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Abstract

The release of Lauryn Hill's 1998 album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* was a watershed moment in the history of hip-hop and the intersection between music and race. On this album, Hill created a narrative that embraced Black love, attempted to educate audiences, and drew on Black musical heritage, elevating Black womanhood and nuancing perceptions of Blackness in American culture. Through musical and lyrical analysis, this paper explores the importance of Miseducation's narrative within the cultural milieu of the late 1990s and its continuing impact on hip-hop and Black American culture.

Keywords

Lauryn Hill, Miseducation of Lauryn Hill, hip-hop, rap, race

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Tomorrow Our Seeds Will Grow: The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill and the Changing Landscape of Hip-Hop

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On August 25, 1998, in what would become a watershed moment in the history of hip-hop, Lauryn Hill released the classic album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. Rap was a site of Black identity formation through authenticity, history, and education, as well as an important location for Black interaction with the White gaze and notions of gender, and this landmark work both drew on hip-hop's heritage and expanded its boundaries. On *Miseducation*, Hill created a narrative that embraced Black love, attempted to educate audiences, and drew on Black musical heritage, elevating Black womanhood and nuancing perceptions of Blackness in American culture. In so doing, she played an important role in defining hip-hop as it entered the mainstream and deeply influenced the future of both the art form and Black American culture more broadly.

Hip-hop emerged in the South Bronx in the 1970s, a period shaped by deindustrialization and economic downturn. As funding was sucked out of cities, the Black middle class fled to the suburbs, and poor Black urban communities experienced displacement due to urban renewal efforts and exploding incarceration rates.¹ Hip-hop attempted to negotiate experiences of oppression due to these changing conditions and provide an alternative for Black youth whose community support had functionally been destroyed.² While hip-hop was originally characterized by DJ-ing, breakdancing, and graffiti art, rappers, known as MCs, soon entered the picture and became increasingly important over time.³ Rap remained largely ignored by the mainstream until the 1980s,

¹ Rose, 30.

² Rose, 21–22.

³ Rose, 53–54.

during which its commercial potential became increasingly clear.⁴ In less than a decade, hip-hop, originally a subculture influenced by Black urban youth's responses to post-industrialization, became a billion-dollar industry edging ever closer to the mainstream.⁵

In response to these conditions, rap developed complicated relationships to Black identity, evoked through notions of authenticity, history, and education. Authenticity, or "keeping it real," was central to hip-hop and linked to familiarity with working-class Black urban landscapes. The 1980s saw the rise of "gangsta rap" or the "thug ethos," which emphasized illicit activities and street life, and was the dominant way rappers projected authenticity by the 1990s.⁶ Of course, this erased large portions of the Black public, and the thug ethos was justifiably critiqued for its embrace of Black stereotypes.⁷ However, it remained an attempt to locate an authentic Black identity in a hostile environment and inject social critique into American popular culture.⁸ While it was no unified political critique, rap attempted to maintain a commitment to the community of disenfranchised urban Black youth from which it stemmed, which is why authenticity was so important.⁹

Education was also a key part of rap's relationship to Black identity. More than simply providing entertainment or critique, rappers spread information and attempted to expand the imagination of their audiences.¹⁰ Socially conscious or "message" rap challenged listeners with moral visions of Black liberation, sometimes through religion or spirituality.¹¹ These social visions were expansive and in flux, reflecting the diversity of Black experience, and rap became a tool to articulate and pass on multifaceted notions of Black identity.

Finally, rap emphasized Black history, in part through sampling technology, which recognized past musicians' roles in Black culture.¹² Like other Black American musical forms, rap retained characteristics of

⁴ George, 102.

⁵ Neal, *What the Music Said*, 150.

⁶ Ogbar, 42–43.

⁷ Spence, 35.

⁸ Adjaye and Andrews, 170.

⁹ Perry, 47.

¹⁰ Spears, 221.

¹¹ Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 316–317.

¹² Jackson and Richardson, 210.

African music, like rhythmic complexity, varied repetition, and breaks in pitch and time.¹³ Moreover, it has been argued that rap retained interpretive frameworks of African music, particularly in regard to repetition.¹⁴ Repetition is part of every culture but understood differently. While western music is organized teleologically, attempting to conceal repetition by moving toward a goal, African music uses repetition to provide circulation and equilibrium, emphasized by occasional ruptures.¹⁵ These features are clearly present in rap. In addition, hip-hop was explicitly nostalgic for the era of Black Power, and in the 1980s and 1990s, nostalgia-based narratives gained significant traction in Black popular culture.¹⁶

In addition to Black identity, hip-hop was a significant part of Black cultural interaction with White society. As it moved toward the mainstream, control over profit-making shifted from rappers to corporations.¹⁷ Rappers, though their work often challenged White establishment power, risked commodification and a destructive impact on the communities they sought to represent, and the rise of the thug ethos was coupled with growing consumerism and conspicuous consumption in hip-hop.¹⁸ Part of rap's original appeal was that it represented an alternative to the American music industry's mass commodification of Black expression, but in the 1990s, rappers began trying to appeal to broader audiences, which many fans saw as selling out to capitalism and disrupting hip-hop's communal composition.¹⁹ The hip-hop generation faced the complex task of trying to "keep it real" but "still get paid," which drew loyalties and authenticity into question.²⁰ At the same time, many older middle-class Black people feared that hip-hop would harmfully impact how Blackness was perceived because of its use of tropes of violence and illegal activity.²¹ Hip-hop was a space for the Black community to work out its understanding of race, but this was always constrained by its subjection to the White gaze.

¹³ Rose, 67.

¹⁴ Floyd, 5.

¹⁵ Rose, 69–70.

¹⁶ Neal, *What the Music Said*, 126.

¹⁷ Rose, 40.

¹⁸ Perry, 200.

¹⁹ Perry, 77.

²⁰ Neal, *Soul Babies*, 194.

²¹ Perry, 45.

During the 1990s, hip-hop became a major part of the culture wars. Rap was scapegoated by mainstream media outlets as a degenerate monolith responsible for crime and violence.²² At the same time, it was being annexed by White America. White teenagers have become a significant portion of rap's audience, in keeping with Black music's long history of White appropriation.²³ Black social dysfunction was commodified in mainstream American culture, fueling demands for violent and misogynistic portrayals of Blackness in hip-hop.²⁴ The genre appeared to offer a peek into the exciting underbelly of Black urban life, and while it gave that life its most humane and insightful treatment, these problems remained.²⁵ One of the most significant issues was gender, and in the 1990s, hip-hop took a particularly sexist turn.

Hip-hop was traditionally seen as a Black male cultural space, and by the 1990s, misogynistic discourse was a central aspect of the thug ethos.²⁶ Because masculinity and misogyny were signals of hip-hop authenticity, female rappers faced difficulties. Early on, they presented in masculine ways to be taken seriously, but by the mid-90s, rappers like Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown took on hypersexual feminine roles and adopted the braggadocio and materialism of the thug ethos, using sexuality as part of a conception of Black female working-class authenticity.²⁷ These public displays of sexual freedom challenged notions of female sexuality, but they also played into pernicious stereotypes about Black women, including teenage pregnancy and single motherhood.²⁸ These attitudes articulated both empowerment and complicity in sexist tropes, and much of the Black public feared they would negatively impact perceptions of Black women.²⁹

On the other hand, many Black female rappers, such as MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Salt-N-Pepa attempted to critique hip-hop misogyny. Many of these women rejected the feminist label because of its connotations as a White women's movement with racial blindspots, and while they challenged misogyny, they did so in dialogue with Black men, noting

²² Ogbar, 111.

²³ Rose, 5.

²⁴ Neal, *What the Music Said*, 131.

²⁵ Perry, 93.

²⁶ Perry, 175.

²⁷ Perry, 45–46.

²⁸ Ogbar, 86.

²⁹ Perry, 168.

that sexism was a symptom of larger issues of oppression.³⁰ A notion of hip-hop feminism, which rejected misogyny, celebrated Black womanhood, and offered an alternative to popular stereotypes, began to gain traction after its articulation by author Joan Morgan in the 1990s.³¹ But female contributions to hip-hop were still downplayed. For example, scholar Nelson George wrote in 1998 that no female rappers had made essential contributions to the genre and that “hip hop has produced no Bessie Smith, no Billie Holiday, no Aretha Franklin.”³² This was critiqued at the time as reductive, but later that year it would become inarguably absurd.

The tipping point was *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. Hill began her career as a member of the Fugees, her trio with Haitian rappers Pras and Wyclef Jean. The group, whose name came from the word “refugees,” emphasized their Haitian heritage and defied borders between the music of the Caribbean and the United States, broadening hip-hop’s ethnic landscape.³³ Hill, an African American from New Jersey and self-proclaimed Haitian by association was a major asset to the group as a singer and MC.³⁴ After the success of their second album, *The Score*, she began writing and producing for artists like Common and Aretha Franklin and experienced several personal transitions, including a messy end to her romantic relationship with Wyclef and her first pregnancy.³⁵ She also began work on a solo project for Columbia imprint Ruffhouse Records, which quickly became one of the most anticipated albums of 1998. When *Miseducation* was released in late August, it dominated the Billboard 200 and R&B charts for four weeks straight and set the record for top-selling album by a female solo artist.³⁶ It also won five Grammy awards.³⁷ But most significant were its impacts on hip-hop’s future. *Miseducation* nuanced perceptions of Black identity surrounding love, education, and musical heritage; provided alternative narratives of Black womanhood; and led hip-hop into the mainstream.

³⁰ Rose, 182.

³¹ Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come*, 22.

³² George, 184.

³³ Light, 378–379.

³⁴ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 5.

³⁵ Light, 376.

³⁶ Watkins, 71–72.

³⁷ Light, 376–377.

Miseducation is a concept album united by skits in which a classroom of children discuss love, guided by Newark city councilman Ras Baraka. It can be interpreted through the following loose narrative. After a skit introduction, the first three tracks, “Lost Ones,” “Ex-Factor,” and “To Zion,” describe personal experiences in love and its uncertainties. Next, “Doo Wop (That Thing),” “Superstar,” and “Final Hour” form a section of community critique which examines sexuality and materialism. “When It Hurts So Bad,” “I Used to Love Him,” and “Forgive Them Father” discuss life lessons gained through experience. The album concludes with celebrations of childhood heritage (“Every Ghetto, Every City”), romantic love (“Nothing Even Matters”), and a hopeful future for Black youth (“Everything Is Everything” and “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill”). The album begins in a state of pain and gradually moves toward a celebration of Black selfhood, embracing complexities and challenges along the way.

One of *Miseducation*’s most important themes is love of self, God, and others as a foundation of Black identity. Neo-soul’s influence is one indicator of this. Placing itself in a continuum with classic soul, the neo-soul genre attempted to provide message-oriented music and sonic experimentation as an alternative to contemporary commercialized rap and R&B.³⁸ It sought to articulate a hip-hop conception of love and represent the Black experience with emotional vulnerability, and Hill herself said that she wanted to push the envelope of hip-hop with a more raw emotional character.³⁹ Her vocal style and orientation toward socially conscious content evoked neo-soul, which assisted her in leaning into the complexities and vulnerabilities of love, expressing pain and despair as well as hope by reflecting on personal relationships and the broader struggles of Black life.⁴⁰

The skits, which acted as a kind of glue for the album, were about love as defined by young children, and they were juxtaposed with Hill’s words, serving as a kind of generational dialogue about love. “Lost Ones” and “Ex-Factor” opened the album with back-to-back portrayals of the same experience (breakup with a lover, speculated to be Jean) with contrasting emotional qualities. “Lost Ones” was a reggae-influenced rap track that centered on anger, whereas “Ex-Factor,” a vulnerable R&B track, betrayed a more complicated set of emotions related to love and

³⁸ Rabaka, *The Hip-Hop Movement*, 197.

³⁹ Rabaka, *Hip-Hop’s Inheritance*, 156–157.

⁴⁰ Brooks, 183.

loss. “Ex-Factor” had no clear resolution, often centering on an A flat minor sonority but never fully committing to it with a solid cadence, pointing to a lack of clarity and closure.⁴¹ Hill left this exploration of the pitfalls of romance unfinished, and the next track, “To Zion,” described another kind of love, namely her journey toward motherhood and her love for her son, which was fraught with uncertainty and fear at the beginning of her pregnancy. The harmonic ambiguity between E major and its relative C# minor throughout the song demonstrated this, but “To Zion” ended with a triumphant gospel confirmation of E major, creating a resolution not present in the earlier depictions of the romantic.⁴² These tracks, with their deeply personal descriptions of love in all its complications, provided nuanced images of different types of love.

When Hill returned to personal representations of love on “When It Hurts So Bad,” she used looping vocals and repetitive text to dwell on the pain of romantic love. The dominant occurred only twice, creating a high point of tension on the line “But I, I loved the young man / and if you’ve ever been in love then you’ll understand” with an impassioned melisma.⁴³ Love was placed at the center of the track, here experienced through a great deal of pain. However, this began to shift in the following songs. “I Used To Love Him” turned from romantic failures to a foundation of self-love and love of God.⁴⁴ This was later followed by “Nothing Even Matters,” the first positive song about romantic love on the album, which was now possible with this new foundation. Like “When It Hurts So Bad,” this R&B-influenced track was full of ornamentation, but it was now used to celebrate love rather than lament its fallout.⁴⁵

While these personal aspects of love were deeply important, Hill also demonstrated care for her community. In the section I have dubbed community critique (“Doo Wop,” “Superstar,” and “Final Hour”), Hill raised concerns out of a sense of love and belonging in her community. While “Doo Wop,” which examined sexuality and materialism, has been criticized as anti-feminist, it was clearly created with compassion. “Don’t think I haven’t been through the same predicament,” Hill rapped,

⁴¹ Hill, “Ex-Factor,” *Miseducation*.

⁴² Hill, “To Zion,” *Miseducation*.

⁴³ Hill, “When It Hurts So Bad,” *Miseducation*.

⁴⁴ Hill, “I Used To Love Him,” *Miseducation*.

⁴⁵ Hill, “Nothing Even Matters,” *Miseducation*.

identifying herself with the people she was criticizing.⁴⁶ While her critiques were occasionally quite biting, they were always framed with love and respect. This love is also clear in “Every Ghetto, Every City,” a nostalgic love letter to Hill’s home and roots. The hook’s melody was interpolated from sitcom *Welcome Back Kotter*, and the claps, maracas, and funk-influenced bassline created a childlike, nostalgic feeling.⁴⁷ It was also extremely cyclical, both in the samples, which came from looped house music, and the chord progressions themselves, including a chromatic descent from V to I during the hook. The tune ended with Hill’s voice alone on the words “looking back.” The whole song emphasized return, both to the tonic and to home. The track also situated Hill in the urban hood of New Jersey, solidifying her credibility and demonstrating a respect for her home and community in which to ground her critiques.

The final tracks continued in this vein. “Everything is Everything” preached a hopeful vision for Black youth despite difficult conditions. Lines like “change it comes eventually” and “tomorrow our seeds will grow” emphasized possibilities for liberation, which were also clear in the track’s use of musical cycles. “Everything is Everything” was remarkably simple, with constant V to i harmonic motion and an easily recognizable bass ostinato that repeated throughout. This cyclical repetition reinforced the inevitability of positive change, and the line “Let’s love ourselves and we can’t fail,” placed self-love at the center of this paradigm shift.⁴⁸ The album ended with “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” a song about finding one’s own dreams and identity, bridging personal and communal orientations and creating a profound statement of self-love that encouraged others to find the same. This was far from the anger at the beginning of the album and showed a journey toward the triumph of Black love and identity.

Education was the next element of Hill’s interaction with Blackness. *Miseducation* was certainly intended to teach, which Hill pointed to in the very title of the album, borrowed from Carter Woodson’s *Miseducation of the Negro*.⁴⁹ Her messages on the community critique section of the album were the clearest examples of her attempts to educate audiences, inviting them to consider their values regarding

⁴⁶ Hill, “Doo Wop (That Thing),” *Miseducation*.

⁴⁷ Hill, “Every Ghetto, Every City,” *Miseducation*.

⁴⁸ Hill, “Everything is Everything,” *Miseducation*.

⁴⁹ Jackson and Richardson, 214.

concepts like sexuality and materialism. “Superstar” and “Final Hour” projected authenticity as she made these critiques. “Hip-hop started out in the heart / Now everybody tryin’ to chart,” “Superstar’s” opening line, implicitly asserted Hill’s contrasting artistic integrity, which she laid out more explicitly in her rap verse.⁵⁰ “Final Hour,” a completely original track with some of Hill’s most sophisticated bars, including internal rhymes and assonance, centered her voice through the sparseness of the accompaniment.⁵¹ Her sheer talent as an MC was a crucial tool to project authenticity, and it is no coincidence that these extremely well-crafted verses, which legitimized her status as a rapper, were used to offer profound critique to her community.

Education through experience was also important. Hill was famously missing from the roll call in the introductory skit, where her name was called twice without a response.⁵² Instead, she received her education in love through difficult experiences, and she shared her betrayal and pain as lessons for her community, particularly on “When It Hurts So Bad,” “I Used to Love Him,” and “Forgive Them Father.” “When It Hurts So Bad” described the pain of loving someone who does not value you in return, and “I Used to Love Him” turned to the lesson Hill took from this experience—that being grounded in self-respect and love of God was a way to avoid this kind of heartbreak—and this track served as the turning point of the album, allowing celebration to become the dominant theme after the articulation of this foundational lesson.⁵³ Hill arrived at these conclusions through personal experience and passed them on, fulfilling the role of educator to her community. The final two tracks served as a culmination of the lessons offered thus far, providing a word of hope to Black youth to love themselves and achieve their dreams.

Hill also incorporated a wide spectrum of Black musical heritage. She intentionally wrote herself into the African diaspora with the Fugees, and her solo work continued to emphasize Black music’s global nature.⁵⁴ The influence of reggae was prominent throughout, most clearly on “Lost Ones,” which interpolated reggae anthem “Bam Bam” and “Forgive Them Father,” which featured reggae artist Shelly Thunder and sampled Bob Marley. Neo-soul was also crucial. Original soul queens like Nina

⁵⁰ Hill, “Superstar,” *Miseducation*.

⁵¹ Hill, “Final Hour,” *Miseducation*.

⁵² Hill, “Intro,” *Miseducation*.

⁵³ Hill, “I Used to Love Him,” *Miseducation*.

⁵⁴ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 14.

Simone and Aretha Franklin provided neo-soul artists with lyrical, musical, and political models, a continuum which Hill intentionally placed herself in.⁵⁵ This was in part through her use of the contralto range, which has traditionally been linked to Black female vocality, especially soul, and Hill's voice provided a sonic link to these past soul singers.⁵⁶ Her orientation toward social messages also drew on soul and fit the nostalgic milieu of the 1990s, which sought to use the symbols of the Black Power era in a new context.⁵⁷ In addition, Hill drew on the Black church, using a gospel choir on "To Zion" and religious language throughout.⁵⁸

Of course, *Miseducation* was primarily a hip-hop album, and Hill's rap verses affirmed her status as a star MC. However, by drawing on these diverse aspects of Black musical heritage, Hill was able to infuse hip-hop with them, bringing history to bear for a new generation. This is perhaps best exemplified in "Doo Wop." Its callback to the doo wop of the 1950s and 1960s was explicit in the title, harmonies, samples, and especially the split screen music video, which featured two versions of Hill, one in a zebra-print skirt set and beehive hairstyle alongside another with dreadlocks, hoop earrings, and a denim jacket, addressing block parties from the 1960s and 1990s, respectively.⁵⁹ This visual component placed Hill's contemporary critiques of sexuality and materialism on a continuum with the past, but it was merely the most explicit expression of what her evocation of the wide range of Black musical history accomplished throughout the album. By incorporating this diverse musical heritage, Hill expanded hip-hop's palette and tied the messages of her music to a broader tradition of Black history.

Hill's portrayal of Black womanhood also had significant effects. *Miseducation* played a major role in hip-hop history, but the fact that Hill was a woman made her accomplishments even more remarkable. The masculine-defined thug ethos of the 1990s meant women were increasingly shut out of hip-hop, but Hill found massive commercial success with a portrayal of Black women which did not shy away from

⁵⁵ Rabaka, *The Hip-Hop Movement*, 168, 176.

⁵⁶ Brooks, 186.

⁵⁷ Perry, 55.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 88.

⁵⁹ Hill, "Doo Wop (That Thing)," YouTube video.

female sexual power and pleasure but was not exclusively focused on those things, presenting women as full, complex human beings.⁶⁰

This multifaceted view of Black womanhood was especially significant in a genre associated with misogyny and objectification of women, and Hill challenged audiences to engage with Black female voices, not just bodies.⁶¹ Songs like “Lost Ones” created space for anger without pleading or sadness, which Black women were discouraged from expressing in popular music before this point.⁶² Hill broke boundaries as a rapper, singer, actor, producer, writer, artist, and mother, transcending tropes while using lyrics that were “not decidedly feminist,” presenting a complex portrait of Black womanhood.⁶³ Perhaps counterintuitively, her body was an important part of this message. Dark-skinned Black women with dreadlocks were not upheld as beautiful in White society and were rare even in hip-hop video. But when Hill was featured in mainstream magazines with an unapologetically Black aesthetic, it was groundbreaking representation for many Black girls and women.⁶⁴ Ultimately, Hill created space for herself and other Black women to cathartically express themselves and be seen in a more human light.

Hill’s attitudes toward sexuality were a controversial part of this. Her sophisticated rapping skills and focus on edifying messages made her a clear alternative to the hypersexualized female rappers of the 90s, which attracted listeners who were uncomfortable with more explicit expressions of sexuality.⁶⁵ Hill critiqued the hypersexual aesthetic, most notably on “Doo Wop,” which has often been interpreted as a foreshadowing of her later social conservatism and critiqued in that light.⁶⁶ While these criticisms are certainly important, it has also been argued that the song advocated for Black women’s right to be contradictory.⁶⁷ Hill criticized Black women with “hair weaves like Europeans” while wearing a straight weave in the “Doo Wop” video.⁶⁸ She expressed sexuality and used hip-hop tropes of self-aggrandizement

⁶⁰ Watkins, 72.

⁶¹ Brooks, 182.

⁶² Morgan, *She Begat This*, 73.

⁶³ Ogbur, 92.

⁶⁴ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 15 and 31.

⁶⁵ Neal, *Soul Babies*, 193.

⁶⁶ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 21.

⁶⁷ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 24.

⁶⁸ Hill, “Doo Wop (That Thing),” YouTube video.

while criticizing others for the same thing. In any case, Hill complicated simplistic division of women into good and bad, virgin and whore, both on “Doo Wop” and throughout *Miseducation*.⁶⁹ She refused to let herself be boxed into a single idea or identity, creating space for an alternative vision of Black womanhood and a conversation about Black female identity, and these were valuable contributions, in spite or even because of her contradictions.

Perhaps most important was Hill’s role as a single mother. Stigmatization of Black single motherhood was high during the 1990s, due to a number of factors including centuries-old stereotypes of Black female promiscuity, the widespread malignment of single motherhood as the source of Black social pathology, and the popularization of the “welfare queen” trope.⁷⁰ So when an unmarried Hill became pregnant and chose to keep her child, tenderly described on “To Zion,” it was an important affirmation for many Black single mothers.⁷¹ Ruffhouse Records was originally unimpressed with the track and released “Lost Ones” as a single to save the album, but “To Zion” became an anthem for many Black women.⁷² Hill presented herself as a human being whose choice to raise her child was legitimate, a representation which countered dominant cultural narratives and which many Black female listeners identified with.

Finally, Hill brought hip-hop into the mainstream. Rap’s entrance into the commercial music industry became undeniable in 1998, and *Miseducation* was one of the most visible evidences of this shift.⁷³ Hill’s success meant more resources were made available to hip-hop, and the fact that she was a female message rapper meant that those elements, marginalized under the thug ethos, began to receive more attention.⁷⁴ For over a decade, hip-hop had faced the question of whether it was possible to stay true to the music’s roots and turn a profit. Hill’s commercial success with an album that preserved hip-hop aesthetics and produced a nuanced portrayal of Black life made it seem possible. She achieved an international platform, appearing on a *Time Magazine* cover, which symbolized not only her importance, but hip-hop’s significance as a

⁶⁹ Dyson, 186–188.

⁷⁰ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 83–84.

⁷¹ Hill, “To Zion,” *Miseducation*.

⁷² Morgan, *She Begat This*, 87.

⁷³ Watkins, *Hip-Hop Matters*, 62.

⁷⁴ Spence, 1–2.

whole.⁷⁵ And she reached this success without changing who she was, both in terms of her appearance and her articulation of her pain, desires, and dreams as a Black woman. The mainstream came to Hill rather than the other way around, and her expression of Black identity has been echoed and built upon across time.⁷⁶

Hill has had no significant follow-up to *Miseducation* in what has now been over two decades. She largely dropped out of the public eye in the early aughts, in part due to the pressures of fame. After the album's release, Hill was hailed as hip-hop's future, and although she has largely removed herself from that conversation, her influence is still deeply embedded in American popular music. The group of contemporary musicians who cite Hill's influence is far too long to list. The success of Black women like Cardi B, the Knowles sisters, Rihanna, and Lizzo has roots in the nuanced visions of Black womanhood Hill brought to the mainstream, and her influence is also clear in some of the most significant male rappers of the twenty-first century, including Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Childish Gambino, and Drake. *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* embraced Black history and identity, redefined perceptions of Black womanhood, and led hip-hop into the mainstream, and its influence remains with us today.

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⁷⁵ Jackson and Richardson, 211.

⁷⁶ Morgan, *She Begat This*, 46.

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