

“Look,” . . . Performing Black Nihilistic Hip-Hop Adulthood

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This essay offers an analysis suggesting ways in which we might read the performativity of contemporary Black adult Hip-Hop culture as inherently nihilistic, which includes the potential for providing strong and valuable modalities for Black being in the 21st century, especially in terms of questions concerning what it means to become existentially mature as a Black youth, and to become strong as a Black adult within anti-Black racist societies. I will use the paradigm of what I have called, “Black Nihilism”¹ to explore existential dimensions of the performativity of what I have elsewhere called, “Hip-Hop Adulthood.”² As an art form containing music, lyrics, dance, stylistic aesthetics, and as a mode of cultural expression displaying subversive ways of being through performances of young Black voices, thoughts, and attitudes, Hip-Hop culture was born 50 years ago, and has since been set to face questions of what it can, has, and will, mature into. Twenty years ago, Lewis Gordon identified serious problems of maturity facing Hip-Hop culture and Black youth.³ The challenges of maturity for Hip-Hop are directly connected to issues concerning the existential categories of Black youth and Black adulthood in anti-Black racist societies, which I argue create contexts for Black pessimism and nihilism situating generations of Hip-Hop youth, who struggle through processes that might yield strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults. At its core, this essay explores the existential struggles of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop youth in anti-Black racist societies, and how should we read the resulting performativity of those valuations of adulthood?

¹ See, Devon R. Johnson, *Nihilism and Anti-Black Racism*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

² See, Devon R. Johnson, “Hip-Hop Adulthood: Nihilism, Hip-Hop, and Black American Youth in the 21st Century.” *Social Alternatives*, The Critical Philosophy of Race and Decoloniality, 28, no. 4 (2019): 42–47.

³ See, Lewis R. Gordon, “The Problem of Maturity in Hip-Hop,” in *Hip-Hop e³ Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, eds., Derrick Darby and Tommie Shelby. (Chicago: Open Court Books, 2005), 105-116.

Since Gordon’s pronouncement of the challenges of maturity for Hip-Hop in the 21st century, we have seen a generation of Hip-Hop adults emerge. But what does appearing as an adult who performs Hip-Hop mean? “Hip-Hop adulthood,” designates an existential space from which some people live and express their being; a space from which some adults grow and mature into relationships with their phenomenal capacities for valuing themselves, and their projections, as a specific form of response to anti-Black racist denials of Black subjectivity. A particular and radically new form of Black valuations of “being,” art, music, style, in addition to political and social protest, i.e., “Hip-Hop,” emerged after the popular Civil Rights movements of the 20th century. Here, “anti-Black,” functions as a descriptive term designating the totality of the existential phenomena of racism’s demand for Black invisibility, which includes the values of “whiteness,” presumed therein. The term, “racism,” denotes people or systems adhering to values hierarchically affirming notions of racial essences, whereby races are imagined to have particular ways of being inhering in them. From this perspective, adding the prefix “anti-Black” to the term merely suggests a qualifying of the particular object of reference for racism. For example, one might imagine antiyellow racism, or antiwhite racism. And, as critical race theorists have shown, it is futile to attempt to ground such notions of human inferiority in morphological terms. “Race,” indeed, is a social construction. However, this is only the beginning of the story. Understanding the falsity of my presumed racial inferiority has never lessened the material or experiential impact of it. I didn’t need to be taught that racial inferiority was a figment of people’s imagination. Rather, *how* do people continue to maintain such incredibly absurd ideals, and what ought I to be projecting as my valued “self” in response? Thus, an engagement with lived mundane realities of value projections denying Black *being* becomes the terrain of Black valuations of *self* in anti-Black racist societies. “Black,” denotes a *lived* situation of attempting to make one’s life

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valuable in spite of anti-Blackness. Thus, *being* “Black,” in anti-Black racist societies, begins with an imposed existential invisibility that, strictly speaking, is not a matter of will, choice, or personal identity formation, but more like a “Fact of Blackness,” or a “Zone of Non-Being,” against which one is set to value.⁴

Franz Fanon illuminated the “Zone of Non-Being;” he remind that the objective dimensions of “Blackness,” while potentially producing debilitating forms of pessimism, are juxtaposed with its subjective dimensions, where one can nihilistically choose to value in spite of anti-Black racist denials. Hip-Hop adulthood is an example of the dynamism and uniqueness of values produced from Black phenomenal perspectives, wherein critical dimensions of one’s subjective capacities develop in relation to the “fact” of Blackness. The question of “adulthood,” or what it means to “grow up,” in an anti-Black racist society requires considering the roles of the category of youth and what it means to be valued as a mature subjectivity in such societies. Along these lines of thought, there are particular ways in which performances of Hip-Hop adulthood can be articulated as situated within, and responding to, contexts of existential denials of Black subjectivity faced as youth within anti-Black racist societies. The category of Black youth, and by extension Hip-Hop culture as a phenomenon originally rooted in the lived experiences of Black youth, becomes further situated within what can be called a ‘nihilistic’ existential context of denial, which pessimistically militates against possibilities for Black adulthood, but wherein there nevertheless remains possibilities for strong, mature, upheavals.⁵

Thus, when discussing Hip-Hop performance, I am not exclusively referencing those who make art, but also those who nonetheless perform Black nihilistic valuations depicted through the eyes of such artists. What does it mean to present as a Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adult? Also, where I am thinking of artists, I’m not speaking exclusively of those employed adequately within a professional music industry, for whom there may be obvious economic incentives to continue producing. I’m thinking, for instance, of the vast numbers of men and women who have grown up creating and continue to make a living and live, recording, and continue to record, performing, and continue to perform Hip-Hop. Perhaps we can imagine how a solitary painter might exist, their need to continually create, to fill canvases in their home, which may never be offered for public consumption. Why continue to make Hip-Hop art? Perhaps some artists will always write

⁴ See, Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. Ch. 5.

⁵ Johnson, BNAR, ch. 6.

rhymes and lyrics, paint, create, or, otherwise, continue reflecting on experiences of our world for no other reason than to make life bearable, if not beautiful. But, what are the existential conditions, attitudes, values, and motivations of Black youth who become Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults, artists, lyricists, performers, etc., who continue to create and perform long after ideals of professional careers have faded? What motivates such adults? What struggles are faced in becoming such an adult? What do such performances have to teach? What are Hip-Hop adults saying? What are Hip-Hop adults? In response to these questions, as both philosopher and artist, I offer theoretical analysis and original art in hopes of articulating and performing at least one way of being “mature,” i.e., a strong, Black, nihilistic, Hip-Hop adult, in anti-Black racist societies.

Adult Hip-Hop : A Performance

I am not on my way to shoot a Hip-Hop music video. Today, I'm on my way to brunch with my wife and 2-year-old daughter. I feel “fresh” and stylish; My bald head is freshly shaven, my beard is neatly shaped, and my skin is moisturized and scented ... My body appears just as I want it. I chose my outfit intentionally. Each item represents not only a particular fashion taste but also symbolizes the extent to which I participate in a certain production of values within a subversive culture called, “Hip-Hop.” The beads around my neck, the urban significance of my shoes, the unique way I tie my laces, the texture and fit of my pants, the hood on my jacket, which in so many ways symbolically contradicts the hood adorning my doctoral robe—that hood hangs in the back of my closet, only to be worn at ceremonial academic functions—everything about my everyday appearance suggests that I am a member of the Hip-Hop community. But, am I seen as an “adult,” as I carry my daughter in one arm and hold my wife's hand in the other, walking through socio-economically, but perhaps more importantly, epistemically “white” normative spaces? What about when I am alone in these spaces? Is “Hip-Hop adult” seen as I approach? What does that term mean?

I am aware that in the production of everyday life, the result of my choices of value and performance of appearance is “Doctor of Philosophy,” which is not what traditional white American perspectives perceive as I move through their cultural spaces. Adorned in what some call a “Hip-Hop” aesthetic, which is a wide and dynamic concept, I also walk and move with attitudinal intention, confidently, perhaps arrogantly, with a slight bop. I'm rarely ever approached to speak; however, behind dark shades, I'm often able to, more or less, autonomously observe white gazes of me. I feel myself behind my body, like a camera capturing actors in a video scene, looking, staring at stares, seemingly trying to fix the meaning of my presence.

Being on the “other” side, in this way, my senses are heightened; I am more aware, more attuned to the gestures, the movements, the attitudes, and the glances of the “others” who seem to fix the meaning of all facets of the world around me. Am I in danger? Should I smile and seek salutations from the following white person I see? No. I’ve read Fanon warns against turning “beseechingly to others” or seeking the attention of those who had taken me “out of the world” in order to be restored to it; as Fanon put it, “just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there.”⁶ I’m not tripping; I refuse to trip. I’m not stumbling, either. I am intentionally walking differently, looking differently, being differently. I am deliberately performing my humanity differently and in defiant transcendence of white normative values. This is all done silently. Nonetheless, I am confronted with gazes seeking to “fix” my meaning.

Behind the dark tint of my shades, I observe white gazes. I have not observed friendly gestures in their eyes—they are often cold, but I have observed them intentionally not looking and unintentionally looking. Sometimes, they do not remember to “snap back,” into once again pretending I am invisible until I’ve turned my entire body in their direction; that is, of course, when it is most difficult to deny that I can see them seeing me. But I do see them “seeing” me. I sense them sensing me. The doubled (tripled?) sense in which the darkness of my shades affords me raw glimpses into their negating stares, through which I am both seen and unseen, is nothing short of what W.E.B. DuBois described as the phenomenon of “double consciousness.”⁷ Paget Henry explained how such phenomena also entail a “potentiated double consciousness,” wherein one is perceptively aware of gazes denying one’s own and simultaneously rejects the denial.⁸ I am more than aware; through the dark tint of my shades, I covertly analyze the gaze of those perspectives in denial of my own. Ironically, removing my shades within this performance doesn’t make me any less not-there. To the extent that I am aware of my subjectivity being seen as an object negatively fixed within the avowed universality of meaning constructing their world, and given that I don’t make a scene, neither of us will genuinely engage the other today, outside of these silent performances rooted in particular ways of being. It seems, to me, my offense is not only am I Black, but I have the audacity to present, perform, look, feel, and be a certain kind of Black. Indeed, I am the type of Black that symbolically and performatively rejects the standard modern bases upon which traditional Western humanisms, American traditionalisms, and thus, my inherited anti-Black racist world,

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. p. 109.

⁷ See, William E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: New American Library, 1969.

⁸ See, Paget Henry, “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” *The C. L. R. James Journal* 11, no.1 (2005): 79-112.

has been built. The Black fitted hat resting angularly on my head, just above my shades, has a solitary, bold, capitalized “G,” above its brim and is worn primarily as an expression of love for my wife, Gina. However, it also fully accomplishes its additional function: representing disruption to the ordered world of white normativity and introducing the perspectival presence of “Gangsta,” the “bad guy,” through an embodiment of subaltern Blackness in the middle of an otherwise lovely café, Downtown, on a Sunday afternoon, where primarily white elites go to enjoy champagne and brunch. After seating my wife and daughter, just before sitting in my chair, I set my shades down in the middle of the table and cast my gaze out in every direction onto the mostly older white crowd around me. I watched each gaze look away as my gaze approached. Then, I sat down. My wife and I enjoyed our meal. We chatted about things for a while; then, we left.

Black Adulthood involves a particular performative production of being within anti-Black racist societies. How one chooses to live their Blackness involves choices, values, and performances against a backdrop of anti-Black racist denials of Blackness, which attempt to erase Black bodies as original sites of value construction. In other words, Black bodies are seen as value-less; or, quite literally, unable to produce valuable values in anti-Black racist societies. The nihilating forces of anti-Black racist value systems, therefore, properly situate Black phenomenal perspectives within the domain of classical pessimism and nihilism, through which one attempts to make lived-realities of Blackness valuable. Black existential fortitude, and strength, are demonstrated in being able to insist upon the value of one’s values despite weak denials of Black valuations.⁹ What I have termed “Black nihilistic Hip-Hop music,” “Black nihilistic youth,” and “Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults” can be considered in terms of each’s philosophical import as a form of struggling against anti-Black racism and its denial of Black values, while potentially producing newer ways of performing Blackness, and adulthood, in the twenty-first century.¹⁰

White Nihilism and Black Existential Life

Making Black existential life valuable, or perhaps “beautiful,” involves attempts at production, or performances, which, like paintings, poems, songs, or music videos, can be viewed as phenomena aesthetically positing and repositing, reflecting

⁹ “Black nihilistic Hip-Hop music involves attempts at valuing through Black pessimism that, often, requires weak nihilism as a stage to be worked through.” Johnson. *BNAR*, p.175.

¹⁰ See, Johnson, *BNAR*, pp. 168-191. See, also, Devon R. Johnson, “Hip-Hop Adulthood: Nihilism, Hip-Hop, and Black American Youth in the 21st Century,” *Social Alternatives: The Critical Philosophy of Race and Decoloniality*, vol. 38 4/2019, pp. 42-47.

and rearranging, deconstructing and reconstructing, myriads of ways of meaning-building reflective of Black being in the face of anti-Black racist demands for non-being. Perhaps Nietzsche was correct in concluding that all constructions of meanings constituting the human world “can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.”¹¹ Yet, traditional justifications offered for Black *being* in anti-Black worlds remain dissolute. Nietzsche’s thoughts, perhaps inadvertently, help in understanding European nihilism as a pretext for Black experiences of existential erasure within anti-Black racist worlds. Nietzsche’s internal critique of traditional European Humanism, for example, revealed a passive, weak nihilism, which is at the heart of anti-Black racism and its demands for Black existential invisibility.¹² For example, Nietzsche wrote,

All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devalued the world—all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination and they have been falsely projected into the essence of things. What we find here is still the *hyperbolic* naiveté of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things.¹³

Anti-Black racism traditionally relies upon modern European philosophies situating a weak nihilistic notion of (European) ‘Man,’ as that which fixes the value of ‘things.’ That is, Nietzsche’s criticisms of Traditional Western Humanism expose a weak nihilism, within which a particular form of whiteness demands the value of chosen ‘appearance,’ including Black non-*being*, masquerading, dancing, and *performing* as if it were ‘true’ reality. Nietzsche’s admission reflects his internal

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. Transl. Francis Golffing. Anchor Books, 1990. p. 143.

¹² “European nihilism, is a consequence of a leveling-down to mediocrity of modern culture, according to Nietzsche, a posturing of rationalism that belies a weak nihilism ... the existential fragilities of (European) “Man” have presented for us an even more fundamentally damning threat, one that threatens to do more to our humanity besides “leveling down.” European nihilism desires a leveling-down of the freedom found in the dynamism of phenomenal will by constructing values for human life which have historically denied the majority of the world’s human beings from theoretical inclusion into the “human” category, while concomitantly building a world of anti-Black racist values around such exclusions. In other words, weak nihilistic European existential dispositions have historically played a fundamental role in the construction and maintenance of the traditional values of anti-Black racism and white supremacy.” Johnson, *BNAR*, p. 56.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*. Transl. Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books, 1968. pp. 13–4.

awareness of something I suspect resides buried, deep-down, suppressed in the psyche of each anti-Black racist; that there exists realities beyond white normative valuations of the anti-Black racist world. Nietzsche admitted as much in saying, “the world, apart from our condition of living in it, the world that we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices, does not exist as a world ‘in-itself’; it is essentially a world of relationships.” He was aware that the “appearance” of modern European values masquerading as *universal* is due to a chimerical distortion of reality, or “an arranged and simplified world,” wherein certain weak nihilistic perspectives laud themselves as performances of ‘*Value*,’ itself; or, as Nietzsche put it, a world in which, “[their] practical instincts have been at work; It is perfectly true for *us*; that is to say, we live, we are able to live in it: proof of its truth for us ...”¹⁴

Had I read that right? Yes; I am being confronted by people who *must* make my life unbearable in order to value the struggles of their own existence; the anti-Black racist world is one they *need* to be “true.” I am engaged in conflicts over the nature of reality, which attempt to erase my Black consciousness as an ontological category of existence, in order that certain forms of white consciousness may experience themselves, and their values, as “true.” But, perhaps, there is a pessimistic void of meaningless-ness situating all human phenomenal constructions of value, including projections of the value of “truth,” from which anti-Black racist forms of “whiteness” flee, but where all human life is ultimately forced to negotiate the meaning of its multiple constructions in terms of relations with “others,” whom perform the same operation. The anti-Black racist world is a world in denial of such relative understandings of the “appearance” of values. Instead, anti-Black racists attempt to situate the relativity of their values through an ironic denial of “others,” as a legitimate source of value, which is performed through a proclivity for distancing themselves from the nature of their own projections. That is, anti-Black racists hide the relative nature of their values behind an asserted universalism, belying an existential weakness, which is performed through desires to exist in a world without consciousness in Black, i.e., non-white, or “other” bodies. There is no doubt, at least for me, that anti-Black racist demands for Black non-existence, especially in spaces where the “objectivity” of white valuations of reality are actively being conjured and performed, carry along with them a subjective demand for feeling the invisibility of one’s Black phenomenal presence. My decision to confront the paradoxical absurdity of anti-Black racist demands to perform

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 306.

non-existence, the deliberateness of my posture when removing my shades and staring directly into negating eyes of “whiteness,” signaled a direct rejection of impositions of non-being, or a refusal to participate in the performance of my own erasure.¹⁵ Such refusal potentially causes weak nihilistic valuations undergirding performances of anti-Black racism to become undermined. This is why so many anti-Black racist gazes quickly avert themselves, lacking the reinforcement of firearms and badges, once Black gazes begin to “look” in return. White gazes are dependent upon “instinctive” needs to retain necessary conditions for weak nihilistic valuing, which includes not *seeing* black people as phenomenally valuing subjects. Fanon talked about Black consciousness needing to be “lost in the night,” of subjectivity, in order for the ideals of negritude to effectively function as a dialectical antithesis to the white normative thesis of anti-Black racist ideals; it seems, in this case, white consciousness *needs* to be “lost in the day,” of its own presumed objectivity, in order for the ideals of anti-Black racism to function as a (false) universal value of Humanism.

When studying the values of modern European “Humanism,” one discovers the ideals of traditional (European) ‘Man’ depend upon anti-Black racist conceptions of Black people that only make sense when considered from weak nihilistic perspectives.¹⁶ Anti-Black racists can only *see* the world as valuable, if Blackness is not *seen* as being able to *see*. Societies undergirded by anti-Black racism, thus, situate racially white people as exclusively possessing subjective capacities necessary for establishing reality and its value, including, ‘truth.’ The weak nihilism of anti-Black racism, or what I have elsewhere called, “white nihilism,” is in response to a potentially pessimistic void of meaninglessness in human life, and entails a continued desire that there exists no other world of value beyond the constructed

¹⁵ This act would have been known as, “reckless eye-balling,” under Jim Crow laws, which could be punishable by torture and/or death.

¹⁶ “Passive/weak nihilism is the inability to value human phenomena projections, without depending upon metaphysical ideals. Active/strong nihilism is the ability to value human values, without depending upon metaphysically situated ideals.” Devon R. Johnson, “Beyond Tradition: A Short Philosophical Ruminations on Africana Philosophy and Nihilism in the 21st Century.” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter*, Philosophy and the Black Experience, 16, no. 2 (Spring 2017):22-3; See, also, Johnson, *Black Nihilism and Anti-Black Racism*, Pp. 23-81.

world of whiteness, which is accomplished through attempts situating the existential category of Blackness outside the scope of reality, i.e., truth and/or value.¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre reminds, people can be aware, and yet profoundly in denial, of the nature of their values; as he put it, “to say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning *a priori*. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it's up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose.”¹⁸ I read Sartre's depiction of the source of values as being descriptive of the pessimistic situation of human valuing, which anti-Black racists seek to deny, while performing denials of that denial; and, for which, they ironically demand Black performance *without* Black presence. This describes the existential motivation imbibed by the Blackness of my returning gaze, which was a confrontational gesture, to be sure. As I gazed around that brunch café (in preparation for a meal that I now realize cost too much), surrounded by so many negating gazes, I symbolically confronted the fact of each white choice of *being* contextualizing the demand for my absence. The qualifications for such “confrontation,” within anti-Black racist spaces, can be met simply by serving as a reminder of the constructed, relative, nature of the values underpinning white performances of those spaces; in particular, to point out the lack of a priori positioning attenuating anti-Black racist judgments, styles, attitudes, and ways of being.

Surviving White Nihilism and Becoming Strong: From Black Pessimistic Youth to Black Nihilistic Adult

The first time I ever stared down the barrel of a gun, it was drawn and trained on me; I was eleven years old. Before I could begin defending myself, or protest my innocence, the cop ordered me to “shut the fuck up!” Let us just say, growing up in an anti-Black racist society, I learned to preemptively assume postures of intentional defiance, especially in the face of authoritative “whiteness,” where I might have to insist upon the value of my life as a cite of value creation. I pessimistically reasoned that if I was going to be perpetually subject to having my dreams, aspirations, and values suddenly, violently, and/or permanently uprooted, at any given time, by all-powerful, seemingly immutable, whims and wills of anti-

¹⁷ See, Devon R. Johnson, “Black Nihilism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Existentialism*, Eds., Kevin Aho, Megan Altman, and Hans Pedersen. New York: Routledge, 2024, pp. 289-301.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Transl. Bernard Frechtman. Philosophical Library, 1957. p.49

Black racist valuations of me, then I was left with no alternative for strongly existing—for *being* Black—outside of nihilistic attempts at valuing myself in spite of a totalizing, negating, universe.

Once, when I was nineteen years old (pre-Sept. 2001), I flew from Miami, Fl., to Tallahassee, Fl. on a return trip to college, after visiting home. The flight was “red-eye,” and so was I ... the night before was spent out late, partying on South Beach; after which, I had sloppily thrown clothes in a duffel bag, while rushing to catch a 6am flight. My now bald-head was, then, covered in fuzzy, corn-rowed, braids, messily tucked under a doo-rag, and cap. My clothes were baggy, and oversized. My newly emergent beard was patchy; my skin was definitely not moisturized. I smelled of cigarette smoke, and weed, from the club the night before. I looked disheveled. I felt tired. Nonetheless, within the confines of my headphones, I was fully immersed, and adorned, within the styling and cultural aesthetics of Hip-Hop.

I was also actively involved in writing and recording music, alongside studying philosophy at a major university, at the time. Immediately after deplaning, I used a pay-phone to page my mother and let her know I arrived safely. As I walked through the terminal to meet a friend who had agreed to pick me up, I was approached by two plain-clothes detectives, flanking me on both shoulders. Barely lifting his hand above waist-level, one of them quickly flashed then concealed a police badge. The other informed that I was to comply while they conducted a search of my duffel bag. I declined; then, continued walking. Getting sweated by the police as a young hip-Hop adult was nothing new, I had become accustomed to it throughout my life, but that does not make the impending danger of this situation any less intense, or horrifying. After declining to be searched, which I accomplished by stating that I was responsible for the items in my bag, only up until the moment either of them chose to place their hands inside of it; at which point, I did not consent to a search without a warrant and my lawyer present. Returning to my stride and looking straight-forwardly, I told them, “I am not what you are looking for.” They seemed taken aback.

This was one of many times throughout my life where I would learn that direct confrontation with anti-Black racist logic can sometimes lead to cracks, fissures, revealing weak nihilistic valuations hiding behind facades of whiteness masquerading as universal “truth.” Continuing to walk next to me, one of the cops sarcastically asked if I was a college student. More specifically, he asked whether I attended Florida A&M University, which is a Historically Black University (he meant the question as an insult; although, I don’t think attending an HBCU is an

insult). Nonetheless, I disclosed that I attended the (predominately white) Florida State University. Both cops rolled their eyes; and, in a decidedly mocking manner, the other asked, “what do *you* major in?” I paused ...

Thinking back on the affair, I realize I no longer recall the faces of those authoritative questioners—only that they were fully-grown men, and I felt outnumbered. I recall that, in the moment, as a kind of defense measure, I decided that I wouldn’t, or couldn’t, sustain *looking* into their negating eyes. I kept looking straight-forwardly ahead. The truth is: I was young, I was scared, and this was happening quickly. I knew I had to remain *cool*, stay calm; I had to breathe, despite my increasing sense of inner panic. I had to express myself, sparingly, but smartly; clearly, but not aggressively; I had to be quick on my feet ... *but do not run*. I had to *think*, despite shivering from numbing emotional waves crashing over me like frigid arctic waters, flooding me, drowning me in a sea of adrenaline and anxiety. I had to defend myself; I had to insist upon myself as something to be defended, if for no other reason at all than, “I exist.” Despite feeling completely and utterly alone, and at the mercy of an ill-intentioned universe, in that moment, I was fighting all by myself, against potential life (and death) changing representatives of a system that intimidates me, and attempts to psychologically cajole me into admissions of false guilt, before asking my name.

After pausing, recognizing that I was being asked to qualify the value of my presence, I managed to utter, “I am going to be a lawyer.” To which, one cop replied, while the other cracked a wry grin in agreement, “It would be amazing for someone like you to be a lawyer.” My ride pulled up. I spoke a final reply: “Well, I guess I’m going to do amazing things.”

I spent much time in the subsequent decades reflecting on that encounter. I have come to the conclusion that not only were those Tallahassee Airport cops bad at their job (and talked too much), they were also forced to candidly articulate the relative value of their “truth.” Indeed, Black consciousness, especially in any rational capacity, is quite literally, “amazing,” i.e., incredible, and/or warrants further interrogation in their world. I never did decide to become a lawyer.

Black and Hip-hop youth are assaulted from young ages by weak value projections of anti-Black racist adults, where they must, nevertheless, insist upon themselves as an original cite of value projection, which involves having the strength to persist in valuing through pessimistic and nihilistic circumstances. Black youth inherit anti-Black racist realities steeped within a profound white nihilism that causes tragic occasions for further forms of pessimism and nihilism, where loss, limitation, and suffering in Black life are alleged to be natural parts of

“reality.” Lewis Gordon reminds that the nature of Black suffering in anti-Black racist societies is rooted in false universalistic projections of whiteness. The absurdity faced in such worlds lies in the fact that those value systems, which should *merely* be understood as functioning epistemically and socially as a “dominant category,” instead presume “universality,” leading to “the false thesis of its intrinsically legitimate status, which eliminates other perspectives from which it could be judged, interpreted, and understood—in short, it is treated as a substance without need of relation.”¹⁹ In other words, the presumption that Black existential perspectives cannot valuably contribute to processes producing, deconstructing, ordering, and reordering the meaning of shared reality is based on denials of phenomenal capacities inhering within Black bodies, which are themselves rooted in weak nihilistic presumptions of the universal value of anti-Black racist ideals, i.e., “white nihilism.”²⁰ Gordon also reminds us, the presumed “particular” in this schema, nonetheless, “draws its meaning from its relations.”²¹ And, understanding the situation of the “*Black, negro, niggers, and savages*” requires interrogating the conditions of their emergence. That they are linked to constructions of people of African descent means asking about the conditions through which Africa could have been interpreted in those ways.²² Furthermore, “as this process continues, one encounters the fundamental relational way by which these avowed particulars are studied, to the point of realizing their greater scope of incorporation by virtue of their always having to be understood with other terms.”²³ In reading Gordon’s

¹⁹ Lewis R. Gordon, “Essentialist Anti-Essentialism, With Considerations From Other Sides of Modernity.” (2012) *Quaderna: A Multilingual and Transdisciplinary Journal*. 1. <http://quaderna.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Gordon>.

²⁰ “[White Nihilism] attempts to socially and politically order the meaning of reality, anti-Black racism seeks to annihilate my Black phenomenal perspective, or at least bring it to the point of inconsolable pessimism, as a means of aiding white people, men, women, boys, and girls, in avoiding the ultimate meaninglessness of their lives. Blackness is traditionally represented as wild, chaotic, animal being, which the whiteness of human rationality keeps in order. Unless the human world is to “degenerate” in Gobineau’s sense, fall prey to evil and immorality in Jacobi’s sense, become unjustified in its phenomenological movements in Hegel’s sense, or be lost to the “brutes” in Kant’s sense, the values of (white) “Man” must be superimposed onto the irrational chaos of Blackness ... White nihilism situates the axiomatic structures upon which traditional meanings of whiteness and Blackness in the anti-Black racist world have been built.” See, Johnson, *BNAR*, p. 79.

²¹ See, Gordon, “Essentialist Anti-Essentialism ...”

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

words, I realize that through attitudes and postures of defiance as a Black pessimistic youth, I had begun the process of interrogating the interconnected matrices of meaning constituting anti-Black reality. I had begun breaking them down, ripping them apart, and tearing through the anti-Black world of appearance. On certain occasions, I managed to expose relational constructs in the place of things said to be universal and essentially complete. That is, as a Black pessimistic youth, I hammered away at the falsities of the anti-Black racist world to reveal its relational structures; and, as a strong Black nihilist, I have grown to perpetually seek the reimagining of newer realities, the *being* for which is always relational and situated through acts of mutual, reciprocal, acknowledgement of self and others.

To the extent that one’s performances of being are necessarily rooted in transcendental freedoms and responsibilities for choosing self and others in a forward-looking direction, human values are also produced out of the facticity of the past. In the case of Black Hip-Hop youth, this facticity is wrought with the static of perpetual attempts at arrestment, but through which one can ironically discover a seemingly infinite capacity for “freestyling,” of performing the flexibility of one’s being in relation to worlds supposedly fixed, but ultimately non-essential, and fully capable of being effaced, devalued, trans-valued. Strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop attitudes can develop, grow, and function in terms of what can be considered an “avowed particular broader than the claimed universal,” as it pertains to white nihilistic ideals of humanity and adulthood.²⁴ In this way, Black nihilistic Hip-Hop cultural performances can be viewed as a form of “decolonizing epistemic practice,” whereby efforts are made towards increased interrelationships with open-ended socio-epistemic possibilities. Such perspectives do not commit the “error” of presuming a *really* real universe from which to draw reality. Gordon has shown, for interrogation of [Black] reality, including the practices by which “universality and particularity were constituted, the proper response is [realizing] that one is a false appeal to substance and the other is an encomium for universalizing practice.”²⁵ By rejecting closed (re: false) ontological realities, lived performances of strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adulthood should be read as an activity that is “not identical with universality” but is “an expanding commitment,” standing opposed to “false appeals to substance” making up anti-Black racist worlds.²⁶ In

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

other words, strong nihilistic Hip-Hop adulthood involves a potential trans-valuation of traditional Western ideals of humanism, including performances of being and attitudes labeled, “gangsta’.” Or, as Gordon put it, “This valuing of values, so to speak, comes down to the old adage of showing what one is made of, what one is ultimately about.”²⁷

Adults and youths participating within Black nihilistic Hip-Hop culture, its music, and its values reflect an entire range of Black nihilism, including pessimism and weak nihilism, as they struggle to mature in these spaces, which can be read through performances of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop modes of production. These modes of value production are grounded within the existential experiences of youth who were left to face problems of maturity, including pessimism and nihilism, alone. The engagement, at first, is a negative, pessimistic moment. The production of new kinds of strong nihilistic values from spaces of Black pessimism is not a guaranteed state of affairs. However, the negative perceptive moment of Black pessimism *can* provide an upheaval necessary to perceive positive formations of values. For example, it produced a radically subversive sound that was musical, lyrical, poetic, and rooted in new, Black, philosophical ruminations on life in America’s post-Civil Rights era. It produced Hip-Hop ways of being, of performing one’s commitments to valuing against the anti-valuing forces of anti-Black racism. These performances forbode continued assaults on black life and dignity, reflecting the perspectives and values of youth and adults navigating the prevalence of anti-Black racist institutions and white nihilistic values in post-Civil Rights America.

Hip-Hop also produced nihilistic innovations within traditional techniques of music production. Sampling, rearranging, and extending specific parts of previously recorded songs created new forms of musicality and instrumentation, thereby trans-valuing conventional forms of Western music, the meanings of which were taken to be complete. Hip-Hop music introduced new sounds and methods for creating “beats” out of old records, which was then complemented by equally radical innovations in poetry and lyricism, which often evokes allegorical, dream-like imagery reflecting lived Black realities. Hip-Hop culture, in other words, birthed the expression of tragedies of Black nihilistic youth at the dawn of the twenty-first century, which can still be observed in the spirit of strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults today.

²⁷ Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought*. New York: Fordham, 2015. P. 115.

Here, Nietzsche’s thought is worth considering, but in terms of his description of the lyric poet as a philosopher-artist. Nietzsche’s descriptions mirror the creative processes of what I have termed “existentially dope,” Black nihilistic Hip-Hop art.²⁸ I read Nietzsche’s description of the spirits of music birthing attic tragedy from the perspective of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults, who either continue to create Hip-Hop art or who find the dark matter of these existential spaces illuminated through the eyes of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop artists. Thus, when Nietzsche wrote, “In the state prior to the act of writing, he does not claim to have had before or within him an ordered causality of ideas, but rather a musical mood... A certain musical atmosphere of moods precedes it, and the poetic idea only comes afterwards.”²⁹ For us, Nietzsche’s description of the Apolline lyric poet combined with the Dionysiac music maker reflects a spirit similar to the existential dopeness in the dialectical relationship between the Black nihilistic Hip-Hop DJ/Producer and MC in creating beats and lyrics. In the case of Hip-Hop music, in general, Nietzsche would only be partially correct in asserting that “If we add to [the Dionysiac spirit of music] the most important phenomenon ... the unification, or indeed the identity of the lyric poet with the musician ... That reflection of primal pain in music, free of images and concepts, redeemed by illusion, now creates a second mirror image as a single allegory or example.”³⁰ The construction of a lyrical verse is often done in conformity with “feelings” inspired by the beat. However, in the case of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop music, Nietzsche would be incorrect in asserting that, “The artist has already abandoned his subjectivity in the Dionysiac process, the image that now reveals to him his unity with the heart of the world is a dream scene symbolizing the primal contradiction and primal suffering ...”³¹ No; not quite. Black Nihilistic Hip-Hop Music insists upon the value of black selfhood. Black nihilistic Hip-Hop and the existential attitudes of the adults it reflects are birthed from the travails of tragic spirits carried over from youth. A Black nihilistic “I,” thus reflected through the perspectives of Black nihilistic artists and lyrics, producing “sounds from the very depths of being,” insists nonetheless, on Black “subjectivity,” while rejecting modern anti-Black ideals as a “falsehood,” which can indeed become a catalyst for “sparks of images,” lyrics,

²⁸ See, Devon R. Johnson, “Existentially Dope.” *The Philosophers’ Magazine*, 2019.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. Transl. Francis Golfing. Anchor books, 1990. P. 37

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

poems, songs, and videos, that bear the name of tragedy, or as I call it, "Black nihilistic Hip-Hop music."

Black Nihilistic Hip-Hop Music: Kendrick Lamar, Tragedy, & Adult Hip-Hop Performance

Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults have matured on a tragic stage in which the backdrop of anti-Black racism confronts Black youth with a nihilistic threat against being and growth. Anti-Black racism enforces a form of weak nihilism dependent upon philosophical ideals of white normativity, which can be called 'white nihilism,' because it values according to notions of the ontological/universal reality of its ideals, i.e., metaphysical commitments in order to justify itself.³² The absurdities of white nihilistic values also reflect an existential weakness on the part of their proponents. They insist upon their values, but not from a position of strength; they value out of weakness. I read Nietzsche admit that, "To assert the existence as a whole of things of which we know nothing whatever [universal reality], precisely because there is an advantage in not being able to know anything of them, was a piece of naiveté of Kant, resulting from needs, mainly moral-metaphysical."³³ Nietzsche lamentably criticized *and* confessed the need for (European) "Man" to have such a "real world" when he wrote, "Our particular case is interesting enough: we have produced a conception in order to be able to live in a world, in order to perceive just enough to endure it."³⁴ At any rate, Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults begin as Black nihilistic youth paradoxically set to mature through anti-Black racist contexts wherein one can sense denials of the value of one's existence firmly rooted in an "adapted world which [anti-Black racist's] feel to be real."³⁵ Weak nihilism and anti-Black racism saturate the terrains traversed by maturing Black youth in such societies. In this case, the "real world" is entirely condemnable. The question becomes, are there potent, Black nihilistic

³² "This spirit of (European) 'Man' entails moralistic judgments concerning universal reality, and is what links both Kantian optimism and Schopenhauerian pessimism each as weak nihilistic philosophies. Weak nihilistic values directly, as in the case of Kant, or indirectly, as in the case of Schopenhauer, depend on metaphysically affirmed conceptions of 'truth;' they are the opposite of human values, rooted in the freedom of consciousness and powers of the phenomenal will." Johnson, *BNAR*, pp. 42.

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 571: 307.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 568: 306.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 569: 306-307.

ways of valuing humanity that confront, reject, and go beyond white nihilism and the anti-Black racist world?

An exquisite symbolic representation of the evolution from Black pessimistic Hip-Hop youth to strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adult, performed on a stage steeped in the tragic absurdities of anti-Black racism, is offered by the Black nihilistic Hip-Hop artist Kendrick Lamar, on his Pulitzer Award-winning album, *Damn*.⁵⁶ Recalling that the term “tragedy” is etymologically derived from the Greek Latin term “Tragode,” or “Tragos,” meaning goat, and “ode” meaning “song,” tragedies are the songs sung by scapegoats. The term suggests extraordinary efforts on the part of the suffering innocent, who are set to experience the fate of the guilty, condemned despite certain forms of right being on their side. In such cases, despite vitality, strength, or morality, one is destined to fail against immutable universal forces. As such, *Damn* is an aesthetic production offering a critique of white nihilistic values in anti-Black racist worlds but which attempts to trans-value the meanings of Blackness and adulthood therein while foreshadowing the tragic fate that may await such attempts. It reflects the Black nihilistic process's failures, pessimism, and optimism. It uses pessimistic languages of death and desire to represent all that is decried by traditionalism in Western worlds as “sin” before ultimately becoming exhausted and seeking newer standards for valuing the meaning of Black life. It encapsulates youthful expressions of Blackness desiring transcendence through affirmations of Black nihilistic will, but set against white nihilistic and Black traditionalistic challenges to Hip-Hop adulthood. *Damn* reflects tensions and contradictions germane to the existential life of Black youth in anti-Black racist societies articulated through the lens of a maturing, Black nihilistic consciousness. For example, Kendrick’s direct Afro-Judaic response to Black nihilism in *Damn* resembles Cornel West’s Black American Christian response, in the sense that both appeal to metaphysically affirmed ideals; but it should be kept in mind that existential contradictions between being and nothingness are anguished and despair-filled encounters from which many adults flee, and which Kendrick openly, artistically, faces and wrestles with on a public stage. We should remember that such creators might press on in vigorous Black nihilistic attempts towards ever newer forms of knowledge. Fanon writes,

This creator, who decides to portray natural truth, turns, paradoxically enough, to the past, and so looks at what is irrelevant to the present. What

⁵⁶ Kendrick Lamar, *Damn*, Top Dawg Records, 2017.

he aims for in his inner intentionality is the detritus of social thought, external appearances, relics, and knowledge frozen in time. The colonized intellectual, however, who strives for cultural authenticity, must recognize that national truth is first and foremost the national reality. He must press on until he reaches that place of bubbling trepidation from which knowledge will emerge.³⁷

One must attempt to be strong in living through the damning contradictions inherent to the predicaments of Black youth maturing within anti-Black racist worlds. Black nihilistic Hip-Hop music reflects desires to *become* mature and strong; it reflects abilities to confront and deflate false hopes in decadent ideals; it challenges one to have the courage to do so; to reevaluate the entire affair of human valuing under oppressive circumstances; to walk, wander, into the possibilities that lay beyond the values of anti-Black racist worlds; this is the task of "mature," strong Black nihilistic, Hip-Hop adulthood.

As mature, strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults, one acknowledges the fundamentally reoccurring choices involved in being Black in anti-Black racist contexts. These include choosing valuing one's phenomenal being as a legitimate site of value construction. Given the anti-Black situatedness of Black value productions, especially where Black nihilistic Hip-Hop youth are concerned, a choice between simply being nihilistic or not, wrongly frames the question. Instead, the fundamental choice is whether one has the strength to value one's values as reflective of one's phenomenal capacities, or as an original producer of values; that is, the choice of each Black existence in this schema is between nihilistically valuing one's values in a strong, or weak, way.

Black youth inherit an inherently nihilistic anti-Black racist world denying Black phenomenal capacities, where they are paradoxically set to be perpetual children who never *truly* get to be children or adults. Since anti-Black racism functionally seeks to lock Black phenomenal life at the level of an object, in such a world, Blacks are interpreted as non-beings, the essence of whom has not transcended objecthood, passion, and dissonance in ways requisite for full, autonomous consideration in the category of neither humanity nor mature adulthood. That is, at the existential level, Black people function as non-existent and/or perpetual children in the anti-Black racist world of adult whiteness. Anti-Black racism, therefore, places Black youth, in particular, in the precariously nihilistic existential position of growing into relations with one's phenomenal capacities within a world premised upon preclusion of the value of such capacities. Yet, strong Black

³⁷ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 161.

nihilistic Hip-Hop youth and adults insist upon phenomenal freedoms in living through these situations. If there is a universal fact, humanity is an open-ended potentiality for freedom and choice, living through an existential situation wherein one is constantly uprooted from the stability of each projection, i.e., pessimism. Fanon reminded us that Man was fated to watch the dissolution of the truths he had worked out for himself one after another. *This* is the process of maturity—a working out of truth and values that always requires critical capacities for developing newer ones. Valuative preclusions against valuing marks the terrain Hip-Hop youth trod towards adulthood—black nihilism and anti-Black racism—a preclusion against developing means for maturing.

Anti-Black racism and nihilism combine to construct an existential zone of non-being, a parameter against which Black phenomenal life is forced to emerge, where existential adulthood becomes eradicated and the existential category of Black youth eviscerated. What does it mean to “mature” in a world that theoretically has no room for one to become an adult? The tragic outcome is a generation of Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults who never truly got to be children. Anti-Black racism forces Black youth to wrestle with adult tasks of nihilistically dealing with pessimism and erasure while simultaneously growing into relational awareness with their transcendent and phenomenal capacities. Acknowledging limitations and valuing despite constraints, i.e., nihilism, is the domain of adulthood. Challenging limitations and dreaming of fantastic futures and alternative possibilities beyond restriction, is the domain of youth. Anti-Black racism infects the processes inherent in Black existential development by affecting phenomenal relationships with possibilities germane to the categories of youth. People born into this culture, or the “Hip-Hop generationers,” as Bakari Kitwana calls us, face the project of maturing within anti-Black racist frameworks where possibilities for maturity are uniquely underdeveloped.

Furthermore, the problem is often misstated in terms of lacking the wisdom of traditional values or simply being *immature* and failing to *grow up*. An analysis of the conventional notion of maturity ought to illuminate the subject. The term “mature” comes from the Latin *maturus*, meaning “ripe,” or having reached the most advanced stage in a process. As Tom Meagher illustrates, “One imagines a banana sitting on a counter, ‘just ripening’ as if maturation were something that ‘just happens.’ However, the banana only matures through a relationship with its environment: warmth and sunlight ripen it, whereas cold and darkness stifle it, leaving it green and starchy. Europe imagines itself as having ripened non-rela-

tionally, a mythic banana.”³⁸ Meagher’s depiction of (European) “Man’s” imagining of himself can be read in terms of white nihilistic value processes, where this myth functions as a sort of Platonic Lie that Black nihilistic Hip-Hop youth profoundly reject. Those languages, symbols, and tools for philosophical and aesthetic expressions of Europe were then jacked, stolen, and refashioned into new forms of meaning; some languages and symbols are scratched and effaced, some are discarded, others are repurposed or remixed, and all are potentially considered in hopes of creating something that might yield life.

Mixing: Creolization, Performance, and my Hip-Hop Adult Performance

Imagine spinning vinyl records backward, intentionally scratching back and forth. Hearing the needle emit high-pitched frequencies. A first reaction might be someone ruining or simply not adequately participating in musical form. It may be difficult for some to view the phenomenon as reflective of maturity or, to use the language of Jane Anna Gordon, to view the phenomenon as a form of *creolization*, where one undertakes a creative, and in this case, potentially aesthetically beautiful, eclecticism of parts, mechanisms, sources, and values, driving the birth of newer musical forms. The term “*creolization*,” as developed in Gordon’s work, is a framework for understanding the fluid and shifting geographies of human thought and development in constructing “truth” and producing “value.”³⁹ Existential maturity, thus, is not a final stage in a process but rather a realization and embracement of the fluidity and constantly evolving nature of human reality alongside desires to take one’s place within the flow of Human constructions, which inherently involves notions of values as resultant from *creolization* processes. Hip-Hop culture and music, from this perspective, are forms of *creolization* of traditional Western philosophical and aesthetic ideals. *Creolization* transvalues dominant languages and symbols into valuable tools for Black people fighting against the meaning of (white) Humanity in the anti-Black racist world. Black nihilistic maturity, then, involves battling against Black invisibility through attempts at creolizing the dominant tropes of anti-Black racist societies. Here, Black nihilistic maturity can be connected with the *creolizing* capacities of “subalterns,” who are not supposed to have the “capacity for symbolic production” to perform such

³⁸ Tom Meagher, “Creolization and Maturity: A Philosophical Sketch,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 17, (2018): 383.

³⁹ See, Jane Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau Through Fanon*. United States: Fordham University Press, 2014.

tasks. Still, nevertheless, we have "blended things supposed to be opposed (e.g., 'high' and 'low' culture, 'Black' and 'white' folks) together."⁴⁰ The process of creolization transforms dominants and subordinates down to the very grammar and syntax of their social interactions, according to Lee. "Creole societies forged symbolic frameworks out of fragments of shattered traditions, frameworks that transformed fragments (but not beyond recognition) into parts of new wholes."⁴¹ Black nihilistic Hip-Hop culture is a prime example of *creolization*, which can be read as expressions of struggles and desires of Black nihilistic youth growing through and in relation to the challenges of maturity in anti-Black racist worlds.

The problems of maturity in Black nihilistic Hip-Hop are exacerbated by the culture being, hitherto, primarily a youth-oriented mode of expression. However, large demographics of adults worldwide have "grown up" in the half a century since Hip-Hop first burst upon the scene. There are Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults, and yet, being a movement initially rooted in the experiences of Black youth, there persist problems with conflating what began as a Black adolescent cultural form of expression with "Black nihilistic culture," or Black culture, itself. The dynamism of Hip-Hop, as a lived dimension of Black cultural ways of life, is too complex to be reduced in such ways. The phenomenon of fixing one dimension of artistic life, youth culture in particular, as a stand-in for the complexity and dynamism of Black people is also a form of anti-Black racism. While there are undeniable exceptions, there remains a fundamental problem concerning maturity in Hip-Hop music and culture, especially as it is portrayed within larger media contexts of anti-Black racist societies. And, since anti-Black racism fundamentally entails weak nihilistic systems of value attempting to delimit axiological parameters of humanity according to metaphysically affirmed idealizations of whiteness, i.e., white nihilistic values, which regard themselves as synonymous with the *Value* of human life, anti-Black racists have constructed a (white) Human world in which they are also seen as the only ones capable of maturing. As Meagher put it,

Europe is viewed not as a relation to the world, a loose and evolving cultural formation emerging out of a peculiar and profoundly troubling history; it is, rather, imagined as a trans-historical substance, a thing that contains within itself those characteristics that make it a priori valuable, desirable, benefi-

⁴⁰ Fred Lee, "Creolizing Political Theory with Extraordinary Racial Politics," *Contemporary Political Theory* 17, (2018): 377.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

cent. Europe asserted itself as substance in denial of the relations that constituted it. It imagined its maturation as the entelechy of an imminent essence.⁴²

Many of the children precluded from Black adulthood at the end of the 20th century have survived to become Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adults in the 21st century. Some of us are now parents, and grandparents, constituting the first generations of Hip-Hop adults. We have survived the bombardment of originally unique values and paradigms of thoughts developed in our youth and have resisted anti-Black racist attempts at devaluations of our *being* as adults; each sought to lock Hip-Hop culture at the level of perpetual youth, i.e., non-being. Meagher's "banana" analogy can be extended to capture this point. "What makes bananas [Hip-Hop] viable as a global export commodity is that they may be harvested in the tropics and then refrigerated to prevent their maturation prior to reaching market destinations. There is a commercial interest in delaying their maturity."⁴³ Applied to the maturation processes of Hip-Hop adults, the analogy means becoming potentially aware of "refrigeration" processes designed to prevent one's "maturation prior to reaching [in order to serve] market destinations." I'm reminded, again, of those cold stares on that sunny day at brunch. One could say, I was "forced ripe," and set to "spoil," or decay quickly. Here, Black "maturity" functions paradoxically, it demands physical growth of the Black body without accompanying nutritional developments of the mind, especially in terms of offering critiques of the (white) Human world and its underlying philosophies. Ask yourself, if you were a Black youth of strong nihilistic will, beginning to pessimistically doubt the objective "goodness" of the values of your social world, which means, in part, recognizing its desire to reduce your mind to your body, i.e., make you a commodity for sex, entertainment, and labor, and/or provide the statistical expectation that you will be destitute, dead, or in prison by the age of nineteen, and undoubtedly not enjoying lobster bisque and champagne, with family, as a Professor of Philosophy, Africana, and Hip-Hop, studies, or otherwise, amongst them? How might you perform your existence in such spaces? How should one go about performing the accomplishment of one's strong Black nihilistic Hip-Hop adulthood?

While it may be tempting to consider these questions about nihilistic Hip-Hop adults, aesthetic creations, and performances of being attempting to make Black life valuable, if not beautiful, in terms of the popular Hip-Hop artists, whom

⁴² Meagher, "Creolization and Maturity," 383.

⁴³ Ibid.

many may be familiar with. I ask you to envision the unfamiliar, the lone Black nihilistic Hip-Hop youth and/or adult creating and trying to make a nihilistic existence beautiful. In this essay, I have been thinking about a particular verse, a poem I wrote more than a decade ago, alone, in my Philadelphia apartment. I was in my twenties, engaged in doctoral studies of philosophy, at the time. A couple of the lines went like this:

*I'm a grown damn man on the M.I.C.
Thoughts mature,
Please say the, Ph.D.
So enlightened, self-righteous,
Don't fuck with me
Effortlessly reciting writings,
That's nothing to me
Don't be a casualty.
People asking me,
"Why," I'm doing this
I'm smooth when I answer, casually
The same reason that the Earth twists
The same reason that the truth is deeper than the surface
Look, ... I'm pursuing my purpose at all costs
I won't follow the leaders; their all lost
I need a sonar, or a golden thread
To avoid the Minotaur that snatches heads
Deep inside the Labyrinth,
Where the path dead-ends
I'm searching for my penance
It was self-defense,
"Your honor," I had to protect my armor
Before they dented my honor ...
Natural honor student
kept ganja inside my school books
rolling up lots of urb, and
using curses when I schooled crooks
The smart speak, the wise listen,
the fool looks ...*

Perhaps, I'll publish it, someday.

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