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WHERE MY GIRLS AT?: THE INTERPELLATION OF WOMEN IN GANGSTA HIP-HOP  
AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

by

CHANEL R. CRAFT

Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani

ABSTRACT

This thesis interrogates gangsta hip-hop for the unique attention it plays to the drug trade. I read theories of hypervisibility/invisibility and Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation alongside hip-hop feminist theory to examine the Black female criminal subjectivity that operates within hip-hop. Using methods of discourse analysis, I question the *constructions* of gangster femininity in rap lyrics as well as the *absences* of girlhood on Season 4 of HBO's television drama *The Wire*. In doing so, I argue that the discursive construction of Black female subjectivity within gangsta hip-hop provides a hypervisibility that portrays Black women as violent while simultaneously erasing the broader social processes that impact the lives of Black women and girls. Hip-hop feminism allows the cultural formations of hip-hop to be read against the politics that structure the lives of women of color in order to provide a lens for analyzing how their criminality is constructed through media.

INDEX WORDS: Hip-hop, Hip-hop feminism, Bonnie, Gangsta rap, The Wire, Black girlhood, Interpellation, War on Drugs, Invisibility/Hypervisibility, Discipline

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AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

by

CHANEL R. CRAFT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

WHERE MY GIRLS AT?: THE INTERPELLATION OF WOMEN IN GANGSTA HIP-HOP  
AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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**DEDICATION**

To my brother Rashan, who made me “stop, fast-forward, and rewind” until my fingers hurt, but who taught me that hip-hop is much bigger than words.

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## Chapter One

### An Introduction

#### 1.1 Overview

I entitle this thesis “Where My Girls At?<sup>1</sup>: The Interpellation of Women and Girls in Gangsta Hip-Hop” to call attention to the absence and marginalization of Black women and girls in hip-hop’s gangsta realm. Hip-hop R&B group 702 asks, “where my girls at?” to call on the support of their friends—their “girls” to be exact—to help them with a difficult situation. I ask “where my girls at?” in response to the relegation of the experiences of Black women and girls to the periphery of gangsta hip-. I use hip-hop to not only talk about the productions that come from this particular subculture, but as a worldview—a means of understanding and explaining particular aspects of the society we live. I use gangsta hip-hop specifically for the unique attention it plays to the drug trade and apply hip-hop feminist theory to examine not just the lyrical and visual productions but also the realities these productions aim to address. I read theories of hypervisibility/invisibility and Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation alongside hip-hop feminist theory to interrogate the Black female criminal subjectivity that operates within hip-hop. Using methods of discourse analysis, I interrogate the *constructions* of gangster femininity in rap lyrics as well as the *absences* of girlhood on Season 4 of HBO’s television drama *The Wire*. In doing so, I argue that the discursive construction of Black female subjectivity within gangsta hip-hop provides a hypervisibility that portrays Black women as violent while simultaneously erasing the broader social processes that impact the lives of Black women and girls. Using hip-hop feminism as a branch of cultural studies, this project interrogates “gangsta hip-hop” through the hip-hop cultural productions of the HBO series *The Wire* and gangsta rap lyrics for the roles they play in the construction of a Black female criminal subjectivity. This research is the result of questioning the increased incarceration rates of

women and girls of color that has been linked to the prison industrial complex (PIC), “a symbiotic and profitable relationship between politicians, corporations, the media, and state correctional institutions that generate racialized use of incarceration as a response to social problems rooted in the globalization of capital.”<sup>2</sup> Hip-hop feminism allows the cultural formations of hip-hop to be read against the politics that structure the lives of women of color in order to provide a lens for analyzing not just the reasons for the increased incarceration, but also how their criminality is constructed through media.

## **1.2 Black Female Criminal Subjectivity**

The Black female criminal subjectivity happens in rap lyrics through the construction of the ideal female gangster and on *The Wire* through the recognition of Black girlhood only through violence. I am building on Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation to argue for a subject that is social constructed, not one that autonomously governs his or her own lives. Althusser argues that Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) are those systems and structures that control by mainly repressive and physical means.<sup>3</sup> These include the government, the police, the courts, the military, and the prisons. But while the dominant power structure heavily employs repressive means of control, Althusser argues that hegemony relies more on Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) by which ideology is instilled in all subjects. ISAs include the family, the school, the church, and the mass media. The ways that individuals are inscribed in ideology is by processes of recognition, and all ideology interpellates individuals as concrete subjects. Interpellation is the way that a representation gets the attention of the viewer or targets a predefined audience. Media texts inscribe ideology in a predefined audience and there is also a political function to mass media texts of gangsta hip-hop. I argue that these gangsta hip-hop texts interpellate a Black female criminal subjectivity. These representations of Black femininity are

taken to be reflections of everyday life. My project examines how this criminalized subject gets interpellated through a process of hypervisibility and invisibility. The subject is constituted by the text, and subjectivity includes the actions and discourses that construct the individual. The rap lyrics construct the ideal female gangster by interpellating her through the call of independence, the call of interconnection with Black men, and the call of loyalty and devotion. However, when these representations couple with the illegal narcotics trades this construction functions as myth. On *The Wire*, the black female criminal subject is interpellated primarily through a call of deviance as she is both hyper-violent and hypersexual. Both of these constructions function as myth when the institutional violence that exists in Black girls' lives comes into view.

This subjectivity is myth because it represents a story that is told about Black women and girls that erases the social realities of their lives. Roland Barthes argues that on the “function[s] of myth is to empty reality.”<sup>4</sup> The myth of the Black female criminal empties the context and histories of Black womanhood to make this subjectivity appear natural. The historical realities of Black women's lives are evacuated in order to construct the image of criminality, an image that then justifies Black women's position in a carceral state. The creation and production of this myth via the rap lyrics fails women in real ways because it holds up an ideal that cannot be actualized when placed against the realities of the War on Drugs. It effaces the historical conditions of race and gender that place women on the dangerous peripheries of the drug trade in order to tell the story of a woman that is independent, that shares a connection with her man, and that experiences mutual loyalty and devotion with her partner.

On *The Wire* the story of the Black girl as deviant is already myth because her experiences are absent on the screen. On *The Wire*, myth is not used to empty out a history instead it fills a

void carved out by her absence. On the television series, myth does not empty out context in the way that it does with the rap lyrics. Rather, by not including the stories of Black girlhood it does not erase but leaves the out the context and creates a total fabrication by representing instances of violence done by and on Black girls without contextualizing the experiences. There are no stories being told of Black girlhood, and as a result, the violences are detached from reality allowing viewers to create their own theories of Black girl deviance.

These stories of the female gangster and the violent Black girl come together to create the myth of Black female criminal that is both hypervisible and invisible working to simultaneously erase context and fill voids.

### **1.3 Hip-hop Feminist Theory**

I ground this project in the theoretical framework of hip-hop feminism in order to analyze the ways in which the cultural formations of *The Wire* and gangsta rap work in the lives of Black women and girls. Building on black feminist thought as well as the womanist tradition, hip-hop feminism aims to “give women in hip-hop some recognition, but also to provide a critique of hip-hop culture that pays attention to issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality.”<sup>5</sup> And while hip-hop feminism works with the theoretical frameworks of Black feminism and womanism, what distinguishes hip-hop feminism from these is the emphasis on popular culture representations to engender a feminist politic. Therefore, hip-hop feminism is also strongly aligned with cultural studies in that it holds that music, movies, and television serve as important locales to investigate “those spaces and places where black girls and women live.”<sup>6</sup>

I use hip-hop feminism as my theoretical framework because it not only provides a way analyzing hip-hop productions but also offers a frame for critiquing the very social ills that hip-hop addresses. Hip-hop artists as well as scholars view hip-hop as something that structures the

way we conceive of and interact with the world. As explained by Aisha Durham, “It is not the sum of cultural elements or signifying practices, rather it can be seen as a worldview that looks at the shifting terrains of cultural, state, and economic power in the wake of deindustrialization, child-welfare and prison reform, and the drug wars waged on poor communities of color.”<sup>7</sup> I hold to the hip-hop feminist belief that hip-hop as a worldview is a useful analytic tool in critiquing power and understanding power relations. Durham defines hip-hop feminism as “a socio-cultural, intellectual and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the post-Civil Rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for the political intervention to challenge, resist and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation...this definition accounts for a black feminist epistemology.”<sup>8</sup> I use hip-hop feminism to challenge the intimate and state violence that intersects on the lives of women and girls of color.

Hip-hop feminists are interested in examining the ways in which the spaces women occupy within hip-hop connect to the spaces they occupy in other social institutions. Thus, hip-hop feminism develops a progressive politic that not only confronts sexist lyrics and misogynistic images, but also addresses the ways these representations work in concert with exploitative systems like the school, the foster care system, the laws and the streets to thwart self-determination. The Black female identity performances that have been “named, codified, characterized and/or caricatured by hip-hop music”<sup>9</sup> must be read alongside twentieth century public policies that largely impact the lives of young black women. Thus, hip-hop feminism is progressive and seeks to move beyond admonishing rap for its sexist and misogynistic lyrics. New strands in hip-hop feminism aim to extend previous scholarship pointing to the misogynistic rap lyrics to discussing hip-hop's social utility. Expanding hip-hop feminists’

theories that deal with the representation of the Black woman, I not only analyze the discourses evident in the music but also show how those discourses are working with the dominant power structure to construct a criminalized female identity in the War on Drugs.

I use hip-hop not to talk about “beats and rhymes” but what the hip-hop creations represent. In this thesis, I use hip-hop as a way of understanding Black women and girls in the War on Drugs. So while this thesis is rooted in the hip-hop tradition, the content and analysis is much bigger than hip-hop. It is ultimately about the construction and circulation of Black female criminality.

#### **1. 4 The Spectrum of Visibility**

Gangsta hip-hop creates Black female criminal subject possibilities through the shifting lens of hypervisibility and invisibility. There is an immense amount of hip-hop feminists scholarship that takes on hypervisibility although most centers the sexualization and objectification of Black women’s bodies in music videos and rap lyrics. I add to these conversations a theory of hypervisibility that looks at the representations of criminal subjectivity that simultaneously functions as an erasure.

I apply the theory of hypervisibility articulated by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence in their collection *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*. The authors’ argue that hypervisibility can be used to both stigmatize people or to make them easily identifiable as objects of fear or targets of violence.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the criminalization of black girlhood and womanhood acts as a modality of hypervisibility that works to easily identify Black women as criminals to be feared and as targets for state violence. Gangsta hip-hop is in many ways a story of a shifting boundary between the visibility and invisibility of women and

girls in the prison industrial complex. It shows the complexities of their lives in institutions of the school, the home, the streets, and the criminal justice system.

*The Wire* attempts to tell the stories of those who are hypervisible in the criminal justice system by rendering the social institutions and practices that influence their lives visible. On Season 4 the creators center the education that four boys receive in the institutions of the school, the home, and the streets, in order to explain the ways in which the visibility of these subjects in prison has everything to do with their unique relationships to these institutions that remain invisible in the criminal justice system. While the creators effectively argue that these institutions work together to interpellate Black youth as criminal by telling the story of four boys, *The Wire* erases the lives of women and girls. Hurricane Katrina activist Shana argues, “Perhaps one of the more insidious effects of invisibility is that mainstream populations and government agencies will not acknowledge that you are gone.”<sup>11</sup> On *The Wire* amidst the praises of objectivity and truth, there is no acknowledgement that girls are gone and that they are virtually absent from the storylines. My analysis of *The Wire* centers two instances of violence involving Black girls, one portrays a girl using excessive violence in a school fight against another young girl the other portrays an act of sexual violence done on a Black girl by two Black boys. In both instances hypervisibility constructs her simultaneously an object to be feared and an object exposed to both the interpersonal violence of her peers and the institutionalized violences of the state. In my analysis of rap lyrics, the female gangster exists as a hypervisible entity against the backdrop of an all-male crew. The criminal enterprise she is a part of couples with hypervisibility to construct her as an object to be feared by the state and an object worthy of intimate violence at the hands of her partner and the state violence at the hands of the criminal justice system.

Women and girls of color live at the intersection of violence perpetrated upon marginalized communities, both by external social forces and by those within their communities. For the experience of women of color to be rendered visible, we need to acknowledge that the experiences of violence within communities and violence perpetrated onto communities by the state intersect primarily on the bodies of women of color. I render Black women and girls visible by representing them as subjects experiencing and resisting the full brunt of oppressions smashing into each other. Shana argues that, "We learned that one way to see people who were invisible before, is to leave them behind."<sup>12</sup> When women and girls are left behind as subjects for critical engagement, they show up as hypervisible archetypes of violence. The telling of this story of Black women and girls as violent and criminal erases the realities of our lives. These lived realities are often characterized by violence. Unfortunately, the violence experienced by Black women and girls is often rendered invisible in the name of ending the "real" problems facing the larger Black community of institutions poverty, police violence, and the failure of the government response. This project centers the experiences of women of color to provide a way of thinking about the War on Drugs through hip-hop as I argue that the lives of women and girls of color exist on continuums of violence that structure their relationships to criminality and deviance.

### **1.5 Gangsta Hip-Hop and the War on Drugs**

From its inception in the mid-1980s, gangsta hip-hop has had a preoccupation with the realities of the War on Drugs. From the lavish lifestyles of high level drug-dealers to the realities of living with a mother addicted to narcotics, experiences of the drug trade have been the center of gangsta rap productions. Most of these hip-hop forms are speaking directly to and about what is known as "Reagan's War on Drugs." Reagan's War on Drugs and the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse



Act successfully transformed drug users from a medical population in need of treatment to a criminal population in need of imprisonment. The view that crack by its very nature called for a penal rather than a medical response justified mandatory sentencing policies that targeted racialized groups. The media panic surrounding the “crack addict” and the “gangster” served as justification for the heightened surveillance of Black men and women in inner-city communities of color. These policies also created a criminalized Black womanhood that constructs Black women’s involvement in the drug culture. This criminalized subject is seen in the way that the Black woman has been stereotyped in the War on Drugs as the “crack-mother” incapable of taking care of herself and her baby and deserving of punishment for placing the fetus’s life at risk; the “crack-whore” morally depraved prostitute selling her body for crack; and the “drug dealer’s girlfriend” all-knowing conspirator with the freedom to choose to stay or leave a relationship with a drug dealer. The hip-hop productions that I examine for this project also take the War on Drugs as its primary focus. For instance, the rap lyrics construct a female gangster whose many responsibilities fall within the criminal drug trade. *The Wire*, attempts to explain many facets of the drug trade in Baltimore, MD that range from the streets where the deals are made, the docks where the drugs are imported, the government branches where the policies are drafted, the educational settings that construct criminality, and media that tell the stories. This project uses hip-hop to examine the construction of the drug dealer’s female partner and the absence of girls in portrayals of the War on Drugs through these texts.

Julia Sudbury cites the War on Drugs, along with globalization and the prison industrial complex as one of the major causes for the increased incarceration rates for women of color.<sup>13</sup> Sentencing provisions established as part of War on Drugs “tough on crime” policies continue to make women of color vulnerable to incarceration based on their associations and not their

conduct. There are four types of expanded liability that have contributed to the recent explosion in women's drug conviction and incarceration rates in the context of drug law enforcement: conspiracy provisions, accomplice liability, constructive possession doctrines, and asset forfeiture.<sup>14</sup> A brief overview of the laws is necessary for understanding how this implicates Black women. For instance, once a conspiracy is established, every person in the conspiracy can be held liable for the actions of every other member, even absent of the knowledge of involvement or existence of others.<sup>15</sup> If a woman tells an undercover agent where he can purchase crack, and the undercover purchases five grams of crack, she can be held liable for the entire five grams. An accomplice is a person who intentionally assists another in the planning or commission of a crime either by providing physical or psychologically aid, or failing to act when there is legal duty to do so.<sup>16</sup> Allowing one's partner's belongings to stay at one's home and taking phone messages for someone are examples of actions that fall under this provision. Constructive possession requires no affirmative act on the part of an individual in order for criminal liability to attach.<sup>17</sup> Possession is based on proximity to the drug, so one can be sentenced under this provision for being in a home where a family member uses drugs. Asset forfeiture is when the government takes ownership of seized property.<sup>18</sup> Property can be seized under this provision even when the owner herself was not accused of drug trafficking and even if she had no knowledge that the property was being used for trafficking. Sentencing policies negatively impact women because the peripheral roles they play as carriers, cooks and operators of homes where drugs are stored leaves them with little information to negotiate lesser sentences. Prosecutors are also more likely to pressure them into pleading guilty even if they are innocent and they do so out of fear of receiving a harsher sentence after a trial. There are also racial disparities in mandatory sentencing that account for Blacks being more likely than Hispanics and

whites to receive mandatory minimum penalties.<sup>19</sup> These sentencing provisions couple with race and gender and create a state response to the drug trade that disproportionately impacts women of color.

The focus of research on women and the drug culture is usually on the factors that influence women's involvement in the drug trade and not that of girls or the ideologies that construct a criminalized identity during Black girlhood. Focus on media here is either on media panics that contributed to the tough-on-crime policies or on the relation between men and women in the “real life” drug trade, thus failing to incorporate the way that media scripts portray and construct these relationships. I contend that hip-hop and law and order policies work together as disciplinary institutions create a criminalized black female identity.

Katherine Wing and Christine A. Willis argue that it is necessary to look at the roles women play in the gangs as gang members, mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, girlfriends, and friends of gang members in order to fully understand the gang problem. While these roles may appear marginal, these authors contend that ignoring these roles delegitimizes the importance they hold in the gang culture and leaves to an incomplete understanding of gang life. To understand a problem in its totality, the periphery must be examined. Building on the emphasis on margins, I also situate my project in the marginal roles women play in gangsta hip-hop.

To examine these margins my research expands Pough's notion of what she terms the Ghetto Girl that deals with the Ghetto Girl's representation in movies and in hip-hop novels to her (mis)representation in gangsta rap lyrics and on *The Wire*. In *Check it While I Wreck It*, Gwendolyn Pough points to the controlling images circulating in the hip-hop culture. One, the Ghetto Girl, “is a repeating and recurring element in the cinema and fiction set in urban America—meant to replicate the gritty realities of life in predominantly Black and poor

neighborhoods.”<sup>20</sup> The Ghetto Exploitation films emerging in the 90s, including films like *Boyz N The Hood*, *Poetic Justice*, and *Juice*, offers various incarnations of the Ghetto Girl who becomes a part of the ghetto background that is vital to these films. These films are connected to hip-hop music as they offer visual representations for the gangsta rap lyrics. Pough states that, “paradoxically, for all the importance that women have in these films, they might just as well be a low-rider, a gang bandana, a tattoo, or some other insignificant prop.”<sup>21</sup> The representation of women in the films parallels women’s representation in gangsta rap as well. In *Boyz N The Hood*, women come to play a role only as they relate to men in the film. Pough categorizes the representations of the Ghetto Girl in *Boyz N The Hood* in three ways:<sup>22</sup>

1. striving sister with bourgeois aspirations whose family wants better for their child, so they send her to private school
2. young single mother or baby mama who doesn't speak but only holds the baby. She is seen as the Ghetto Girl trap as she is linked to the character who is receiving a football scholarship.
3. Braid wearing, fast-talking, forty-ounce-malt-liquor guzzling caricature that is ignorant to establishment ways.

I move from an analysis of the representation of the Ghetto Girl, to one that focuses on the way that this construction situates her in the illegal narcotics trade. Pough asks what it means when Black womanhood is “constantly represented as a danger to black manhood in our popular culture.”<sup>23</sup> This thesis further explores what it means that her identity is constructed as marginal and accessory as well as a danger to society and links these types of representations to the real work of stricter law and order policies.

## **1.6 Methodology**

I employ methods of discourse analysis to do the work of reading text and determining the wider social implications of the text. I examine the ways in which discourse both produces human subjects and disciplines them into certain ways of thinking and acting. Theorist Michel

Foucault believes that the most powerful discourses, in terms of their social effects and productivity, depend on assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true. This type of analysis allows me to look at “the casual assumptions, the everyday mundane routines, the taken-for-granted architecture, [and] the banalities”<sup>24</sup> of gangsta hip-hop and the ways they discursively produce a Black female subjectivity. Law and order policies coupled with media-induced panics suggest that the Black female is criminal and is one to be corrected and disciplined through laws, schools, and media scripts. I am concerned with the discourse of the criminalized Black girl and its production in cultural forms.

Discourse analysis also involves reading for what is not there and that these absences are just as important as the visibilities. The fact that it is the Black male child’s story being told on *The Wire* erases gendered difference by making “the boy” the taken for granted gender of “the child.” Critics have viewed *The Wire* as being objective television,<sup>25</sup> but a closer reading will show the contrary. Discourse analysis allows me to unpack the invisibilities of Black female subjectivity on the series and the way that these absences reinforce the erasure of their social realities.

For the examination of gangsta rap, I use gangsta rap songs dealing with what I term the Bonnie myth. Bonnie refers to the romanticized rags-to-riches story of Bonnie and Clyde, a story that lives in the American popular imagination as part fact, part fiction. Our contemporary understanding of Bonnie and Clyde pulls both from the historical accounts of the notorious bank robbing couple as well as from the 1967 release of the movie biopic *Bonnie and Clyde*.<sup>26</sup> In a genre that glorifies the gangster image *Scarface*, Bonnie becomes the ideal girl that every gangster needs and Bonnie is used as a point of reference for women in gangsta rap to aspire.

The songs I use span from 1988, a period cited as being the creation of gangsta rap and the height of Reagan's War on Drugs, to the present.

Using discourse analysis enables me to look at the ways in which particular materials are produced through and reiterated by particular institutions and their practices and how these sites produce Black female subjects. The genre of rap as well as *The Wire* reiterate law and order policies that relate to the War on Drugs and the prison industrial complex. How these cultural materials work to produce normalized subjectivities and how these subjects function in a carceral state are the questions that guide this project

### **1.7 Chapter Organization**

Chapter One entitled “Every Thug Needs a Lady: The Interpellation of Bonnie,” examines the Bonnie myth and the encoded messages in the music with their correlation to the roles women play in the drug culture allowing hip-hop to function pedagogically. Comparing the real-life story of Bonnie and Clyde to their idolization in hip-hop, I pay attention to how aspects of race, class, and sexuality relate to her representation in gangsta rap. In this chapter I conclude that Bonnie is interpellated through the call of independence, the call of interconnection with Black men, and the call of loyalty and devotion but when these representations couple with the illegal narcotics trade Bonnie is a myth. In reality she is on the margins of decision-making processes and lacks the knowledge necessary to negotiate within the trade. She does the lower-level jobs that place her in the closest proximity to law enforcement agencies. Ultimately, she is viewed as an object who does not act out of her own volition and is physically and mentally controlled. The interpersonal violences that the “real Bonnies” are subjected to as well as the violences perpetrated by the state remain invisible in the legal system of mandatory minimums.

In Chapter 2, “And all the pieces matter: The Omission of Girls on *The Wire*,” I argue that even though critics view *The Wire* as covering a complete urban experience *The Wire* contributes to the construction of a criminalized Black girlhood because the absence and marginalization of female Black youth mystifies the plight of the Black girl and ignores the role of various forms of violence and schooling on the lives of young women of color. *The Wire* is an HBO television series set in Baltimore, Maryland that claims to explore all aspects of the drug trade. Season 1 focused on the streets the drugs were sold in. Season 2 examined the docks. Season 3 look at the politics involved and focused on the mayoral races in Baltimore. Season 4 focused on the schools and Season 5 looked at the media. For this project I examined Season 4 and the institutions of schooling that act as paths of involvement into the trade.

While *The Wire* as a television series may be easily overlooked as a site in need of a hip-hop analysis, I argue that it is indeed a hip-hop text. Hip-hop feminists recognize popular culture as a pivotal site for political interrogation and reading *The Wire* as a part of the culture reveals many parallels. The themes that are prominent on *The Wire* are also prominent themes in hip-hop, making *The Wire* a new point of reference for the culture. While still not as popular as the usage of *Scarface*, the 1983 movie of the Cuban drug lord Tony Montana, since its inception, rappers have referenced *The Wire* in many songs. Many cast members on the series have used the credibility gained as characters on the show to break into the rap scene and several well-known rappers have appeared as actors on the series. Cast members also frequently appear on popular BET shows like *Rap City* and *106 & Park* and have been featured in mainstream hip-hop magazines. The characters on the series adorn hip-hop fashion and the soundtrack of the show makes use of local Baltimore hip-hop artists. Thus, *The Wire* and its cast interact with the genre of hip-hop in ways that *Scarface* and Al Pacino never have. Adding further credence to the

connection between *The Wire* and hip-hop is the way that the coke-rap trend, a trend that kicked off the same year as *The Wire*, shares many of the same themes used in the show.<sup>27</sup> Coke-rap differs from the lavish lifestyles gloriously represented in the lyrics of Jay-Z and Biggie—rappers who use *Scarface* as a point of reference to highlight their kingpin status—and instead focuses on the lives of low-level corner boys and the corners where drug deals are made. Like *The Wire*, a focus on the everyday players attempts to provide a more realistic view of the drug trade. However, whereas rap artists largely center their music on themes of the self, creators of *The Wire* center its themes on Baltimore and interconnect the drug trade with other social institutions that include the police system, politics, the ports, the schools, and the media. The appropriation of some forms of hip-hop, most notably gangsta rap, into the mainstream left a void for hip-hop's usage as a tool for social critique and change. However, the issues hip-hop once addressed never ceased being important, they just went unreported. The poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, surveillance, and criminalization that once concerned early mainstream hip-hop artists like NWA and Public Enemy remain key issues for that inner-city inhabitants that make-up hip-hop's internal audience. What has changed is that mainstream rap artists no longer take these issues as their primary focal point. *The Wire* filled this void in hip-hop because of its power to serve as a cautionary voice.<sup>28</sup> Reading *The Wire* as a hip-hop text allows for a hip-hop feminist analysis that can analyze the role it plays in the construction of Black female identity and how this construction functions in a carceral state.<sup>29</sup>

While *The Wire* depicts a city uniquely situated in the War on Drugs, a closer look shows it does not sufficiently represent girlhood or womanhood, complicating critics' view of it being a complete story. Women and girls are largely accessory and often absent from the series. While the creators aimed to use Season 4 of *The Wire* to capture the reality of Baltimore's complexity



within the War on Drugs, it omits the realities of women and girls. *The Wire*, then, interpellates them in ways that further encourages their absence, and this representation reveals the ways that intimate violences done on their bodies link to state violences evident in their lived environments. The show, though fundamentally about surveillance, acts as a panoptical space that captures women and girls through this shifting lens of invisibility and hypervisibility. As this chapter proves, the stories of girls are silenced, and hypervisible archetypes of deviance are used to fill the void. To render their stories visible I highlight two portrayals of interpersonal violence—one perpetrated by a Black girl, both enacted on the bodies of Black girls—to show the ways in which these violences are framed through the use of hypervisibility and mark Black girls as deviant

The title of this conclusion “It’s Bigger than Hip-Hop: From Bonnie ‘through *The Wire*” references Kanye West’s rap song “Through the Wire<sup>30</sup>” and is used in order to better read them as sites that simultaneously mis(represent) and construct a Black female criminal identity. Kanye West records this entire song with his mouth wired shut as a result of a near-fatal car accident, hence the title “Through the Wire.” I use this powerful image to symbolize the ways in which surveillance tactics and strategies of silence (whether through invisibility or hypervisibility) have wired the mouths of women of color in the prison-industrial complex shut. Angela Davis calls for a “mandate to think through things together that we normally think apart.”<sup>31</sup> In reading women situated with the War on Drugs through a lens of hip-hop feminism, I show how these seemingly separate areas are interconnected in the construction of criminalized Black girlhood.

## Chapter Two

### “Every Thug Needs a Lady<sup>32</sup>”: The Bonnie Myth and the War on Drugs

This chapter interrogates the construction of an ideal femininity in gangsta rap that I term the Bonnie Myth. Using Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation, I look at the circulation of popular representations of Bonnie and Clyde in hip-hop and show how the discourses around Bonnie construct a particular kind of female gangster subjectivity. A discourse analysis of gangsta rap lyrics engaged in the formation of this hip-hop Bonnie reveals that the Bonnie constructed through these lyrics is a mirage—an image that appears to uphold ideals of independence, interconnection, and reciprocal loyalty, but one that disappears when the realities of the War on Drugs comes into view. Bonnie’s life is plagued with marginality and violence. In fact, the ideals of the Bonnie myth promote the marginal roles of the War on Drugs that are most dangerous and result in the least reward; it encourages women to inhabit positions that makeup the frontlines of the drug trade.

What follows is a brief discussion of the gendered constructions of the gangster in gangsta rap and the interpellation of a hip-hop Bonnie. The remainder of this chapter places the ideals that frame Bonnie against the roles she plays in the drug trade and investigates the invisibilities of the violences she faces. Interspersed throughout the chapter are narratives of real women incarcerated for drug-related crimes and who represent the principles that make up the Bonnie myth. These narratives demonstrate another facet of the discursive construction of the Bonnie myth and its power.

#### 2.1 From *Scarface* to Bonnie: Gender Constructions in Gangsta Rap

The gangster in the gangsta rap genre is constructed along gendered lines that promote a brazen gun-toting machismo for men and a loyal, self-sufficient femininity for women. Most

instrumental to these constructions are the 1983 release of the movie *Scarface* and the popular discourse around Bonnie and Clyde. *Scarface* tells the story of a young Tony Montana, a Cuban refugee arriving to Florida in 1980. It is a rags-to-riches narrative that couples criminality and ruthlessness with the American Dream. Arriving with nothing more than the clothes on his back, Montana is able to use the drug trade to amass large amounts of wealth, provide for his family, and briefly live a life of extravagance. For gangsta rappers, a group predominately made up of young urban men of color, this story provides a site of hope as they align their struggles against poverty with those of Montana's. Montana is the embodiment of a "Gangster's American Dream"—one that celebrates disregard for authority and the willingness to make one's own way in a system designed to keep one out.

From *Scarface* gangsta rap takes a masculine gangster ideal that seeks to actualize the American Dream through an illicit market and places self and domination of others at the forefront. The movie's legacy within hip-hop is not only evidenced by the Houston-based rapper Brad "Scarface" Jordan's adoption of the movie title for his stage name, but also by the numerous songs that pay tribute to many aspects of the movie. Montana's statue inscribed with the words The World is Yours has inspired songs like Nas' "The World is Yours" and Mobb Deep's "It's Yours." Jay-Z's "Say Hello to the Bad Guy" signals one of the movie's most memorable scenes featuring an intoxicated Montana inside a fine-dining establishment telling patrons "you need people like me so you can point your fingers and say 'there goes the bad guy.' Well, say hello to the bad guy."<sup>33</sup> The MTV series *Cribs*, a series that showcases celebrity homes, constantly shows rappers proving their authenticity by pulling out their copy of *Scarface*. As a result, it is difficult to overlook the influence of *Scarface* on the genre of gangsta rap.

Sharing this discursive landscape with the ambitious gangster masculinity of Tony Montana is the story of Bonnie and Clyde. This story expands the rags-to-riches narrative of *Scarface* by adding an ideal romance predicated on loyalty and devotion. Their two-year bank-robbing spree was cheered on not only because Americans were disillusioned with the capitalist system that resulted in the Great Depression, and this couple represented revenge, but also because they represented an ideal romance. The love shared between Bonnie and Clyde is remembered just as much as their robbing spree. In fact, the bank robberies are discussed as demonstrations of their love. Clyde's sister recalls this devotion saying that "they never worried about anything else but each other and time and time again they would risk their own lives to protect the other's."<sup>34</sup> Bonnie's devotion to Clyde and shared experiences with marginality situate her as the ideal romantic partner for a gangster.

This ideal romantic partner represented through Bonnie provides a model of the ultimate gangstress that is rehashed in gangsta rap. Bonnie has had a presence in hip-hop from its earliest days as indicated by Ice Cube and Yo-Yo's 1986 duet "Bonnie and Clyde," one of the first to articulate a gangsta romance. Keeping with the trend, Jay-Z has continuously pulled on this Bonnie and Clyde script with two duets in the 90s with rapper Foxy Brown entitled "Bonnie and Clyde" and "Bonnie and Clyde Part II" and a subsequent duet with Beyonce entitled "03 Bonnie and Clyde." There is also an array of songs that rely on the Bonnie script while not directly referencing the character. For instance, Notorious B.I.G.'s "Me and My Bitch," Tupac Shakur's "Me and My Girlfriend," Apache's "Gangsta Bitch" and Ja Rule's "Down Ass Chick" all rely on the feminine ideal constructed in the Bonnie narrative. Still there are songs that narrow in on Bonnie and Clyde's exemplary loyalty and devotion like Bow Wow's "Let Me Hold you Down" and Method Man and Mary J. Blige 1995 hip-hop classic "You're All I Need." These songs are

not just engaged in naming Bonnie, they construct and define an ideal female subject. This construction of gangsta femininity is what I term the Bonnie Myth,<sup>35</sup> a script that is identifiable by its emphasis on the ways in which the characters of independence, interconnection, loyalty and devotion are proven through criminality.

## **2.2 “Definition of a Rider<sup>36</sup>”: The Bonnie Myth**

### **2.2.1 “I Love Her ‘Cause She’s Got Her Own<sup>37</sup>”: Bonnie as Independent**

Because the Bonnie script pulls from a figure that is intimately linked to her boyfriend, the Bonnies of rap must constantly prove they are independent and able to ‘hold their own’ in ways the men in rap, who are pulling from a self-actualizing Montana, do not. While the men in the genre are already awarded the ideals of strength and independence, Bonnie is constantly in a battle to prove that she also possesses these capabilities. Bonnie must prove that she is hardworking, supportive, economically self-sufficient, and tough. The lyrics project an image of Bonnie that interpellates her as a woman who can "handle her own." This interpellation is easily identifiable to others who value the "pulling up by the bootstraps" aspect of the American dream and she is interpellated as a part of that dream. She is able to work hard to achieve success.

The Bonnie script exists within what can be explained as a sister/bitch dichotomy that circulates within hip-hop. Under immense pressure from feminists and Black leaders of the Civil Rights Era to address misogyny in hip-hop, gangsta rappers began to categorize women in terms of good women and bad women.<sup>38</sup> As a response to questions regarding his treatment of women, Jay-Z released his song “Bitches and Sisters.”<sup>39</sup> The song begins with a woman asking “hey Jay-Z, why you got to go and disrespect the women, huh?” and he uses the remainder of the song to describe the type of woman that “gets respect” against the type of woman that “gets what she deserves.” He is predominantly interested in defining the “bitch,” a woman who is out to

“trap” a man or basically looks at him for material gain. A “bitch” attempts to “get pregnant and get hit off with paper [money]” and as result of such attempts, she deserves to be disrespected and used for sex. A “sister” on the other hand, is an ideal woman who can ‘handle her own’ and who makes a good partner. “Sisters get respect” by earning it and are defined in opposition to the “bitch” by their ability to work hard (“sisters work hard, bitches work your nerves”), be supportive (“sisters hold you down, bitches slow you up”), and help her partner in achieving his life goals (“sisters help you progress, bitches slow up.”) The characteristics of the “sister” couple with criminality and create Bonnie as a figure that exemplifies these traits through her willingness to apply them in the criminal sphere. The “sister” can function outside of the Bonnie script, but Bonnie cannot function outside of the ideologies that govern the “sister.” Phillips and Stephen argue that self-sufficiency and an aggressive attitude are integral pieces to the Gangsta Bitch script.<sup>40</sup> One of the ways in which Bonnie proves she is she self-sufficient is through her economic independence. This type of self-sufficiency is witnessed in artists like Vita who adamantly contends that her “life don’t revolve around no nigga. I don’t put it down (her life and aspirations) for niggas...I’m not really into ice and shit. See I’m more concerned with dough, how to stack it and let it grow.”<sup>41</sup> In this light, her concern is not to be lavished with expensive gifts. Rather, she desires the tools to be economically self-sufficient.

Not only must Bonnie prove that she is economically self-sufficient, she must also demonstrate that she is a feminine version of “one of the boys” or as rapper Eve puts it “a pit-bull in a skirt.” Apache describes his “Gangsta Bitch”<sup>42</sup> as a girl that participates in “sticking up girls from around the fucking way.” Like “one of the boys” she also likes “puffin on a blunt and sipping on a Heineken.” A romantic evening for Apache and his “gangsta bitch” includes “going to the movies packing his and her nines” and “On Valentine’s Day [they are] doing stick-ups

together.” This ability to take part in the same activities as her partner is not only desirable but is a must for this script that pulls on the bank-robbing couple Bonnie and Clyde. And like Bonnie, who died in the same blaze of fire as Clyde, this script relies on a woman who is not only willing to face the consequences of illegal involvement, but is able to do so with ease. Rapping about her then pending prison time, Li'l Kim boasted in 2003, “Now the DA wants to give me time in the feds. I'm from Brooklyn, I can do the time on my head.”<sup>43</sup> Bonnie's ability to be tough enough to hang with the boys and confront the consequences constantly reappears throughout this script. Indeed, only a woman that can handle her own can stand beside a gangster.

Hard work, economic self-sufficiency, and being “tough” interpellates a Bonnie that can ‘hold her own’ and once she is able to prove that she can handle her own, she can then stand beside her Clyde as an equal.

### **2.2.2 “All I Need in this Life of Sin is Me and My Girlfriend/Boyfriend<sup>44</sup>”: Connection to Black Men and Shared Struggle**

Contrary to the relationship mantra “behind every good man there is a good woman,” the Bonnie script places emphasis on her ability to stand *beside* her partner. In the 90s, Sean “P. Diddy” Coombs solidified the new relationship discourse into the gangsta rap genre with the creation of the slogan “beside every Bad Boy there's a Bad Girl” as a way of introducing the new female acts to his Bad Boy label. One of the ways she is able to stand beside him is through the recognition of shared experiences.

The shared experiences of Bonnie and Clyde are just as instrumental to the construction of the Bonnie script as the emphasis on equality. The real Bonnie and Clyde both grew up in working class families in rural Texas. Disillusioned with the capitalist system that exacerbated their impoverished conditions during the Great Depression, they envisioned the economic system

as their primary enemy and each other as their only allies. In gangsta rap there is also an emphasis on shared experiences in the Bonnie script. She must come from the same “poverty-stricken, drug-infested neighborhoods as these men”<sup>45</sup> enabling her to have an appreciation and a connection to the ‘hood. In his ode to “girls around the world”<sup>46</sup> Jay-Z preferences the “project chick that plays her part” declaring that “if it goes down y’all that’s my heart.” She holds this favored position against an army of other women because she has “been with [him] from the start. Hid [his] drugs from the Narcs (Narcotic Agents), [and] hid [his] guns in the parks.” It is her connection to the projects in which he grew up that defines his relationship with her and that takes precedence over all other things.

Bonnie and Clyde experience a deeper connection with one another because they are intimately engaged in a fight against an oppressive system and they both use this to describe a level of interdependence in which they heavily rely on one another. Men in hip-hop use this understanding of struggle to explain the conditions that make up a “black girl lost”; a script that attempts to contextualize the “wayward” women that make up the bitch script. Songs that fit into this script include Nas’ “Black Girl Lost,” Tupac’s “Brenda’s Got a Baby” and Ludacris’ “Runaway Love.” I find the ways in which these men talk about the “black girl lost” problematic as it begins with the idea of improper womanhood. For instance, in “Brenda’s Got a Baby,”<sup>47</sup> the song is used to discuss the circumstances that lead up to the death of a fifteen-year-old prostitute and Nas’ “Black Girl Lost”<sup>48</sup> works to explain the conditions that lead a woman to become a “gold-digger.” This type of song attempts to explain the conditions of these “wayward” women’s lives and try to counter the songs that ridicule and objectify such women. However, they do nothing to disrupt the idea that this is immoral behavior. Through the Black Girl Lost songs, Black men position themselves as best able to explain the conditions that lead women to



fail in fulfilling the Bonnie role these Black men value. The Black Girl Lost narrative attempts to contextualize her deviance by explaining the circumstances that lead her down this path. This script is a way of explaining these women to the outside world that only pushes her further to the margins.

In contrast, Bonnie uses her songs to engage in a deeper conversation *with* Clyde, not about him. These songs tell him that she understands that the rest of the world may see him as deviant and without value but she sees beyond the media representations of him. Women in gangsta rap have a more nuanced and real-life description that differs from the men that are more invested in constructing a problematic myth. Phillips et. al contend that these women see the hood as a “complex of forces constraining life’s options and cultivating a particular mix of hardness and vulnerability.”<sup>49</sup> Erykah Badu’s “Other Side of the Game”<sup>50</sup> provides an example of this kind of understanding through her representation as the pregnant girlfriend of a drug dealer. The "Other Side of the Game" is one that complicates the glamorous life of drug dealing detailed in many hip-hop songs as well as media representations of the trade. It also gives voice to the women who are intricately connected to men who are in the game, women whose stories are not often given light from a woman's perspective. She reveals ambivalence between understanding the drug game and why he must participate in it while simultaneously not wanting him to participate, further telling of Bonnie's complexity. "I understand the game...but I love you," means that she values his life more than the game or the "life that she came to live." She is not committed to the street life, but to a man who has made this kind of commitment. She represents the ambivalence of a woman whose relationship with a man brings complex feelings of love that requires her to support him although she would rather he did something else. It also speaks of the economic need even though "the work ain't honest." She is pregnant and this work

better "pays the bills" than a job he can get with the degree he has earned. She struggles with worrying for his safety and needing the money with supporting him and wanting him out of harm's way ("I understand the game sometimes, so I pray"). After all his occupation "gave her the life that she came to live" but also "gave [her] the song that she came to give," a song showing the "Other Side of the Game."

The chorus gives more insight into the theme of interdependence and their need for each other as she asks "what *you* gonna do when they come for you? Work ain't honest but it pays the bill. What *we* gonna do when they come for you?" The smooth progression from the individual "you" to a conjoined "we" suggests both a familiarity with his probable fate and a question of survival as she later declares, "I can't make it on my own." Method Man speaks of his ability to survive because of his girlfriend's love and support when he describes the hardships he faces living in the ghetto and tells her that through it all, "you're all I need to get by."<sup>51</sup> Not only do Bonnie and Clyde understand each other, their survival depends on each other. However, as I will explain in more detail in later section, interdependence is part of the mirage. In fact, it is he who is dependent on her free and cheap and labor in the drug trade.

### **2.2.3 "I'll Protect You Like a Vest Do"<sup>52</sup>: Bonnie as Loyal and Devoted**

The most prevalent aspects of the Bonnie Myth are the characteristics of loyalty and devotion. One of the major ways they exemplify this commitment to each other is through songs that describe a willingness to sacrifice one's life for the other. Beyonce's verse in "03 Bonnie and Clyde"<sup>53</sup> demonstrates this type of loyalty and devotion to Clyde as she tells him:

If I was your girlfriend, I'd be there for you if somebody hurt you even if the somebody was me. Sometimes I trip on how happy we could be. And I put this on my life, nobody or nothing can ever come between us. And I promise I'd give my life, my love, and my trust if you were my boyfriend. I put this on my life, the air that I breathe and all that I believe in. I promise to give my life, my love, and my trust if you were my boyfriend.

Here, she takes the “us against the world” theme a step further by declaring that she will sacrifice her own life “the air that [she] breathes and all that [she] believes” in exchange for being his girlfriend. This willingness to sacrifice one’s life for Clyde is repeated in the lyrics. For instance, Charli Baltimore proves she is a “Down Ass Chick” when she tells her Clyde “I’ll protect you like a [bulletproof] vest do.” Foxy Brown declares her loyalty to her crew The Firm telling her lover “I’m married to The Firm boo you got to understand. I’ll die for ‘em. Give me the [electric] chair and I’ll fry for ‘em. And if I gotta take the stand I’m a lie for ‘em.”<sup>54</sup> This willingness to die for one’s lover is not exclusive to Bonnie as the men in the genre express this devotion as well. For instance, Notorious BIG tells his girlfriend “lie together, cry together, I swear to God I hope we fucking die together”<sup>55</sup> and when Foxy Brown asks Jay-Z “would you ride for me?”<sup>56</sup> and “would you die for me?” he responds in the affirmative. Death symbolizes the intense devotion between Bonnie and Clyde.

Phillips et. al speak of this kind of devotion and observe that “this exchange represents an expression of mutual loyalty and, to an extent, relational reciprocity. It is a way of saying, on a gendered level ‘I would go to the lengths,’ while also recognizing, from racial and class positionality, that “it’s us against the world.”<sup>57</sup> The “us against the world” mantra is separatist in that it imagines the entire world as an enemy that Bonnie and Clyde must combat. What the world is shifts depending on the circumstance. It can be a disapproving parent who does not want them together as Method Man shows in the video for “All I Need.” The world could represent a rival crew if they threaten the success of Bonnie and Clyde. The world could be a system and a government that has left them out. The world is imagined as a threat to their union and an entity for them to defend themselves against. Once the world is constructed as enemy, then response in the form of action follows. When the world stands in for one’s mother, they

continue to see each other anyway. In the world as rival crew, they plot ways of sabotage and even murder. In the world as oppressive system, they participate in illegal markets like the drug trade as a form of defense. For Bonnie, participation in the drug trade is the most common response.

The relational reciprocity and mutual loyalty also links to criminality in the emphasis placed on Bonnie holding Clyde down if he is incarcerated. Being able to “hold someone down” is testament to one’s ability to be supportive and loyal so in addition to aiding in his illegal endeavors, she is also required to support him if his illegal endeavors result in his incarceration. This includes regular visits and sending him money as well serving as a representation of him, which requires her to be faithful and appear “respectable.” Method Man demonstrates this when he raps, “when I was locked up north, you [were] in my world rocking three-fourths of cloth, never showing your stuff off.” R&B singer Monica effectively captures the ideology of holding down in her song “U Should’ve Known Better,”<sup>58</sup> when she sings from the perspective of a woman whose boyfriend is incarcerated. Responding to her boyfriend’s concern that she would leave him or be unfaithful, in other words not adequately “hold him down,” she reassures him that:

Ever since you’ve been gone, I’ve been holding us down on our own. I’ve never ever cheated. I’ve never ever lied. So you can stop asking me why. Why I’ll never leave you and why I kept real and why I’m still with you... You should have known your girl would stay by your side. You should have known your girl was going to ride or die. And it don’t matter if you’re rich or poor, out here or doing five-to-ten.

The ability to handle one’s own, stand beside one’s man, be supportive, and ride-or-die, all come together to interpellate a Bonnie who is able to hold Clyde down. While “holding one’s own” is a marker of strength through independence, “holding one down” marks a strength that can support the weight of whatever Clyde brings her way. It is the coupling with the drug trade

that the idea of interdependency begins to unfold as myth because while they both may imagine the world as their enemy, Bonnie's marginality in the trade means that she is often the only one expected to directly stand against the "world" of the criminal justice system and the "us" quickly becomes a "me."

In summarizing the Bonnie script, Bonnie is interpellated as an independent woman who can handle her own, as a woman who is connected to Black men through their shared struggles, and as a woman who experiences relational reciprocity in terms of support. However, as the following sections will show, Bonnie is a myth that evacuates the harsh realities of the War on Drugs. She is subject to violence at the hands of her partner and the violences of the state enacted both on her body and on her liberty.

### **2.3 "I Need a Soldier"<sup>59</sup>: Bonnie on the Frontlines of the War on Drugs**

While the real Bonnie is often pictured holding guns and is believed to have equal involvement in the operation, accounts from those closest to the couple say that she was never actually involved in any of the shootouts.<sup>60</sup> Her responsibilities were rather marginal and included packing lunches, loading the guns and carrying them to the car, serving as lookout, and going into banks pretending to set up accounts in order to map out the premises. Interestingly enough, the Bonnie of gangsta rap is also represented as being directly involved in the operations, when actually she resides on the margins. When the ideals that coalesce to form the Bonnie script are read against the realities of the War on Drugs, Bonnie as we know her cannot exist. The Bonnie that is constructed as being independent, interdependent, and loyal is actually a figure placed on the dangerous frontlines of the drug trade. She is the hypervisible first point of contact for the imagined enemy (the state) and she is extremely vulnerable to the harms of the War on Drugs.

The Bonnie script not only constructs a particular kind of female subjectivity, it promotes the positions she holds and the roles she carries out in the drug trade. These roles can be described as positions that both “protect and serve” the interests and motives of Clyde through the use of her body and her labor. She protects Clyde’s motives through her role as decoy and serves him through her labor and this protection and service places her in the crossfire of the criminal justice system. For Bonnie, *protection* and *service* to Clyde ironically leave her *exposed* to law enforcement and her marginality *hinders* her ability to negotiate with district attorneys.

### 2.3.1 “I’m Here to Serve You”<sup>61</sup>: Cheap and Free Labor

Just as the real Bonnie was responsible for the making and packing of lunches, Bonnie in rap is valued for cooking and packing (drugs). Memphis Bleek says his “Pretty Young Thing” “knows how to bag the weed and cook coke.”<sup>62</sup> Notorious BIG also speaks of his girlfriend’s assistance in his drug enterprise letting us know that “during the day she helped me bag up my nickels.” These roles prescribed in the music connect to the ‘real stories’ of women incarcerated for drug offenses. The narratives of women who have been incarcerated for drug-related offenses expose Bonnie as myth by providing examples of what happens when the ideologies that make-up Bonnie come into contact with the drug trade and the policies that govern the trade. These narratives show that the “reality” she represents is fictional. For instance, if Bonnie’s celebrated role as preparing the drugs for sale is read against Karen Blakney’s narrative, it is revealed that this role is necessary but not valued. In fact, Blakney reveals that it is a role of immense danger and vulnerability. She tells how the transforming of cocaine into crack, an act she correctly identifies as marginal and not as close to the decision-making process or the monetary rewards as other aspects of the trade, resulted in her being sentenced to ten years in prison. She recalls:

*I didn’t know the co-defendants well. They came over and wanted somebody else to cook the crack, and at the time my sister was on crack, so that’s who they were looking*

for. They asked me to cook it up, but I didn't want to... The undercover agent gave me the drugs to cook up. When I was done, he gave me one hundred dollars, even though *I didn't charge him*. Later at the district court trial the undercover agents were asked, "Why did you want it turned into crack?" They said, "Because crack carries more time." *I didn't know* I could get in so much trouble for cooking it up. I had nothing to do with the sale; I just cooked it up.<sup>63</sup> (emphasis mine)

Under the mandatory drug laws,<sup>64</sup> this very act of transforming cocaine to crack constructed her as a serious criminal offender. The Bonnie script is a myth because she is central to the crack-cocaine trade for her cheap and free labor but is marginal in power and hypervisible in the law. Blakney's narrative points to the ways that her labor is not connected to desires for large monetary gains since she willingly provides her services free of charge while recognizing that "there is a skill to cooking crack."<sup>65</sup> She highlights the importance of being able to correctly execute the action as she notes that "if you don't do it right you might lose a gram or two"<sup>66</sup> yet she does not ask for money. Even when she does receive money for cooking, the hundred dollars she receives pales in comparison to the 2,800 dollars the person who initiated the contact between her and the undercover cop received, or the money to be made on the street. As indicated by Blakney's repetitions of "I didn't know," the frontlines are not spaces of knowledge and information. For Blakney, she did not know her co-defendants very well or the legal consequences of cooking crack. Because she did not know her co-defendants, she also lacked information about whom they worked for and the positions they held. She did not know whether the crack she was making would be sold or used and did not fully grasp the legal implications of her role.

This lack of knowledge comes into contact with the imposition of the mandatory sentencing policies to create a system that requires judges to deliver fixed sentences to individuals convicted of a crime regardless of the level of direct involvement or other mitigating factors. The federal mandatory sentences are based on (1) the type of drug (2) the weight of the

mixture and (3) the number of prior convictions. Arguing for the utility of such sentencing, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) chief of staff, Jodi L. Avergun, remarked in a statement before House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security that:

In drug cases, where the ultimate goal is to rid society of the entire trafficking enterprise, mandatory minimum statutes are especially significant. Unlike a bank robbery, for which a bank teller or an ordinary citizen could be a critical witness, often in drug cases the critical witnesses are drug users and/or other drug traffickers. The offer of relief from a mandatory minimum sentence in exchange for truthful testimony allows the Government to move steadily and effectively up the chain of supply, using the lesser distributors to prosecute the more serious dealers and their leaders and suppliers.<sup>67</sup>

Where then does that leave those who, like Blakney, “don’t know” and who have no information to bargain for relief? Knowledge, in the form of inner-workings of the trade, becomes the only commodity that can be offered in hopes of reducing a sentence. Interestingly, these offers are not made to judges, now hindered by these mandatory guidelines from fulfilling their roles of delivering judgment, but to prosecutors. These mandatory minimums, while designed to reduce inequalities that often result from sentencing discretions, only shifts such discretion from the judge to the prosecutor.<sup>68</sup> Prosecutors have the power to offer plea bargains in exchange for the lessening of mandatory penalty. The ACLU report entitled “Prison Overpopulation and Harsh Sentencing” argues, “the traditional requirement mandated by the Eighth Amendment that punishment maintain some proportion to the crime committed has been abandoned in the name of the ‘war on drugs.’”<sup>69</sup> However, women are kept on the margins of such vital information and face the full effects of the mandatory sentencing policies. While Congress intended mandatory sentences to target “kings pins” and upper-level managers, the method of eradicating the frontlines to bring down the war has resulted in those on the lowest levels receiving the highest punishment. In fact, only 5.5 percent of federal crack-cocaine



defendants and 11 percent of overall drug defendants are high-level offenders. The disproportion in incarceration is directly linked to access to information because their level of power also means they have more information than those on the lower rungs.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, the most culpable defendants are also the defendants who are in the best position for negotiation and the drug mules and street dealers serve longer sentences as a result of ignorance. Only by providing prosecutors “substantial assistance that aids in prosecuting other offenders may they reduce their sentences.”<sup>71</sup> Judges are unable to consider the offender’s role in the trade, the motivation for involvement, or the likelihood of recidivism in determining a sentence.

Bonnie is one of the first points of contact for law enforcement, in Blakney’s case in the form of an undercover agent, but she lacks the knowledge of the overall workings of the drug trade. This lack of knowledge couples with her expertise in cooking crack to subject her to the violence of the state. The ability to cook crack is erroneously read as possessing knowledge of the criminal enterprise. Unfortunately, her role as cook is one of many positions she holds that are positions of necessity and of domesticity, but not positions of power.

### **2.3.2 “Get Me Bodied”<sup>72</sup>: The Use of Bonnie’s Body as a Means of Enacting Criminality**

Another way that marginality is linked to culpability is through the use of Bonnie’s body. The Bonnie script contributes to conversations around the use of the Black female body in hip-hop<sup>73</sup> by specifically asking how her sexualized body is used to enact a gangster identity. The gendered body is an essential site of interrogation for the Bonnie script as it is used as a decoy to both trap and misdirect the enemy and is a vehicle for drug transportation. As a trap, it is a sexualized vehicle of enticement and seduction. For instance, before the bank robbery in their duet “Bonnie & Clyde” Jay-Z modifies Foxy Brown’s desire to “pull up to the joint slow and hop out the van” by instructing her “No don’t hop out, slide out, looking like a knockout. Show a

little thigh, make this nigga's eyes pop out. Seize him with the cleavage. Make this nigga believe he's about to eat it, then let him see the six [millimeter]." Her body is deployed as a trap to lure the bank security guard into her sexually so that the gun her partner wields will come as a greater surprise. Similarly, Yo-Yo and Ice Cube's duet features Yo-Yo saying "See every now and then my man had a plan to hook me up with his closest friends. Take me to the bar, maybe mingle and kick it. Let him think he's getting over while I gank him for his riches. Robbing, stealing, killing at will." In both of these cases, the use of women's bodies is controlled through the instructions of their partner. They are not situated as the independent agential Bonnie, rather one who is being, as Foxy puts it, "schooled by the best" as to how her body can better serve this criminal activity. She is directly exposed to the enemy, and if the trap becomes visible, she is directly in harms' way.

Bonnie's body is further placed in harm's reach as a sexualized vehicle for the transportation of drugs. Li'l Wayne raps, "I see she's wearing those jeans that show her butt crack. My girls can't wear that. Why? That's where the stash (drugs) is at."<sup>74</sup> Notorious BIG reports "I got my honey on the Amtrak with the crack in the crack of her ass. Two pounds of hash in the stash."<sup>75</sup> Li'l Kim tells tales of "pushing the coke in the v's (vehicles) in the DTs (detectives). Doped taped to titties from city to city."<sup>76</sup> These reiterations of a sexualized body exist in the sphere of gangsta rap that already represents women as sexual objects and targets of conquest, exploitation, and manipulation. As a result, it takes very little to turn a sexualized body that functions for pleasure into a sexualized body that functions for criminal gain. While her "ass" and "titties" are still being controlled for the benefit of men, the implications of such objectification when coupled with criminality subjects them to the violences of the state.

The ideals of loyalty and interdependence effectively come together to place Bonnie in the position of drug carrier and her body is used to transport illegal narcotics. The lyrics intimately connect Bonnie's body to the War on Drugs as it becomes a vessel for transporting drugs through ingestion or concealment. In "You Must Love Me,"<sup>77</sup> Jay-Z recalls how he "strapped her (his girlfriend's) body with them things (drugs) as she boarded the plane." The song highlights the necessity of Bonnie's loyalty as we see that she was "one of the few people [he] could trust" for his "emergency [drug] trip out of town." It also reveals the ways in which her ability to "hold him down" couples with the narrative of interdependence as he reminds her that "the fact of the matter is I slang these pies for us." This shows that they depend on each other and that he puts his life at risk for the betterment of their lives as well. We know that there is immense danger involved as he hesitates to send her and he asks retrospectively "what would make you sacrifice your life?"

Furthermore, the promotion of the use of Bonnie's body in rap lyrics informs law enforcement interactions with women of color's bodies even outside of the drug trade. This is because women of color exist in a landscape in which they are already read as sexual and criminal. Therefore, the transportation of narcotics through the body is indeed a sacrificial role that places these women as the first points of contact with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The perception of criminality connected to historical archetypes of hypersexuality place Bonnie on the frontlines of strip searches and bodily violences. A study conducted by the General Accounting Office supports this argument as it reveals that women of color are more frequently stopped by law enforcement agents who suspect them to be carriers and as a result are disproportionately targeted for strip searches.<sup>78</sup> While they are actually less likely than their White counterparts to be transporting drugs, they are nine times more likely to be subjected to X-

rays after being patted down.<sup>79</sup>

The idea that women of color are always-already criminal exposes them to violence at the hands of police officers who go to extreme means to shore up their beliefs. For example:

In 1996, Sandra Antor, a nursing student and a Sunday school teacher, was pulled over by a South Carolina state trooper as she was driving down Interstate 95 on her way home to Florida, ripped from her car, shoved to the ground on a busy highway, and beaten before being taken into custody. The officer later cited the possibility that Sandra may have been transporting drugs as justification for his actions.<sup>80</sup>

At other times, the violence is connected to racialized sexualization:

Danni Tyson was arrested on a subway train on her way to pick up her daughter from swim practice, and subsequently strip-searched at a Manhattan police station. During the search, she was asked to lift up her breasts to show that she was not hiding drugs, and subjected to racialized ridicule.<sup>81</sup>

In some instances, state violence leads to death:

Frankie Perkins, a black mother of three on her way home one evening in 1997 was crossing an empty lot when she was stopped and subsequently choked, by police officers who later claimed that they had seen her swallowing drugs and were trying to get her to spit them up. Autopsy photos revealed bruises on her face and rib cage, and showed her eyes swollen shut. The cause of death was listed as strangulation. No drugs were recovered. In a similar incident in south Seattle, Theresa Henderson was choked by police who claimed that she tried to swallow a small amount of cocaine.<sup>82</sup>

The reality of violence disrupts the myth of leniency awarded to Bonnie based on gender.

While Yo-Yo brags that her gender affords her a degree of protection saying, “While they (the cops) are searching him I got the gat (gun) in my skirt”<sup>83</sup> the reality is as a Black woman, she is hypervisible as criminal. As a result, she is not rewarded leniency but more violence. Her marginal status in terms of her race and gender as well as the positions she holds, construct a criminalized body that must be attacked by the state in fighting a War on Drugs in an effort to bring down the rest of the operation.<sup>84</sup> Sudbury highlights this policy in action in the story of a young woman harshly sentenced for drug trafficking:

The judge, when he sentenced me, said he's going to use me as an example. Because he knows I've been set up, but he has to give a message to the world: 'Don't bring drugs.' He used me as an example because he knew I was pregnant. I was set up by a friend of mine, if you can call him that. And they knew that. But still he said that's why they're using women to bring drugs to the country because they think that the system is not going to be as hard on women as on male prisoners. He said that's not the case.<sup>85</sup>

Her marginality is not only recognized but also targeted in an effort to eradicate the margins, the frontline of defense, in order to bring down the system. However, the socio-economic realities that make up Bonnie's life means there are more Bonnies being interpellated everyday.<sup>86</sup>

Interdependence is myth because while he "slangs these pies for" them, it evacuates the reality that she alone is asked to carry out a dangerous trip that could result in her incarceration. While she proves that she is able and willing to "hold him down," he "lets her go" onto the plane alone. Her race and gender couple with the mandatory minimums to disallow any form of leniency. Thus, Jay-Z's emphasis that "everything will go smooth" is misleading as the reality is that her race and gender, read as criminal, make her hypervisible to the DEA surveillance tactics. Furthermore, 90 percent of drug-offenders serving prison time are lower-level offenders. US Bureau of Prisons director Kathleen Hawk-Sawyer examples how this has deeper implications for women in her testimony stating, "The reality is, some 70 percent of our female population are low-level, non-violent offenders. The fact that they have come into prison is the true question for me. I think it has been an unintended consequence of the mandatory minimums."<sup>87</sup> Bonnie is interpellated into a lifestyle that is presented as rewarding with few consequences and that any trouble would be worth her while despite the reality that the lifestyle leads to imprisonment.

The state also enacts violence through the lens of visibility and invisibility that allows it to see Bonnie but not her paths of involvement. Julia Sudbury details three paths of involvement for the women in the drug trade that include threat and coercion, deception, and economic need. These paths are often invisible in the eyes of judges who are forced to use mandatory sentencing

that disallow any discretion or consideration of extenuating circumstances. While Bonnie is touted as a figure who is in control, the lyrics reveal that there is a desire to physically and mentally dominate Bonnie. Revealing the violence present in the script, Notorious BIG remarks “I admit, when the wine is right I’ll dine you right, treat you right [but] talk slick I’ll beat you right.”<sup>88</sup> This evidences a larger pattern of discipline for women within the Bonnie myth that works to “put them in their place” when “they are out of line.”<sup>89</sup> Stephens and Phillips further discuss the relationship violence as being a constant characteristic of the Gangster Bitch script. They argue that these women are expected to fight their men back as Notorious BIG claims in this same song “and if I deceive she won’t take it lightly. She’ll invite me, politely to fight G,” but there is also an “unwritten rule that she cannot overtake the male. To do so could lead to a serious beating or death.”<sup>90</sup> Violence is used to regulate her behavior and nudges her into the drug trade. For instance, Marilyn, serving a twenty-two-years-to-life sentence for participating in an armed robbery in which one of the victims was shot and killed, speaks of deception, threat and the probability of violence as being factors of her incarceration. Speaking of her then boyfriend she recalls:

One day he led me to believe that we were going to his mom’s house...but when we got there his mom wasn’t there. We had a few drinks at the after-hours place and he started robbing the place. He told me to put stuff in the bag and I did it. I was really afraid of the guy. I was scared if I didn’t do it, he would smack me around...I never loved this man; I was afraid of him and I wasn’t well.<sup>91</sup>

But the violence that details her marginality cannot be seen under mandatory drug laws that only allow for a description of the type of narcotic and the weight. The particular conditions that make up the lives of women of color, make Bonnie operate within a violent criminal justice system.

### 2.3.3 “...All in the Name of Love”: Other Means of Control

Physical violence is not the only way Bonnie is controlled; the mechanisms of domination also play out through the use of “game.” Game<sup>92</sup> is the use of trickery, deception, manipulation, or misrepresentation by a person in order to persuade another person to complete actions or participate in activities for the persuader’s benefit. The use of game signals a disruption in the interpellation of Bonnie as agential. Instead, her independence is used to lure women in, but she turns out to be an object to be manipulated and controlled.

Game is predominantly used in the courting process between men and women with sexual intercourse being the ultimate goal. Mase speaks of coercive practices involved the use of game in obtaining sex, rapping, “I had niggas making bets like ‘did he fuck her yet?’ Asking ‘did he touch her bra?’ when I say ‘nah’ they say ‘awww.’ So tomorrow I use that pressure to undress her.”<sup>93</sup> Success in these efforts would solidify his role among his peer group and enable him to achieve the respect of his peers. Anderson further explains the link between these “mating games” and mind/body control explaining:

To the young man the woman becomes, in the most profound sense, a *sexual object*. Her *body* and *mind* are the objects of a *sexual game*, to be won for his aggrandizement. Status goes to the winner, and sex is prized as a testament *not of love but of control over another human being*. The goal of the sexual conquests is to make a fool of the young woman.<sup>94</sup> (emphasis mine)

There is a desire to place her body as well as her mind under the control of a male counterpart for his benefit. This control is demonstrated in The Lox’s declaration “I Need a Ryde or Die Bitch”<sup>95</sup> when rapper Jadakiss declares he “gamed her to death. [She] tattooed my name on her neck.” He views the bodily inscription of his identity as evidence of his gaming skills and links the ownership and control of her mind and body.

In gangsta rap, the Bonnie script shows how the conquest has implications beyond sex as

she is “gamed into death” by the War on Drugs. Thus, the ability to “game” Bonnie influences not only her sexual decisions but also serve as a path of illegal involvement in the drug trade and calls her into the role of mule. Notorious BIG reveals that game was used to obtain the free labor of the woman that “had the stash in the crack of her ass.” He raps, “I told her she could be lieutenant [and] the bitch got gassed.” Fabolous raps “Now I thugged you [out].”<sup>96</sup> The way that you be drinking and don’t be scared to carry the yay that I be slinging.”<sup>97</sup> The connection between game and labor continues as Sheek boasts his gaming skills rapping:

I get drunk with bitches that don't get drunk [and] don't get high. I have them doing drive-bys. Shit they never did. Forgetting about they kids. Moms babysitting ain't seen her in a week. I'm a bad influence to parents they hate Sheek. I need a ryde or die bitch that'll take this coke out of town, and come back and breakdown when I'm broke.<sup>98</sup>

These lyrics construct a Bonnie that benefits Clyde by allowing him to achieve a level of respect amongst his peers and excuses him from the menial tasks of drug carrying. His identity is achieved through her and is evidenced by the emphasis on “I.” For instance, “I told her,” “I thugged you out,” and “I have them doing...shit they never did.” These songs work as amplified bragging sessions that allow Clyde to have an identity as the man. The ability to game her into criminality trumps simple sexual conquests.

Bonnie’s involvement in the drug trade is not only linked to his “expertise in game” but also to her feelings of love. Bonnie is interpellated through discourses of love characterized by interdependency and holding down. This call into love is represented as the precursor to drug trade involvement. In “Allure,”<sup>99</sup> Jay-Z highlights a connection between love and the drug trade when he says:

Say hooray to the bad guy and all the broads putting cars in their names for the stars of the game.<sup>100</sup> Putting caine in their bras and their tomorrows on the train. All in the name of love. Just to see that love locked in chains.<sup>101</sup>

Returning to his song “You Must Love Me” provides a reminder of his answer to the question



“what would make you sacrifice your life?” as he simply concludes, “you must love me.” In both of these songs, love is imagined as the ultimate objective in Bonnie’s life. If she is unable to acquire the love of Clyde, or if something prevents her actualizing love, she loses. In gangsta rap, her involvement is not linked to aspirations of monetary advancement; rather it is ‘all in the name of love.’ The representation of love as end-goal is also seen in Li’l Kim’s “Spend A Little Doe” as she links her willingness to engage in criminal activities and serve prison time to the promise of love. Before enacting revenge on her lover who persuaded her to take jail time for him but did not ‘hold her down’ while she was incarcerated, I return to the aforementioned lyrics “I remember, how you said you loved me with a passion...[so] I pushed the v’s (vehicles) with the coke from the DTs (undercover agents).” Hence, she puts herself in harm’s way by transporting drugs from undercover agents because of promises of love. She signals how this love placed her in danger because “when the cops came you gave them my name” and quelled any hesitation because “you said if I didn’t snitch you’d make a shorty rich.” After serving a three-year sentence alone, she realizes that love was a vehicle for game. Blakney also argues that love often functions as a trap that places women in prison:

There are a lot of Black women locked up, but sometimes we do it to ourselves. We want to stick with our men and do what our men say, but sometimes the men want to blame the women. The man isn’t thinking about the woman and the woman gets in over her head without any way out until it’s too late... You also have women who were set on the wrong path by those who were supposed to protect them.<sup>102</sup>

Bonnie is interpellated and represented as a woman that prioritizes love over all other things. However, the representation of a Bonnie that acts either out of being gamed by Clyde or love for Clyde is a myth that erases the realities of participation in the drug trade. While this discourse of love makes visible the ways in which the connection to men serves as a path of involvement for women in the drug trade, it erases the ways that drug involvement is a consequence of state

violences. If it is “all in the name of love” then it cannot be in the name of anything else. Love masks the reality of the prison industrial complex that results in women being incarcerated for activities pursued to support their families, supplement incomes, sustain a drug addiction, or escape violent situations. Love masks the way that the state participates in a feminization of poverty that results in an overrepresentation of women in impoverished conditions. Thus, it may not be love that encourages her participation but a need to support herself and her family. Li'l Kim not only speaks of betrayal in terms on unreciprocated love but also economically when she states “I ain't see a G off of none of them keys (kilos)” referencing the reality that while he profits off her labor, she loses. Love cannot account for the increased criminalization of women's acts of survival. Love does not account for the post-conviction penalties that eliminate government programs like welfare, public housing, and financial aid for women with drug offenses increasing the likelihood that she will have to remain in the drug trade. The interpellation of a Bonnie that must be driven exclusively by a love for Clyde as “they never worried about anything but the other” runs counter to the reality of a Bonnie that has sole caretaking responsibility for her children. It is highly unlikely that she “forgot about her kids” rather, the narratives show that these women risk incarceration for the sole purpose of providing for their children. For example, Marta, a Jamaican mother of four serving a five-year sentence for drug trafficking explains the connection of criminality and caregiving saying:

They [women she is incarcerated with] do it mainly for the kids, to support the kids. You have a mother who has four or five kids, two is very sickly, every time she visits the hospital or the doctor, you have to pay to register, you have to pay for medicine, you have to pay for an X-ray. Everything costs money. So anything comes up they're going to jump at it, the easiest way to make money.<sup>103</sup>

The reality of mothering in impoverished conditions calls into question the Bonnie of rap lyrics constructed as acting “all in the name of love.” In reality, her path to the drug trade is extremely

complicated.

Bonnie is interpellated through the call of independence which constructs her as a woman that can “handle her own” economically and physically. She is constructed through the call of interconnection with the struggles of Black men with whom she enters into relationships of interdependence. Lastly, she is interpellated into relationships of love, loyalty and devotion in which she and Clyde hold each other. However, when these representations couple with the illegal narcotics trade the Bonnie myth break down. The reality is that she is on the margins of decision-making processes and lacks the knowledge necessary to negotiate within the trade. She is not an equal but is employed to do the lower-level jobs of transforming cocaine into crack-cocaine and drug carrying, positions which place her in the closest proximity to law enforcement agencies. Ultimately, she is viewed as an object to be controlled physically and mentally, and as someone who does not act out of her own will. The interpersonal violences that the “real Bonnies” are subjected to as well as the violences perpetrated by the state all remain invisible in a legal system that views her as equal and sentences her with rigid mandatory minimums. While Bonnie and Clyde both die in a violent blaze, Bonnie’s marginality amplifies the violent murder done on her.

### Chapter Three

#### “And all the pieces matter”<sup>104</sup>: The Absence of Girls on *The Wire*

Praised as “painstakingly authentic”<sup>105</sup> and “as true as television gets,”<sup>106</sup> it comes as no surprise that critics credit the success of the dramatic series *The Wire* to its “unrelenting realism.” One reviewer notes, “it’s not what happens to the characters, or the societal trends the script explores, that matter so much, it’s the authentic and precise ways in which events are represented.” Another hails it as “leaving nothing about [and] offering viewers a close chance as anyone can get to everything.” A writer on Savage Minds, a website dedicated to “Notes and Queries on Anthropology” considers it “the best ethnography we have of contemporary American society.”<sup>107</sup> Critics and online reviewers are not alone in their praises of *The Wire* as representing a complex and in-depth picture of an inner-city community. An interview with youth in the DC/Maryland Metropolitan area mirrors these claims of authenticity. Duane Hatten, a student at Baltimore Community College who grew up in northeast Baltimore feels as if the series was secretly filmed at his former public school, as he says, “the schools are the realest to me.”<sup>108</sup> He talks about his and his peers’ empathy with the four boys on Season 4 reasoning that “[they] all get so attached because [they] know kids just like them in that situation.”<sup>109</sup>

The authentic feel of the series has much to do with creators David Simon, an ex-cop in Baltimore Police Department and Ed Burns, a former schoolteacher in Baltimore Public Schools incorporating their real-life experiences into the storylines. *The Wire* makes use of truthful characters who speak contemporary Baltimorean slang and employ the regional dialect. Casting non-professional actors in minor roles and soliciting feedback from cast members further enhances the realism. This adds to the attention to detail evident in characters ordering “half and halves” a popular Baltimore drink made of half lemonade and half ice tea and a “2 piece Snack

Box from the Chicken Spot” a meal consisting of two pieces of chicken, fries, and a biscuit. Gangsta rap emits from the Cadillac Escalades of the street players while Irish pop fills the bars during the police “wakes.” Furthermore, Felicia “Snoop” Pearson uses her real nickname on the show and plays an assassin. Adding to the authenticity, Pearson was offered this role upon her real-life release from prison after being sentenced at age 14 for the murder of a 15 year-old-girl.

Snoop, the character and the real woman, highlights the ways in which women of color often experience life on a continuum of violence. Women as perpetrators and victims of violence comprise marginal scenes on the show, but this violence makes up the realities of their lives. Yet, while *The Wire* is celebrated for its unrelenting realism, the absences and portrayal of the realities of women and girls are the makings of myth. A close look at Season 4 and its focus on the institutions educating four inner-city boys reveals the ways in which *The Wire* not only inadequately represents girlhood and womanhood but also reinforces an erasure of the intimate and state violences that greatly impact their lives. By focusing on the institutions of the school, the home, and the streets I show the gendered ways these ideological state apparatuses work to educate women and girls in a carceral regime. The boxcutter scene between Laetitia and Chiquan and the sex between Tiffany, Paul and Monell reveal how the shifting lens of invisibility and visibility operates as a gendered tool of oppression.

### **3.1 Ideological State Apparatuses**

Simon and Burns use *The Wire* to explore the many facets of the US War on Drugs and examine “how institutions have an effect on individuals, and how, regardless of what you are committed to, whether you’re a cop, a longshoremen, a drug dealer, a politician, a judge, a lawyer, you are ultimately compromised and must contend with whatever institution you’ve committed to.”<sup>110</sup> *The Wire* tells the stories of those who are hypervisible in the criminal justice

system by rendering visible those social institutions and practices that influence their lives. By revealing the educations received in the institutions of the school, the home, and the streets, the creators are showing the ways in which the visibility of these subjects in prison has everything to do with those factors that are made invisible in the criminal justice system. These factors include interpersonal violence, socioeconomic structures, a history of institutionalization represented by foster care, failing schools, and the prison, all made invisible by a legal system that looks at offenses and not individuals. The criminal justice system is more likely to remove people rather than repair relationships and punishes people for a variety of harms while hiding the harms caused by the state. Building on the work of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, I argue that the representation of girls on *The Wire* shows the ways in which intimate violences done on their bodies connect to state violences that exist on their communities.

### **3.2 “Streets is Watching”: Surveillance on *The Wire***

While Simon and Burns show the multiple ideological and disciplinary institutions at work in Baltimore, *The Wire* is ultimately a show about surveillance. The use of electronic visual and audio surveillance equipment by the Baltimore Police Department is central to the structure and plot of the series. The multiple shots of cameras and police stakeouts highlight the volume of surveillance in modern life for those with criminalized subjectivities. The series title serves as a metaphor for this surveillance, but for women and girls it signals the ways in which their mouths are wired shut and their lives and experiences are hidden from view thus allowing the series to have the dual function of revealing the multiple locations of surveillance while relying on its own methods of concealment.

Michel Foucault’s use of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon is useful in understanding the shifting lens of visibility and invisibility in the prison industrial complex. The prison industrial

complex (PIC) is defined by grassroots organization Project South as the “neoliberal policies, practices and institutions of all levels of government designed to remove the discarded (those who are unemployable, poor, uneducated, etc.) from society to further the social control of those negatively impacted by globalization.”<sup>111</sup> Central to the PIC are the multiple mechanisms of surveillance. Foucault describes the surveillance machine through the architectural structure of the “all-seeing” panopticon:

At the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with a wide window that opens onto the inner side of the ring; the periphery building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then is to place the supervisor in the central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy.<sup>112</sup>

The panopticon was not meant to simply exist architecturally; its appeal is in the possibility of internalization in which those who are knowingly visible become responsible for the limits of power. The subject then “inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principal of his own subjection.”<sup>113</sup>

I read the structure and content of *The Wire* as representative of a panoptical space that provides a way of understanding what it means to be oppressed through invisibility when “visibility” itself “is a trap.” I look at the series for its depictions of “locations of bodies in space, of [this] distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centers and channels of power, of definitions of the instruments and modes of intervention of power”<sup>114</sup> as implemented in the school and streets. While the series focuses on the wiretapping of a particular Baltimore drug-ring and the special police unit assigned with their surveillance, Season 4 focuses on the surveillance that characterizes multiple sites of education. Power in the panopticon is visible and unverifiable and this is evident in the school as well as on the streets of *The Wire*. It is visible in that “the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the

tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied” or the eyes of the teacher or the lens surveillance cameras or the windows of drug bosses. It is unverifiable in that “the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment but he must be sure that he may always be so.”<sup>115</sup> I use Foucault’s theory of the panopticon to analyze the disciplinary methods of visibility used on *The Wire* to capture a Black female subject in a frame without context of experience—the capturing of myth.

### **3.3 Visibility and Invisibility on *The Wire***

Foucault argues that the arrangement of the cells in the panopticon are “opposite the central tower, imposes on him axial visibility, but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, the inmates can see the tower housing the guard in front of them but cannot see the other inmates beside them. As a result they are invisible to each other, hindering their ability to work together, thus guaranteeing docility. The camera itself, invisible to viewers, also contributes to the panoptical functioning of *The Wire* “captur[ing]” the subjects in the frame through “full lighting and the eye of a supervisor [which] capture better than darkness.”<sup>117</sup> By putting the stories of economically underprivileged Black children living in a drug-infested inner city on HBO for millions to see, the experiences of the real life inhabitants enjoy a visibility they are usually not afforded. However, for those undeveloped characters that have no voice this “arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and recognize instantly.”<sup>118</sup> This makes the invisibility of the viewer “a guarantee of order” and the visibility of women and girls “a trap.” But while the scrutiny of visibility may be a trap it is more apparent for women of color that the darkness and lack of visibility is fatal. For those people in prison that spend years in the absence of visitors, not being seen is not freedom; it may make them more vulnerable to correctional



injustices. Being seen in a panopticon is not visibility. One's body may be present, but the social contexts and experiences that surround one's existence are not. While the guard is invisible his/her position of power is not. While the inmates are visible, their desires, wants, needs, and claims of knowledge are not. While visibility is a trap in bodily and spatial terms, the invisibility of existence is ultimate oppression. The rendering of certain subjects invisible is a prerequisite for placement in the panopticon. It was the erasing of the human characteristics of Africans that justified their treatment as chattel. It was the animalistic descriptions of Sara Baartman that justified her being caged and placed on display. The rendering of a group of people invisible is a conscious thing. It is no accident that women's voices are not heard on *The Wire*. By placing emphasis on the "real" problems of institutional poverty, police violence and the failure of government and by casting these as men's and boy's problems, the problems facing women and girls in the margins is rendered invisible.

But the visibility that is a trap for Foucault is what I see as hypervisibility, that type of visibility that erases those things and institutions of influence. Curtis Linton describes hypervisibility using the example of a black dot in the center of a circle, the black dot representing a single Black student in a white student filled cafeteria. In this example, the black dot "by virtue of its color contrast, sticks out and is hypervisible" against the backdrop of a neutralized and invisible whiteness. Subsequently, the white students' "color, culture and consciousness are viewed as normal and appropriate... [and] these factors are not scrutinized and examined."<sup>119</sup> In a similar way, *The Wire* attempts to provide a space for those who have historically been relegated to the position of "objects of information" to be "subjects of communication" by placing those historically silenced by their existence in the margins to be placed in the center along with their multiple interactions with surveillance and oppression. But

what of those mouths wired shut and their oppressions placed behind barbed wire and out of view? In centering four young boys on Season 4, the creators have rendered millions of young girls invisible. The bodily visibility of women and girls on *The Wire* without a voice serves the same disciplinary function as the panopticon as it “fixes, arrests, or regulates movements.” The disciplinary arresting of their voices makes them subjects that are merely being and never doing. They once again exist as an “object of information, never a subject in communication” a blank canvas onto which viewers can paint coded ways of seeing of a racialized and gendered “other.” The viewers can then only give the silence a “meaning it does not have, endowing it with the essence of what we would have liked such subjects to have said.”<sup>120</sup> They are silenced and only permitted to speak when they are speaking fictional truths of what it means to be Black women.

These women’s bodies:

...do not function as slices of reality, but as fragmented “emblems” of invisibility” in which their vulnerabilities...highlight their otherness without providing details of their struggles or depth to their experience and identity. Through the nature of this fragmentation, the subject then becomes inscribed with meaning—“truth”—by the spectator as guided by the framing of the image by the artists.<sup>121</sup>

For Foucault, visibility is a trap but the goal is not to be invisible in a panoptic space. (Even those who are invisible in the tower are subjected to surveillance. The teachers are watched by the principal who is watched by the superintendent who is watched by the parents who are watched by social workers). The goal is to have visibility that extends beyond docile bodies for as Audre Lorde puts it “that visibility which make us most vulnerable is that which is also the source of our greatest strength.”<sup>122</sup> It is the invisibility and erasure of humanity that makes particular subjects more visible in deplorable oppressive circumstances like the prison and impoverished communities. But while the creators of *The Wire* attempted to highlight the social contexts that are usually not seen, they did so by making women and girls both invisible and

hypervisible. Invisibility erases, discredits, and ignores while hypervisibility stigmatizes a group of people, making them targets of fear and violence, rendering their unrecognized realities invisible. “Oppressors render the oppressed invisible or hypervisible, relative to how the situation benefits their agenda. Invisibility can be used as a tool of oppression because if a people can’t be seen then their work can be discounted, their experiences of violence and oppression can go without recourse, and their lives can be devalued.”<sup>123</sup> Writing about the invisible status of domestic violence victims in during Hurricane Katrina, social organizer Shana “learned that one way to see people who were invisible before, is to leave them behind.” The way that we “see” women and girls on *The Wire* is through their stories being left behind, leaving hypervisible archetypes in their place. These are the bodies that are most useful in a carceral regime. Thus the visibility of these bodies in the panopticon results from the oppressive invisibility they have endured.

For the experiences for women of color on *The Wire* to be rendered visible, I recognize the multiple intersections that create the corners of their lives. *The Wire* provides a way of looking at the places where the streets and the home collide, where the home and the school collide, where the streets and the school collide and where all these intersect with the prison. When one’s life exists at a corner, one possesses a heightened awareness of those things influencing one’s life. A focus on women and girls vividly reveals these corners and the violence of living them.

My analysis is based on the two key scenes featuring girls on Season 4 of *The Wire*. I take the altercation between Laetitia and Chiquan and the sex between Tiffany, Paul and Monell as the point of my analysis because these instances show the ways in which the lens of visibility and invisibility couple with violence and function as a tools of oppression for women and girls.

A brief discussion of these events is necessary for this analysis. Chiquan's constant teasing of Laetitia leads to a face-to-face confrontation in which Laetitia slices both of Chiquan's cheeks with a boxcutter. Amidst the groans of Chiquan laying in a pool of blood, Ms. Williams calmly tells a student to call 911 and we can faintly hear others saying "she's going to jail" and "the other girl's going to the hospital." Later, Paul and Monell ask Randy to stand as lookout while they go to "get it on" with Tiffany in the bathroom. Tiffany walks into the bathroom, never unfolding her arms and the boys later return smiling. We see her later talking to the police to file charges of rape. While the fight was a moment of hypervisibility that took place in the public domains of the classroom, performed before an audience of students, the sex was invisible, done in the privacy of the public restroom left to the imaginations of even the viewers of the series. In both of these moments, the institutions of violence remain invisible.

If we see the fight between Laetitia and Chiquan as connected to the sex between Tiffany, Paul and Monell, we can extend them from their portrayal as normative parts of inner-city youth relationships to being specific forms of interpersonal violence that are part of a larger continuum of state violence plaguing the lives of women of color. We can also see that black women's bodies exist at the multiple corners of intimate and state violences.

The fact that these instances took place inside the school, an institution believed to be a place of learning and where students should be safe is meant to point to the fallacies of the underfunded school system. The reality however, is that the school, like the streets, is an institution of education and learning that teaches through violence done on girls of color.

It was through the fight that we learned a little more about Randy's fear of going back into a group home. Interrupting a conversation his friends were having about Laetitia's mental state, Randy sullenly remarks, "She lived in a group home...and in those places you don't have to boil

cats to make you crazy.” The sex scene was also produced as a means of developing Randy’s story line as it was used to *teach* us about the complexities of the No Snitching culture through the experiences of Randy. Thus, the bodies of girls of color exist here only as vehicles for making meaning and are most pedagogical when violence is perpetuated.

### **3.4 The School**

The fact that these instances of violence took place within the school and the fact the school officials responded by involving police shows the ways in which “the prison is the school.” Angela Davis asks, “Can a state that is thoroughly infused with racism, male dominance, class-bias, and homophobia and that constructs itself in and through violence act to minimize violence in the lives of women? Should we rely on the state as the answer to the problem of violence against women?”<sup>124</sup> This reliance on outside authorities highlights the interpersonal use of violence by students as abnormal, deviant, and in need of correction while erasing the state violence in the forms of both the police and the school. Reliance on the criminal justice system also means that even though these girls exhibited hostility towards one another the day before, nothing was done to prevent these altercations and there was nothing done to ensure that they would not happen again.

If we look at the disruption of relationships that occurs in a carceral state, the school perpetuates disruption of community and familial ties as it relies on mechanisms of removal. This school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is characterized by the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the criminal justice system that are being used in public schools, resulting in children being removed from mainstream education into alternative education and prison. The zero tolerance policies that result in increasing reliance on exclusionary discipline, suspension, and expulsion and result in the removal of the child from the school system for a period of time

perpetuate “a failure cycle, decreasing the opportunity to gain academic skills and appropriate social behaviors.”

While STPP researchers correctly point out a school system that has unjust policies that push students out, there is an underlying assumption that the school is a benign institution that exists to educate children and “make them better people.” Schools that are unable to accomplish this betterment point to the lack of resources that disable the administration from providing adequate services for students to deal with trauma. The belief that keeping children in school prevents them from going to prison ignores all the mechanisms in the school that make the school and the prison function in similar ways. For Althusser, the school is the most significant ISA, not just working to educate but also working to interpellate young people into their respective roles in society. Foucault notes that the prison was actually modeled after the school and both share disciplinary tactics from their origins. With this in mind, the school shifts from being a location of learning and advancement to being an institution that functions much like the prison and works to create docile bodies. The idea that the school, like the prison, is a broken institution in need of reform aids in the creation of “solutions” to the STPP like peer mediation, and In-School Suspension that actually increase surveillance and disciplinary control. Not only does the school share the panoptic structure of the prison, the goal is one of civilizing and it does so by classifying and removing deviance and using force to punish force. The school then is a “warehouse for children,” a locale where they work, are kept, and manufactured into citizens. The physical set up of the classroom is panoptic with the teacher positioned in the front of the classroom serving as “the annular building in the center” and the students seating arrangement is a form of “divi[sion] into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building...For the schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, not chatter, no waste of time” which makes it

possible to “draw up differences.”<sup>125</sup> The classroom setup as well as the examination structure “makes it possible to observe performances (without there being any imitation or copying) to map attitudes, to assess characters, to draw up rigorous classifications, in relation to normal development, to distinguish ‘laziness and stubbornness’ from incurable imbecility.”<sup>126</sup> These dividing practices work as tools of normalization making it easier to identify students who adhere to this structure as normal and those that do not as abnormal. On *The Wire*, the “abnormal” schoolchildren are set apart largely because of their reliance on violence and are removed from the “normal” classroom setting and sent to the special class to be further classified, ranked, and normalized.

The special classroom for the “corner boys” serves the laboratory aspects of the panopticon, which is “used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals...to try out pedagogical experiments—and in particular to take up once again the well debated problem of secluded education.”<sup>127</sup> The special class was a classroom to prepare those troubled “corner kids” for the normal classroom. By separating ten of the most troubled kids, this class serves as a normalization machine teaching them how to control their temper and better function in a “normal” classroom panoptical setting. These are the children who “play with” the surveillance of the teacher/central tower by hiding magazines in their textbooks, throwing spitballs, starting fights, and showing a lack of respect for authority. They know when they are being watched, for they are usually the most watched, but they do not care. Constant disruption means they will be put out. As Colvin states, they know what is expected of them and act accordingly. Those successfully “normalized/civilized” would have the “privilege” of returning while those unable to “fit in” would be relegated to the criminalized inmate class.

These children are pathologized because of their use of violence and are deemed normal when they can control their use of violence.

However, by correcting the behavior of an individual student, nothing is done to control the use of violence by the state. They are pathologized as deviant without situating their violence in the larger structures. This pathologization calls into question who has a right to be hostile. In the midst of the trial, the researchers begin to further classify the students by naming and marking disorders even identifying Charlene as having Oppositional Defiant Personality Disorder<sup>128</sup>, something that would appear as normative teen resistance in another context. Through this “proliferation of disorders” the school becomes a location that can be reformed to better deal with the mental instability of its students without addressing its own mind-state. And while the conduct of the students caused their removal from their regular class into the special class, Laetitia was removed from the school entirely and placed into the juvenile detention system, a system that Assistant Principal Donnelly tells us is “only a little worse than her group home.”

### **3.5 Foster Care**

While the creators of *The Wire* do understand that foster care is an institution that greatly harms the children in its care, it is unclear whether they see the prison and the foster care system as working in tandem. Incarceration is fundamentally about the removal of those marked deviant from their communities and perpetuates a disconnection of ties. With this in mind, I am arguing that Laetitia was already incarcerated before being sent to juvenile detention. Dorothy Roberts writes about the symbiosis between the prisons and the foster care system and maps those areas densely populated with children in this form of state custody. She says, “The spatial concentration of the child welfare supervision creates an environment in which state custody of



children is a realistic expectation, if not the norm. Everyone in the neighborhood has either experienced state intrusion in their family or knows someone who has.”<sup>129</sup> Roberts further talks about the racial injustice of the foster care system that disproportionately places Black children in state custody and says:

Most white children who enter the system are permitted to stay with their families, avoiding the emotional damage and physical risks of foster care placement, while most Black children are *taken away* from theirs. Foster care is the main “service” state agencies provide to Black children brought to their attention. Once *removed* from their homes, Black children remain in foster care longer, are *moved* more often, receive fewer services, and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted than any other children.<sup>130</sup> (emphasis mine)

The taking away, removal, and movement mark a similarity between processes of disruption in the foster care system and the prison. Laetitia’s life then exists on a trajectory of removals and state control through the foster care system to the school and to the juvenile facility. As she stands with the boxcutter in hand all the state violence she’s experienced is erased and all we see is deviance in the flesh.

### **3.6 Girls Gone Wild: Black Girlhood and Animality**

The fight represents a key moment of girl’s hypervisibility on *The Wire* as it portrays these women as Linton’s black dot, extremely visible and lacking social context and rationale for violence. The viewer is never told what things preceded the fight, thus making the incident appear as an erratic and irrational and allows black women to be defined as wild and animalistic. The creation of such images is one of the ways in which women of color have historically been controlled. Patricia Hill Collins argues that:

As animals, Black women receive no...redeeming dose of culture and remain open to the type of exploitation visited on nature overall. Black women’s portrayal...as caged, chained and naked creatures that possess “panther-like,” savage, and exotic sexual qualities reinforces this theme of Black women’s wildness.<sup>131</sup>

In her ethnography of the fighting patterns of inner city black girls in Philadelphia Cindy Ness further constructs Black girls as irrational beings that lack control. She concludes that “whether winning or losing, girls do not want to stop” and they therefore “need to be restrained.” As a result, “the phrase *girls gone wild* is commonly used by police, and by the girls themselves, to describe this intensity and tenacity that girls exhibit in a fight.”<sup>132</sup> This connection to animality works as a controlling image that marks her as wild and in need of control. She is once again locked into the frame and placed into state custody.

The fact that this is the only fight we see between girls on the series further disconnects it from a normative form of identity making in inner-city neighborhoods and connects it to deviance. As mention in the previous chapter, young women in this social context are socialized to “hold their own” and are not awarded for passivity. The same neighborhood effects of failing institutions, dilapidated housing, high unemployment, concentrated poverty, and crime which lead to male violence also contribute to a culture of violence for girls. Because this season focused on the lives of four boys, they were shown using peer violence in multiple ways ranging from street fights, to shooting, to organized fighting in the boxing ring. Their fighting is contextualized in ways that Laetitia and Chiquan’s fight is not. This creates a discourse of inner-city fighting that says that boys’ use of violence is a normative part of masculinity making and fighting amongst girls is evidence of maladjustment and deviance.

The storyline of the rape works to situate Tiffany as the archetypical Jezebel, a conniving, agential, whore who cries rape when she does not receive what she wants. As an image that survived slavery, the Jezebel’s function “was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults typically reported by Black slave women.”<sup>133</sup> The next time we see Tiffany after the sex

scene she is speaking to Paul and Monell as they ignore her and laugh at her with their friends. The very next time she appears she is talking to police. This kind of movement links mockery to her rape claim, making it appear as an act of revenge and as untruthful. The fact that she later recants and her reasoning for recanting is never known further works to define her as a Jezebel. Because she was already constructed as a conniving liar, the erasure of her character and her testimony are justified. Sexual violence usually happens behind the closed doors of our homes and institutions and it's often rendered invisible in the media and public discourse thus to be made invisible on the scene is a form of violence.

This form of erasure marks her body as one that is unrapeable and further erases the realities of women of colors' experiences with sexual violence. The marking of unrapeability further pulls on the Jezebel archetype that was used to justify the rape of Black women by slave masters. Aishah Simmons writes "Rape and sexual assault are taboo subjects in every community. As a result of the impact of racism on the lives of Black people in the United States, many Black men and women think that exposing and addressing intra-racial sexual violence against Black women divides the Black community, and that we should only work to expose and address racism since that is the 'real' problem facing our community."<sup>134</sup> When women speak out they are stigmatized. We also know that it is difficult to speak when the perpetrators are people one knows and who are integral to the community and the only response available would remove them from that very locale. With these factors in mind, it is important that her claims of rape be taken seriously, regardless of later retraction.

However, because the creators of the series did not develop this storyline from the eyes of Tiffany, one can only speculate if the sexual exchange was indeed rape. What we do know happened is that Paul and Monell "ran a train on her," an act that is equally problematic.

Running a train, often called gang-banging, is a sexual act in which multiple men have sex one after another (like a train) and they all watch and wait their turn. This action is a form of identity-making that is played out on the bodies of women color. Through running a train on Tiffany, Paul and Monell are able to actualize several codes of the street that guide their lives. These codes of the streets are preparing inhabitants for survival in the inner city. The makers of *The Wire* see the street as another form of schooling and those who do not learn the code are left back or expelled. The codes are learned either verbally through peers and/or “old heads” or visually through watching the daily interactions of others. Students are given opportunities to prove what they have learned through several tests with the consequence of failing usually equating to death. One of the ways in which you can practice the codes with the least amount of risk is through perpetrating violence against a young girl. Because Black women are already read as hypersexual, they cannot be raped. Their bodies are already deemed as unworthy and violence can be acted upon them without retaliation.

In Elijah Anderson’s book *Code of the Street*, he argues that at the heart of the code is respect. In his ethnography of one of the most economically depressed areas of Philadelphia he argues that the rules of civil law have been severely weakened and replaced with a “code of the street.” At the heart of the code is a set of informal rules of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence among so many of the residents. Possession of respect is highly valued for shielding the ordinary person from the interpersonal violence of the street. In this social context of persistent poverty and deprivation, alienation from the broader society’s institutions, notably that of the criminal justice system, is widespread. Thus, “the code of the street emerges where the influence of the police

ends and personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin, resulting in a kind of 'people's law' based on 'street justice.'"<sup>135</sup>

But it not just that the code governs the use of violence, it works and becomes actualized through the violence on particular bodies—notably bodies of women of color—simultaneously leaving them out of the code and making them victims of it. And while Anderson discusses women's relationship to the code as one of mimicking men, he fails to recognize not only the ways in which women uphold the code and are integral to its construction, but also the ways in which the code plays out on their bodies. On *The Wire*, respect can be garnered through one's individual reputation, one's social ties with a reputable peer group, and adherence to codes around standing tall, using force, and exacting revenge. The fight and the train both exemplify how respect is garnered through the deployment of these codes on women's bodies.

These codes of the street are intimately connected with the larger state violence of militarization. On *The Wire* we see the ways in which the police department and the streets use military hierarchy with the naming of positions as lieutenant, sergeant, and captain using the military structure to guide their organization. Smaller players on the streets are often referred to as soldiers, characterized by their ability to follow orders and exemplify loyalty. Namond is often in his room playing the military simulation video game, Halo, and many of the characters wear combat boots and army fatigues. They also share ideology in terms of the codes that get reinforced. *The Wire's* focus on respect relates to the military message of "The Strong. The Proud. The Marines." We see the emphasis on revenge in the discourse of war that says, "We will make them pay..." Standing tall is synonymous with the notions of "An Army of One" in which soldiers stick together—the consequence of disloyalty being death. A country's position as a world power is often achieved through war, and in war those who are most impacted are

women and children. The war on the street is no different and identity is actualized through the bodies of women.

If we situate this train in the larger context of ideologies of violence we understand this act, like rape, was not about sex but about power training the girl into being an object and transporting boys from the realm of theory to practice. Nathan McCall presents a detailed analysis of this practice of “running trains” in his autobiography *Makes Me Wanna Holler*. Describing his upbringing in Portsmouth, VA he speaks of his own role in this practice retrospectively calling it a barbaric exercise in which women are the spoils of war. Through his description of this practice, it becomes clear that for these boys these trains function as a means of masculinity making.

McCall speaks of one particular instance in which the group of boys he called his crew coaxed a 13 year old virgin, Vanessa, into having sex with all of them. The coercion included one boy playing the crazy guy role scaring her into sex saying “if that bitch don’t give me some, she ain’t never leavin’ this house”<sup>136</sup> followed by the “nice guy” who seemed to be on her side saying “look, baby, if you let one of us do it, then the rest of them will be satisfied and they’ll let you go. But if you don’t let at least one of us do it, then them other dudes gon’ get mad and they ain’t gonna wanna let you leave.” Cornered, she gives in and the one boy turned into several and the boys take turns having sex with her one after the other. McCall remembers feeling that this was wrong and wanting to lead her out but not wanting to be called a punk so he too climbs on top of her. McCall says:

That train on Vanessa was definitely a turning point for most of us. We weren’t aware of what it symbolized at the time, but that train marked our real coming together as a gang. It certified us as a group of hanging partners who would do anything and everything together. It sealed our bond in the same way some other guys consummated their alliances by rumbling together in gang wars against downtown boys. In so doing, we served notice—mostly to ourselves—that we were a group of up-and coming young cats

with a distinct identity in a specific portion of Cavalier Manor that we intended to stake out as our own.

Through this literal *coming together* the identity of the group was formed. Comparing it to the “gang wars” further highlights the way in which the violence done on her body produced meaning for the perpetrators. Her body allowed them to experience bonding and became synonymous with the enemy. When Paul and Monell walk down the hallway with their group of friends telling of their exploits, they stand together against Tiffany ignoring her greeting in unity. The rape charges also shored her up as an enemy and solidified their bond, as they were not only going against her but also the enemy state. Standing tall against both, they performed this code and reaped the benefits of respect of their peers. By cooperating with police, the already imagined enemy of this community, she further becomes part of the enemy. They then go against her with as much vengeance as they do the state.

The running of trains is different from sex because meaning can only be produced through the surveillance of others. Other boys must be present to ensure that the act took place and to measure how well the other person did in the conquest. This is why Randy was summoned as a lookout; it was not possible for Paul to stand lookout while Monell went in and then vice versa because the eye of the spectator is integral to the act. Respect is given by the other party, measured by the other’s ability to conquer. “Guys crowded into the room and hovered, wide-eyed, around the bed like gawkers at a zoo” observing the performance of the other guys. When it is over, any feelings of guilt are “eclipsed in no time by the victory celebration held after” she leaves. In McCall’s narrative he says that they “joked about who was scared, whose dick was small, and who didn’t know how to put it in”<sup>137</sup> comparing techniques to for the next conquest. Paul and Monell reported their conquest to their friends and with the

group Namond says “Hey, Tiffany for 50 cent will you suck my dick?” The group of boys walks together smiling as their respect is harnessed through disrespecting her.

Moving from the training to the fight we see that Laetitia, like many who are subjected to various mechanisms of violence, also perpetrates violence enacting codes on the body of Chiquan. Seeking vengeance for Chiquan’s previous tormenting, Laetitia “puts Chiquan back in her place”; beneath her, lying on the ground, silent except for her constant groans of pain. Standing over Chiquan, Laetitia asks, “Who’s laughing now bitch? You on the floor now bitch.” With each swing of the arm, Laetitia solidifies herself as someone “not to be fucked with.” Disrespect must be dealt with to avoid being labeled a punk. For Laetitia her reputation was on the line. Talking about the fight the next day we hear girls reciting this code saying, “If you start shit you can’t complain how someone finishes it.” Thus, Laetitia’s response to Chiquan’s teasing was prescribed through rules that guide inner-city life and her ability to adhere to it earned her respect.

Revenge plays a part in all of the institutions on *The Wire* so it is no surprise that this is the impetus of this fight. Asked, “What makes a good corner boy?” the students in the special class lay out the rules. When describing revenge they say, “If someone messes with you, you got to pay them back.” The Fayette Street Crew successfully gets revenge on Officer Walker, a police officer who constantly harasses and takes advantage of them. In turn, Walker prepares for an all out war in which Officer McNulty remarks, “You play in dirt you get dirty.” This Golden Rule ideology is apparent in many institutions on the series then, further blurring the lines between state controlled institutions and the streets. Revenge regulates behavior and keeps girls in check as the threat of violence through retaliation disciplines.



In conclusion, while the creators aimed to use Season 4 of *The Wire* to capture the reality of Baltimore's complexity within the War on Drugs through institutions of education, it grossly omits the realities of women and girls. Girls on the series are being educated through a lens of invisibility and visibility that interpellates them in ways that further encourage their absence. The representation of girls on *The Wire* reveal the ways that intimate violences done on their bodies links to state violences evident in their lived environments. Ironically, this show that is fundamentally about surveillance acts as a panoptical space that captures women in girls through this shifting lens of invisibility and hypervisibility. As this chapter proves, the stories of girls are silenced and hypervisible archetypes of deviance are used to fill the void. To render their stories visible, I used this chapter to recognize the intersections that characterize their lives and the violences that define these corners. The two acts of violences show the ways in which Simon and Burns frame these violences through use hypervisibility to mark Black girls as deviant. Through the fight the representation of Black girls, is a violent animal, lacking reason and context and through the sexual violence she is the unrapeable hypersexual Jezebel. In both of these instances of violences, codes of the street are practiced on the bodies of girls. If "all the pieces matter" then the absence and marginalization of women of color keeps this picture incomplete.

## Conclusion

### **It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop<sup>138</sup>: Bonnie Through *The Wire***

I close this project with a reference to the Dead Prez song “It’s Bigger Than Hip-Hop” to articulate the broader implications of this work. The hip-hop group Dead Prez used this song to fundamentally argue that the content of hip-hop in all its forms is always bigger than hip-hop itself. Hip-hop is an amalgamation of experiences with oppression and resistance. So while gangsta hip-hop may appear to be specifically concerned with criminality, it is always connected to the subjugated experiences of people of color. Studying gangsta hip-hop is never just about hip-hop, it is about how oppressed groups represent and negotiate domination. So while this thesis is squarely situated within hip-hop feminist frameworks of analysis, this project is much bigger than hip-hop. It is ultimately a project about the conditions that structure the lives of Black women and girls. It is about the disciplinary and shifting lens of visibility and the intimate and state violences that structure their marginal lives. It uses the hip-hop feminist mission of representing women and girls where they live by interrogating the politics of marginality and absence.

In the area of gangsta rap, representing where women and girls live requires an examination of how women fit into the genre’s preoccupation with the drug trade. I use the Bonnie Myth to describe the way rap lyrics simultaneously to construct a hypervisible and marginal woman in the drug trade. Bonnie is interpellated by narratives of “handling her own” that harp on strength and independence, “us against the world” that center interdependence, and “holding down” that focus on loyalty and devotion. In spite of the construction and development of this script, it is a myth that can never exist within a drug trade that marginalizes her or within War on Drugs policies that disproportionately punish her. While this work adds to the field of

hip-hop feminism, there is more work to be done in tracing Bonnie in other hip-hop productions like novels and movies. These next steps will help develop a more complete understanding of the myth and its function in hip-hop and beyond. We must also ask examine the construction of other myths in hip-hop, notably those that link to a particular masculinity. If we ask what are the implications of a Bonnie myth that circulates in rap music, we must also ask of the circulation of *Scarface* and Clyde. In doing this, we can begin to understand the class dynamics of a genre started by poor youth, dominated by artists who were (and some who still are) poor, but who aspire to occupy the upper echelons that oppress them. What kind of masculine interpellations are happening in hip-hop and how do these masculinities work with the criminalized femininities constructed in gangsta hip-hop?

To represent the lived experiences of women and girls on *The Wire*, I interrogate the absences of girls and argue that girls on the series are being interpellated through a lens of invisibility and hypervisibility. While Season 4 centers on four boys, the stories of girls are silenced and hypervisible archetypes of deviance fill the void. The tokenized Black girl is constructed as a violent animal, lacking reason and context as well as a hypersexual Jezebel. To render their stories visible, I used this chapter to recognize the intersections of Black girls' lives and the violences that define these locations and the codes of the street that are enacted on her body. This thesis contributes to an understanding of the body as a site of identity and meaning making, but more work must be done to develop a hip-hop feminist body politic that incorporates and expands theories of the sexualized body.

This lenses of hypervisibility and invisibility that are possible in this hip-hop texts coalesce to construct a mythical Black female subjectivity that evacuates the historical realities of Black women—the realities of racism, sexism, and interpersonal and state violences that exist

at the corners of their lives. This project brings these stories into view in order call out the myth as a representation of dangerous falsehoods.

When I ask “where my girls at?” I am calling out to hip-hop feminists to that engage in work dedicated to the lives of women and girls. It is rally cry and cheering on of the work we are and must continue to do in centering the margins and filling the voids of representations and constructions of Black femininity. As hip-hop feminists deeply committed to the conditions that constitute the lives of women and girls of color we must continue to question and resist the War on Drugs sentencing policies. As tools of a carceral state that disproportionately lock-up those on the margins, the very women and girls of color are praxis centers, we must move to those spaces of marginality. By moving to the margins where women and girls live, we can begin to envision responses that eradicate those intersections of oppressions that pushed them to the margins. If we start our analyses with those who are most vulnerable to the violences of the state aimed at communities of color and the interpersonal violences within communities of color, we can envision antisexist, antiracist, anticolonialist, antihomophobic, responses to crime.

As hip-hop feminist, we can no longer celebrate hypervisibility as progress, satisfied by the fact that “at least we are there.” Instead, we must see these representations as mythical constructions of Black girlhood and womanhood that evacuate the historical realities of our existence. We must call out detached representation that exists void of context as modes of oppression. As we continue the call for a multiplicity of stories of Black womanhood, we do so knowing that these additions leave less room for archetypical representations devoid of context to masquerade as realities of Black femininity. We must then, continue to point out absences, interrogate these voids, and eradicate the conditions that make that enable their existence.

Finally, we must engage in scholarship that reads the absences of women in hip-hop and that continues to interrogate those dangerous margins of vulnerability often unseen. Thus, we must not only concern ourselves with spaces of hypervisibility, but also those of invisibility and marginality. Overall, we must continue the labor of advocating for a more responsible hip-hop that recognizes the harm in its constructions and representations and that continues developing theories and responses to those social ills hip-hop seeks to address. We must continue filling the voids.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> 702, "Where My Girls At?," in *702* (Motown Records, 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> Julia Sudbury, *Global Lockdown : Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>3</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press, 2001).
- <sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
- <sup>5</sup> Pough, Check it, v.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.
- <sup>7</sup> Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It : Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).
- <sup>8</sup> Aisha Durham, "Using [Living Hip-Hop] Feminism: Redefining an Answer (to) Rap," in *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology*, ed. Gwendolyn D. Pough, et al. (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, LLC, 2007).
- <sup>9</sup> Brittany Cooper, "Excavating the Love Below: The State as Patron of the Baby Mama Drama and Other Ghetto Hustles," in *Home Girls Make Some Noise: A Hip Hop Feminist Anthology*, ed. Gwendolyn Pough (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, ed. *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* (South End Press, 2007).
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>13</sup> Sudbury, "'Mules,' 'Yardies,' and Other Folk Devils: Mapping Cross-Border Imprisonment in Britain."
- <sup>14</sup> Lapidus and others, "Caught in the Net," 35.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.
- <sup>23</sup> Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It : Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*.
- <sup>24</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 2001).
- <sup>25</sup> "The Wire (H.B.O.)—Reviews from Metacritic," Metacritic, [www.metacritic.com](http://www.metacritic.com).
- <sup>26</sup> Warren Beatty, *Bonnie and Clyde* (Warner Bros.-Seven Arts, 1967).

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<sup>27</sup> For examples see The Clipse *Lord Willin* released in 2002, Scarface *The Fix* released in 2002 and T.I. *TrapMusik* released in 2003

<sup>28</sup> Hip Hop DX, "A Baltimore Love Thing: The Wire," <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/lifestyle-features/id.1045/title.a-baltimore-love-thing-the-wire/p.2>.

<sup>29</sup> A carceral state is a state modeled after the prison.

<sup>30</sup> Kanye West, "Thought the Wire," in *The College Dropout* (Roc-A-Fella, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Stephanie Maari Booker, "Angela Davis speaks on presidential elections, prison abolition," *The Twin Cities Community Newswire*, March 7, 2008, <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/article/2008/03/06/angela-davis-speaks-presidential-elections-prison-abolition.html>

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey "Ja Rule" Atkins and Tiffany "Charlie Baltimore" Lane, "Down Ass Chick," in *Pain is Love* (Murder Inc./Def Jam, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Brian De Palma, *Scarface* (MCA Home Video, 1983), Movie.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Geringer, "Bonnie and Clyde: Romeo and Juliet in a Getaway Car," Tru TV, [http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/gangsters\\_outlaws/outlaws/bonnie/1.html](http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/gangsters_outlaws/outlaws/bonnie/1.html).

<sup>35</sup> What I refer to as the Bonnie Myth is an umbrella term that encompasses the ride-or-die chick, the down ass chick, the gangster bitch, and other similar scripts.

<sup>36</sup> Tupac Shakur, "Ambitionz Az a Rider," in *All Eyez on Me* (Death Row Records, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Jamie Foxx and Ne-Yo, "She's Got Her Own," in *Intuition* (J Records, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise : Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, "Bitches and Sisters," in *The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Dionne P. Stephens and Layli D. Phillips, "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts," *Sexuality and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>41</sup> LaVita "Vita" Raynor, "Vita, Vita, Vita," in *Irv Gotti Presents: The Murderers* (Def Jam/Polygram, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Apache, "Gangsta Bitch," in *Apache Ain't Shit* (Tommy Boy, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Kimberly "Li'l Kim" Jones, "All Good," in *Naked Truth* (Atlantic, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter and Beyonce Knowles, "'03 Bonnie and Clyde," in *The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Stephens and Phillips, "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts."

<sup>46</sup> Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, "Girls, Girls, Girls," in *The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Tupac Shakur, "Brenda's Got a Baby," in *2Pacalypse Now* (Jive/Interscope, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> Nasir "Nas" Jones, "Black Girl Lost," in *It Was Written* (Columbia, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens, "Oppositional Consciousness within an Oppositional Realm: The Case of Feminism and Womanism in Rap and Hip-Hop 1976-2004," *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3, The History of Hip Hop (2005).

<sup>50</sup> Erykah Badu, "Other Side of the Game," in *Baduism* (Kedar/Universal, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Clifford "Method Man" Harris and Mary J. Blige, "You're All I Need," in *Tical* (Def Jam, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Atkins and Lane, "Down Ass Chick."

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<sup>53</sup> Carter and Knowles, "'03 Bonnie and Clyde."

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that one of the most notable Bonnie's in hip-hop, Li'l Kim, served one year and one day in prison for perjury charges in an attempt to protect her all-male "crew".

<sup>55</sup> Christopher "Notorious BIG" Wallace, "Me and My Bitch," in *Ready to Die* (Bad Boy, 1994).

<sup>56</sup> Inga "Foxy Brown" Marchand and Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, "Bonnie & Clyde, Part II," in *Chyna Doll* (Def Jam, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Phillips, Reddick-Morgan, and Stephens, "Oppositional Consciousness within an Oppositional Realm: The Case of Feminism and Womanism in Rap and Hip-Hop 1976-2004."

<sup>58</sup> Monica Arnold, "U Should've Known Better," (J Records, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> Destiny's Child, "I Need a Soldier," in *Destiny Fulfilled* (Columbia, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> Geringer, "Bonnie and Clyde: Romeo and Juliet in a Getaway Car."

<sup>61</sup> Destiny's Child, "Cater 2 U," in *Destiny Fulfilled* (Columbia, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> Malik "Memphis Bleek" Cox, "P.Y.T.," in *The Understanding* (Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Paula C. Johnson, *Inner Lives : Voices of African American Women in Prison* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 171.

<sup>64</sup> At the time of her arrest, possession for one half-gram (0.5g) of crack resulted in a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison, while the law tolerated up to 28 grams (28g) of powder cocaine for the same mandatory minimum.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Inner Lives : Voices of African American Women in Prison*, 171.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> "Defending America's Most Vulnerable: Safe Treatment and Child Protection Act of 2005," ed. Terrorism and Homeland Security House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime (Washington, DC 2005).

<sup>68</sup> "Prison Overpopulation and Harsh Sentencing," (American Civil Liberties Union, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> David A. Harris, "Driving While Black: Racial Profiling on Our Nation's Highways," (American Civil Liberties Union, 1999).

<sup>70</sup> "Mandatory Minimum Sentences," Drug Policy Alliance, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/drugwar/mandatorymin/>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Beyonce Knowles, "Get Me Bodied," in *B'Day* (Columbia/Music World, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> See Tricia Rose *Black Noise*, Gwendolyn Pough's *Check it While I Wreck it*, and Joan Morgan's *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*

<sup>74</sup> Dwayne "Li'l Wayne" Carter, "Fireman," in *The Carter II* (Cash Money/Universal).

<sup>75</sup> Christopher "Notorious BIG" Wallace, "Everyday's a Struggle," in *Ready to Die* (Bad Boy, 1994).

<sup>76</sup> Kimberly "Li'l Kim" Jones, "Spend a Little Doe," in *Hard Core* (Undeas, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, "You Must Love Me," in *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> "Law Enforcement Violence against Women of Color and Trans People of Color: A Critical Intersection of Gender Violence and State Violence," ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. (Redmond, WA).

<sup>79</sup> "Caught in the Net: The Impact of Drug Policies on Women and Families," in *ACLU Break the Chains: Communities of Color and the War on Drugs* (The Brennan Center at NYU School of Law, 2005).



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<sup>80</sup> "Law Enforcement Violence against Women of Color and Trans People of Color: A Critical Intersection of Gender Violence and State Violence," 30.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Yolanda "Yo-Yo" Whitaker and O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson, "The Bonnie and Clyde Theme," in *You Better Ask Somebody* (Atlantic/East West Records of America, 1993).

<sup>84</sup> Her marginality is also recognized and used by higher-level drug offenders who have begun to use the method of "dead cows for piranhas." This describes the practice of earmarking a large percentage of mules to never complete the task. They are given small quantities of the drug and serve as "dead meat" to detract attention from people carrying larger quantities. Higher-level dealers tip off law enforcement agents to the "dead cows" enabling the larger ones go through. This practice is not common in the Bonnie script and its emphasis on relationship.

<sup>85</sup> Julia Sudbury, "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex," *Feminist Review* 80 no. Reflections on 25 Years (2005).

<sup>86</sup> Annette Hubishu of the Institute for Security Studies argues "mules are pawns, easily replaced by others who are vulnerable due to their socio-economic conditions or drug addiction."

<sup>87</sup> "Mandatory Minimum Sentences."

<sup>88</sup> Wallace, "Me and My Bitch."

<sup>89</sup> Eva Mendes Berry did a groundbreaking exposition piece on the violence in hip-hop in which Notorious B.I.G (amongst other rappers) was exposed for domestic violence incidents with his wife singer Faith Evans and his girlfriend Lil' Kim.

<sup>90</sup> Stephens and Phillips, "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts," 28.

<sup>91</sup> Johnson, *Inner Lives : Voices of African American Women in Prison*, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Game is also referred to as "playing someone" like a game or "gassing someone up" as in filling one's head with false notions.

<sup>93</sup> Mason "Mase" Betha, "I Need to Be," in *Harlem World* (Bad Boy, 1997).

<sup>94</sup> Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street : Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W Norton, 1999), 150.

<sup>95</sup> The Lox, "Ryde or Die Bitch," in *We Are the Streets* (Ruff Ryders/Interscope, 2000).

<sup>96</sup> To 'thug someone out' is to introduce one to the rules of 'thug' or criminal life. It is similar to game but places more emphasis on teaching than manipulating.

<sup>97</sup> Fabolous, "Take You Home," in *Ghetto Fabolous* (Elektra Records, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Lox, "Ryde or Die Bitch."

<sup>99</sup> Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, "Allure," in *The Black Album* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2003).

<sup>100</sup> Under accomplice liability an accomplice is defined as a person who intentionally assist another person in the planning or commission of a crime by either providing physical or psychological aid or by failing to act when there is a legal duty to do so. Acts included under this provision include renting a car for interstate travel, allowing an intimate partner to keep their belongings in one's home, and taking phone messages for another person. So here, the act of "putting cars in their name for the stars of the game" makes her susceptible to the consequences of this provision.

<sup>101</sup> Carter, "Allure."

<sup>102</sup> Johnson, *Inner Lives : Voices of African American Women in Prison*, 172.

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- <sup>103</sup> Julia Sudbury, "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex," *Feminist Review*, no. 80 (2005).
- <sup>104</sup> References a line spoken by Freamon, a police officer on the series
- <sup>105</sup> "The Wire (H.B.O.)—Reviews from Metacritic."
- <sup>106</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all critiques are from [www.metacritic.com](http://www.metacritic.com)
- <sup>107</sup> "Is 'the Wire' Our Best Ethnographic Text on the U.S. Today?," in *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology*
- <sup>108</sup> Carol D. Leonnig, "'the Wire': Young Adults See Bits of Their Past," *The Washington Post*, December 11 2006.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Megan Dietz, "The Wire, Hierarchy, and Fitting In: How Organizations Make Us Who We Are," [http://www.thesunnyway.com/index.php/site/comments/the\\_wire\\_hierarchy\\_and\\_fitting\\_in\\_how\\_organizations\\_make\\_us\\_who\\_we\\_are/](http://www.thesunnyway.com/index.php/site/comments/the_wire_hierarchy_and_fitting_in_how_organizations_make_us_who_we_are/).
- <sup>111</sup> "Project South Timeline: Prison Industrial Complex," Defending Justice, [http://www.thesunnyway.com/index.php/site/comments/the\\_wire\\_hierarchy\\_and\\_fitting\\_in\\_how\\_organizations\\_make\\_us\\_who\\_we\\_are/](http://www.thesunnyway.com/index.php/site/comments/the_wire_hierarchy_and_fitting_in_how_organizations_make_us_who_we_are/).
- <sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., 202-03.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid., 204.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid., 201.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid., 201.
- <sup>118</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>119</sup> Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations About Race : A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2006), 214.
- <sup>120</sup> Jacquelyn Shannon, "'Visibility Is a Trap': Photography and Panopticism," in *Lyrics of Marginality* (2009).
- <sup>121</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>122</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider : Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Calif.: Crossing Press, 2007), 42.
- <sup>123</sup> Violence, ed. *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*, 32.
- <sup>124</sup> Angela Davis, "The Color of Violence against Women," *Colorlines* 3, no. 3 (2000).
- <sup>125</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 201.
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., 203-04.
- <sup>128</sup> The DSM defines oppositional defiance disorder as a pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least 6 months, during which four (or more) of the following are present: (1) often loses temper (2) often argues with adults (3) often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules (4) often deliberately annoys people (5) often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior (6) is often touchy or easily annoyed by others (7) is often angry and resentful (8) is often spiteful or vindictive **Note:** Consider a criterion met only if the behavior occurs more frequently than is typically observed in individuals of comparable age and developmental level. B. The disturbance in behavior causes clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning. C. The behaviors do not occur exclusively during the course of a Psychotic or [Mood](#) Disorder. D.

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Criteria are not met for [Conduct Disorder](#), and, if the individual is age 18 years or older, criteria are not met for [Antisocial Personality Disorder](#).

<sup>129</sup> Dorothy Roberts, "Feminism, Race, and Adoption Policy," in *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), 47.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>131</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Rev. 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 139.

<sup>132</sup> Cindy Ness, "Why Girls Fight: Female Youth Violence in the Inner City," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 595, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>133</sup> Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

<sup>134</sup> Aishah Simmons, "The War against Black Women and the Making of No!," in *The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006).

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street : Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, 10.

<sup>136</sup> Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Dead Prez, "Hip-Hop," in *Let's Get Free* (Loud Records).