

Music Videos, Performance and Resistance: Feminist Rappers

Robin Roberts

Popular culture provides us with particularly compelling examples of the tension between dominance and resistance and one of the most engaging sites of such tensions is the feminist rap music video. Feminist rap music videos require the viewer to participate in their construction and analysis.¹ This music explores tensions between black and white, male and female, in a direct and explicit fashion. Feminist rap videos are not the only feminist music videos—there are feminist videos of almost every type of music—but feminist rap performers have received less media attention than rock and roll artists like Tina Turner or Janet Jackson. There are reasons for this: unlike Turner and Jackson, feminist rap artists make little accommodation for white audiences and consequently, rap receives less airplay on Music Television, the premier music video station. This is true of all rap artists, masculinist and feminist alike.

Yet for the feminist rapper, rap offers unique possibilities. What Barbara Christian suggests about blues singers applies here to the more optimistic musical form, rap: “Perhaps because the blues was seen as ‘race music’ and catered to a black audience, black women were better able to articulate themselves as individuals and as part of a racial group in that art form” (122). Rap, or hip hop as “the culture of clothes, slang, dances, and philosophies that sprang up in the ‘80s” (George 40) is sometimes called, can be seen daily on a special MTV program “Yo MTV Raps” and on “Rap City” an hour-long show on BET. Both shows frequently air music videos by female performers and some rap videos like “Push It” by Salt ‘n Pepa and “Supersonic” by J.J. Fad received heavy rotation outside the rap show. Rap’s increasing popularity has been accompanied by the appearance of a number of feminist performers including (The Real) Roxanne, M.C. Lyte, Shelly Thunder, Roxanne Shante, J.J. Fad, Salt ‘n Pepa, Queen Latifah, Sweet Tee, Ms. Melodie, Antoinette, Precious and crossovers like Paula Abdul and Neneh Cherry.

These performers draw on rap specifically as a black art form to resist racism; yet unlike most of their fellow male rappers, feminist rappers draw additional energy from their simultaneous discussion of race and

gender. Evoking the spectres of racism and sexism enables them to attack them more effectively. Unlike other political videos, feminist rap videos point to the ways that systems of oppression are linked and are interdependent. Their message is particularly powerful in the context of the other videos that air on MTV and BET. In this frame, the feminist rap videos are always, already, radical.

Rap, like all other forms of popular music, is not inherently feminist or political, and indeed some of the best known rap songs like Tone Loc's "Wild Thing" are obnoxiously sexist. However, female performers manage in this genre as in other popular genres, to use specific generic qualities to promote a feminist message. Rap is noted for its strong rhythm, often only a percussive beat, and its emphasis on lyrics. The melody in a rap song frequently follows the performer's enunciation of lyrics, which usually rhyme and involve clever linguistic plays on meaning and sound. Through the lyrics, female rappers make explicit and overt assertions of female strength and autonomy. Through their lyrics, style, and dance, female rappers draw what Audre Lorde has described as "uses of the erotic: the erotic as power" (Lorde 53, 59).

The rap performer is the focus of the group rather than instrumentalists or record scratchers (the "disc jockeys" who manipulate records to produce that sound unique to rap of a record moved back and forth rapidly). In rap, particular stress is laid upon the performer's personality and name. As described by a participant in street rap, rap is "about competition and gaining attention . . . 'Listen to my story, about myself, life and romance; and listen while I tell it to the beat of the music. There's poetry here, and I'll tell you anything without missing a beat'" (Ewen 56). While this description was produced by a male rapper, it applies equally well to female rappers. Since rap revolves around self-promotion, female rappers are able to use the form without being accused of being self-centered or narcissistic. The dynamic of rap requires that the performer focus on personal narrative, a focus that in the hands of a female rapper can produce a feminist tale. Female rappers compete with male performers and gain attention for their feminist message through music videos, which also, as Simon Frith argues, function to draw attention to the performer. "Whether as video-art or as video-promotion, clips work as self-portraits: they represent their performers to their fans" (Frith 216). Rap music doubles this self-promotion, making rap videos especially suitable for feminist appropriation. Cornel West identifies this quality of self-promotion as distinctively African-American. "A distinctive feature of these black styles is a certain projection of self—more a *persona*—in performance. This is not simply a self-investment and self-involvement in musical, rhetorical, and athletic enactments; it also acknowledges radical contingency and even solicits challenge and danger" (West 93). The challenge and danger that he describes is redoubled

in feminist rap because of the paradoxically strong position black female performers have as a result of their perspective as both a part of rap scene and in opposition to its misogyny.

Significantly rap involves postmodernist qualities, an aspect of rap that has been ignored, perhaps because it is usually associated with white "high" masculine culture. I agree with West that "For too long, the postmodernism debate has remained inscribed within narrow disciplinary boundaries, insulated artistic practices, and vague formulations of men and women of letters" (90). Rap music videos provide a site to explore postmodernism in the intersection of African-American and mass culture. Scratching demonstrates the postmodern qualities of rap because it involves the appropriation of another record. This method of producing music and the frequent use of snatches of melody from other songs as part of a rap record, sampling, emphasize pastiche and fragmentation, two fundamental aspects of postmodernism. The music video's use of rapping situates it in another postmodernist style—that of grafting older forms of art to newer manifestations. Rap music videos belong to a long and venerable tradition of rapping in African-American culture, including for example the tradition of the toast.²

To appreciate feminist rap videos, the viewer must first redefine the idea of a "text," expanding it to include a multitude of nonverbal signs and freeing it from monologic and auteurist assumptions. In a music video the performer's dress, gestures, enunciation, and style all become signs liable to interpretation. Redefining "text" also means redefining "author." The author of a multivoiced and polyphonic video is no longer, what he (or less likely she) would be in the auteur theory, the purportedly male director only, supposedly controlling all meanings, but also the female performer, who interweaves and juxtaposes meanings through her delivery, her look, her gestures, and in many cases the music and lyrics. Well-established performers like Janet Jackson choose their own choreographers and work with them to create an image. In this type of interpretation, the female performer is legitimated as an agent and her role fuses with that of the traditional director.³ The star-centered institution of music videos further empowers the performer. Information on music video directors is difficult to obtain, while every video carries the name of its star⁴ and Music Television's programming, for example, emphasizes the primacy of the star. "Rock Blocks" on Music Television consist of three or more videos by a particular performer, rather than a particular director. The director as well as the performer's agent undoubtedly have hands in the final product, but poststructuralist theory licenses the discussion of the performer as an equal participant, another voice, rather than as a puppet of a director.⁵

This poststructuralist view is especially appropriate for black feminist rap videos. Both the black audience and the black performers have an intense relationship with music videos. A recent study suggests that music videos are a particularly potent form of social construction for women and minorities; according to this study, women and blacks watch more music videos than other groups of teenagers (Brown 19-32). In an article on black female sexuality, Hortense Spillers discusses blues singers and sexuality, but her reasoning applies equally well to music videos and may further explain the attraction of music videos for women and blacks as viewers. "The singer is likely closer to the poetry of black female experience than we might think, not so much interestingly enough, in the words of her music, but in the sense of dramatic confrontation between ego and the world than the vocalist herself embodies" (Spillers 86). This sense of duality, of confrontation, is central to the female appropriation of the music video form and helps explain why so many black female performers are so effective in this subversion. Black female performers have a tradition to draw on—a tradition in which, as Spillers notes, the singer's "sexuality is precisely the physical expression of the highest self-regard and often the sheer pleasure she takes in her own powers" (88). While female blues singers did focus on melancholia, Daphne Duval Harrison argues that blues songs like "Every Dog Has His Day," performed by Sippie Wallace, involve "an assertion of power" (89). Harrison explains that "women began to use the blues as a positive means of retaliation" (89) and argues that women's blues in the 1920s "represented a distinctly female interpretation. The choice of performing style, inflection, emphasis and improvisation on certain aspects of lyrics gave a perspective and expressiveness that had a profound effect. . . [these singers] introduced a new, different model of black women—more assertive, sexy, sexually aware, independent realistic complex, alive" (111). This new model was rediscovered for some feminists in rock and roll. Writers like Karen Durbin maintain that it is rock and roll that liberated women of a different time period: "Rock music. . . provided me and a lot of women with a channel for saying 'I want' for asserting our sexuality without apologies and without having to pretty up every passion with the traditionally 'feminine' desire for true love and marriage and that was a useful step toward liberation."⁶

The liberation that women of other time periods sought in the blues and in rock and roll are compellingly seen in contemporary feminist rap videos. To use Nelson George's words, rap is "cartoony, antimelodic, brooding, materialistic, entrepreneurial, chauvinistic, user-friendly, genital conscious, and always spoiling for a fight" (40). West's description of general African-American cultural practices also accurately depicts rap: "By kinetic orality, I mean dynamic repetitive and energetic rhetorical styles that form communities, e.g., antiphonal styles and linguistic

innovations that accent fluid, improvisational identities and that promote survival at almost any cost. By passionate physicality, I mean bodily stylizations of the world, syncopations, and polyrhythms that assert one's somebodiness in a society in which one's body has no public worth, only economic value as a laboring metabolism" (93). These are the qualities of rap that feminist performers draw on.

"Roxanne's on a Roll" (The Real) Roxanne

In an interview, Roxanne explains "My style is aggressive. It's blunt, and a lot of it also speaks about real things. . . I also want people to take me seriously as far as my work is concerned. I do get involved. I write my own songs and I work with the production of my album." Her claims require us to read her video carefully. She also describes herself as knowing "how to handle things, and I know how to keep things under control. I can handle people!" (Boyd). Her video shows her living up to her description.

This video tackles the question of musical heritage forthrightly through its depiction of Elvis as Roxanne's sidekick. The video opens with Roxanne stranded in the desert, but Elvis drives by in a suitably gaudy Cadillac and offers her a ride. From the moment where she thinks "is he for real?," their roles are reversed—he becomes her chauffeur, fan and back-up dancer. Elvis falls in step with her, crosses his arms, imitating her and follows her dance steps on the sidewalk in Las Vegas. This role reversal highlights Elvis' notorious appropriation of black music and places him in a suitably subordinate position. Roxanne's refrain "This is how it should be done" makes the significance of the role reversal clear. The woman of color should be in control. As part of her play with power, Roxanne appears in many guises—a cowgirl, gambler, showgirl. In each guise, she clearly relishes her playacting and her pleasures. Throughout the video, Roxanne asserts her right to be in control, to be at "the top of the line." She also promotes herself as a female rapper, able to move the crowd. "Watch how a real Queen moves the crowd" she proclaims and she emphasizes her superiority as rapper: "Sucker M.C. can't beat" her. She warns others to "step aside." She loses at gambling in the end, but her wry smile and her leap into the Cadillac and the exit with Elvis into the sunset suggest that she's won the game she wanted to play.

This video's feminism is most marked in the appropriation of the figure of Elvis. Through her relationship with this character, Roxanne's self-promotion combines feminism and rap. She implicitly comments on Elvis's thievery from black culture and reclaims that culture for herself and other Puerto Ricans. "Puerto Rican and proud" is how she describes herself. Whether the male character she is with actually is supposed to be Elvis or just one of the many Elvis impersonators doesn't matter.

In either case, she recuperates the figure of Elvis, and by ridiculing him, she reclaims rock music, particularly its new Afrocentric encapsulation, rap, for people of color and for women. "Listen up it's my temple" she proclaims, a statement that simultaneously refers to Las Vegas, her body and rap.

At the same time that she makes Elvis look like a buffoon, she identifies and asserts her right to a healthy, vibrant and specifically female sexuality. "You're all dried up but I'm moist." Her explicit language echoes that explicit dance moves of artists like Salt 'n Pepa who similarly valorize women's assertions of desire. Roxanne's many costume changes and gambling motif emphasize the social construction of sexuality as a game, a game that Roxanne is ready and eager to play. The playfulness of the video and Roxanne's dress, look and enunciation license the interpretation of this music video as a rebuttal to more conventional and oppressive characterizations of female sexuality. The camera angle supports this reading, for Roxanne's extreme close-ups and pull backs resist the depiction of the female body as the object of the male gaze. "This is how it should be done" Roxanne declares and after watching this video the viewer agrees.

"Lyte as a Rock" M.C. Lyte

M.C. Lyte's video addresses issues of history and education. Her video is less lyte-hearted than Roxanne's, and its intensity is moving. The video opens with an allusion to the tremendously popular *Star Wars*, a film that similarly opened with credits blazing across the backdrop of stars. Instead of a galaxy far away, however, these credits cite M.C. Lyte as a Rock. With this opening, Lyte asserts her ambitions for this video and identifies herself as a fiesty fighter like the heroes of the movie. These opening frames also set the video up as a fairy tale, for like *Star Wars*, this video is a fable, directed toward a young girl picking up a doll and opening a door. Through the door, the viewer follows Lyte through history, beginning in prehistoric times. This survey constantly reminds the viewers of a variety of oppressions, from the identification of cave men as symbols of male dominance through Egyptian slave society and the oppressiveness of gangster violence to the racial violence evoked by the picture of Malcolm X when Lyte is in a prison cell. First we watch a young girl journey through a cave, in a scene reminiscent of Lyte's own development. Lyte explains "I'm a rapper who is here to make things the way they ought to be" and she declares "I can't be stopped/ I am Lyte as a rock." Lyte watches another woman shield her child from a caveman and interjects with her strong, assertive message "move out of the way." She continues through history, confronting other strong women both in Egyptian times and then in a gangster setting. She finally appears in a jail cell and locks the door with a key. Here

the camera pans a poster of Malcolm X, suggesting the black rights movement as a lineage from which Lyte draws strength. The setting dissolves into a classroom where her back-up explains "Lyte as a rock" is a simile, a discussion that stresses history and education as systems, systems that Lyte herself resists and literally dissolves when she takes over the blackboard. The alienness of these structures to black women is emphasized when Lyte is described as being from "the planet of Brooklyn." She begins smiling and dancing. Finally the young girl waves good-bye and closes the door on a panorama of stars.

This survey of history seems designed to criticize history and education and to do so for the young girl's edification. As Lyte explains "By the tone of my voice you can tell I'm a scholar," an identification supported by the video's images of history and the appearance of Lyte's words in a classroom. The reversal of canonical history is emphasized through Lyte's plays on language, all which point to her correction of these events. The song title and refrain "lyte as a rock" with its clever play on sound and language involve self-promotion. Lyte uses the characteristics of rap to emphasize her feminist self-assertion. She plays with the sound of her name, with the notion of metaphor and simile, to emphasize her importance. "I am the Lyte" is one refrain that emphasizes her reinterpretation of history, her illuminating perspective. It of course recalls descriptions of Christ as the light, again suggesting how radical Lyte's revisioning is. Debating in the rap whether "Lyte as a rock" is a metaphor or a simile shows that she even dominates English class. "LYTE STRIKES AGAIN" reads the headline of the newspaper that appears both in the scene with gangsters and in the prison cell. In both instances, the idea of lightning striking evokes the power that Lyte is claiming for herself. Unfortunately, in two of the instances, Lyte pushes out another woman and replaces her as a figure of power. But the overall criticism of symbolic structures of language and history is marred rather than destroyed by these moments.

Even more than (the Real) Roxanne, Lyte preaches. "This is the way it is don't ever forget" refers both to her reinterpretation of history and to her own stance of strength. In the Egyptian frames, Lyte lectures the woman she has ejected from the bier, but she also directs her words to the young girl who seems delighted. "I show stability potential and strength" Lyte declares so forcefully that the viewer is inclined to take her at her word. It's believable when she explains "Lyte is here no one can stop me." "Never underestimate Lyte DMC I am the rapper here to make things the way they're meant to be." "Meant to be" means less racist and sexist, especially in the context of video's images. Lyte identifies herself with women through the doubled image of herself as Cleopatra and in present day dress as well as through the implication that the young girl is or could become like herself. She also declares

"Guys watch me even some girls clock me." Like Roxanne, she declares her right to sexual desire through the image of herself as a seductive and powerful Cleopatra, then as the leader of a gang in the nineteen forties. This image of Lyte directly connects her to the blues singers of the same period, an association strengthened when Lyte refers to another black singer, Grace Jones. When Lyte declares she is a "slave to the rhythm" she is alluding to a song of the same name by Jones, an important and influential contemporary performer. Like Jones, her choice of the word "slave" recalls racism and literal enslavement.

Lyte uses a postmodern sensibility to make her feminist message. Postmodernism appears in the style of the video, particularly in the use of the door and her giant face in contrast to the little girl's image and in the revision of history implicit in the costume and setting changes. Postmodernism appears in the doubling of Lyte as both Cleopatra and her contemporary self and in the blackboard that dissolves into a video image of Lyte's face. Lyte demonstrates a keen sense of her lineage and of history in the allusions to Jones and slavery and in the poster of Malcolm X that appears in the jail cell. In this scene, as in Salt 'n Pepa's video which is discussed next, jail functions as a reminder of both the way that black men are imprisoned by white patriarchal culture and of how black women can similarly be trapped by sexism. Lyte turns this image around, for she has the key to the cell and explains that she is not trapped, but that others are. The video's frame of a young girl dangling her doll and staring entranced to Lyte's image emphasizes the positive and formative aspects of videos like this one. The young girl might be Lyte herself, dreaming of her future or she might be Lyte's audience. Either way, Lyte demonstrates that postmodern style and rap style can work together to make a feminist statement about strong women.

"Shake Your Thang" Salt 'n Pepa

Salt 'n Pepa have been explicit about their feminist purpose: in an interview on MTV, they described their music as depicting "a female point of view. I guess you could call what we do feminist. We believe in standing up for your rights."⁷ Their videos consistently assert the rights of women to control their own bodies and to proclaim their desires. As their name suggests, the two work together; their partnership itself points to a feminist cooperation. The extent of their partnership is reflected in the dialogue structure of their rapping. One of them begins a line and the other finishes it and then they speak simultaneously. Their first video, "Push It" and their most recent video, "Shake Your Thang" demonstrate their feminist convictions with a wry sense of humor and witty play with language. Throughout, Salt 'n Pepa appropriate the use of masculinist language about sexuality to reclaim it and to assert their right to speak of desire. Their images and language evoke phallic

sexuality whether they are "standing up" for their rights and or discussing men.

The video opens with their being arrested for "dirty dancing" and their being harangued by a group of men, presumably police detectives. The implications in terms of racism and sexism are clear. Through the structure of an arrest, imprisonment, protests and then release, Salt 'n Pepa recall unjust incarceration of civil rights leaders. This parallel identifies the similarity between racism and sexism, for their jailers are all male. The two do not take their arrest quietly. They both complain and Pepa grabs a detective by the tie and shouts at him an action repeated twice, an action whose phallic significance is obvious. Pepa takes patriarchy by the phallus! The scene then switches to a group of women dancing together and taking great relish in their performance. They are being addressed by a male who urges them on, using the Isley Brothers' 1969 hit, "It's Your Thing." "It's your thing—do what you want to do—I can't tell you who to sock it to." This masculine support for their music and dancing is only the beginning, for Pepa takes over the lyrics and proclaims "it's my thing." They may accept inspiration and support from a male leader, but they quickly move to make the declaration of independence their own. Part of their "thing," their independence, involves dancing together, eschewing men. At the end of the video, one of the men informs the leader that "we gotta let them go captain" and the two women march off triumphantly. The reflection of the bars suggests that the men are imprisoned, just as Lyte explains that others are imprisoned, not she. This conclusion emphasizes the optimism and energy of the feminist rap video, in which the female rappers are always vindicated.

This video contains several elements typical of the feminist rap video. First, Salt 'n Pepa assert their right to express sexual desire and to control their own bodies. This is a central part of its feminism, especially in the context of music videos in which women are more frequently used as objects of desire for a male gaze. Their resistance becomes apparent in the first frames when their mug shots are being taken. Each woman smiles rebelliously and seductively, both acknowledging the camera and controlling it self-consciously. This moment should be read as the key to the rest of the video and a sign of the postmodern, self-reflexive nature of video. In this postmodern moment, Salt 'n Pepa both acknowledge and refute exploitative use of the female body, a position that places them in the same arena with radical feminists like Ellen Willis, who argues that women have a right to express sexual desire without caving in to the male gaze. Salt 'n Pepa make this point when they declare "It's my dance/It's my body." Second, the corollary to their control of their own bodies is their refusal to allow men to presume that control. Salt and Pepa announce "If a guy touches my body I put him in check

I say you can't do that we just met." In a response undoubtedly aimed at male rappers like Young M.C. and Afrika Bambatta, who repeatedly accuse women of being rapacious goldiggers, they declare "We don't want your money." Similarly, Salt and Pepa are shown triumphing over a group of men—the police—who would restrict them. A jail scene is common in feminist rap videos as a representation of female incarceration through sexism. In line with the self-promotional aspects of the video, the female artists invariably succeed in circumventing male authority. As Pepa said in the MTV interview: "Especially do something somebody tell you not to do." This is the same point she makes in the video when she grabs the police captain's tie and declares: "we're going to do what we want to do." Even the incorporation of an older song, "It's Your Thing," (a common feature of rap) into their video ends up being an appropriation, for Salt 'n Pepa rework the 1969 song into a feminist rap. The idea of movements building upon other movements, as this rap song builds on the 1960s classic, shows how this particular attribute of rap works to intensify the feminist message of the video. Through this dynamic, Salt 'n Pepa suggest that race and gender can work together positively as models for ways to resist oppression. In fact, they go further and suggest that black men should not and cannot imprison black women.

As they make this case, however, there is an unpleasant moment when Pepa accuses the police captain of being "fruity."⁸ This homophobia reveals that even a feminist rap music video, like all of popular culture, cannot escape the taint of prejudice. In drawing your attention to Salt 'n Pepa and other feminist rappers, I don't mean to suggest that they are entirely exemplary, but that their work merits critical attention for the forms of oppression they *do* counter. This moment shows that even when racism and sexism are dealt with, there are still other prejudices to be overcome.

All three of these music videos contradict the stereotypical perception of rap as somehow inherently anti-female. Rap, like other popular culture forms, can be usurped by feminists. In fact certain qualities of rap make it particularly suitable for feminist purposes. Because rappers endemically focus on themselves, once the performer is female, she can use this self-promotion without altering the musical form. Rap's emphasis on lyrics also tailors it to a political agenda, for listening to the words requires thoughtful attention.⁹ As Pepa said about other rappers "You have to listen to their tapes like a hundred times." These particular rap artists are so clear that you don't have to listen that many times to hear them assert their right to control their own bodies. Their feminist message is clear and forthright. As with other feminist music videos, rap music videos draw on self-promotion, attention to language, and postmodernism of the music video form to strengthen their feminist message and to present an alternative to the sexist depiction of woman as the object

of male desire. Most emphatically, feminist rap artists criticize history, education and language through their doubly powerful vision as black women.

Notes

¹These videos provide an example of what John Fiske calls the "producerly" text. He identifies this text as situated between Barthes' "readerly" text that relies on a passive, receptive reader and a "Writerly" text that challenges the reader to rewrite the text to make sense of it. Music videos are more like a writerly text in that they are open to interpretation and in fact require some effort on the part of the viewer, while they are not as difficult or as abstruse as a truly writerly text. In short, music videos are accessible but involve some production on the part of the viewer. They have, as Fiske claims for other popular culture texts, the best of both worlds. The combination of readerly and writerly approaches appears also in the combined strengths of other issues that feminist rap music videos are uniquely situated to explore. See John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 6.

²Little has been written recently about the toast; one exception is Mona Lisa Saloy's article, "The Tradition Continues: Shining in New Orleans Arthur PFister's New Orleans 'Shine and the Titanic' " (Mesechabe 4-5): 115-21.

³As she is in Nina Auerbach's biography of Ellen Terry, *Ellen Terry: A Player in Her Time* (New York: Norton, 1987). Auerbach's discussion of Terry as a performer demonstrates that this type of analysis applies to nineteenth-century as well as twentieth-century performers.

⁴Ann Kaplan, pioneering critic of music videos and the author of the first book on Music Television, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987) stresses the difficulty of obtaining information about music videos from the station. Her videography includes the names of only a few directors. As she points out, there is no reference work for music videos—yet (154). Occasionally the names of directors appears when music videos are released in cassette form; for example, from the video cassette version of *Control*, the viewer can learn that Janet Jackson's "Nasty" was directed by Mary Lambert, information included in the video cassette credits. But in general this information is not available and it is certainly not conveyed on Music Television or other music video shows.

⁵Kim Carnes' experience may not be typical, but it is supported by other description by performers like Aimee Mann and Pat Benatar. "It was great. We would all get together and sit around a table at night and throw a million concepts around until one felt right. That's definitely the ideal way to do it." Kim Carnes, *Women in Rock* (1986) Directed and produced by Stephanie Bennett.

⁶Karen Durbin quoted by Alice Echols in "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-83," in Carole Vance ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 227.

⁷MTV Interview aired 3-35-89

⁸Other rap songs express a homophobic attitude. Another glaring example is Tone Loc's "Funky Coal Medina." I certainly agree with Bell Hooks when she argues that black communities are not more homophobic than other communities and that indeed white communities that refuse to even name homosexuality are more insidious. However, Hooks does admit that the black community is perhaps more vocal about

expressing homophobic sentiments and this vocality appears, logically enough, in some rap videos. See Bell Hooks, *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989): 120-126.

⁹Cornel West argues "Black musical practices—packaged via radio or video, records or live performance—are oppositional in the weak sense that they keep alive some sense of the agency and creativity of oppressed peoples" (96). Feminist rappers are oppositional in more than this sense; they specifically draw our attention to sexism and racism and present a model for their viewers of ways to act.

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Nina. *Ellen Terry: A Player in Her Time*. New York: Norton, 1987.
- Boyd, Raymond. "The Raw Deal with the Real Roxanne." *Yo!*, 1:5 (Dec. 1989).
- Brown, Jane D., Kenneth Campbell and Lynn Fischer. "American Adolescents and Music Videos: Why Do They Watch?" *Gazette* 37 (1986).
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic, 1988.
- Fiske, John. *Reading the Popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Frith, Simon. *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop*. New York: Polity, 1988.
- George, Nelson. "Rap's 10th Birthday." *The Village Voice* XXXIV No. 43 (October 24, 1989).
- Harrison, Daphne Duval. *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1988.
- Hooks, Bill. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- Kaplan, Ann. *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." *Sister Outsider*. Trumansbury, NY: Crossing Press, 1984.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Intensities: A Small Drama of Words." *Pleasure and Danger*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.
- West, Cornel. "Black Culture and Postmodernism," in *Remaking History*. Eds. Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani. Seattle: Bay Press, 1989.

Robin Roberts, Department of English, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Copyright of Journal of Popular Culture is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.