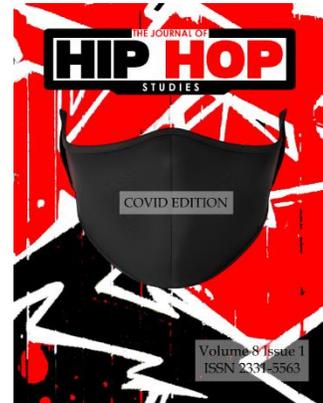


For the Dead Homie: Black Male Rappers, Homicide Survivorship Bereavement, and the Rap Tribute of Nipsey Hussle

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Ermias “Nipsey Hussle” Asghedom’s murder represented a cultural cataclysmic event that startled the Hip Hop community and triggered previous memories of Black men’s homicidal deaths in the world. Nipsey Hussle’s death inspired touching rap tribute songs by Black male rappers, who sought to commemorate his cultural legacy and express their bereavement as homicide survivors. Rap tribute songs occupy a significant history, as rappers historically employed them to honor Hip Hop’s fallen soldiers, communicate their homicide survivorship bereavement processes, and speak about social perils in the Black community. Framed by critical race (CRT) and gender role conflict theoretical frameworks, this study investigated twenty-six rap tribute songs, which were authored by twenty-eight Black male rap artists in commemoration of Nipsey Hussle’s life and legacy. We sought to understand how the examined Black male rappers use their music to grieve and communicate their bereavement experiences as homicide survivors.

The findings yielded complex, yet contradictory themes related to existing scholarship on Black men’s homicide survivorship bereavement strategies, rap’s homicide-related lyrics, and the sociocultural functions of rap tribute songs as rhetorical expressions of Black men’s homosociality and as laments of deceased friends and rappers. The examined rap tribute songs advanced three dominant themes in relation to the Black male rappers’ articulations of their homicide survivorship bereavement of Nipsey Hussle, which were 1) Black men’s grief, homosociality, and complex vulnerability narratives, 2) fear and paranoia declarations, and 3) and resolution of internal conflict and grief with vengeance. This investigation was significant to Hip Hop studies, for it illustrated how twenty-eight Black male rap artists leveraged the rhetorical power of rap tribute songs to articulate their complex homicide survivor bereavement processes, advance vital counternarratives concerning Black men’s mental health experiences with repeated exposure to homicide deaths and violence in rap and urban communities, and offer rich criticisms of gun violence, internalized racism, poverty, and systemic oppression.

Introduction¹

In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released staggering statistics, reporting that although Black men aged 15 to 34 represented only two percent of the United States population, they made up thirty-seven percent of homicidal deaths. The proclamation was clear: gun violence is a health crisis that profoundly affects Black men’s life expectancies. And the statistic was proven true yet again,² this time on a scale too tectonic to ignore, when gun violence visited the

¹ The authors humbly dedicate this academic work to the memories of Marshall A. Latimore and Torian Bailey. Although your transitions were not caused by homicide, you are both forever missed and in our hearts.

² Nada Hassanein, “Young Black Men and Teens are Killed by Guns 20 Times more than Their White Counterparts, CDC Data Shows,” *USA Today*, February 25, 2021,

neighborhood of beloved Eritrean-American rapper, Ermias “Nipsey Hussle” Asghedom on March 31, 2019.³ Nipsey Hussle was fatally shot outside his Marathon clothing store in South Los Angeles, California, rattling the Hip Hop community at its core and launching a months-long grieving period in mass media. A community activist, entrepreneur, rapper, and “Rollin’ 60s Crip” member, Nipsey Hussle’s murder drew comparisons to that of Tupac “2Pac” Shakur’s and ignited overwhelming grief among rappers, who publicly mourned his death as a catastrophic Hip Hop tragedy and yet another heartbreaking case of a culturally impactful Black male rapper gone too soon.⁴ In reaction, Nipsey Hussle’s legacy was honored with a memorial service at the Staples Center, stirring tributes at the 2019 Black Entertainment Television (BET) Awards and 2020 Grammys, and a tribute letter from former United States (US) President Barack Obama.⁵ His mantra, “The Marathon Continues,” also crystallized through touching rap tribute songs from Black male rappers such as Meek Mill, Roddy Ricch, and YG.⁶ In these songs, the rappers articulated their bereavement, reflected on Hussle’s legacy, and connected his murder to the homicide deaths of Black men in urban communities.

The epidemic of homicide among Black men remains an American tragedy, with homicide rates disproportionately impacting Black men more than their Hispanic and white peers.⁷ According to the National Criminal Justice Resource Service homicide report, Black men were victims of murder and non-negligent homicide 1.5 times more frequently than white men and 3.3 times more frequently than Hispanic or Latinx men.⁸ Of all Black victims, eighty-nine percent were killed by a Black perpetrator with whom they had some form of a prior relationship; a statistic that directly correlated with

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/02/23/young-black-men-teens-made-up-more-than-third-2019-gun-homicides/4559929001/>.

³ Throughout the study, all deceased rappers will be first introduced by their full and stage names, and then referenced by only their stage names. Contrarily, the examined Black male rappers will be exclusively referenced by their stage names.

⁴ Justin Tinsley, “Still Grieving Nipsey Hussle a Year Later: Coming to Terms with Hussle’s Death Hasn’t Gotten Any Easier,” *The Undefeated*, March 31, 2020, <https://theundefeated.com/features/still-grieving-nipsey-hussle-a-year-later/>.

⁵ Kendall Trammell, “Barack Obama Pays Tribute to Nipsey Hussle,” *CNN*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/11/entertainment/obama-letter-nipsey-hussle-trnd/index.html>.

⁶ August Brown, “Meek Mill and Roddy Ricch Release Nipsey Hussle Tribute Song, ‘Letter to Nipsey,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2020-01-27/nipsey-hussle-meek-mill-roddy-ricch-letter>.

⁷ Charles H. Hennekens, Joanna Drowos, and Robert S. Levine, “Mortality from Homicide among Young Black Men: A New American Tragedy,” *American Journal of Medicine* 126, no. 4 (2013): 282–83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2012.07.007>.

⁸ National Criminal Justice Resource Service, “2017 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week Resource Guide: Crime and Victimization Fact Sheets,” 2017, https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/ncvrw/2017/images/en_artwork/Fact_Sheets/2017NCVRW_Homicide_508.pdf.

Nipsey Hussle's death. In the case of Nipsey Hussle, he was murdered due to an alleged conflict with accused killer Eric Holder, which resulted in gun violence. Nipsey Hussle's murder showcased the troubling state of affairs in Hip Hop and urban communities in which the smallest infractions or disputes can accelerate into violence, and guns are used as problematic, restrictive means in Black men's gender conflict resolution (GRC) and as a way to end rap beefs.⁹

Because of such sociocultural factors, Black men are also placed at higher risk for experiencing the tragic loss of a peer and thus becoming homicide survivors.¹⁰ Homicide survivors are the friends, family, and community members who face the task of carrying the legacy of a slain loved one.¹¹ Lula M. Redmond has estimated that each homicide victim typically leaves behind at least seven to ten family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors who must survive their violent death.¹² These typical homicide survivor numbers were magnified due to Nipsey Hussle's community impact, commercial success, and respect within the rap industry. Grieving the homicide of a loved one is a multidimensional, complex process that extends beyond just the event or their relationship with the victim to community/neighborhood, cultural, historical, and social factors as well.¹³ Black American survivors of homicide victims often create and rely on spiritual coping and meaning-making, maintaining a connection to the deceased, collective coping and caring for others, and the concealment of emotions to manage grief brought about by having experienced the murder of a loved one.¹⁴ Additionally, narratives are central to the grief process, as narrators include a great deal about the person who died, their life challenges and experiences, and how much the grieving person has lost due to the homicide victim's death.¹⁵

⁹ James M. O'Neil, Glenn E. Good, and Sarah Holmes, "Fifteen Years of Theory and Research on Men's Gender Role Conflict: New Paradigms for Empirical Research," in *A New Psychology of Men*, edited by Ronald F. Levant and William S. Pollack (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 164–206; Sunni Ali, *Lessons Learned: Critical Conversations in Hip Hop and Social Justice* (Chicago Heights: African American Images, 2020).

¹⁰ Tanya L. Sharpe and Javier Boyas, "We Fall Down: The African American Experience of Coping with the Homicide of a Loved One," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 6 (2011): 855–73.

¹¹ Sharpe and Boyas, "We Fall Down."

¹² Lula M. Redmond, *Surviving: When Someone You Know Was Murdered* (Clearwater, FL: Psychological Consultations and Educations Services, 1989).

¹³ Tanya L. Sharpe, "Understanding the Sociocultural Context of Coping for African American Family Members of Homicide Victims: A Conceptual Model," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 16, no. 1 (2015): 48–59.

¹⁴ Sharpe and Boyas, "We Fall Down."

¹⁵ Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Parent Grief: Narratives of Loss and Relationship* (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 2000).

There is a dearth of literature on the unique experiences of Black male homicide survivors in Hip Hop, and this study redresses that lamentable scholarly shortcoming. Americans are widely familiar with the trope of the daughter, mother, and/or sister who survives and mourns the death of Black male homicide victims, but much less so the image of the son, father, brother, or in this case, the Black male rap peer. Thus, this research's focus on Black male rapper homicide survivors and their bereavement experiences contributes to a growing body of literature on Black men's and Hip Hop studies. As noted by Tommy Curry, Black men struggle with death and homicide in different ways as victims structurally disadvantaged by their race, sex, and societal oppression and their "gendered" existence deserves further study and theorization.¹⁶ For example, Black male rappers who are homicide survivors identify with their deceased Black male homicide victims due to lived experiences and music industry politics, leading to grieving experiences and coping mechanisms that are different from those of Black female homicide survivors. Therefore, the authors aimed to increase the amount of rigorous and humanizing scholarship on Black men, while advancing counter-narratives for Black male homicide survivors in Hip Hop studies in a manner that does not imply a zero-sum with research on Black women.

Rap music remains a pivotal influence in the socialization process of Black men and a therapeutic, expressive tool to engage in grief work (following the murder of a loved one), to support mental health treatment among Black American men, and to memorialize a rapper's death through rap tribute songs.¹⁷ For conceptualization purposes, the authors defined a rap tribute song as "a musical composition authored by a rap artist(s) to commemorate a rapper, rap figure, and/or friend's (famous or non-famous) death and to eulogize their Hip Hop legacy using rap lyrics."

Rap tribute songs occupy a significant history, as rappers historically employed them to honor Hip Hop's fallen soldiers, communicate their homicide survivorship bereavement processes, and speak out about social perils in the Black community.¹⁸ Moreover, rap tribute songs represent powerful mechanisms for Black male rappers to share their grief-stricken experiences as homicide survivors. Acknowledging this history and the impact of Nipsey Hussle's murder on the rap community, this study conducted a critical discourse analysis of twenty-six rap tribute songs, authored by twenty-eight Black male rappers and dedicated to Nipsey Hussle, between March 31,

¹⁶ Tommy Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Don Elligan, "Rap Therapy: A Culturally Sensitive Approach to Psychotherapy with Young African American Men," *Journal of African American Men* 5, no. 3 (2000): 27-36.

¹⁸ XXL, "The Current Status of Every Murdered Rapper's Case," November 17, 2020, <https://www.xxlmag.com/current-status-murdered-rappers-cases/>.

2019, and September 30, 2020. Specifically, it considered the following research question: How did Black male rappers use the examined Nipsey Hussle rap tribute songs to communicate their bereavement experiences as homicide survivors?¹⁹ Ultimately, this study examined the rap tribute song as a form of social critique and a rhetorical expression of Black male rappers' grief processes as homicide survivors.

The Life and Legacy of Nipsey Hussle

Born August 15, 1985, to an Eritrean father and Black mother, Nipsey Hussle was an activist, community organizer, entrepreneur, Grammy award-winning rapper, and philanthropist, who famously took his stage name from the famed comedian and actor Nipsey Russell.²⁰ An underground legend in Los Angeles, California, Nipsey Hussle amassed critical acclaim for his thirteen mixtapes (released between 2005 and 2017) before the release of his Grammy-nominated, first studio album, *Victory Lap*, in 2018. A business-oriented rapper, Nipsey Hussle was renowned for his entrepreneurial acumen and once sold mixtapes out of a car trunk in parking lots at the corner of Crenshaw Boulevard and Slauson Avenue, where he later established a store for his clothing line, The Marathon.²¹ Despite being relatively unknown at the time, he famously priced his 2013 *Crenshaw* mixtape at \$100, at a time when most mixtapes sold for about five dollars, and made headlines when Hip Hop icon Jay-Z spent ten thousand dollars to purchase one hundred copies from Nipsey Hussle.²² Unfortunately, the parking lot where Nipsey Hussle built his rap legacy would become the very place where he was killed on March 31, 2019, by alleged murderer Eric Holder, who shot Nipsey Hussle ten times following a disagreement. According to Angel Jennings, Holder was a familiar face in South LA, whose social media pictures showed him wearing gang paraphernalia (i.e., "Crips-blue bandannas").²³ To date, there are still a number of questions surrounding Holder's allies and his actions leading up to Nipsey Hussle's violent murder; a factor that prompted assassination allegations considering the broader political context of the rapper's life

¹⁹ This is research question RQ1.

²⁰ Kendall Trammell, "That 'Nipsey Russell' Flub Was a Reminder of How Nipsey Hussle Got His Name," *CNN*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/11/entertainment/nipsey-russell-nipsey-hussle-trnd/index.html>.

²¹ Soren Baker, *The History of Gangster Rap: From Schoolly D to Kendrick Lamar* (New York: Abrams Image, 2018).

²² Rob Markman, "Nipsey Hussle Breaks Down His \$10,000 Album Transaction with Jay-Z: Watch Now," *MTV News*, October 9, 2013, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1715358/nipsey-hussle-jay-z-crenshaw/>.

²³ Angel Jennings, "Nipsey Hussle's Brother Found Him Dying. These Are His Final Moments," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-nipsey-hussle-final-moments-20190404-story.html>.

and work and additional investigations into the Los Angeles police department's discriminatory targeting of Nipsey Hussle's street corner and store before his death.²⁴

Michael Ralph noted two distinguishing characteristics of Nipsey Hussle's cultural impact on the Los Angeles and Hip Hop communities: "His emphasis on uplift (financial planning, political acumen, and motivation, nestled in a sustainable vision for individual and community empowerment)" and "his ability to move across the political and economic spectrum and to navigate regional distinctions and armed conflicts with extraordinary grace."²⁵ In his media interviews and music, Nipsey Hussle encouraged Black people to buy assets that appreciated rather than flashy commodities, emphasized the importance of financial strategy and the economic promise of cryptocurrency, and urged musicians to "create different methods to monetize the connection" with fans in a 2013 *Forbes* interview.²⁶ Nipsey Hussle also moved seamlessly between varying communities, as he owned property in territories dominated by rival gangs with competing economic and political interests; united community associations and gangs; employed formerly incarcerated people at The Marathon clothing store; created "Destination Crenshaw" to rebuild school playgrounds and gymnasiums and bring beautification to his Crenshaw neighborhood; and even met with the president of Eritrea in 2018.²⁷ At the time of his death, Nipsey Hussle had a meeting scheduled with law enforcement officials on combating gang violence in an attempt to spark a truce between warring gangs.²⁸

More than a talented artist and philanthropist, Nipsey Hussle represented a hero and political icon with an incomparable capacity to mobilize people through his strategic thinking and vision of economic organization. He frequently referenced his cultural teachings of endurance, integrity, and self-sufficiency, which "obligated [him] to carry that same integrity" in the music industry and his brand, The Marathon.²⁹ Nipsey Hussle remains revered in Los Angeles, Hip Hop, and around the world. After

²⁴ Ali, *Lessons Learned*; Sam Levin, "Revealed: How LAPD Targeted Nipsey Hussle's Store Corner and Store," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/07/revealed-nipsey-hussle-lapd-the-marathon-clothing>.

²⁵ Michael Ralph, "Higher: Reflections on the Life and Legacy of Nipsey Hussle (Ermias Asghedom)," *Transforming Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2019): 81-84.

²⁶ Natalie Robehmed, "Rapper Nipsey Hussle and the \$100 Mixtape," *Forbes*, November 6, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2013/11/06/rapper-nipsey-hussle-and-the-100-mixtape/#330463fa4bc0>.

²⁷ Ralph, "Higher: Reflections on the Life and Legacy of Nipsey Hussle."

²⁸ Janelle Griffith, "Nipsey Hussle Planned a Meeting with L.A. Police on Gang Violence to Go on in His Honor," *NBC News*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nipsey-hussle-s-planned-meeting-l-police-gang-violence-go-n989676>.

²⁹ Eri-TV, "Eri-TV: Interview with Nipsey Hussle, Eritrean-American Recording Artist and Entrepreneur," *YouTube*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSjKr7nxiiQ>.

his passing, Nipsey Hussle's music experienced a surge of 2,776 percent in sales and streaming and posthumously earned the artist two Grammy awards for his rap collaborations, "Racks in the Middle" and "Higher."³⁰ Additionally, his death inspired truces between warring gangs and rappers, ignited cultural discussions of gang violence and gun reform, and was revered by commemorative rap tribute songs released by his rap peers. These songs articulated the critical perspectives of Black male rappers as homicide survivors, shedding light on how they coped with the grief, loss, and trauma of Nipsey Hussle's murder and, thus, served as the focus of this analysis.

Critical Race Theory, The Rapper, and The Rap Tribute Song

Critical Race Theory (CRT) explicates the embeddedness of racism in every area of American society, making visible the ways in which race-neutral institutions, systems, policies, and practices maintain a "regime of White supremacy."³¹ In doing so, CRT emphasizes the absolute centrality of history and context in any attempt to theorize the relationship between race, legal, and social discourses.³² CRT amplifies the power of the voice-of-color in articulating the expertise of people of color, whose direct experiences as the recipients of racism position them as expert voices in the discourse of racism that can aid in transforming cultures of oppression.³³ Its tenet, "experiential knowledge (and counter storytelling)," emphasizes the power of Black narratives to make visible the subjugated realities of what it is like to be Black in America and to counter mythical and stereotypical depictions (e.g., Black criminality and violence) of Black life.³⁴ Under this prism, Black counternarratives offer a "cure for silencing," which abolish historic tendencies for marginalized groups to internalize blame for experiences of racial trauma, to tell no one about personal encounters with racial trauma, or to minimize the impact of individual exposures to racial trauma.³⁵ When connected to the current study, these counternarratives represent critical, rhetorical tools for Black men's experiences of homicide survivorship and racial trauma to be named, more clearly recognized, and addressed. Moreover, this context is critical for understanding the overrepresentation of Black American homicide victims and the multilayered experiences of their survivors.

Rap tribute songs are musical compositions authored by rappers to commemorate a rapper, rap figure, and/or a (famous or non-famous) friend who has

³⁰ Robert Blair, "Juice Wrld, Pop Smoke, & Hip Hop's Growing Posthumous Hypocrisy," *Highsnobiety*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/juice-wrld-pop-smoke-posthumous-hip-hop-hypocrisy/>.

³¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil T. Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1995), xiii.

³² Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*.

³³ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

³⁴ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 48.

³⁵ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 49–51.

passed and to eulogize their Hip Hop legacy. From DJ Pete Rock and CL Smooth's "They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)" (1992), Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's rap tribute song to Wallace "Wally" Laird III and Eric "Eazy-E" Wright, "Tha Crossroads" (1996), and the multiple songs written in memory of 2Pac to the Grammy award-winning rap tribute to Christopher "The Notorious B.I.G." Wallace, and Nipsey Hussle ("I'll Be Missing You" [1997] and "Higher" [2020]), rappers used rap tribute songs to navigate their grieving processes and to pay respect to fallen friends.³⁶ Most notably, "I'll Be Missing You," a 1997 rap tribute song released by Diddy, Faith Evans, and the group 112, made history as the first rap song to debut at number one on the *Billboard Hot 100*.³⁷ In 2019, Diddy recounted the legacy of the rap tribute song and its role in healing the rap community after The Notorious B.I.G.'s murder on the Netflix series *Hip Hop Evolution*. He stated, "Hip Hop wasn't really vulnerable.... That song ["I'll Be Missing You"] humanized us. We can be at our lowest point and still feel hope."³⁸

As rhetorical expressions, rap tribute songs also afforded Black men inimitable opportunities to express their humanity toward other men whom they considered friends in progressive ways that were indicative of rap's homosociality between Black men. In his research on homosociality and Black masculinity in gangster rap music, Matthew Oware notes three themes of homosociality that bear relevance to the rap tribute song as a form of commemoration: 1) friends are family; 2) success by association (namely monetary success), and, most relevant to this study; 3) lament for friends lost due to incarceration or death.³⁹ In detailing the third theme, Oware describes how rappers craft rap tribute songs to courageously express their vulnerability due to the passing of beloved companions (both rapper and non-rappers), while attempting to comprehend the damages caused by their lives and those of other adherents of gang dogma and urban communities.

Such discourse positioned rap tribute songs as counternarratives that reimagined conventional understandings of rap artists, Black masculinity, and documented accounts of Black men's homicide survivorship experiences. Furthermore, they articulated Black male rappers' coping strategies and reflected their cultural beliefs,

³⁶ XXL, "The Current Status of Every Murdered Rapper's Case."

³⁷ Gary Trust, "This Week in *Billboard* Chart History: Puff Daddy and Faith Evans' Tribute to The Notorious B.I.G. Hit No. 1," *Billboard*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/7825802/this-week-in-billboard-chart-history-in-1997-puff-daddy-faith>.

³⁸ *Hip Hop Evolution*, season 3, episode 2, "Life after Death," produced by Darby Wheeler, Rodrigo Bascuñán, Russell Peters, Scot McFadyen, Sam Dunn, and Nelson George, September 6, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/title/80141782>.

³⁹ Matthew Oware, "Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music," *Journal of African American Studies* 15 (2011): 22-39.

practices, and societal experiences as Black Americans and survivors of homicide victims. Within this context, CRT acted as an appropriate foundation for this research study, for it analyzed the examined rap tribute songs to uncover the multifaceted range of emotions and experiences shared by Black male rappers in reaction to the homicide death of Nipsey Hussle.

Black Male Rappers, Gender Role Conflict Resolution, and the Rhetoric of Homicide in Rap

The history of rap music and the prevalence of Black male homicide deaths of rappers are too vast to discuss comprehensively in this work. For example, in the thirty-three years between the shooting deaths of rappers Scott “Scott La Rock” Sterling of Boogie Down Productions in the Bronx in 1987 and Bashar “Pop Smoke” Jackson in 2020, *XXL Magazine* documented over seventy murdered rappers, equating to nearly two rappers per year and over forty unsolved legal cases.⁴⁰ However, it is necessary to provide a cultural analysis of the rhetoric of homicide in rap music and how Black male rappers are positioned and impacted. Depictions of homicide (fictional and nonfictional) are common in American cultural discourses and media, yet rap music commonly appropriates homicide as a theme in its songs, rapper personas, and rhetorical themes. In rap, homicide is more visible due to its graphic content, presumed “shock value,” racial connotations, and urban culture ties, but it is still present in nearly every musical genre.⁴¹

Particularly in mainstream rap, lyrics about homicide are commoditized by music executives and record labels, removed from their origins of storytelling and symbolic meaning, and strategically curated to develop on- and offline rapper personas and generate profit.⁴² Consequently, the coopting of homicide in rap has historically attracted, and continues to attract increased audiences due to its egregious violence, virility, misogyny, and graphic nature and, thus, remains a major theme in popular rap songs. Gwen Hunnicutt and Kristy Humble Andrews noted three major themes in homicide-related rap lyrical content: 1) the normalizing of killing; 2) respect maintenance; and 3) conflict with power structure, vengeance, and masculine confrontation.⁴³ The threat of homicide was often articulated as a tool in respect maintenance and revenge-seeking against power structures and individuals and also to

⁴⁰ *XXL*, “The Current Status of Every Murdered Rapper’s Case.”

⁴¹ Edward G. Armstrong, “The Rhetoric of Violence in Rap and Country Music,” *Sociological Inquiry*, 63 (1993): 64–83.

⁴³ Gwen Hunnicutt and Kristy Humble Andrews, “Tragic Narratives in Popular Culture: Depictions of Homicide in Rap Music,” *Sociological Forum* 24, no. 3 (2009): 611–30.

maintain hypermasculine superiority in conflicts with other men; it functioned as a flawed form of gender role conflict resolution.

Gender role conflict theory is used to describe unconscious phenomena produced when perceptions of masculine gender roles deviate from, restrict, devalue, or violate norms and to explain “how sexism and gender role socialization interact to produce oppression.”⁴⁴ Its theorists maintain that these learned gender roles are individualized, generational, and contextualized according to age, masculinity, and ethnicity, among other factors, and thus, reify specific masculinities in Hip Hop culture.⁴⁵ Themes of contest and confrontation are undoubtedly part of rap’s authenticity markers, masculine expressions, and street codes, yet this gendered form of control, domination, and conflict resolution represents a distinct type of hypermasculinity for its Black male artists.⁴⁶ This gendered pattern also suggests that the importance of respect through violence continues to take on symbolic importance for rap artists, which presents a dangerous paradox for Black male rappers, with material consequences.

Indisputably, the gendered plight of Black men and Black male rappers is distinct because in many regards “they have not been factored into the social, cultural, and economic future of the society.”⁴⁷ Rap’s homicidal rhetorical practices are emblematic of a sadder state of affairs that exists in many American communities, where some individuals are programmed in geo-spaces to see no other way to resolve their conflicts than with a gun.⁴⁸ Also, the settling of personal vendettas with a gun remains a promoted narrative in American military discussions and mass media, as core principles of revenge play out widely in its criminal justice and political systems.⁴⁹ Thus, the positioning of Black men in rap within a homicidal milieu illustrates how racial homogenization, poverty, economic marginalization, and public policy can actively contribute to Black rage and nihilism and present violence as a recognizable outlet for Black men’s gender role conflict resolution.

⁴⁴ O’Neil, Good, and Holmes, “Fifteen Years of Theory,” 166.

⁴⁵ James M. O’Neil, “Summarizing 25 Years of Research on Men’s Gender Role Conflict Using the Gender Role Conflict Scale: New Research Paradigms and Clinical Implications,” *Counseling Psychologist* 36 (2008): 358–445.

⁴⁶ Geneva Smitherman, “The Chain Remains the Same: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (1997): 3–25.

⁴⁷ Joy DeGruy Leary, “A Dissertation on African American Male Youth Violence: ‘Trying to Kill the Part of You That Isn’t Loved’” (PhD diss., Portland State University, 2001), 36.

⁴⁸ Ali, *Lessons Learned*.

⁴⁹ Richard V. Reeves and Sarah E. Holmes, “Guns and Race: The Different Worlds of Black and White Americans,” Bookings Institute-Social Mobility Memos, December 15, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2015/12/15/guns-and-race-the-different-worlds-of-black-and-white-americans/>.

Black American Men's Homicide Survivorship

Survival is an endemic aspect of Black men's lives, as the visible loss of Black men in the context of homicide has increased domestic and international awareness of the impact of race in the United States.⁵⁰ There is a concentrated disadvantage in urban and impoverished communities that places Black men at disproportionate risk for exposure to violence and trauma.⁵¹ Homicide represents a health disparity that positions Black men as vulnerable to premature violent death and traumatic loss, particularly when peers are murdered.⁵² As a result, Black male homicide survivors and their social networks are burdened with disproportionate experiences of loss, grief, and other mental and physical health concerns.⁵³

Homicide is the leading cause of death for Black youth aged ten to twenty-four in the United States, and among this population, the homicide rate is 51.5 deaths per 100,000.⁵⁴ This rate exceeds the combined homicide rates of Hispanic/Latinx men (13.5 per 100,000) and white men (2.9 per 100,000) of the same age range and amplify as young Black men enter adulthood.⁵⁵ Homicide remains the leading cause of death for Black men aged twenty-five to thirty-four, as more young Black men are killed annually than young men of any other racial-ethnic group in the United States.⁵⁶ With a stagnant statistic, and an abundance of historical precedence for Black male homicide, the conversation on homicide survivorship is not simply about preventing death in the Black community, but about how those left behind choose to recover and resume their lives.

⁵⁰ Jocelyn R. Smith-Lee and Michael A. Robinson, "'That's My Number One Fear in Life: It's the Police': Examining Young Black Men's Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting from Police Violence and Police Killings," *Journal of Black Psychology* 45, no. 3 (2019): 143-84.

⁵¹ Jocelyn R. Smith-Lee and Desmond Upton Patton, "Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Context: Examining Trauma Responses to Violent Exposure and Homicide Death Among Black Males in Urban Neighborhoods," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 86, no. 2 (2016): 212-23.

⁵² Jocelyn R. Smith, "Peer Homicide and Traumatic Loss: A Qualitative Examination of Homicide Survivorship among Low-Income, Young, Black Men" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2013).

⁵³ Osagie K. Obasogie and Zachary Newman, "Police Violence, Use of Force Policies, and Public Health," *American Journal of Law & Medicine* 43 (2017): 279-95.

⁵⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC), "Youth Violence: Facts at a Glance," 2012, http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv_datasheet_2012-a.pdf.

⁵⁵ CDC, "Youth Violence."

⁵⁶ Jocelyn R. Smith Lee, Andrea G. Hunter, Fernanda Priolli, and Veronica J. Thornton, "'Pray That I Live to See Another Day': Religious and Spiritual Coping with Vulnerability to Violent Injury, Violent Death, and Homicide Bereavement among Young Black Men," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 70 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2020.101180>.

Black Americans are at a disproportionate risk for experiencing traumatic loss of peers and, thus, becoming homicide survivors.⁵⁷ Alarming, the likelihood that Black youth will have someone close murdered is 7.8 times that of whites, and the risk is highest for young Black men.⁵⁸ Black homicides also have a higher chance of being reported in the media compared to the violent crimes of other races, and the perpetrator is often known to the victim, which further complicates the grieving process for survivors.⁵⁹ Black homicide survivors attempt to process their losses and are often confronted by paranoia and suspicion, as the relationships that are usually available in times of grief may be strained.⁶⁰

Anna Laurie and Robert A. Neimeyer maintain that Black people tend to eschew professional counseling methods due not only to a generations-entrenched distrust for systemic healthcare, but a strong aversion to appearing unstable to the rest of the community (e.g., revealing personal secrets and trauma).⁶¹ For such reasons, reliance on religion remains one of the more noteworthy homicide survivor bereavement strategies within the Black community.⁶² To fill the gap, Black homicide survivors often turn to the church and spiritual leaders to steer them through recovery with a familiar reference point. As Joleen Schoulte writes, though not all Black Americans identify with Christianity, many Christian influences are relevant to grieving for them.⁶³ In the case of Black male homicide survivors, religiosity and spirituality are crucial cultural and developmental assets that help them to process pain, construct meaning, find hope after homicide, and reduce fears of violent victimization and retaliation.⁶⁴ Moreover, religious and spiritual coping fosters posttraumatic growth among Black men.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Jocelyn R. Smith Lee, "Unequal Burdens of Loss: Examining the Frequency and Timing of Homicide Deaths Experienced by Young Black Men across the Life Course," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. S3 (2015): S483-S490.

⁵⁸ David Finkelhor, Richard Ormrod, Heather Turner, and Sherry L. Hamby, "The Victimization of Children and Youth: A Comprehensive, National Survey," *Child Maltreatment* 10 (2005): 5-25.

⁵⁹ Tanya L. Sharpe, Sean Joe, and Katie C. Taylor, "Suicide and Homicide Bereavement among African Americans: Implications for Survivor Research and Practice," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 66 (2013): 153-72.

⁶⁰ Anthony L. Bui, Matthew M. Coates, and Ellicott C. Matthey, "Years of Life Lost Due to Encounters with Law Enforcement in the USA, 2015-2016," *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 8 (2018): 715-18.

⁶¹ Anna Laurie and Robert A. Neimeyer, "African Americans in Bereavement: Grief as a Function of Ethnicity," *Omega Journal of Death and Dying* 57, no. 2 (2008): 173-93.

⁶² Smith, "Unequal Burdens of Loss."

⁶³ Joleen Schoulte, "Bereavement among African Americans and Latino/a Americans," *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 33, no. 1 (2011): 11-20.

⁶⁴ Smith Lee, Hunter, Priolli, and Thornton, "'Pray That I Live to See Another Day.'"

⁶⁵ Smith Lee, Hunter, Priolli, and Thornton, "'Pray That I Live to See Another Day.'"

But even a well-developed faith relationship cannot stave off some of the mental and social ramifications of homicide survivorship. Previous research has established a strong association between Black men's exposure to violence and the endorsement of posttraumatic stress symptoms.⁶⁶ In a study of traumatic events and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), A. L. Roberts, S. E. Gilman, J. Breslau, N. Breslau, and K. C. Koenen found that lifetime prevalence for PTSD was highest among Black Americans due to exposure to personal violence, and exposure to witnessing violence.⁶⁷ Three years later, Tanya L. Sharpe, Philip Osteen, Jodi Jacobsen Frey, and Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos examined the experiences of Black homicide survivors and found that no coping mechanisms were able to significantly reduce symptoms of PTSD felt by the survivors, even up to five years after the homicide victim's death.⁶⁸ Also, in this study, Black men were reported to be more likely than Black women to suppress outward demonstrations of their sorrow. For Black men, particularly, breaking through anger and grief to bring their deeper reactions to the surface, galvanize healing, and avoid retaliation is one of the dominant challenges of homicide survivor bereavement and treatment.⁶⁹ Accordingly, the ways in which Black men cope with trauma as homicide survivors speaks to the lack of support available to Black men who experience chronic community violence and a deeper need for traumatic stress screening, psychoeducational resources, and treatment services.⁷⁰

Methodology

The authors conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of rap tribute songs, authored by Black male rappers, in commemoration of the late Nipsey Hussle. Specifically, the researchers conducted an analysis of twenty-six rap tribute songs, authored by twenty-eight Black male rappers, to examine how Black male rappers articulated their experiences as homicide survivors and communicated grief. According

⁶⁶ Margartia Alegría, Lisa R. Fortuna, Julia Y. Lin, Fran H. Norris, Shan Gao, David T. Takeuchi, James S. Jackson, Patrick E. Shrout, and Anne Valentine, "Prevalence, Risk, and Correlates of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Across Ethnic and Racial Minority Groups in the United States," *Medical Care*, 51 (2013): 1114–23.

⁶⁷ A. L. Roberts, S. E. Gilman, J. Breslau, N. Breslau, and K. C. Koenen, "Race/Ethnic Differences in Exposure to Traumatic Events, Development of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and Treatment-Seeking for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the United States," *Psychological Medicine* 41 (2011): 71–83.

⁶⁸ Tanya L. Sharpe, Philip Osteen, Jodi Jacobsen Frey, and Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos, "Coping with Grief Responses among African American Family Members of Homicide," *Violence and Victims* 29, no. 2 (2014): 332–47.

⁶⁹ Tanya L. Sharpe, Derek Kenji Iwamoto, Johari M. Massey, and Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos, "The Development of a Culturally Adapted Pilot Intervention for African American Family Members of Homicide Victims: A Preliminary Report," *Violence and Victims* 33, no. 4 (2018): 708–20.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Purtle, Linda J. Rich, Sandra L. Bloom, John A. Rich, and Theodore J. Corbin, "Cost-Benefit Analysis Simulation of a Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 48 (2015): 162–69.

to Teun A. van Dijk, CDA is a form of discourse analytical research that investigates language as a social practice tied to specific cultural and political contexts.⁷¹ CDA recognizes the power of language and how it can contribute to oppression and be used for liberation.⁷² Thus, its approach is characterized by a realist social ontology, which regards both abstract social structures and concrete social events as parts of social reality.⁷³ From this perspective, CDA analysts provide a dialectical view of the relationship between structure and agency, the relationship between discourse and prominent social events (e.g., Nipsey Hussle's death), and the ways in which discourse reconstructs social life in processes of social change.⁷⁴ This was a key benefit to this research, as it considered the impacts of Nipsey Hussle's death on his homicide survivors and their bereavement expressions in rap music. Acknowledging the role of rap lyrics as texts that serve as "storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music" and their abilities to provide insight into the personal experiences of rappers, CDA enabled the researchers to take an observational role in the analysis of the examined rap tribute songs, focus on prevailing themes and storylines within the rap texts, and analyze Black male rappers' various ideologies about Nipsey Hussle's death and Black men's societal oppressions, grief, and homicide survivorship, among other topics.⁷⁵

The current study employed a criterion sampling technique, which enabled the researchers to construct a comprehensive understanding of phenomena by stating explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, including specifications for methodological rigor.⁷⁶ For the research, the authors sought to include rap tribute songs released by mainstream and underground rappers. As a consequence, a criterion sampling technique enabled them to select a diverse range of Black male rappers in terms of commercial success, regionality, social class, and underground rap origins. Thus, the criteria for inclusion were as follows: 1) the rap tribute song must be authored by a Black man; 2) the rap tribute song must be available on the streaming services of Amazon Music, Apple Music, Soundcloud, Spotify, and/or Tidal; and 3) the rap tribute song's original release date must occur between March 19, 2019, and September 30, 2020. Amazon, Apple Music, and Spotify were chosen based on subscribership and their

⁷¹ Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Study* (London: Sage, 1998).

⁷² Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁷³ Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis," *International Advances in Engineering and Technology* 7 (2012): 453–87.

⁷⁴ Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis."

⁷⁵ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2.

⁷⁶ Harsh Suri, "Purposeful Sampling in Qualitative Research Synthesis," *Qualitative Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (2011): 63–75.

status as three of the more popular music streaming platforms, with Soundcloud and Tidal being included to specifically target underground rap artists.⁷⁷ Additionally, the time period was significant, for it captured Nipsey Hussle's death date and all subsequent rap tribute songs released by Black male rappers to the date of this analysis.

When selecting the examined rap tribute songs, the authors used the following six keywords for searches: "Nipsey Hussle tribute song," "Nipsey Hussle rap tribute song," "Nipsey Hussle tribute song 2019," "Nipsey Hussle tribute song 2020," "Nipsey Hussle rap tribute song 2019," and "Nipsey Hussle rap tribute song 2020." After compiling the initial search results, a secondary filtering of the data was conducted to review each artist's biography, gender identity, and race, and to exclude non-Black men and women per the study's focus on Black male rappers. "Nipsey Hussle Tribute" instrumental songs were also excluded given the analysis of lyrical content. Based on these criteria, twenty-six rap tribute songs, authored by twenty-eight Black male rappers, were analyzed, and the researchers' transcribed lyrics from each rap tribute song, examining each song separately and then collectively, based on the rap artists who authored them. While conducting the CDA, the researchers investigated the rap tribute song's musical messages and captured significant discourse concerning each rapper's expression of grief and homicide survivorship in relation to Nipsey Hussle's death. Once data were collected, a qualitative inductive thematic analysis was conducted to discover prominent themes within the texts.

Overview of Findings

The twenty-six examined rap tribute songs revealed a number of complex and sometimes contradictory themes related to prior literature on Black American men's homicide survivorship bereavement strategies, CRT, and rap's homicide-related lyrics. It also furthered our understanding of the sociocultural functions of rap tribute songs as rhetorical expressions of Black men's homosociality and as laments of friends and rappers concerning deceased Black men. Dually functioning as insightful bereavement and commemorative narratives, the rap tribute songs of Black male rappers foregrounded the cultural impact and legacy of Nipsey Hussle through vivid accounts of his character attributes, entrepreneurial philosophy, and political teachings, and through personal memories of him. The rappers referred to Nipsey Hussle as "an example," "big brother," "fam[ily]," "[someone] influential," and a "peacemaker," among other endearing terms. Their adulation of Nipsey stressed that his murder was atypical compared to other slain rappers, and, instead, called his death a "blow to the [Black] culture." Additionally, they made direct references to previously murdered

⁷⁷ Christian de Looper and Steven Cohen, "The Best Music Streaming Services You Can Subscribe To," *Business Insider*, August 31, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/best-music-streaming-service-subscription>.

Black cultural figures (e.g., 2Pac, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and The Notorious B.I.G.) and described his death as a “wake-up call” for the Black community in terms of gun violence, rap’s homicidal culture, and presumed street violence in gang and urban communities. *Table 1* provides a listing of the positive names Black male rappers used to describe Nipsey Hussle.

A Banger with a Reason	Dead Homie
A Good Dude	Dedicated
A Real Big Brother	Different
A Real One	Don
A Real Peer	Entrepreneurial
A Real Solider	Fam[ily]
An Example	Fly Crip
Black Man Stirring Up Politics	Friend
Big Brother	Grammy-Nominated
Boss	Great
Brother	Hero
Brother from Another Color	Hussle the Great
Bright like a Lightbulb	Hustler
Cuh	Influential
Kin[folk]	Street Legend
King	Teacher
Not a Thug	The Great
Legend	The Motivation
Locc’d Out Crip Nigga	The New 2Pac
Loyal	The New Snoop [Dogg]
My Nigga	The Vibes
Peacemaker	Young 2Pac for this Generation
Powerful	
Respected	
Sacrificial	

Table 1 *Positive Names Black Male Rappers Used to Describe Nipsey Hussle*

In the rap tribute songs, Black male rappers expressed a variety of emotions, which ranged from anger, disbelief, and personal devastation to posttraumatic stress, suicidal thoughts, and vengeance declarations. The examined rappers candidly acknowledged feeling lost without Nipsey Hussle, shedding tears, and wanting to seek revenge toward his alleged murderer. Moreover, they detailed the posttraumatic stress incurred from repeated exposures to Nipsey Hussle and other Black men’s homicide deaths in Black and rap communities. Their discourses suggested a sense of fear and paranoia, as the rappers questioned the loyalty of their social circles, shared painful anxiety moments related to Nipsey Hussle’s death, and uttered traumatic fears that they

would be murdered next. In response, they vowed to “stay strapped” or carry guns for safety measures and “only hang with real niggas” and “shooters” who would protect them and murder enemies on their behalf.

Comprehensively, the examined rap tribute songs advanced three dominant themes in relation to the Black male rappers’ articulations of their homicide survivorship bereavement of Nipsey Hussle and the study’s analytical framework. The themes that we developed out of our critical discourse analysis are: 1) Black men’s grief, homosociality, and complex vulnerability narratives; 2) fear and paranoia declarations; and 3) resolution of internal conflict and grief with vengeance. *Table 2* displays frequencies and corresponding percentages and depicts the prominence of these themes in the twenty-six examined rap tribute songs. Ultimately, the emergent themes revealed the multidimensional grieving processes of Black male rappers and the complex ways in which they employed the expressive and therapeutic, rhetorical functions of rap tribute songs to publicly document homicide survivorship experiences, engage in grief work, and memorialize a rapper’s death.⁷⁸

Dominant Theme	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 26)	Percentage of Total
Black men’s grief and vulnerability narratives	18	69.2
Fear and paranoia declarations	13	50
Resolution of internal conflict and grief with vengeance	14	53.8

Table 2 Dominant Homicide Survivor Bereavement Themes Presented in Black Male Rappers’ Nipsey Hussle Rap Tribute Songs

Black Male Rappers Use Nipsey Hussle Rap Tribute Songs to Express Grieving Pains, Homosociality, and Complex Vulnerability

Complex grief and vulnerability narratives pervaded the rap tribute songs of Black male rappers as they chronicled the pain, stress, and trauma following Nipsey Hussle’s murder. In the musical compositions, all twenty-eight rappers expressed feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness, recounted despair and complicated grief pains, and communicated their difficult meaning-making processes in the aftermath of

⁷⁸ Oware, “Brotherly Love.”

his death. Throughout the sample, the rappers questioned the reality of Nipsey Hussle's murder and noted feeling "angry," "anxious," "depressed," "empty," "sick to their stomachs," and suicidal, among other emotions. For these men, Nipsey Hussle's death represented a cultural cataclysmic event that triggered previous memories of Black male homicidal deaths in rap and their surrounding communities, and subsequently, the recollections left them feeling defeated, fearful, hopeless, and stunned.

LGM Quis declared in "One Last Lap," "They done killed my nigga Nip, and it hurt me to my heart" and "I went crazy in my mind."⁷⁹ Cash B proclaimed, "Man this shit hurt. This shit dug deep," and admitted to waking up on April 1 and wishing Nipsey Hussle's death was a joke in "R.I.P. Nipsey."⁸⁰ Charlie Sky and Snap Dogg articulated comparative reactions. In "Nipsey Hussle Tribute," Charlie Sky declared, "Somebody tell me if this real ... I heard the news and caught chills. I don't even know how to feel" and questioned if death was "even worth a record deal?"⁸¹ Charlie Sky suggested a desire to forsake his current rap occupation in lieu of its homicidal culture and implications for Black male rappers. Likewise, Snap Dogg's "Fallen Solider" characterized Nipsey Hussle's death as "this nightmare feelin' like a dream" and even revealed the rapper's suicidal thoughts as he asked, "Lord tell me. Do you got some room for a thug?"⁸² As a social group, the rappers displayed the complicated grief often experienced by survivors of homicide, an event which prompts "protracted and impairing grief response to the loss of an attachment figure that is more debilitating and intractable than traditional grief trajectories."⁸³ Further, their lyrics implied key symptoms associated with complicated grief responses to homicide loss, which included avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, disbelief, and suicidality.⁸⁴

Rap tribute songs also outlined a number of personal coping mechanisms used by the rappers to assuage the traumatic anxiety, grief, and paranoia sustained from Nipsey Hussle's death and their violent environments. Coping methods included alcohol ("I put my pain in the bottle," Geechi Gotti and Poppa Chop),⁸⁵ comedy ("I crack a joke to hide the pain, it doesn't work," Earthgang),⁸⁶ marijuana ("I think I hit the

⁷⁹ LGM Quis, "One Last Lap (Nipsey Hussle Tribute)," 1111292 Records DK, 2019.

⁸⁰ Cash B, "R.I.P. Nipsey," Vision Records Entertainment, 2019.

⁸¹ Charlie Sky, "Nipsey Hussle Tribute," 907830 Records DK, 2019.

⁸² Snap Dogg, "Fallen Solider (Nipsey Hussle Tribute)," track 1 on *Fallen Solider (Nipsey Hussle Tribute)*, Bronco Boyz Entertainment, 2019.

⁸³ Rebecca J. Zakarian, Meghan E. McDevitt-Murphy, Benjamin W. Bellet, Robert A. Neimeyer, and Laurie A. Burke, "Relations among Meaning Making, PTSD, and Complicated Grief Following Homicide Loss," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2019.1565111>.

⁸⁴ Zakarian, McDevitt-Murphy, Bellet, Neimeyer, and Burke, "Relations."

⁸⁵ Geechi Gotti and Poppa Chop, "Condolences (Dedication to Nipsey)," track 9 on *NoStudioN 3.5, Ruin Your Day*, 2019.

⁸⁶ Earthgang, "This Side," track 6 on *Mirrorland*, 2019, Dreamville Records.

joint too hard, plus I'm tired of all this trash," Earthgang),⁸⁷ and most frequently mentioned, religion. It bears noting that mental health and psychological treatment services were not mentioned in any of the twenty-six examined rap tribute songs as potential grief coping options, denoting the longstanding tendency of Black male homicide survivors to eschew professional counseling methods and traumatic stress treatment services.⁸⁸ However, it bears noting that lyrics are performative, and the rappers might have sought medical services independent of a song's content.

Religious narratives permeated the rap tribute songs, for Black male rappers referenced religious concepts and teachings (e.g., love thy neighbor, reaping and sowing, spiritual healing) in an attempt to make meaning of not only Nipsey Hussle's death, but also their own fears of death and violence. Black male rappers admittedly prayed for fallen rap soldiers, Nipsey Hussle's family, and their "niggas and niggettes," while asking Allah and God to heal their bereavement pains and to hear their cries for help and protection. Kid3RD's "R.I.P. Nip" best embodied this rhetorical trend, professing, "People dying every day. On my knees praying to the Lord that He take death far away. On my knees praying to the Lord that you take this pain all away."⁸⁹ Poetic Lamar engaged Muslim religious beliefs and asked, "Oh my Allah, can you hear my cry? Tears for my soldier in the Southern Sky," LilCadiPGE asked God, "Why do all the legends die young," and Earthgang referenced God and accepted their own mortality amid rap's violent mythology, stating: "If it pleases God, I hope the shooter aim best. Then I can fly to better lands and Neverlands like Sandra Bland."⁹⁰ Consistent with Jocelyn R. Smith-Lee, Andrea G. Hunter, Fernanda Priolli, and Veronica J. Thornton's research on Black male homicide survivor coping strategies, religiosity and spirituality were crucial cultural and developmental assets that helped Black male rappers to process pain, construct meaning, find hope after homicide, and reduce fears of violent victimization and retaliation.⁹¹

Though most rappers expressed disbelief and sorrow, there were more introspective discussions of Nipsey Hussle's life and legacy that uplifted his mantra of "The Marathon Continues" and memorialized previous slain rappers. For instance, longtime friend and rapper on Nipsey Hussle's label, J. Stone, commemorated Nipsey Hussle's legacy ("[Barack] Obama wrote you a letter, what more can I say? ... 'The Marathon Continues,' that's what you would say"), shared details of his funeral

⁸⁷ Earthgang, "This Side."

⁸⁸ Purtle, Rich, Bloom, Rich, and Corbin, "Cost-Benefit Analysis Simulation."

⁸⁹ Kid3RD, "R.I.P. Nip (Nipsey Hussle Tribute)," track 1 on *Motiv8D*, R.L.G.G., 2019.

⁹⁰ Poetic Lamar, "Tribute Nipsey Hussle," track 3 on *Mourning Blues*, 2019; LilCadiPGE, *The Marathon Must Continue*, Pilot Gang Entertainment, 2019; Earthgang, "This Side."

⁹¹ Smith-Lee, Hunter, Priolli, and Thornton, "'Pray That I Live to See Another Day,'" 70.

("Stevie [Wonder] sang at your funeral, nigga, you the great"), and, most significantly, situated his murder within the context of prior Black male rapper homicides.⁹² In "The Marathon Continues," J. Stone cross-referenced Stephen "Fatts" Donelson, a thirty-year-old Los Angeles, California, rapper who was murdered in 2017, and stated, "Damn I wish Nip and Fats was here. How y'all die at thirty something after banging all them years?"⁹³ Comparably, Meek Mill's ode to Nipsey Hussle ("Letter to Nipsey") mentioned his fallen protégé, eighteen-year-old rapper Addarren "Lil Snupe" Ross, who was killed via gun violence in 2013.⁹⁴ J. Stone and Meek Mill's lyrics positioned homicide as a health disparity that disproportionately shortened the life expectancy of Black men in gang and urban communities due to social determinants of violence, which increased the propensity for crime, violence, and ultimately death. Furthermore, their commentary highlighted homicide's longstanding status as the leading cause of death for Black men aged twenty-five to thirty-four; an age range occupied by the named victims (Lil Snupe [eighteen], Fatts [thirty], and Nipsey Hussle [thirty-three]).⁹⁵

The rap tribute songs were not exclusively somber in tone. Homosociality narratives dominated the sample, as Black male rappers voiced brotherly love for Nipsey Hussle, and shared heartwarming memories and lessons learned from the late rapper. Similar to Oware's research, the twenty-six rap tribute songs expressed Black male rappers' love for Nipsey Hussle, while claiming familial bonds with Nipsey Hussle and the larger Hip Hop community. As griots of Nipsey Hussle's legacy, the rappers humanized him as a "motivation," a "real big brother," "friend," "homie," "good dude," "teacher," and someone who was entrepreneurial ("you sold a mixtape for a whole \$100. Jay-Z bought 100 copies, that's \$10,000"), exhibited unwavering loyalty ("and when them niggas went against me, you ain't change on me"),⁹⁶ provided intellectual stimulation ("he gave me books to read and shit like that"),⁹⁷ impacted dietary options ("he taught me alkaline, vegan since 2017, that's my diet and way of eating" [2 Official]),⁹⁸ and supported young rap artists ("you ain't have to do that for

⁹² J. Stone, "The Marathon Continues," track 1 on *The Definition of Loyalty*, All Money In Records, 2019.

⁹³ Nicole Santa Cruz, "Stephen Donelson, 30," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 2017, <https://homicide.latimes.com/post/stephen-donelson/>.

⁹⁴ Meek Mill and Roddy Ricch, "Letter to Nipsey," Atlantic Records, 2020; *Billboard Staff*, 2013.

⁹⁵ CDC, "Youth Violence."

⁹⁶ Meek Mill, "Letter to Nipsey" 2020.

⁹⁷ YG, "My Last Words," track 13 on *4REAL 4REAL*, Def Jam Recordings, 2019.

⁹⁸ 2 Official, "Nipsey Hussle," track 14 on *Everything Counts*, Family or Nothing Music Group, 2019; YG, "My Last Words," track 13 on *4REAL 4REAL*, Def Jam Recordings, 2019.

me on that ‘status symbol,’ but I’m thankful that you did” [LilCadiPGE]), among other touching accounts.⁹⁹

Many Black male rappers deviated from stereotypical guises of “strong Black men” and “gangster rappers” to openly engage in homosocial rhetoric and uplift other Black men in affirming and caring ways. For example, Yo Gotti reflected on Nipsey Hussle’s death and declared, “I done cried to my niggas (cried to my niggas) ‘cause real brothers really love each other” and proclaimed to younger, Memphis, Tennessee, rappers Blac Youngsta, BlocBoy JB, and Moneybagg Yo, “I love these niggas dearly” in “Untrapped.”¹⁰⁰ Reflecting on his message of unity, rappers accredited Nipsey Hussle’s passing as inspiration to “squash” existing disagreements and rivalries with other Black male rappers. Big Sean’s “Deep Reverence” cited Nipsey Hussle’s death as his motivation to “reach out to Kendrick [Lamar]” and discuss prior discrepancies, while analogously, Problem mildly acknowledged the possibility of resolving a longstanding, regional disagreement with rapper YG in “Janet Freestyle (Tribute to Nipsey Hussle).”¹⁰¹ The rappers collectively expressed love for not only Nipsey Hussle, but also perceived rap peers and rivals. Their lyrics exemplified the power of rap tribute songs to manifest positive and progressive, homosocial messages for Black men in times of despair and grief as homicide survivors.¹⁰²

However, in spite of this homosocial rhetoric, some Black male rappers still struggled to fully express bereavement and vulnerability. In these cases, rappers proclaimed, “real niggas don’t cry”; they only shed tears for Nipsey Hussle because he was a “real nigga,” and confessed to hiding and suppressing their emotions. An example of this discourse was Meek Mill and Roddy Ricch’s “Letter to Nipsey.” In the song, Meek Mill declared, “You made me cry, and I don’t cry, nigga,” while Roddy Ricch admitted to turning off his phone, throwing on shades, meditating, and “wishing to go blind to hide the tears.”¹⁰³ Nipsey Hussle’s protégé, LilCadiPGE, expressed similar sentiments in “The Marathon Must Continue,” as he told concerned listeners, “Don’t ask me if I’m straight!” after labeling Nipsey Hussle’s death as “traumatizing.”¹⁰⁴ Their contradictory yet multifarious narratives were significant to this study for two distinct reasons. First, they demonstrated Black men’s tendencies to suppress outward demonstrations and expressions of sorrow as homicide survivors.¹⁰⁵ Second, the lyrics

⁹⁹ LilCadiPGE, “The Marathon Must Continue.”

¹⁰⁰ Yo Gotti featuring Estelle, “Untrapped,” track 14 on *Untrapped*, Epic Records, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Big Sean and Nipsey Hussle, “Deep Reverence,” track 3 on *Detroit 2*, G.O.O.D. Music, 2020; Problem, “Janet Freestyle (Nipsey Hussle Tribute),” Diamond Lane Music Group, 2020.

¹⁰² Oware, “Brotherly Love.”

¹⁰³ Mill and Ricch, “Letter to Nipsey.”

¹⁰⁴ LilCadiPGE, “The Marathon Must Continue.”

¹⁰⁵ Sharpe, Osteen, Frey, and Michalopoulos, “Coping with Grief Responses.”

illuminated Hip Hop's gendered function as a "medium for Black men to give voice to their vulnerable situatedness" and how Black male rappers organize and negotiate their masculinity in distinct ways.¹⁰⁶ Together, these factors elucidated the complex emotionality of homicide survivors, and its interplay with Black masculinity.¹⁰⁷

"The Streets Is Done!" Black Male Rappers Share Death Fears and Vow to "Stay Strapped"

Nipsey Hussle's murder outraged Black male rappers into larger discussions of death anxiety, gun violence, and street code violations in Black urban communities and Hip Hop. In rap tribute songs, the rappers discussed the presence and frequency of crime, gun violence, poverty, and police brutality around them, while detailing how repeated, traumatic exposures to neighborhood violence and rap peer deaths (like that of Nipsey Hussle) left them fearful and paranoid for their own lives. Their discourses suggested a sense of fear and paranoia, as the rappers questioned the loyalty of their social circles, shared traumatic anxiety and stress related to Nipsey Hussle's death, and uttered fears that they would be murdered next.

Declaring "the streets is done," the rappers cited presumed violations of "the street code," which previously "articulated "powerful norms and characterize[d] public social relations among residents, particularly with respect to violence"¹⁰⁸ yet were being broken due to rap fame, government informants, "jealous niggas," lack of Black unity, incarceration, poverty, and social media clout chasers, among other factors. Pimpin Pat and Yo Gotti were most critical of the Black community and rap's cultural climate in relation to gun violence, homicide, and street code violations. In "Tribute to Nipsey Hussle," Pimpin Pat purported, "Black folks the only race that don't stick together, while every nigga on your team got a full clip. We only come together for memes and bullshit."¹⁰⁹ From Pimpin Pat's perspective, Black people suffered from self-hate stemming from internalized racism, jealousy, and poverty, and as a result of systemic oppression were more likely to kill one another in pursuit of clout, fame, and wealth. Relatedly, Yo Gotti questioned Hip Hop's sad state of affairs, condemning street code violations, gang culture, Internet gangsters, and "rats" or government informants who murdered and "snitched" on street peers for lighter federal prison sentences. The

¹⁰⁶ Keven James Rudrow, "'I Was Scared to Death': Storytelling, Masculinity, and Vulnerability in 'Wet Dreamz,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2020): 5. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2020.1741660>.

¹⁰⁷ Natalie Graham, "Cracks in the Concrete: Policing Lil Wayne's Masculinity and the Feminizing Metaphor," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 4, (2016).

¹⁰⁸ Charis E. Kubrin, "Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and the Code of the Street in Rap Music," *Social Problems* 52, no. 3, (2005): 363, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2005.52.3.360>

¹⁰⁹ Pimpin Pat, "Tribute to Nipsey Hussle," Pimp Mob LLC, 2019.

rappers viewed these social-structural perils as key contributors to the increased homicide deaths, social disorganization, and gun violence in the rap community. As a consequence, they felt trapped in rap and urban communities' milieu of gang banging, homicide, and violence "despite the hit songs."¹¹⁰

Black male rappers recognized that fame and wealth were simply not enough to protect them from the egregious violence of "the streets" and urged other rappers to watch their surroundings and "stay strapped" or carry guns for safety measures. In "Condolences (Dedication to Nipsey Hussle)," Geechi Gotti acknowledged the structural disadvantages Black male rappers faced as public figures, which from his vantagepoint, made them more susceptible to homicide. He declared, "When you young and you Black," rappers were left with two polarizing options: "You'll shoot or you get killed. This is really how it is."¹¹¹ As a result, Geechi Gotti "kept a steel [gun] in the ride" and stayed away from "fuck niggas," who would kill him if given the opportunity.¹¹² Of equal significance, Meek Mill stated that Nipsey Hussle's death "made me feel like I could die," and because of this anxiety, he was "scared to go outside without the flame [gun] on" him.¹¹³ Rap duo Earthgang communicated akin death fears and compared Nipsey Hussle's death to the deceased rapper Jahseh "XXXTentacion" Onfroy. In "This Side," they rapped, "They took Nip, took X, just a hatin' ass nigga. Hope that I ain't next" before warning listeners that "death around the corner."¹¹⁴ Poetic Lamar confirmed similar paranoia, rapping, "The same niggas I gave love, wanna see me dead. Catch me at the bodega and put two in my head.... Got me feeling like Nip bullets inside of me."¹¹⁵

In reaction to these fears, rappers advised rap peers to carry guns, "move safely in the streets," "watch who they trusted," and "don't fuck with niggas who ran the streets," while promising to "only hang with real niggas" and "shooters" who would protect them and kill on their behalf. In "Tribute Nipsey Hussle," Poetic Lamar bragged about hanging with "real gangsters" who aimed like professional basketball player "Steph Curry when they shoot" at his enemies, while Yo Gotti cautioned younger Black male rappers: "Don't get caught up in these streets, you one hit away."¹¹⁶ Recognizing the streets' violent social climate, KiD3RD advised rappers to watch their social circles

¹¹⁰ Big Sean, "Deep Reverence."

¹¹¹ Geechi Gotti and Poppa Chop, "Condolences (Dedication to Nipsey Hussle)," 2019.

¹¹² Geechi Gotti and Poppa Chop, "Condolences."

¹¹³ Mill and Ricch, "Letter to Nipsey."

¹¹⁴ Earthgang, "This Side."

¹¹⁵ Poetic Lamar, "Tribute Nipsey Hussle."

¹¹⁶ Yo Gotti, "Untrapped," track 14 on *Untrapped*, Epic Records, Roc Nation, and Collective Music Group, 2020.

and asserted, “Better watch who you make enemies with. Make sure the people around you legit.... Ever since Nip died, can’t take no more. I can’t ignore shit.”¹¹⁷

The rap tribute songs produced three significant themes in relation to Black men’s homicide survivorship and the positioning of guns as symbols of power, protection, and remedy in street culture. First, the rappers’ lyrics embodied common symptoms of posttraumatic stress and trauma produced by Black men’s violent exposures to homicide, such as anxiety, arousal, and reactivity in response to neighborhood violence-related stressors, hypervigilance, intrusive images of death, and prolonged distress. Second, the songs uncovered how Black male rappers’ prior life course exposures to Nipsey Hussle’s murder and other related homicide deaths informed their appraisals of presumed vulnerability to gun violence, which fueled their efforts to protect themselves from potential harm using guns. Aligning with the work of Tanya L. Sharpe, and C. Shawn McGuffey and Tanya L. Sharpe, the rappers made racial appraisals about gun violence and homicide that were informed by repeated exposures to death and violence, the permanence of racism in society, and the embeddedness of racism in law and criminal justice.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the rap tribute songs personified key tenets of CRT.¹¹⁹ Using rap lyrics, they made visible the subjugated realities of Black homicide survivors, while advancing astute counternarratives of their personal struggles with grief, homicide, posttraumatic stress, and racial trauma related to Nipsey Hussle’s death and “the problems of black urban life in contemporary America.”¹²⁰

Third, the rappers’ reliance on guns for protection corresponded with Deanna Wilkinson and Charis E. Kubrin’s research on urban community street codes and the positioning of the gun as a symbol of power and remedy for disputes.¹²¹ Wilkinson argues, “violence is thought to be the single most critical resource for achieving status among those who participate in street culture,” and for such reasons, guns raised the stakes of the street code even higher.¹²² Under this prism, guns were viewed as symbols of respect, identity, and power, had strategic survival value, and served as mechanisms

¹¹⁷ KiD3RD, “RIP Nip.”

¹¹⁸ Tanya L. Sharpe, “Understanding the Sociocultural Context of Coping for African American Family Members of Homicide Victims: A Conceptual Model,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 16, no. 1 (2015): 48–59; and C. Shawn McGuffey and Tanya L. Sharpe, “Racial Appraisal: An Integrated Cultural and Structural Response to African American Experiences with Violent Trauma,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Work* 3, no. 2 (2015): 55–61.

¹¹⁹ Sharpe, “Understanding the Sociocultural Context of Coping”; and McGuffey and Sharpe, “Racial Appraisal.”

¹²⁰ Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.

¹²¹ Deanna Wilkinson, “Violent Events and Social Identity: Specifying the Relationship between Respect and Masculinity in Inner-City Youth Violence,” *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth* 8 (2001): 231–65; Kubrin, “Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas,” 360–78.

¹²² Wilkinson, “Violent Events and Social Identity,” 243.

to deter future assaults.¹²³ For rappers invested in street culture, guns discouraged enemies from challenging them and built violent reputations that prevented future challenges. In the case of the examined rappers, “staying strapped” with guns functioned as both a coping mechanism and protective strategy that temporarily soothed death fears and posttraumatic stress symptoms related to their homicide survivorship bereavement. However, their actions concurrently upheld previously established street codes that promoted gun violence and murder as means of gender role conflict resolution and protection, did little to eradicate existing rhetorical themes of homicide and violence in rap culture and urban communities (e.g., the normalization of killing and masculine confrontation), and, thus, made the rappers complicit in the social problem under critique.

Black Male Rappers Seek Vengeance for Nipsey Hussle’s Death

In addition to eulogizing Nipsey Hussle’s life, Black male rappers consistently drew on rap’s homicidal themes of revenge and vengeance to resolve their anger toward his alleged murderer, Eric Holder. From their perspectives, murder and violence were the only viable forms of conflict resolution and retaliation for Nipsey Hussle’s homicide. The rappers loathed Holder as a “foul,” “jealous,” “fuck nigga” “informant,” and “rat,” who deserved to die and not simply be incarcerated for his crime. Baffled by the details of Nipsey Hussle’s death, the rappers advanced conspiracy theories and questioned why fellow rappers and street gangsters allowed Holder to kill Nipsey without violent consequences. Corresponding with Gwen Hunnicut and Kristy Humble Andrews’s research, the rappers normalized homicide and violence as appropriate revenge-seeking tools for Nipsey Hussle’s murder and against Holder and vowed to “apply pressure,” “hang him on the [railroad] tracks,” “kill his family,” and “tape him off” until he “burned in hell.”¹²⁴ *Table 3* outlines the negative names Black male rappers used to describe Nipsey Hussle’s alleged murderer.

Cold Nigga	Jealous Nigga
Clout Chaser	Informant
Foul	Rat
Fuck Nigga	Snake in Disguise
Hating Ass Nigga	Selfish
Hater	Troll
Hoe	Vulture
Jealous	Witness Protection Informant

Table 3 *Negative Names Black Male Rappers Used to Describe Nipsey Hussle’s Alleged Murderer*

¹²³ Kubrin, “Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas.”

¹²⁴ Hunnicut and Humble Andrews, “Tragic Narratives in Popular Culture.”

In the sample, rappers advanced conspiracy theories related to Nipsey Hussle's death. However, the most prevalent allegation contended that Holder was an informant sent by the government to murder the late rapper. Most notably, Cash B's "R.I.P. Nipsey" questioned if Nipsey Hussle's death was a government set-up and accused Holder of being a "witness protection informant," who the government would eventually "let ... off" and "move to another state to do another job." In response, he felt justice would not be properly served until Holder was dead and "hang him off the [railroad] tracks."¹²⁵ LilCadiPGE also mistrusted the police and rejected Holder's arrest for Nipsey Hussle's murder, "And we don't want him in no cell. We want more than jail. Tape him off, kill his family, tell him burn in hell."¹²⁶ For LilCadiPGE, Holder's wrongdoing provoked a violent response similar to capital punishment, and the rapper would not be satisfied until the alleged murderer was dead. Snap Dogg expressed similar desires and warned Holder, "If them niggas catch you out, I hope the lord bless you cause them niggas ain't gonna leave until somebody stretch you. They done took the wrong nigga's life."¹²⁷ His lyrics metaphorically referenced the act of sending a victim to the hospital for emergency treatment services and stressed his desires for violent revenge on behalf of Nipsey Hussle. Pledging to "slide on his dead homie's name," Poetic Lamar sought vengeance via "hittas" who would "slide for him" and kill Nipsey Hussle's murderer.¹²⁸

In the preceding examples, there was a language of militarization and readiness to kill, which inspired extreme methods of discipline and vengeance commonly referenced in American military culture. Through rap tribute songs, the rappers presented gun violence as a narrow yet viable avenue to ease grieving pains, resolve anger and conflict, and enact revenge, while assembling additional Black men and rap entourages to commit homicide. Their assertions reified rap's street codes of conflict resolution and hypermasculinity, promoted themes of contest and confrontation, and positioned homicide as a tool to avenge fallen rappers' deaths and seek justice. Most important, their vengeance actions, if successful, would further increase the number of Black-on-Black homicides and, in turn, produce more Black homicide survivors. Still, the rap tribute songs spoke to Black men's cultural distrust of law enforcement and the government in delivering justice to Black homicide survivors, which prompted the rappers to engage in horizontal homicides and vengeful self-help in the absence or weakness of legal protections and third-party control.¹²⁹ From this perspective, these gendered, violent forms of control, domination, and conflict resolution are indicative of

¹²⁵ Cash B, "R.I.P. Nipsey."

¹²⁶ LilCadiPGE, "The Marathon Must Continue."

¹²⁷ Snap Dogg, "Fallen Soldier."

¹²⁸ Poetic Lamar, "Tribute Nipsey Hussle."

¹²⁹ Alan V. Horowitz, *The Logic of Social Control* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990).

the concentration of economic disadvantage and violence in their urban neighborhoods, established street codes that laud homicide as vengeance-seeking means, and the amplification of guns as dispute resolvers in American cultural values and military practices.

Conclusion

Nipsey Hussle's murder represented a cultural cataclysmic event that startled the Hip Hop community and triggered previous memories of Black men homicidal deaths in rap and Black American urban communities. Most significant to this study, Nipsey Hussle's death inspired touching rap tribute songs by Black male rappers, who sought to express their bereavement pain as survivors of his legacy. As a consequence, this study investigated twenty-six rap tribute songs, which were authored by twenty-eight Black male rap artists in commemoration of Nipsey Hussle's life and legacy. The findings revealed complex, yet contradictory, themes related to existing scholarship on Black American men's homicide survivorship bereavement strategies, CRT, rap's homicide-related lyrics, and the sociocultural functions of rap tribute songs as rhetorical expressions of Black men's homosociality and laments of deceased Black male friends and rappers. In rap tribute songs, Black male rappers foregrounded the cultural impact and legacy of Nipsey Hussle through vivid accounts of the rapper's character attributes, entrepreneurial philosophy and political teachings, and personal memories.

Detailing their homicide survivorship bereavement experiences, they expressed a variety of emotions, which ranged from anger, disbelief, and personal devastation to posttraumatic stress, suicidal thoughts, and vengeance declarations. Based on this study's analytical framework, the examined rap tribute songs advanced three dominant themes in relation to the Black male rappers' articulations of their homicide survivorship bereavement of Nipsey Hussle: 1) Black men's grief, homosociality, and complex vulnerability narratives, 2) fear and paranoia declarations, and 3) resolution of internal conflict and grief with vengeance.

Our findings bear significance to Hip Hop studies, for our study illustrated how twenty-eight Black male rap artists leveraged the rhetorical power of rap tribute songs to articulate their complex homicide survivor bereavement processes, advance vital counternarratives concerning Black men's mental health experiences with repeated exposure to homicide deaths and violence in rap and urban communities, and offer rich criticisms of gun violence, internalized racism, poverty, and systemic oppression. While sharing these narratives, this research advanced a timely criticism of the social problems of gun violence and homicide in the United States. Since the murder of Nipsey Hussle, homicide-related deaths in rap continue to increase, with recent examples including Adolph "Young Dolph" Thornton, Melvin "Mo3" Noble, Dayvon "King Von" Bennett, Rudolph "Lil Marlo" Johnson, and Pop Smoke.

Reflecting on the violent deaths of Black male rappers, Fabolous declared in a 2020 Instagram story, “Respectfully ... being a rapper has become one of the most dangerous job in America. Black men are surviving the trenches, constant battles in a war zone environment ... and somehow still end up dead or in jail.”¹³⁰ His sentiments echoed previous statements from Jim Jones, who described the career choice as “harder than fighting a war in Iraq.”¹³¹ The major themes found in these Nipsey Hussle rap tribute songs exposed the cultural conditions under which Black male rappers publicly navigated homicide survivorship in lieu of Nipsey Hussle’s death and, most significantly, repeated exposure to gun violence in their respective communities. As lyrical compositions, the examined rap tribute songs commemorated Nipsey Hussle yet revealed that the tragic side of rap’s gangster, inner-city biosphere, which deeply threatens the life expectancies of Black male rappers, will likely yield more Black homicide victims and, tragically, result in more Black male homicide survivors and rap tribute songs.

Yet, there remain further questions for future studies of Nipsey Hussle’s homicide murder and its cultural impact on Black American culture and Hip Hop studies. For instance, how do we explain Nipsey Hussle’s posthumous popular notoriety, and what will potential mediated commodification mean for the preservation of his cultural legacy? What are we, as Hip Hop studies scholars, to make of the enduring assassination accusations of Nipsey Hussle raised by the examined artists, given the propensity of rap’s homicidal deaths and unsolved murders? The notable absence of references to professional mental health services by Black male rapper homicide survivors remains a consistent trend in Hip Hop and a larger society; why does this problem persist in Black men’s grief studies? These answers could not be answered given the scope of our analysis, yet indubitably prompt additional analyses of Black men’s homicide survivorship bereavement experiences, Hip Hop studies, and Nipsey Hussle worthy of future scholarly queries.

¹³⁰ Mike Winslow, “Jim Jones, Fabolous Say Rapping Is the Most Dangerous Job in the United States,” *All Hip Hop*, December 11, 2020, <https://allhiphop.com/news/jim-jones-fabolous-rapping-most-dangerous-job/>

¹³¹ Winslow, “Jim Jones, Fabolous.”

APPENDIX A

List of Nipsey Hussle Tribute Songs Examined

Artist Stage Name	Song Title	Release Date (in chronological order)
LGM Quis	"One Last Lap"	April 2, 2019
Charlie Sky	"Nipsey Hussle Tribute"	April 3, 2019
Geechi Gotti (featuring Poppa Chop)	"Condolences (Dedication to Nipsey)"	April 5, 2019
LilCadiPGE	"The Marathon Must Continue"	April 5, 2019
Snap Dogg	"Fallen Soldier"	April 7, 2019
Pimpin Pat	"Tribute to Nipsey Hussle"	April 15, 2019
Ghost Omega	"Nipsey Hussle Tribute"	April 17, 2019
Cash B	"RIP Nipsey"	April 21, 2019
Pappi Nixon	"Nipsey Hussle"	May 8, 2019
DJ Khaled	"Higher (featuring Nipsey Hussle, John Legend)"	May 17, 2019
YG	"My Last Words"	May 23, 2019
J. Stone	"The Marathon Continues"	June 10, 2019
2 Official	"Nipsey Hussle"	July 4, 2019
Poetic Lamar	"Tribute Nipsey Hussle"	August 11, 2019
Snoop Dogg	"Nipsey Blue"	August 14, 2019
Benji Stone featuring Stonie	"Bad News"	August 21, 2019

Rif	"Nipsey Hussle"	August 23, 2019
Ar Wings	"Nipsey Hussle"	August 24, 2019
Kid3rd	"R.I.P. Nip (Nipsey Hussle Tribute)"	August 30, 2019
Earthgang	"This Side"	September 6, 2019
SwaveyDuPree	"Lifted Up"	October 25, 2019
Meek Mill featuring Roddy Ricch	"Letter to Nipsey"	January 26, 2020
Yo Gotti	"Untrapped (featuring Estelle)"	January 31, 2020
Problem	"Janet Freestyle (Remix)"	May 15, 2020
Da Gweed	"TMC (Tribute to Nipsey Hussle)"	May 31, 2020
Big Sean	"Deep Reverence (featuring Nipsey Hussle)"	September 4, 2020
Dom Kennedy	"Saint Ermias"	September 25, 2020

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