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# CAN ONE “SNATCH THE SOUND?”: THE IMPACT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR APPROPRIATION IN POPULAR MUSIC

*Taylor Smith*

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In “On Black English,” James Baldwin argues that the African American Vernacular (AAVE) is a language within its own right, divergent from the English language. Referred to as Black English by Baldwin, AAVE functions as both a unifier of diverse African traditions but also as a way African Americans separate themselves from white people. This separation was historically for their protection. The words and phrases that African Americans, during and after enslaved, formed were adopted by white people but often diluted or had a change in meaning all together. These stolen terms became the names of movements and eras, garnering mass dividends for white people. The idea of stolen terms lead to questioning of how Black American and Diasporic intellectual property has been commodified. Black culture has been merchandised by Black and white audiences, in terms of white people appropriating it is often centered around ways in which people fashion and adorn their body. One of the goals of the research was to determine if white people, who have degraded and policed Black expression and creativity, have the right to profit from it. This research attempts to formulate answers through individual case studies of white artists, including Elvis Presley, Iggy Azalea, and Eminem. Their authenticity and potentially the validity of their claim and use of Black cultural elements was largely determined through their personal background, racial interactions and ideals, and their use of the AAVE, in performance and everyday life. The research was conducted through the analysis of academic discourse on race, music, “race music,” and linguistic studies of the AAVE, and is intended as an addition into the overall conversation about anti-Black ideals that shape the capitalist economy and valuing of Black cultural products for Blacks and non-Black peoples.