

Without a Trace: Sketching out the Connection between Comics & Hip Hop

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This paper explores how many Hip Hop artists have intentionally and strategically invoked specific superhero imagery and verbiage from the world of comics as a means to cope with daunting challenges they face in life and to also inspire their audience to hold them personally as artists with high esteem.

Hip Hop forms an important social function, and consequently so do the various images generated within it. Thus, by examining why Hip Hop holds such an important place in our culture, we also tangentially explore its mass market global appeal to the world of comics. One possible clue on how a heavily criticized and controversial musical genre could eventually become so mainstream decades later is possibly because of certain Hip Hop artists – whether deliberately or unwittingly – centering their presence in the public light in a manner that closely aligns with conventional comic book superhero narratives. More specifically, Hip Hop artists create alter egos (or stage names), constantly paint themselves in positive angles (like a comic book cover), talk about their “triumphs” or “escapes” from difficult life situations (defeating nemesis) and in some cases make tangible and explicit connections to the comic book world by making analogies or metaphors using specific comic book references.

This session infuses historical contextualization as a backdrop against exploration of particular genres, artists, styles, sounds, images, and rhetorical techniques within the Hip Hop industry. By exploring the various literary, musical, and methodological techniques employed in Hip Hop, this paper will illustrate how several Hip Hop artists strategically draw upon many elements also seen with superhero comic book characters as a way to build up their self-image as a defense mechanism from institutional and structural forces that conspire to make an upward economic and social trajectory difficult, if not impossible for many people of color.

Biography:

Frederick W. Gooding, Jr. is an Assistant Professor within the Honors College at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX. A trained historian, Gooding most effectively analyzes contemporary mainstream media with a careful eye for persistent patterns along racial lines that appear benign but indeed have problematic historical roots. As such, Gooding’s most well-known work thus far is "You Mean, There’s RACE in My Movie? The Complete Guide to Understanding Race in Mainstream Hollywood." His most recent book, "American Dream Deferred" about the growth and struggles of black federal workers in the postwar era, will be released December 4, 2018. His next book, "Black Oscar: What the Academy Awards Tell Us about African Americans," will be released by February, 2020.