

Rather than use the “Funky Worm” sample autsonically as he did previously for “Dope Man,” Dr. Dre used a now-iconic melodic riff for “Nuthin but a ‘G’ Thang” (*The Chronic*, 1992), invoking a synthesizer timbre that alluded to “The Funky Worm” but that carried its own melodic identity. The synthesizer-heavy “Chronic Intro” sets the tone for the soundscape of the album, with the synthesizer sounds acknowledging influences from the P-Funk of George Clinton.²¹ The trend of using high-pitched synth melodies continued with Snoop Doggy Dogg’s “Serial Killa,” from his 1993 debut album, *Doggystyle*, which used a fragment of the “Funky Worm” riff that was heard on “Dope Man.” Even former N.W.A. member Eazy-E’s 1993 diss of Dr. Dre on “Real Muthafuckin G’s” (which was a response to Dr. Dre’s 1992 diss of Eazy-E in “Fuck wit Dre Day”) used the stylistic allusion of a high-pitched synthesizer to help make his point.

The Game also used the effect of a whiny synth for “California Vacation” on his second major-label album, *Doctor’s Advocate* (2006), where it accompanies lyrics such as “The West Coast back crackin’ like it’s ‘94” and “I graduated from Dre school, top of my class,” and “Still bangin’ The Chronic like Doggystyle came with it.” The melody is exactly the same portion of “Funky Worm” used for “Serial Killa” (which itself was part of “Dope Man”) and features guest raps from Snoop Dogg and Xzibit, both of whom are associated with Dr. Dre and West Coast gangsta rap. What was once a funk sample representing 1970s funk groups like Parliament Funkadelic and the Ohio Players thus became firmly associated with a powerful moment in late 1980s/early 1990s West Coast gangsta rap. The synth stands for the success of G-funk and its associated artists, the gangsta lifestyle, Compton, and West Coast rap as well as celebrates black masculinity (at the expense of black women). The “Funky Worm” synth is one of the most prominent signifiers of West Coast gangsta rap, identifying an era, subgenre, and a geographical location. It is celebratory in most of its contexts, but Lamar uses it in markedly different lyrical contexts.

The sound of the synth at the end of “m.A.A.d. City,” however, can be read in a completely different manner from previous examples given the lyrical content of the song. For Dr. Dre, the synth sound became celebra-

tory of an early 1990s Compton under gang peace treaty, full of parties and barbecues, depicted in music videos from *The Chronic*. For Lamar, it is a leitmotif for Compton that becomes attached to the horrors of the city and the anxieties of its inhabitants. This can be particularly powerful for the fans of hip-hop, as reception hinges on a person's knowledge of the "original" material. A listener who grew up with G-funk or knows it well would find the Lamar track especially poignant and might even feel a sense of shame for celebrating the "gangsta" lifestyle in the early 1990s. "m.A.A.d. City" is an example of a track in rap music where the lyrics deeply affect the interpretation of the accompanying sounds.²² Pharrell Williams, another producer on the album, commented that Lamar is "speaking of a Compton that's very different from the one Dre and Snoop blessed us with. He's giving us a new perspective on a world most people don't even know about" (Ahmed 2012).

While in its new context, the whiny synth Compton leitmotif in "m.A.A.d. City" is associated with negative connotations, "Compton," the last track on *GKMC*, does use earlier G-funk musical themes in a celebratory manner. The track signifies the start of Lamar's successful rap career and the lineage of artists from Compton. It is the only track on the album that features Dr. Dre, and the ending includes robotic-sounding vocoder vocalizing initially associated with recordings by Zapp and Roger (such as "Computer Love" [1985]). To an audience familiar with rap music, the brief vocoder phrases on "Compton" are reminiscent of "California Love," a 1996 track from 2Pac's *All Eyes on Me* by Dr. Dre featuring Roger Troutman from Zapp. Many interviews note that Lamar was a young child when he stood on his father's shoulders to watch the filming of the "California Love" music video in Compton. Lamar describes "Compton" as the "perfect song"

The history behind that song is incredible. It was the first song I ever recorded with Dre. It was the first time meeting him and actually walking in the studio, that was the beat that was playing. I'll never forget that exact moment. (Ahmed 2012)

While the linkage between Lamar and Dr. Dre is less explicit and much less performed than Eminem and Dr. Dre or The Game and Dr. Dre, such extramusical quotes help place Lamar into gangsta rap history even if the subject matter and posturing toward it have a slightly different effect.²³

Conclusion

The song “We Ain’t” exemplifies the intramusical lineage construction of The Game within an already-established yet constantly shifting canon of “great rappers.” According to Brendan Koerner (2005), “Since 1998, only five albums can truly be considered pure Dre projects—the first two releases from Eminem, the debuts of 50 Cent and The Game, and his own *2001*.” In the decade-plus since Koerner wrote those words, *Good Kid, m.A.A.d. City* and Dr. Dre’s third album, *Compton* (2015), can be added to that list, though Lamar’s inclusion is more complicated given that much of the album questions, rather than celebrates, gangsta lifestyles. The Game became the new star rap artist after 50 Cent, aligned with Eminem and Dr. Dre, and used the symbolic immortality of rappers such as Tupac Shakur to solidify his place. Paula Higgins (1997, 2007) explains student-mentor composer relationships through the concept of “creative patrilineage,” noting that these canons are often overwhelmingly male, and gangsta rap and its problematic lyrics celebrating misogyny and violence toward women are no exception. Some have also commented on the disappearance of women in the N.W.A. biopic *Straight Outta Compton* (2015)—in particular, women who were physically abused by Dr. Dre, such as reporter Dee Barnes and his girlfriend, Michel’le (Barnes 2015; Bradley and Visci 2015; Rich 2015). Race, too, seems to trump gender: white rapper Eminem’s place in Dr. Dre’s lineage (see Williams 2013, 144–58) demonstrates that a white male can enter the canon of great rappers in ways that women cannot. Rumors have suggested that Eminem will perform the Eazy-E role on tour with the reunited members of N.W.A. (Gordon 2015), thus solidifying a lineage that is arguably more color-blind than gender-blind. Michel’le and other female artists associated with Ruthless Records and Aftermath artists such as Eve and Truth Hurts are excluded from historicization, adding to the barriers and discrimination faced by females of any race who seek to become rap artists and producers.

Although all hip-hop is intertextual to varying degrees, The Game represents an intensification of the referencing and allusion found in most hip-hop.²⁴ Perhaps this is not a coincidence. According to Simon Reynolds (2010, xxi), 2000s pop music reflected a culture obsessed with its own recent past rather than interested in creating new styles: “Not only has never before been a society so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of its immediate past, but there has never before been a society that

is *able* to access the immediate past so easily and so copiously.” He sees retro as an “intersection between mass culture and personal memory” (xxi) and provides a long list of such manifestations including band reunions (the Police, Led Zeppelin, the Pixies), the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and other museums, biographies, rockumentaries, shows such as VH1’s *I Love the 80s*, reissues, remastered albums, YouTube as new “field of cultural practice” (59), Hollywood film remakes (*True Grit*, *Get Smart*, *Dukes of Hazzard*), sampling, and the White Stripes and other bands that espouse much older rock ideologies from the 1960s (xi).²⁵

While I would not label the Game’s albums “retro” in the way that Reynolds conceives it, a link may exist between the amplification of the referential in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the intensification of the hyperlink-like flow of the Game. In the esthetic realm of interpretation, there also exists an amplification of identifying references with websites such as *Rap Genius*.²⁶ This arguably demonstrates a Web 2.0 intensification of the crowdsourced lyrical interpretations of hip-hop’s intertextuality by those I have called the imagined community of the hip-hop nation (Williams 2013, 13–15). These crowdsourced interpretations, debated and posted online, have helped make the imagined community of hip-hop become a virtual community for website users. There are line-by-line interpretations of “We Ain’t”: for example, one *Genius* user (Maboo) outlines the main theme of the song: “The Game worships Eminem, his former—and now reunited—labelmate.” Lamar’s albums in particular include a range of lyrical interpretations by fans published online. These interpretations are primarily lyric-based (although music producers and some samples are cited on the website, echoing the lyric focus of early rap academia) and may well catch only a certain level of rap’s intertextualities. Following the work of John Frow (1990), Burns, Woods, and Lafrance (2015, 6) observe, “The selection or recognition of intertextual references . . . is always already an interpretative process.” What is particularly interesting with *Genius* and deserving of further study is how such an interpretative process online forms a dialogue between one’s individual interpretation and the discourse of crowdsourced interpretations of song texts.²⁷

The hyperreferential in both the rap stylings of The Game and interpretations on *Genius* and other websites also demonstrates a process of historicization in gangsta rap and emphasizes cultural memory as a feature of African American culture (Floyd 1995; see also Rose 1994). I am not arguing that one impulse or characteristic trumps all others on these tracks, but that they involve a complex blend of African American cul-

tural impulses, intrageneric references and cultural memory, the urge to periodize, the obsession with our recent past, and the appropriation of a usable past to promote new artists and place them within a tradition. These centuries-old practices are in evidence in “We Ain’t,” “m.A.A.d. City,” and other tracks in West Coast gangsta rap history.

Notes

1. This invocation of history can reference either hip-hop culture itself (Williams 2013, 20–46) or wider links with African American culture such as funk music (Rose 1994).

2. This N.W.A.–Dr. Dre–2Pac–Eminem–50 Cent lineage was first discussed in Williams 2013, 140–66), and this chapter extends the lineage to encompass more recent developments.

3. Taruskin (1988, 158) writes that Furtwängler’s and Schoenberg’s approaches “rely on a sense of continuity—and hence direct transmission—of tradition that many in the twentieth century believe to be lost.” Echoes Morgan (1988, 62), “Always implicit in Schoenberg’s remarks is the belief that music history is linear in nature—that one compositional development leads logically and inexorably to the next, producing the progressive growth of an ever more varied, complex, and differentiated musical language.” For examples outside of music, see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992.

4. Yet Mozart’s letters offer no evidence that he ever heard Beethoven play (DeNora 1995, 114). Higgins (1997, 2007) finds cases of intertextuality that emphasize the student-mentor lineage (what she deems “creative patrilineage”) between composers in early laments, particularly in laments for fifteenth-century French composer Johannes Ockeghem. Examples include Josquin des Prez/Jean Molinet, “Nymphes de Bois” (1497) and Guillaume Cretin, “Déploration sur le Trépas de J. Ockeghem” (1497). Higgins uses the term *patrilineage* to emphasize the male-dominated nature of such canons.

5. Also important to memorial processes and lineage is the 1995 death of N.W.A. founder Eazy-E (Eric Wright) of an AIDS-related illness. Eazy and others (e.g., Jam Master Jay, Big L, and Proof) are memorialized to a lesser degree than 2Pac and Notorious B.I.G. but are nevertheless reflective of the close proximity of death within gangsta rap cultures (see Williams 2015).

6. The album was originally supposed to be titled *Nigga Witta Attitude Vol. 1*—a reference to N.W.A.—but the name had to be changed because of legal complications involving Eazy-E’s estate.

7. Snoop Doggy Dogg was, however, from Long Beach, creating a Southern California linkage.

8. Eminem-produced tracks for other artists include Jay-Z’s “Renegade” (2001) and “Moment of Clarity” (2003), Nas’s “The Cross” (2002), and 50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting” (2003), among others. His star persona as an MC, however, receives much more media focus and promotion than his production work.

9. Adam Krims (2007, 161) writes that many rap fans are knowledgeable

enough to identify producers' sonic identities on rap albums: star producers such as Timbaland, Kanye West, and Pharrell Williams espouse what Krims has identified as branding in recent music trends, as there often exist elements of a sonic signature recognizable by fans (and sometimes imitated by other producers), and consumers will purchase these albums based on the producer brand. According to producer Scott Storch, "People say that [Eminem's] music sounds the same or whatever but anybody can make a beat, the thing they need to realize is you need to create a signature beat so that every time you hear a beat you automatically think 'yeah Lil Jon or Dr. Dre or Just Blaze'" (quoted in Brown 2006, 82).

10. Like his mentor, Dr. Dre, Eminem has a number of collaborators who feature in production credits, among them the Detroit Bass Brothers (Mark and Jeff Bass) and keyboardist and producer Luis Resto. When I refer to Eminem as producer, I am acknowledging that Eminem's sonic signature is a product of these collaborations and not simply Eminem as auteur. I use "Eminem's production" or "Eminem's sonic signature" as shorthand for "the result of a number of agents involved in a production credited to Eminem."

11. Gillespie differentiates between "sound signatures" (nonvocal sonic material) and "name signatures" (allonymic [the producer is named by someone else] and autonymic [the producer names him/herself]). Gillespie's taxonomy of sound signatures includes (1) discrete (immediately recognizable sounds, e.g., Timbaland's "flute" sound); (2) abstract (e.g., particular rhythmic patterns); (3) performative ("feel," use of quantization); (4) structural (organization, how the track is put together); (5) orchestral (specific combinations of patches); (6) sound effects; and (7) phonographic staging.

12. Rumors that Eminem was racist were fueled by the 2003 discovery of a tape from his teens where Eminem uses the word *nigger* to refer to a black girlfriend. The Game's defense of Eminem may specifically refer to this incident. See BBC News 2003; Reid 2003.

13. The imitation could be an act of homage, or Eminem may have ghostwritten the lyrics for The Game, which would explain the stylistic similarity in flow.

14. Although the beat of "We Ain't" was produced by Eminem (and his team), Dr. Dre's role as executive producer (and as mentor figure) did not go unnoticed in the press. Dr. Dre gets framed not only as a founding father of West Coast gangsta rap but also as boss, as Svengali, in line with the mentor-student relationships found in earlier eras. One writer wrote of The Game's debut album, "Then there's the fact that *The Documentary*, though it bears The Game's byline, is more a product of the Dr. Dre assembly line than anything else" (Koerner 2005).

15. Tupac Shakur often mentioned figures in African American history, in particular civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X as well canonical artists such as Marvin Gaye and Billie Holiday (e.g., "Thugz Mansion"). For an investigation of hip-hop sampling of civil rights and 1970s blaxploitation figures, see Demers 2003.

16. The high degree of intertextual reference is also displayed on The Game's body in the form of tattoos he has received throughout his career. First, his body emulates the archetype of the Tupac Shakur-type gangsta rapper (made iconic on the *Rolling Stone* cover after his death), a heavily muscled and tattooed iteration of black masculinity also shared by 50 Cent. The Game has tattoos of Eazy-E

(on his right forearm); a graveyard with 2Pac, Jam Master Jay, and Eazy-E; Cedar Block Pirus; N.W.A.; Tupac Shakur as an angel; the word *Compton* across his stomach; album covers of *The Chronic* and *The Documentary* on his lower stomach; and Trayvon Martin and Nate Dogg on his legs. He also has a tattoo for his son, a deceased friend, Barack Obama's face, and others.

17. This romantic trope of struggle—in particular, the psychology of inner feeling largely popularized by Tupac Shakur and Eminem—has intensified through the work of Kendrick Lamar, Earl Sweatshirt, Future, and others since 2010.

18. This follows 2Pac's penchant for using acronyms to mean more than one thing (e.g., NIGGA = Never Ignorant, Getting Goals Accomplished). Here, *m.A.A.d.* is often cited as "my Angel's on Angel Dust" or "my Angry Adolescence Divided." In some instances, *M.A.A.D.* (all capitals) is used; however, I use *m.A.A.d.* here for consistency.

19. According to Lamar, the track "Good Kid" "represents the space I was in. Knowing that you're doing wrong things, but at the same time, you're a good kid at heart. I knew what I was doing and what I was getting myself into and the people I'm hanging with" (Ahmed 2012).

20. Examples include Ice-T, "Bitches 2" (1991); MC Breed, "Ain't No Future in Your Frontin'" (1991); X-Clan, "Xodus" (1992); Above the Law, "Black Superman" (1994); and the pop rap duo Kris Kross, "Jump" (1992). Ice Cube's "The Wicked" (1992) uses the sample as a shorter loop than "Dope Man," creating a more menacing effect.

21. The influence from George Clinton and P-Funk is the primary reason that the style was dubbed G-funk (with the G standing for "gangsta"). For a fuller account of the early G-funk era, and the use of the funky worm sample, see Westhoff 2016.

22. On "Wesley's Theory," the opening track from Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), we hear a high-pitched synthesizer as part of the beat before we hear an interlude with Dr. Dre saying, "Yo, what's up? It's Dre. Remember the first time you came out to the house? You said you wanted a spot like mine. But remember, anybody can get it. The hard part is keepin' it, motherfucker." The song itself is a parable for young African American men who achieve fame and fortune but lose it as a consequence of ignorance and poor management. (*Wesley* refers to actor Wesley Snipes, who was convicted of tax evasion.) Less explicit than "m.A.A.d. City," "Wesley's Theory" represents both a lineage with George Clinton (who also appears on the song) and the dangers of a lifestyle associated with Compton.

23. Lamar's second major-label album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, is framed as a poem that Lamar writes to 2Pac, and the album ends with an interview with 2Pac (digitally manipulated as if he were speaking to Lamar). This powerful case of post-mortem sampling (Williams 2013, 2015) furthers a link between the two despite the fact they did not know each other in reality.

24. For examples that use this hyperreferencing to very different ends, see rapper Childish Gambino (Donald Glover). The work of Lady Gaga might also fit this trend, with her use of a number of musical intertexts, though Burns, Woods, and Lafrance (2015) have argued that her intertexts go beyond simple plagiarism and that she advances popular music genres in new ways.

25. "Instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the 'Re' Decade. The 2000s were dominated by the 're-' prefix: revivals, reissues, remakes, re-enactments. Endless retrospection: every year brought a fresh spate of anniversaries with their attendant glut of biographies, memoirs, rockumentaries, biopics and commemorative issues of magazines" (Reynolds 2010, xi). Reynolds is overly critical of mashups and of digital sampling in general, and his book has encountered a lot of criticism, in particular his postpunk, tinted-sunglass view of musical creativity.

26. Founded in 2009, the website began as *Rap Genius* but has now expanded to embrace other musical genres and in 2014 renamed itself *Genius*.

27. For more on crowdsourcing, see Howe 2006; for a critique, see Silverman 2014.

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