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From “Mind Playing Tricks On Me”^{*} to “Trauma”^{**}: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Hip Hop’s Prescription

andré douglas pond cummings[†] and Caleb Gregory Conrad^{††}

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, research focused on the causes and the lasting impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, has been changing the way researchers, healthcare providers, and advocates approach areas like mental health, risky behaviors, and chronic disease.¹ Numerous studies have produced and solidified results that present three undeniable truths: (1) the vast majority of Americans have experienced some form of trauma in their childhood,² (2) people with low income or educational attainment and people of color experience increased instances of childhood trauma and adversity,³ and (3) the more childhood trauma an individual

^{*}GETO BOYS, *Mind Playing Tricks On Me*, on WE CAN’T BE STOPPED (Rap-A-Lot/Priority Records 1991).

^{**}MEEK MILL, *Trauma*, on CHAMPIONSHIPS (Maybach Music/Atlantic 2018).

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1. *Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/aces/fastfact.html> [perma.cc/9THM-KNV3] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

2. *About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION (Apr. 2, 2019), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/cestudy/about.html> [https://perma.cc/PY3X-DAU9].

3. Stacy Shwartz Olagundoye, *What are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?*, APPLIED SURVEY RES. (May 21, 2019), <https://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org/news/2019/5/21/what-are-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-1> [https://perma.cc/BH5R-MQ4W]; see also Tara Haelle,

experiences, the higher the risk that he or she will be exposed to “multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults.”⁴ The causal link between childhood trauma and negative health outcomes has been shown to be so severe that Dr. Robert Block, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, notably stated, “Adverse Childhood Experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today.”⁵

Childhood trauma and adversity has shaped the music, careers, and lives of many of hip-hop’s brightest stars. The lasting impact of traumatic childhood experiences has propelled some artists to international stardom, as listeners around the globe are able to connect with them through the honest and raw lyrics and musical styles born out of, and in spite of, such adversity. What can hip-hop, a proud and storied genre that is no stranger to taking on taboo topics, and its artists, many of whom are the products of communities teeming with adversity, tell us about Adverse Childhood Experiences? How can lawmakers, mental healthcare providers, and community activists work to address and curtail the prevalence and negative impact of childhood trauma through the framework provided to them by hip-hop artists and messages? Messages that dictate action by courageously challenging the complacent status quo, beginning with efforts that spread awareness and education, and building on the work of those in the field that have come before? What would laws and policies developed through a hip-hop framework look like? This article seeks to answer these questions and to encourage immediate action in combating the epidemic of childhood trauma.

Part I of this article will provide an introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences and an overview of the first study on the subject that led to more in-depth research to provide a basis of understanding. Part II will connect childhood trauma to hip-hop’s origins and detail how traumatic childhoods have impacted the genre’s overall popularity and, in more direct terms, some of hip-hop’s most popular artists. Part III will offer a hip-hop framework that should be adopted by lawmakers, mental health providers, and community advocates in addressing the difficulties and pain of childhood trauma. Part IV will detail what the laws, policies, and initiatives

Childhood Trauma And Its Lifelong Health Effects More Prevalent Among Minorities, NPR (Sept. 17, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/09/17/648710859/childhood-trauma-and-its-lifelong-health-effects-more-prevalent-among-minorities> [https://perma.cc/M6QB-9N8X].

4. Vincent J. Felitti et al., *Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study*, 14 AM. J. PREV. MED. 245 (1998).

5. Sabrina Harris, *How to Combat the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences*, COUNCIL ON ACCREDITATION BLOG (Apr. 10, 2018), <https://www.coablog.org/home/2018/4/9/combating-the-effects-of-adverse-childhood-experiences> [https://perma.cc/S3HD-BT7E].

developed through the hip-hop framework would look like and advocates that specific policy goals be at the forefront of the battle against Adverse Childhood Experiences.

I. ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES: INITIAL DISCOVERY OF IMPACT

Adverse Childhood Experiences (“ACEs”) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, ranging from abuse and neglect to other traumatic experiences derived from household dysfunction.⁶ Today, ACEs are generally placed in seven to nine categories of childhood adversities: (1) physical abuse, (2) sexual abuse, (3) emotional abuse, (4) having a mother who was treated violently, (5) living with someone who was mentally ill, (6) living with someone who abused alcohol or drugs, (7) incarceration of a member of a household, (8) parental divorce or separation, and (9) social disadvantage, meaning economic hardship, homelessness, community violence, discrimination, and/or historical trauma.⁷ These types of trauma, although not fully understood or appreciated even as late as the 1990s, were known to occur; however, the overall impact of childhood trauma on an individual’s long-term health outcomes was only first considered in the now famous CDC-Kaiser Permanente ACE study.⁸ The study’s findings would forever alter the understanding of the link between childhood trauma and health outcomes and would push researchers to look more deeply into the ultimate impact of traumatic childhood experiences on overall adult health.

The original ACE study was conducted in the mid-1990s by Dr. Vince Felitti of Kaiser Permanente and Dr. Robert Anda of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”).⁹ The physicians surveyed nearly 17,500 adults in southern California about their history of exposure to trauma in childhood, indicators that the researchers dubbed “Adverse Childhood Experiences.”¹⁰ These experiences included “physical, emotional or sexual abuse; physical or emotional neglect; parental mental illness, substance dependence, incarceration; parental separation or divorce; or domestic violence.”¹¹ For every experience the respondents reported they endured as a child, one point was added to their ACE score. A respondent’s total ACE

6. *Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences*, *supra* note 1.

7. Olagundoye, *supra* note 3.

8. Felitti et al., *supra* note 4.

9. *Id.*; Nadine Burke Harris, *How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime*, TED.COM: TALKS (Sept. 2014), https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime [<https://perma.cc/T2DA-T6M8>].

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.*

score was then compared to that individual's health outcomes, and the findings were nothing short of "groundbreaking."¹²

First, the CDC-Kaiser Permanente study found that ACEs are strikingly common. Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported having at least one ACE, and 12.6 percent had four or more.¹³ Second, the study found a strong dose-response relationship between ACEs and health outcomes.¹⁴ A dose-response relationship is one in which increasing levels of exposure are associated with either an increasing or decreasing risk of the outcome.¹⁵ In the context of the ACE study, researchers found overwhelming evidence that increased levels of exposure to trauma in childhood heavily increased the risk of negative health outcomes later in life.¹⁶ For example, the researchers found that an individual with an ACE score of four or more—representing 12.6 percent of respondents—was two-and-a-half times more likely to contract obstructive pulmonary disease, two-and-a-half times more likely to contract hepatitis, four-and-a-half times more likely to suffer from depression, and twelve times as likely to take his or her own life.¹⁷ CDC researchers have recently determined that exposure to childhood trauma literally shortens an individual's lifespan; in fact, on average, a person with six or more ACEs died *twenty years earlier* than a person with no ACEs.¹⁸ These results were "striking" and, in classifying ACEs as the newest critical public health issue in the United States, the original ACE study prompted additional in-depth studies on a larger scale.¹⁹

Two recent studies, the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health and a study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* in November of 2018, sought to expand the CDC-Kaiser study into a national and representative model.²⁰ The study featured in *JAMA Pediatrics* analyzed data from 214,157 adults

12. *Id.*; Olagundoye, *supra* note 3.

13. Felitti et al., *supra* note 4; Harris, *supra* note 9.

14. Harris, *supra* note 9 (meaning the higher an individual's ACE score, the worse his or her health outcomes).

15. Sydney Pettygrove, *Dose-response relationship*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/science/dose-response-relationship> [https://perma.cc/9R4X-736B] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

16. Harris, *supra* note 9.

17. Felitti et al., *supra* note 4; Harris, *supra* note 9 (additionally, Dr. Harris notes that an individual with an ACE score of seven or more was found to have triple the lifetime risk of lung cancer and three-and-a-half times the risk of ischemic heart disease).

18. Jane Stevens, *Traumatic childhood takes 20 years off life expectancy*, LAWRENCE J.-WORLD (Oct. 6, 2009, 12:00 AM), <https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2009/oct/06/traumatic-childhood-takes-20-years-life-expectancy/> [https://perma.cc/XB6M-PYXY].

19. *Id.*

20. Vanessa Sacks & David Murphey, *The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, nationally, by state, and by race or ethnicity*, CHILD TRENDS (Feb. 12, 2018), <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity> [https://perma.cc/N698-QATJ]; Haelle, *supra* note 3.

across twenty-three states between 2011 and 2014.²¹ The results confirmed the 1998 finding that ACEs impact a majority of Americans, as three out of five adults reported one adverse experience in their childhood and a quarter of respondents reported at least three.²² This study went further, however, and found convincing evidence that “[t]hose identifying as black or Latino and those with less than a high school education or an annual income below \$15,000 were more likely to have more ACEs.”²³ The 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health found comparable numbers. Nationally, forty percent of white non-Hispanic children experienced at least one ACE, a number significantly lower than the fifty-one percent of Hispanic children and sixty-one percent of black non-Hispanic children that reported having experienced at least one ACE.²⁴

The research is clear. The higher an individual’s ACE score, the more likely it is that he or she will experience negative outcomes later in life, including an increased risk of contracting chronic disease or attempting suicide, engaging in risky behaviors, developing addictions to alcohol or drugs, and ultimately dying an earlier death. Also known is that people of color and those of low socioeconomic status consistently experience more ACEs and, in turn, are more at risk for these harmful outcomes. As Dr. Block so famously asserted, ACEs present an unaddressed public health threat, placing minorities and low income individuals in the crosshairs. This research demands that solutions be sought and action be taken. These answers can be found in an internationally-recognized music genre and pop culture phenomenon that not only finds its origins in trauma and adversity, but whose ambassadors and icons are largely the products of traumatic childhoods. The answers may very well be found in hip-hop.

II. HIP-HOP’S RELATIONSHIP WITH ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

A. Hip-Hop was Born out of Adversity and Trauma

At its core, hip-hop was created out of poverty and, yes, trauma and adversity. Amidst the residual effects of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s and the higher crime and rising poverty rates that accompanied the continuing urban decay of the 1970s, inner city youth in the South Bronx used the limited resources available to them to create cultural expressions

21. Haelle, *supra* note 3.

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* (noting that multiracial, gay, and bisexual individuals suffer the most ACEs).

24. Sacks & Murphey, *supra* note 20 (explaining that in most regions across the country, the prevalence of ACEs is highest among black non-Hispanic children).

of music, dance, visual art, and fashion.²⁵ Without the financial means to purchase expensive instruments or sound equipment, the first hip-hop DJs used what they had access to: old turntables and R&B, soul, and funk records.²⁶ Young people flocked to public parks and street corners to create, listen, and dance so as to escape the adversity and harsh reality of their lives in the surrounding impoverished communities.²⁷ The DJs, whose goal it was to “mov[e] the crowd,” would spin a record and isolate a beat-heavy percussion portion.²⁸ As the beat played on, over and over, the DJ, or another MC, would spit rhymes over the music.²⁹ It was this musical innovation, necessitated by struggle, and the developing themes of the lyrics and rhymes that told the stories of that struggle, that would take hip-hop from the streets of the South Bronx to the international spotlight.

As hip-hop progressed into the 1980s and 1990s, the genre became a vehicle by which artists expressed the trauma experienced in their daily lives.³⁰ Hot-button and taboo subjects like the government’s failing war on drugs, mass incarceration, police brutality, gang life, and the struggle of communities of color were readily available to hip-hop’s listeners, as accessible as a report on CNN to the viewer—Chuck D, member of the hip-hop group Public Enemy, even referred to hip-hop as the “CNN for black people.”³¹ Those reporting on the issues through their music were artists and groups like Public Enemy, N.W.A, KRS-One, and Tupac.³²

I stop at the light like a superstar,
and automatic weapons cold sprayed my car,
I hit the accelerator scared as shit,
and drove one block to find my brother was hit,

25. *The Historical Roots of Hip Hop*, TEACHROCK, <https://teachrock.org/lesson/the-historical-roots-of-hip-hop/> [<https://perma.cc/NC42-W2R6>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

26. *Id.*; Raheem Veal, *The Neo-Blues: How hip hop has led discussions about trauma*, REVOLT (June 4, 2018, 3:49 PM), <https://www.revolt.tv/2018/6/4/20824919/the-neo-blues-how-hip-hop-has-led-discussions-about-trauma> [<https://perma.cc/P7TE-TR4D>] (connecting soul and R&B artists like B.B. King, Muddy Waters, and Etta James, whose music told stories of addiction, heartbreak, and institutional racism, to the current wave of socially conscious hip-hop telling the stories of trauma).

27. *The Historical Roots of Hip Hop*, *supra* note 25.

28. Tonya M. Evans, *Sampling, Looping, and Mashing...Oh My!: How Hip Hop Music is Scratching More than the Surface of Copyright Law*, 21 FORDHAM INTELL. PROP. MEDIA & ENT. L.J. 843, 854 (2011).

29. *Id.*

30. GRANDMASTER FLASH & THE FURIOUS FIVE FEAT. MELLE MEL & DUKE BOOTEE, *The Message*, on THE MESSAGE (Sugar Hill 1982); *The Message*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Grandmaster-flash-and-the-furious-five-the-message-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/R2AD-PKF5>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) (“Broken glass everywhere; People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don’t care; I can’t take the smell, can’t take the noise; Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice; Rats in the front room, roaches in the back; Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat; I tried to get away but I couldn’t get far; ‘Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car”).

31. Stereo Williams, *Is Hip-Hop Still ‘CNN For Black People?’*, DAILY BEAST (Apr. 14, 2017), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/is-hip-hop-still-cnn-for-black-people> [<https://perma.cc/5978-YEK9>].

32. *Id.*

he wasn't dead but the blood was pouring,
 and all I could think about was war and,
 later I found that it was Rob and his crew,
 now tell me what the f*** am I supposed to do³³

I see no changes, wake up in the morning and I ask myself
 Is life worth livin'? Should I blast myself?
 I'm tired of bein' poor and, even worse, I'm black
 My stomach hurts so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch
 Cops give a damn about a negro
 Pull the trigger, kill a n****, he's a hero
 "Give the crack to the kids, who the hell cares?
 One less hungry mouth on the welfare!"³⁴

These artists were showcasing and sharing their traumatic childhood realities through their music. As hip-hop's popularity grew, the genre became a leading voice in spreading awareness of what we now know to be ACEs. These experiences, shaped throughout the artists' tough childhoods in dangerous and poor communities that were largely forgotten by those at the top, formed the anthems played around the world, propelling the artists to be the voices of the environments they escaped, but where many just like them remained.

B. ACEs in "The Ghetto":³⁵ Trauma in Poor Communities

Trauma is inexplicably intertwined with poverty. No matter an individual's background, socioeconomic status, or geographic location, he or she will likely experience some form of childhood trauma;³⁶ however, it has been clearly shown that children who are raised in poverty are substantially more at risk to experience increased levels of trauma and adversity.³⁷ Sixty-one percent of black non-Hispanic children reported having at least one ACE, the most of any demographic.³⁸ This startling data point is coupled with the fact that African Americans have the highest

33. KRS-ONE, *Love's Gonna Get 'Cha (Material Love)*, on EDUTAINMENT (Jive Records 1990); *Love's Gonna Get 'Cha (Material Love)*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/boogiedp/edutain/love.bdp.txt> [https://perma.cc/L35P-59GD] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

34. 2PAC, *Changes*, on 2PAC: GREATEST HITS (Interscope Records 1998); *Changes*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/2pac-changes-lyrics> [https://perma.cc/9WB3-95U9] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

35. TOO \$HORT, *The Ghetto*, on SHORT DOG'S IN THE HOUSE (Jive Records 1990); *The Ghetto*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/tooshort/shortdog/ghetto.tss.txt> [https://perma.cc/76M3-K9EK] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

36. Felitti et al., *supra* note 4; Sacks & Murphy, *supra* note 20; Haille, *supra* note 3.

37. Sacks & Murphy, *supra* note 20; Haille, *supra* note 3.

38. Sacks & Murphy, *supra* note 20.

poverty rate in the U.S., twenty-one percent, compared to just eight percent of non-Hispanic whites.³⁹ Social disadvantage is a defined category of ACEs that can most likely produce trauma and adversity such as economic hardship, physical or emotional neglect, and community violence.⁴⁰ The increased likelihood of traumatic experiences for socially and economically disadvantaged children can be attributed to the constant toxic and chronic stress that they face in these environments.⁴¹ A small child surrounded by hunger, significant violence, and abject scarcity experiences constant feelings of heightened fear and terror.⁴² Although family stress and dysfunction are not solely dictated by income, “these problems are more pervasive and severe among poor families and children.”⁴³ Children growing up in impoverished communities may witness or take part in violent crimes, lose friends or family members to violence or incarceration, or become victims of crime or abuse themselves.⁴⁴ Each time a child experiences such trauma, the child’s ACE score increases, and the heightened danger for negative health outcomes, risky behaviors, and shorter life expectancy becomes even greater.

Hip-hop is not only an art form created by and developed through struggle, but many of its most popular and top-selling artists are the products of impoverished and underserved communities where adversity and trauma are ubiquitous. In a recent ranking of the top ten cities with the best rappers, fans chose New York City, Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Compton, Cleveland, New Orleans, and Philadelphia.⁴⁵ As debatable as such a ranking may be, many of the most successful and influential rappers hail from cities included on the list. Another commonality among the included cities is that they each have a child poverty rate well above the national rate of eighteen percent:⁴⁶

39. Pam Fessler, *U.S. Census Bureau Reports Poverty Rate Down, But Millions Still Poor*, NPR (Sep. 10, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/10/759512938/u-s-census-bureau-reports-poverty-rate-down-but-millions-still-poor> [<https://perma.cc/KZQ4-ZCJN>].

40. Olagundoye, *supra* note 3.

41. Danna Bodenheimer, *Real World Clinical Blog: Poverty as Trauma, Social Work as Cure*, SOCIAL WORKER, <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/real-world-clinical-sw/poverty-as-trauma-social-work-as-cure/> [<https://perma.cc/5VF7-XCCR>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

42. *Id.*

43. Caroline Ratcliffe & Margery Austin Turner, *Reduce Poverty By Tackling Childhood Trauma*, URBAN WIRE: CHILDREN (Apr. 26, 2011), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/reduce-poverty-tackling-childhood-trauma> [<https://perma.cc/ZC6P-WMTK>].

44. *Id.*; MEEK MILL, *Trauma*, on CHAMPIONSHIPS (Atlantic 2018); *Trauma*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Meek-mill-trauma-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/LQL5-S7S5>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

45. *Top Ten Cities with the Best Rappers*, TOP TENS, <https://www.thetoptens.com/cities-with-best-rappers/> [<https://perma.cc/BL23-J7RK>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

46. *U.S. Child Poverty Rate Reaches Prerecession Level*, ANNIE E. CASEY FOUND. (Sep. 18, 2018), <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/updates/show/213-child-poverty-rate-reaches-prerecession-level> [<https://perma.cc/SA7J-6A93>].

New York City ⁴⁷ :	30.0%
Los Angeles ⁴⁸ :	27.0%
Detroit ⁴⁹ :	59.0%
Atlanta ⁵⁰ :	21.0%
Chicago ⁵¹ :	32.3%
Houston ⁵² :	32.2%
Compton ⁵³ :	31.2%
Cleveland ⁵⁴ :	53.0%
New Orleans ⁵⁵ :	24.4%
Philadelphia ⁵⁶ :	38.0%

It is undeniable that growing up in these cities shaped some of hip-hop's most popular and top-selling artists. Meek Mill, who grew up in Philadelphia, was five years old when he lost his father to violence, a tragedy that rendered his family indigent and forced the rapper to start selling drugs just to get by.⁵⁷ Eminem, growing up in Detroit, was raised by a single mother who constantly struggled with addiction and mental

47. Brenden Cheney, *Capital Data: Child Poverty in New York City*, POLITICO (Oct. 17, 2014), <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2014/10/capital-data-child-poverty-in-new-york-city-016674> [<https://perma.cc/JWA3-BKQZ>].

48. John Myers, *Millions of Californians are poor, and they don't always live where you'd expect*, L.A. TIMES (July 29, 2018), <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-road-map-poverty-report-20180729-story.html> [<https://perma.cc/LNU5-VS96>].

49. Karen Bouffard, *Study: Detroit tops in child poverty*, DETROIT NEWS (Feb. 19, 2015), <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/wayne-county/2015/02/18/detroit-childhood-poverty-ranking-kids-count-report/23657355/> [<https://perma.cc/U2QQ-B4F2>].

50. Nedra Rhone, *Georgia still ranks among states where childhood is most threatened*, ATLANTA J.-CONST. (May 30, 2018), <https://www.ajc.com/blog/talk-town/georgia-still-ranks-among-states-where-childhood-most-threatened/kejiG6DzlQHAsdmTok288I/> [<https://perma.cc/NMU4-6FFS>].

51. *Poverty in Chicago, Illinois*, WELFARE INFO, <https://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate/illinois/chicago> [<https://perma.cc/2UTH-QGKG>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

52. *Houston, Texas (TX) Poverty Rate Data*, CITY-DATA, <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Houston-Texas.html> [<https://perma.cc/6U4U-E6HD>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

53. *Compton, California (CA) Poverty Rate Data*, CITY-DATA, <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Compton-California.html> [<https://perma.cc/A9DC-2A6N>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

54. Chris Mosby, *More Than Half of Cleveland Children Live in Poverty: Data*, PATCH: CLEVELAND, OHIO (Oct. 15, 2019), <https://patch.com/ohio/cleveland/more-half-cleveland-children-live-poverty-data> [<https://perma.cc/Q9FV-5XEP>].

55. *New Orleans, Louisiana (LA) Poverty Rate Data*, CITY-DATA, <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-New-Orleans-Louisiana.html> [<https://perma.cc/THE2-CP4U>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

56. Martha Goodall, *Report: More Philly children living in poverty*, PHILA. INQUIRER (Oct. 31, 2016), https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/20161101_Report_More_Philly_children_living_in_poverty.html [<https://perma.cc/4D2E-MHMP>].

57. Grant Rinder, *Meek Mill Looks Back At His Tough Upbringing On "Oodles O' Noodles Babies"*, GENIUS (Nov. 24, 2018), <https://genius.com/a/meek-mill-looks-back-at-his-tough-upbringing-on-oodles-o-noodles-babies> [<https://perma.cc/9LHK-4D75>].

illness and often abused and neglected the rapper and his brother.⁵⁸ Jay-Z, growing up in the Macy Projects of Brooklyn, New York, experienced parental separation at eleven years old and began selling drugs and engaging in gun violence.⁵⁹ Lil Wayne, growing up in New Orleans, was sexually assaulted at eleven years old, attempted suicide at twelve, lost his father figure at thirteen, and had his first child at fifteen.⁶⁰ Not only did these artists, and countless more, tell the stories of their trauma through their music, but because of their success, they broadcasted their many ACEs to people around the globe. Eminem, Jay-Z, and Lil Wayne have collectively sold approximately 320 million physical albums worldwide.⁶¹ Meek Mill's 2018 album, *Championships*, debuted at the top spot on the Billboard 200 and placed fifteen songs in the Billboard Hot 100.⁶²

These artists, products of poor, underserved, and high-crime neighborhoods, were unashamedly describing childhood trauma to a global audience. One of Meek Mill's songs from his *Championships* album, and one that appeared on the Billboard Hot 100, was even entitled "Trauma." An article written about the track and the accompanying cinematic music video asserted that the rapper was "recalling the dark experience" of "events that were deeply distressing to [him]" in his childhood.⁶³ The hook includes:

I just won
I was on the corner with the reefa
And they got us warring for our freedom
See my brother's blood on the pavement
How you wake up in the mornin' feelin' evil?
Uhh, trauma
When them drugs got a hold of your mama

58. Brandon Michaels, *12 Messed Up Facts About Eminem's Troubled Upbringing*, RANKER, https://www.ranker.com/list/messed-up-things-about-eminems-early-life/brandon-michaels?ref=profile_pub [<https://perma.cc/8JEX-QYX9>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

59. Jay-Z: *Biography*, BIOGRAPHY.COM, <https://www.biography.com/musician/jay-z> [<https://perma.cc/39AD-BNXS>] (last updated Sep. 10, 2019).

60. Justin Tinsley, *Lil Wayne's 'Carter V' Is A Triumph Over Trauma*, UNDEFEATED (Oct. 11, 2018), <https://theundefeated.com/features/lil-wayne-carter-v-is-triumph-over-trauma-abuse-suicide-attempt-jail-time-lawsuits-natural-disaster/> [<https://perma.cc/KQE6-VSGL>].

61. *Top Ten Best Selling Rap Artists Of All Time*, SA HIP HOP MAG. (Dec. 7, 2018), <https://sahiphopmag.co.za/2018/12/top-10-best-selling-rap-artists-of-all-time/> [<https://perma.cc/28KD-J7TX>].

62. Xander Zellner, *Meek Mill Charts 15 Songs From 'Championships' on Billboard Hot 100*, BILLBOARD (Dec. 11, 2018), <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8489850/meek-mill-charts-15-songs-championships-billboard-hot-100> [<https://perma.cc/E8TD-FRQC>]; Keith Caulfield, *Meek Mill's 'Championships' Album Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart*, BILLBOARD (Dec. 10, 2018), <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8489725/meek-mill-championships-album-tops-billboard-200-chart> [<https://perma.cc/659S-XFKP>].

63. *Meek Mill Recalls His Dark Childhood Past In 'Trauma' Cinematic Music Video*, ACESHOWBIZ.COM (Dec. 20, 2018), <https://www.aceshowbiz.com/news/view/00130311.html> [<https://perma.cc/UKV9-F2KP>].

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And the judge got a hold on your father
Go to school, bullet holes in the locker⁶⁴

Meek Mill was rhyiming about his ACEs, and people listened.

But put yourself in my position; just try to envision
Witnessin' your momma poppin' prescription pills in the kitchen
Bitchin that someone's always goin' through her purse and shit's
missin'
Goin' through public housin' systems, victim of Munchausen's
Syndrome
My whole life I was made to believe I was sick when I wasn't
'til I grew up, now I blew up, it makes you sick to ya stomach
doesn't it? Wasn't it the reason you made that CD for me Ma?
So you could justify the way you treated me Ma?⁶⁵

Eminem was rhyiming about his ACEs, and people listened.

I seen my first murder in the hall, if you must know
I lost my pops when was eleven mmm twelve years old
He's probably somewhere where the liquor is takin' it's
toll⁶⁶

Retrospect ain't been the same since I lost my dad
He's still alive, but f*** you, don't cross my path⁶⁷

Jay-Z was rhyiming about his ACEs, and people listened.

I found my momma's pistol where she always hide it
I cry, put it to my head and thought about it
Nobody was home to stop me, so I called my auntie
Hung up, then put the gun to my heart and pondered
Too much was on my conscience to be smart about it

64. MEEK MILL, *supra* note 44.

65. EMINEM, *Cleanin Out My Closet*, on THE EMINEM SHOW (Aftermath Records 2002); *Cleanin Out My Closet*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/eminem/the_show/cleanin.mnm.txt [https://perma.cc/7RSA-7KEJ] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

66. JAY-Z, *Streets Is Talking*, on THE DYNASTY ROC LA FAMILIA (Roc-A-Fella Records & Def Jam Recordings 2000); *Streets Is Talking*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/jigga/dynasty/talking.jyz.txt> [https://perma.cc/876Z-PHQ3] (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

67. JAY-Z, *Hova Song (Outro)*, on VOL. 3... LIFE AND TIMES OF S. CARTER (Roc-A-Fella Records & Def Jam Recordings 1999); *Hova Song (Outro)*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/jigga/volume_3/hovoutro.jyz.txt [https://perma.cc/3385-6B3V] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

Too torn apart about it, I aim where my heart was pounding
I shot it, and I woke up with blood all around me⁶⁸

Lil Wayne was rhyming about his ACEs, and people listened.

It very well could be that honest lyrics about traumatic childhood experiences are so popular because a vast majority of Americans have experienced childhood trauma, as sixty percent of all American adults have at least one ACE, and twenty-five percent have three or more, and they can therefore relate.⁶⁹ With this existing library of songs on adversity and trauma, and a host of artists who have reached success out of such traumatic upbringings, hip-hop, and the numerous lessons it teaches, can provide a framework for lawmakers and activists to successfully confront the epidemic of ACEs.

III. THE HIP-HOP FRAMEWORK FOR COMBATING ACEs

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris closed her 2015 Ted Talk on the impact of ACEs with the following: “The single most important thing that we need today is the courage to look at this problem in the face and say, ‘This is real and this is all of us.’ I believe that we are the movement.”⁷⁰ Harris calls for a moment of courage and a challenge of the complacent status quo. She calls for a *movement*. There may not be a better suited medium for such a movement than hip-hop. Hip-hop provides what can best be described as a framework for assessing and addressing the problem of ACEs: (1) courageously confront the complacent status quo, (2) tear down the stigma of mental health and trauma through awareness and education, and (3) defer to experts in the field of ACEs to craft the most effective policies in combating their prevalence and negative impact.

A. “*Fight the Power*”⁷¹: Challenge the Complacent Status Quo

Hip-hop’s history is rich with moments of defiance and rising up against groups and institutions unyielding in the pursuit of maintaining an ineffective and oppressive status quo. With anthems like Public Enemy’s

68. LIL WAYNE, *Let It All Work Out*, on THA CARTER V (Young Money Entertainment 2018); *Let It All Work Out*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Lil-wayne-let-it-all-work-out-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/4V9X-W9VS>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

69. Haele, *supra* note 3 (sixty percent of American adults experienced at least one ACE and twenty-five percent have three or more ACEs).

70. Harris, *supra* note 9.

71. PUBLIC ENEMY, *Fight the Power*, on FEAR OF A BLACK PLANET (Def Jam Recordings 1990); *Fight the Power*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Public-enemy-fight-the-power-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/B3WL-7LV2>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

“Fight the Power” and N.W.A’s “F*** Tha Police,” hip-hop shocked the public conscious as it revealed the reality of conditions in America’s inner cities and the government’s apparent ambivalence to its citizens’ plight. Hip-hop brazenly called out corrupt law enforcement officers and politicians for abusing their power without fear of repercussion.⁷² At times, hip-hop was angry, and its goal was to simply expose the harsh and discriminatory treatment communities of color received from the same authorities who pledged “*To Protect and to Serve*.”⁷³ At other times, hip-hop served as observer, telling the unheard and under-appreciated stories of the people living on the edge.⁷⁴ At no time was hip-hop scared or weak, nor did it turn away from leading a movement against the status quo.

This is the first plank of the hip-hop framework that lawmakers and other mental health and community leaders should adopt in attempting to address and curtail ACEs. The existing system is failing millions of children and families, and is ultimately leading to negative health outcomes for far too many. Lawmakers and community activists need to embody the brave hip-hop groups that showed how to lead by disrupting the complacent status quo. If any movement could move the needle on a given topic, especially one so ingrained in its history and successes, hip-hop is the perfect candidate to take on childhood trauma and its long-term effects. This can be seen not only through hip-hop’s reputation as a challenger of

72. N.W.A, *F*** Tha Police*, on STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON (Priority Records 1988); *F*** Tha Police*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/nwa/straight/fuck_tha.nwa.txt [<https://perma.cc/R3ZM-3B4T>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) (“F*** the police comin straight from the underground; A young n**** got it bad cause I’m brown; And not the other color so police think; They have the authority to kill a minority”).

73. *The Origin of the LAPD Motto*, L.A. POLICE DEP’T, http://www.lapdonline.org/history_of_the_lapd/content_basic_view/1128 [<https://perma.cc/ZJ6N-CYPR>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) (explaining the motto was adopted in 1963 after an internal entry competition). Officer Joseph S. Dorobek’s submission was selected under the criteria that “[t]he motto should be one that in a few words would express some or all the ideals to which the Los Angeles police service is dedicated.” *Id.* PUBLIC ENEMY, *911 Is A Joke*, on FEAR OF A BLACK PLANET (Def Jam Recordings 1990); *911 Is A Joke*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/pb_enemy/fear_of/911_joke.pbe.txt [<https://perma.cc/EJW6-2W9Y>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) (“I call a cab ‘cause a cab will come quicker; The doctors huddle up and call a flea flicker; The reason that I say that ‘cause they; Flick you off like fleas; They be laughin’ at ya while you’re crawlin’ on your knees; And to the strength so go the length; Thinkin’ you are first when you really are tenth; You better wake up and smell the real flavor; Cause 911 is a fake life saver”).

74. See generally 2PAC, *Brenda’s Got A Baby*, on 2PACALYPSE NOW (Interscope Records 1991); *Brenda’s Got A Baby*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/2_pac/2pclypse/brenda.2pc.txt [<https://perma.cc/6R5E-ZSVF>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) (describing the true story of a twelve-year-old mother who had her baby in her family’s apartment building and threw the newborn down a trash chute); James C. McKinley Jr., *Baby Saved From Compactor, Where Mother, 12, Says She Put Him*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 28, 1991), <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/28/nyregion/baby-saved-from-compactor-where-mother-12-says-she-put-him.html> [<https://perma.cc/D9WN-AU7A>].

the status quo, but it also can be gleaned through the genre's recent focus of bringing awareness to and promoting the discussion of mental health.⁷⁵

B. From "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" to "Trauma": Tearing Down the Stigma of Trauma and Mental Illness Through Education and Awareness

A majority of people living with mental illness have inevitably been blamed for their condition at some point, having been called names or told that their symptoms were just a phase and that they could control their condition if they tried.⁷⁶ People suffering from and struggling with mental illness have been discriminated against without justice.⁷⁷ That is the power of *stigma*.

Stigma, a word finding its origins in Greek society, is understood to mean "a social construction whereby a distinguishing mark of social disgrace is attached to others in order to identify and devalue them."⁷⁸ The two major components of stigma are a *public* one, or the reaction of the general public to the stigmatized individual, and a *self-stigma*, the prejudice that stigmatized individuals turn against themselves.⁷⁹ Stigmas not only cause people to feel immense shame for something out of their control, but it also, more damagingly, prevents those suffering from seeking and obtaining the help and services they desperately need.⁸⁰

There is no place where the negative stigma surrounding mental health is stronger than in the black community.⁸¹ In 2018 alone, over 6.8 million black Americans had a diagnosable mental illness, but the overwhelming message in black communities is that "men are not supposed to cry" and that "we 'should deal with problems on our own.'"⁸² Mental health, or simply feeling sad or down, is rarely talked about amongst friends or family in the black community, as seeking professional help or wanting to talk to a therapist is an understood sign of weakness.⁸³ This could explain why,

75. Kara Taylor, *Hip-hop works to break down mental health stigma for black men*, NBC NEWS (Nov. 25, 2017, 6:18 AM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/music/hip-hop-works-break-down-mental-health-stigma-black-men-n819461> [<https://perma.cc/932R-K5X5>].

76. Luna Greenstein, *9 Ways To Fight Mental Health Stigma*, NAT'L ALL. ON MENTAL ILLNESS (Oct. 11, 2017), <https://www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog/october-2017/9-ways-to-fight-mental-health-stigma> [<https://perma.cc/UV7W-C52J>].

77. *Id.*

78. Julio Arboleda-Flórez, *What causes stigma?*, 1 WORLD PSYCHIATRY 25–26 (Feb. 2002), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1489829/> [<https://perma.cc/J2W4-K4P6>].

79. *Id.*

80. Greenstein, *supra* note 76.

81. Hafeez Baoku, *Challenging Mental Health Stigma In The Black Community*, NAT'L ALL. ON MENTAL ILLNESS (Jul. 27, 2018), <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/July-2018/Challenging-Mental-Health-Stigma-in-the-Black-Comm> [<https://perma.cc/SB6D-ATK8>].

82. *Id.*

83. Jeremy Divinity, *The Healing Power of Hip Hop*, MY SUPREMACY (Nov. 24, 2017), <https://mysupremacy.com/the-healing-power-of-hip-hop/> [<https://perma.cc/B33F-H5G8>] ("The stigma

although African Americans are twenty percent more likely to experience serious mental health problems, only twenty-five percent of African Americans seek mental health care, as opposed to forty percent of whites.⁸⁴ Mike Veny, a patient expert writing for *Health Central*, offered ways to address the stigma surrounding mental health with respect to the obstacles faced by those in the black community: (1) normalize the treatment of mental health, (2) seek to redefine what “strong” is, (3) recruit more black men and women who can serve as mental wellness role models, and (4) allow access to more resources and free therapy in predominately black neighborhoods.⁸⁵ Recently, hip-hop has stepped up to become a leader in this critical movement of tearing down the stigma surrounding mental health and trauma, particularly in the black community. Hip-hop and its artists have recently been more bold in taking the steps suggested by Mike Veny in his blog post. The genre should continue this fight and also become a proponent of addressing and confronting ACEs.

2016 served as a turning point for the discussion of mental health in the hip-hop community.⁸⁶ Successful artists like Lil Wayne, Kid Cudi, and Kanye West publicly admitted to their struggles with mental health, with the latter two checking themselves into treatment.⁸⁷ These public announcements were powerful in breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health, as it showed these hip-hop superstars of color normalizing mental illness and seeking treatment. The simple idea that Kanye West, Kid Cudi, and Lil Wayne could be struggling with their mental health and seeking treatment for it worked to break down the dogma of mental health’s taboo label in the black community. Although 2016 served as a springboard for more open conversations on the topic, it was not nearly the first time that individuals struggling with their mental health have turned to hip-hop for comfort, or the first time that hip-hop’s artists had opened up about their own experiences with mental illness in their music.⁸⁸

and taboo that comes with depression can be seen as a sign of weakness. I didn’t want to be seen as weak so I talked myself out of therapy, out of denial. I would ask myself, why would I need therapy if I wasn’t going crazy? Leading to my depression going undiagnosed. I was often told to ‘man up’ and to ‘get over it[.]’ Even though by manning up, I could not escape the pain.”); Elisabet Kvarnstrom, *Breaking Down the Stigma of Mental Illness in the Black Community*, BRIDGES TO RECOVERY (June 7, 2016), <https://www.bridgestorecovery.com/blog/breaking-down-the-stigma-of-mental-illness-in-the-black-community/> [https://perma.cc/V374-UE4H].

84. Mike Veny, *7 Ways to Beat Mental Health Stigma in the Black Community*, HEALTHCENTRAL (Aug. 7, 2018), <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/ways-to-beat-stigma-in-the-black-community> [https://perma.cc/EX4F-G44C].

85. *Id.*

86. Taylor, *supra* note 75; Allison Fox, *Hip-Hop Artists Have Been Writing About Mental Health For Decades*, HUFFINGTON POST (Oct. 14, 2016, 8:34 AM), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mental-health-hip-hop_n_57fbc3ae4b068ecb5e087a1 [https://perma.cc/6QZV-JT64].

87. Taylor, *supra* note 75.

88. Fox, *supra* note 86.

At the same time that rebellious, aggressive, and hyper-masculine “gangsta rap” was dominating hip-hop’s airwaves in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Geto Boys, a rap trio from Houston, released what one commentator dubbed the “first vulnerable gangsta rap song” in 1991.⁸⁹ The lyrics told the story of hardcore hustlers that “were traumatized by [the streets].”⁹⁰

Day by day it’s more impossible to cope
 I feel like I’m the one that’s doing dope
 Can’t keep a steady hand because I’m nervous
 Every Sunday mornin I’m in service
 Prayin for forgiveness
 And tryin to find an exit out the business
 I know the Lord is lookin at me
 But yet and still it’s hard for me to feel happy
 I often drift when I drive
 Havin fatal thoughts of suicide
 BANG and get it over with
 And then I’m worry-free, but that’s bullshit⁹¹

This confessional “street ministry” spoke effectively to the unsavory feelings that boys—particularly black boys—were conditioned to hide, and verses like Scarface’s quoted above acted as a form of therapy for the listeners.⁹² The track, illustrating the “tormented flip side of gangsta braggadocio,” spoke to the mental state of those engaging in criminal and dangerous behavior just trying to survive another day in the streets.⁹³ This classic song by the Geto Boys paved the way for the current conversations about mental health in hip-hop and made vulnerable gangsta rap a viable subsect of the genre, inspiring artists like MC Eiht, Spice 1, and Tupac to produce and release gangsta rap songs steeped in pain.⁹⁴ The Geto Boys’ anthem likewise influenced Charlamagne tha God to write an entire book

89. Rodney Carmichael, *Stressed Out: How ‘Mind Playing Tricks On Me’ Gave Anxiety A Home In Hip-Hop*, NPR (May 29, 2019, 5:00 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/29/726615663/geto-boys-mind-playing-tricks-on-me-anxiety-american-anthem> [https://perma.cc/5AXU-X3FS].

90. *Id.*

91. GETO BOYS, *Mind Playing Tricks On Me, on WE CAN’T BE STOPPED* (Rap-A-Lot Records 1991); *Mind Playing Tricks on Me*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/getoboys/stopped/mindptom.gtb.txt> [https://perma.cc/69ZM-G6XX] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

92. Carmichael, *supra* note 89.

93. Chris Vognar, *Essential listening: The madness, paranoia and tormented conscience of ‘Mind Playing Tricks on Me,’* DALL. MORNING NEWS (May 30, 2017, 2:25 PM), <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/music/2017/05/30/essential-listening-the-madness-paranoia-and-tormented-conscience-of-mind-playing-tricks-on-me/> [https://perma.cc/DT23-XTPV].

94. Carmichael, *supra* note 89.

titled after the song: *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*.⁹⁵ The book detailed the hip-hop radio personality's struggles with mental health and was released in late 2018, some twenty-seven years after the release of "Mind Playing Tricks On Me." The residual effects of "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" can be seen on the top of the hip-hop charts even today, as artists like Post Malone, 21 Savage, and Lil Uzi Vert continue to collect hit songs and massive popularity by "pouring out their pain" to millions of listeners.⁹⁶

Today, mental health is at the forefront of the hip-hop conscious.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, as was true in the 1990s, hip-hop continues to be the closest thing to therapy for many.⁹⁸ As artists articulate their trauma through their music, listeners empathize and relate to it, understanding, maybe for the very first time, that they are not alone. The beats and rhymes of hip-hop tracks provide listeners "life and glimmers of hope" in times of darkness, or clarity when fans are trying to escape and understand their own emotions.⁹⁹ Artists like Kid Cudi have not only opened up about their own personal battles with mental health, but they have also invited their fans and followers to join them on the path to recovery, allowing listeners the space to begin true healing.¹⁰⁰ Hip-hop, with its current emphasis on mental

95. *Id.*

96. *Id.*; see generally POST MALONE, *I Fall Apart*, on STONEY (Republic Records 2016); *I Fall Apart*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE,

https://ohhla.com/anonymous/p_malone/stoney/iflapart.pst.txt [<https://perma.cc/KUY8-6YUF>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) ("She told me that I'm not enough, yeah; And she left me with a broken heart, yeah; She fooled me twice and it's all my fault, yeah; She cut too deep, now she left me scarred, yeah; Now there's so many thoughts goin' through my brain, yeah; And now I'm takin' these shots like it's novacane [sic], yeah"); 21 SAVAGE FEAT. J. COLE, *a lot*, on I AM > I WAS (Epic Records 2018); *a lot*, ORIGINAL HIP-HOP LYRICS ARCHIVE, http://ohhla.com/anonymous/21savage/iam_iwas/a_lot.21s.txt [<https://perma.cc/6XPK-QD63>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) ("How much money you got? (A lot); How many problems you got? (A lot); How many people done doubted you? (A lot); Left you out to rot? (A lot); How many pray that you flop? (A lot); How many lawyers you got? (A lot); How many times you got shot? (A lot); How many n***** you shot? (A lot); How many times did you ride? (A lot); How many n***** done died? (A lot); How many times did you cheat? (A lot); How many times did you lie? (A lot); How many times did she leave? (A lot); How many times did she cry? (A lot); How many chances she done gave you? F*** around with these thots? (A lot)"); LIL UZI VERT, *XO TOUR Llif3*, on LUV IS RAGE 2 (Atlantic Records 2017); *XO TOUR Llif3*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Lil-uzi-vert-xo-tour-llif3-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/55MS-SVW3>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) ("She say I'm insane, yeah; I might blow my brain out (Hey); Xanny, help the pain, yeah; Please, Xanny, make it go away; I'm committed, not addicted, but it keep control of me; All the pain, now I can't feel it; I swear that it's slowin' me, yeah; [Chorus] I don't really care if you cry; On the real, you shoulda never lied; Saw the way she looked me in my eyes; She said, 'I am not afraid to die' (Yeah); All my friends are dead, yeah, ooh; Push me to the edge; All my friends are dead, yeah; All my friends are dead, yeah").

97. Carmichael, *supra* note 89.

98. Divinity, *supra* note 83 ("Hip-hop is our therapy," said the rapper Prodigy.).

99. *Id.*

100. *Id.*; KID CUDI, *The Prayer*, on A KID NAMED CUDI (10.Deep 2008); *The Prayer*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Kid-cudi-the-prayer-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/92W5-GQFY>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) ("And if I die before I wake; I pray the Lord, my soul, to take; But please don't cry; Just know that I have made these songs for you").

health, is in the best position to wade further into the water and take on ACEs by simply broadening its mental health message. Artists that have experienced adversity and trauma in childhood have the platform to make honest music and publicly share their experiences so that others can relate.¹⁰¹ Lil Wayne has recently started to discuss the sexual assault he experienced when he was just eleven years old,¹⁰² which has resulted in a larger dialogue about how society ignores the sexual assault of black boys.¹⁰³ Jay-Z, in his most recent album *4:44*, raps about seeing a therapist: “My therapist said I relapsed... I said, perhaps I Freudian slipped in European whips.”¹⁰⁴ The conversations surrounding these topics can be transformational for rapper and listener alike.¹⁰⁵ Approaching the issues of mental health and trauma in honest and open ways can have a great impact on tearing down the stigma associated with suffering from mental illness, as can be seen from other movements designed to tear down stigma.

Strong lessons on just how effective awareness and education can be in promoting the empowerment of stigmatized individuals and breaking down a stigma’s overall negative impact can be gleaned from the #MeToo movement that works to raise the voices of survivors of sexual assault. The #MeToo movement began in 2006 when Tarana Burke, a survivor of sexual assault, decided that she wanted to help women and girls of color who had also survived sexual assault.¹⁰⁶ The movement’s popularity skyrocketed in the wake of the myriad of sexual assault accusations against media mogul Harvey Weinstein and other powerful men in 2017, and “hashtag MeToo” (#MeToo) went viral as millions of women posted that they had experienced sexual harassment or assault.¹⁰⁷ The #MeToo movement, by showing the world that millions of women had experienced unwanted sexual advances, touching, or assault, empowered other survivors to step forward and seek the help they needed.¹⁰⁸ Survivors of sexual assault could finally see that although they felt utterly alone and powerless, they were not. The #MeToo movement embodies the impact of showing people they are not alone. Hip-

101. Divinity, *supra* note 83 (“‘Everything I’ve gone through, I’ve put in my music,’ as said by rapper Charles Hamilton.”).

102. Tinsley, *supra* note 60.

103. G. Hylton, *Yes, Sexual Abuse of Black Boys Is a Problem – and We Need To Pay Attention*, MEDIUM: LEVEL (Oct. 23, 2017), <https://level.medium.com/the-sexual-abuse-of-black-boys-9e21d1134679> [<https://perma.cc/9UYV-X4E7>].

104. Divinity, *supra* note 83 (internal quotation marks omitted).

105. *Id.*

106. *#MeToo: A timeline of events*, CHI. TRIBUNE (Jan. 6, 2020, 2:15 PM), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htlstory.html> [<https://perma.cc/AC5Y-97FU>].

107. Cory Vaillancourt, *#MeToo: Shedding the stigma around sexual assault*, SMOKY MOUNTAIN NEWS (May 2, 2018), <https://www.smokymountainnews.com/news/item/24677-metoo-shedding-the-stigma-around-sexual-assault> [<https://perma.cc/VUA4-YHBP>].

108. *Id.*

hop has similarly engaged in recent efforts to tell its listeners, especially those in communities where mental health is seen as a weakness and a taboo subject, that admitting to struggling with mental health and seeking help is not only okay, but it is the right thing to do for individuals and communities.

Hip-hop is the best equipped medium to broaden its message to bring awareness to ACEs. Meek Mill's aforementioned track "Trauma" can build on the progress hip-hop has made in the area of mental health awareness and have the equivalent impact of the Geto Boys' "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" for Adverse Childhood Experiences. Although hip-hop artists have been alluding to the harsh realities of their childhoods in their music for decades, Meek Mill calls it what it is: *trauma*. The trauma of engaging in criminal and dangerous activities as a minor.¹⁰⁹ The trauma of losing friends and family to police or community violence.¹¹⁰ The trauma of seeing a brother or best friend bleed and die on the street.¹¹¹ The trauma of having a father in and out of prison or incarcerated for long periods of time.¹¹² The trauma of having a mother who uses narcotics.¹¹³ The trauma of attending schools plagued by violence in the halls.¹¹⁴ These experiences that Meek Mill has gone through and illustrates in this track and music video, are not his alone; in fact, they are all too common. "Trauma," by referring to these experiences as trauma instead of glorifying or normalizing them, is powerful. For the over 15.5 million monthly listeners on Meek Mill's Spotify page,¹¹⁵ the content in this song can be as transformative for those struggling with a history of childhood trauma as "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" was in the 1990s for those battling untreated depression.

Lawmakers, mental health professionals, and activists need to adopt the second plank of the hip-hop framework for combating ACEs: start with conversations, both spoken and lyrical, that tear down the stigma and increase education about childhood trauma. Only when more people fully understand the causes and effects of ACEs can large structural change take place.

109. MEEK MILL, *supra* note 44; *Trauma*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Meek-mill-trauma-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/6DJ2-L4AC>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) ("I was on the corner with the reefa").

110. *Id.* ("See my brother blood on the pavement").

111. *Id.*

112. *Id.* ("And the judge got a hold on your father").

113. *Id.* ("When them drugs got a hold of your mama").

114. *Id.* ("Go to school, bullet holes in the locker").

115. Meek Mill, SPOTIFY, <https://open.spotify.com/artist/20sxb77xiYeusSH8cVdata> [<https://perma.cc/3E2J-FYJ5>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

*C. Bust the Facts*¹¹⁶: *Pay Homage to the ACEs Experts to Craft Effective Policies and Initiatives*

Hip-hop defers to the experts. Throughout hip-hop's evolution, which has seen numerous stages and innovations, one key component has remained unchanged: paying homage to the greats that have come before.¹¹⁷

In a genre built on sampling and borrowing,¹¹⁸ one of the greatest compliments is when a lyric or theme from an artist of the past is used in some way by a new or current artist to show respect.¹¹⁹ For example, in 1992, the track "Bust The Facts" was released by the Ultramagnetic MC's.¹²⁰ The track paid homage to all of the pioneers of hip-hop's early block party era, referring to several of them by name and shouting them out in the lyrics:

I got a flier in my hand, Bambaataa with Cold Crush
 The place is packed, with Johnny Wa and Rayon
 Lovely ladies smellin' sweet, with a lot of Avon
 Jazzy Jay by my side, Charlie Chase behind me
 Flash and Theodore, super cuts that blind me
 Catch a Groove is the rhythm, spinnin' back and forth
 From the East and Valley, swingin' back up North
 Towards the South Bronx, Euceda Park and Webster¹²¹

Paying homage through shout-outs is prevalent in hip-hop. Widely considered to be the founding father of the hip-hop movement, DJ Kool Herc has been saluted through the lyrics of artists such as KRS-One, Common, Ludacris, Kool Keith, A Tribe Called Quest, and MC Shan.¹²² As if the track "The Kool Herc" by KRS-One on his 2008 album *Maximum Strength* was not enough of a shout out to the hip-hop pioneer, the rapper kicks off the track by definitively proclaiming, "Yeah, Kool Herc! Kool

116. ULTRAMAGNETIC MC'S, *Bust the Facts*, on FUNK YOUR HEAD UP (Mercury Records 1992).

117. Kim D. Chanbonpin, *Legal Writing, the Remix: Plagiarism and Hip Hop Ethics*, 63 MERCER L. REV. 597, 630 (2012).

118. Olufunmilayo B. Arewa, *From J.C. Bach to Hip Hop: Musical Borrowing, Copyright and Cultural Context*, 84 N.C. L. REV. 547, 561 (2006).

119. Horace E. Anderson, Jr., *No Bitin' Allowed: A Hip-Hop Copying Paradigm for All of Us*, 20 TEX. INTELL. PROP. J. 115, 136 (2011) ("Like a jazz musician, a hip-hop artist may use a quote from another as a springboard for her own creativity. The quote usually is a well-known, even iconic one, so that the audience clearly understands that the quoter is quoting and not biting").

120. Cis Van Beers, *Top Ten Songs That Pay Homage To Hip Hop's Early Days*, HIP HOP GOLDEN AGE (Apr. 7, 2016), <https://hiphoggoldenage.com/list/top-10-songs-that-pay-homage-to-hip-hops-early-days/> [<https://perma.cc/P4FC-Q697>].

121. ULTRAMAGNETIC MC'S, *Bust the Facts*, on FUNK YOUR HEAD UP (Mercury Records 1992); *Ultramagnetic MC's: Bust the Facts Lyrics*, ELYRICS, https://www.elyrics.net/read/u/ultramagnetic-mc_s-lyrics/bust-the-facts-lyrics.html [<https://perma.cc/DU27-NVKH>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

122. Trent Fitzgerald, *20 Rappers Who Pay Homage To Hip-Hop In Their Songs*, BOOMBOX (Aug. 11, 2018), <https://theboombox.com/rappers-who-pay-homage-hip-hop-in-songs/> [<https://perma.cc/7KPQ-NM96>].

Herc, this goes out to you!”¹²³ Hip-hop artists like KRS-One realize that they stand on the shoulders of those that have come before and laid the foundation for the genre. Without DJ Kool Herc’s innovative take on spinning funk and soul records at the rec room in the Bronx in 1973, KRS-One’s career and life might have looked very different.

Additionally, in 2020, Eminem released *Music to be Murdered By*, which contains the track “Yah Yah” wherein Eminem pays ultimate respect to those that came before and inspired him:

Now here’s to LL, Big L and Del
K-Solo, Treach and G Rap
DJ Polo, Tony D, ODB, Moe Dee, Run-DMC
Ed O.G. and EPMD
D.O.C., Ice-T, Evil Dee and King Tee
UTFO, and Schoolly D
PE and BDP
YZ and Chi-Ali, Rakim and Eric B
They were like my therapy
From B.I.G. and Perris, Three Times Dope and some we’ll never
see, and PRT
N.W.A and Eazy-E;
and D-R-E was like my GPS
Without him, I don’t know where I’d be¹²⁴

Indeed, Eminem acknowledges that listening to the founding artists of socially conscious hip-hop and gangsta rap “were like [his] therapy” when coming up in Detroit, the city that suffers the most dramatic child poverty rate out of the top ten hip-hop cities identified above.¹²⁵ In a city and childhood overcome with ACEs, Eminem relied upon hip-hop to pull him through.

A similar type of respect is paid when an artist uses the same form and theme of an existing track and reconfigures it to make something fresh and exciting.¹²⁶ A quintessential example of making an iconic song into something new is when Mos Def and Talib Kweli put a new spin on Slick Rick’s classic track “Children’s Story.”¹²⁷ Slick Rick’s version ultimately

123. KRS-ONE, *The Kool Herc*, on MAXIMUM STRENGTH (Jive Records 2008); *The Kool Herc*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Krs-one-the-kool-herc-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/R2UC-NRBW>] (last visited on Feb. 15, 2020).

124. EMINEM FEAT. ROYCE DA 5’9”, BLACK THOUGHT, Q-TIP, DENAUN, *Yah Yah*, on MUSIC TO BE MURDERED BY (Aftermath Entertainment 2020); *Yah Yah*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Eminem-yah-yah-lyrics> [<https://perma.cc/9HTZ-NE3C>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

125. See Bouffard, *supra* note 49.

126. Anderson, *supra* note 119, at 117.

127. *Id.*

reached number two on the charts in 1989,¹²⁸ and Mos Def and Talib Kweli took the theme and form of the song, interjected their own lyrics and style, and released their own “Children’s Story” in 1998.¹²⁹ Not every hip-hop artist or creative track demands the honor of being shouted out by fellow artists or duplicated in theme or form; rather, homage is reserved for the pioneers, the innovators, and the iconic.¹³⁰

This is the third and final plank of the hip-hop framework for addressing and combating ACEs. Hip-hop mandates that lawmakers and activists *bust the facts*, or stated another way, defer to the experts of ACEs when crafting policy solutions to the complex issues that ACEs present. Experts in ACEs have advocated for many evidence-based solutions to confront the prevalence of ACEs and curtail the negative impact that they have on millions of Americans, thus laying the groundwork for policies to be enacted that defer to their knowledge and experience. Lawmakers should pay homage to these experts, like Dr. Vince Felitti and Dr. Robert Anda of the original ACE study, and Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, California’s first Surgeon General and ACEs advocate, and build on the research and the solutions these experts proffer to address the complex issues surrounding ACEs. Employing this hip-hop framework to craft policies and programs to combat ACEs is only one role hip-hop can play in confronting childhood trauma. Hip-hop can correspondingly be used by mental health professionals in their treatment of those who experienced trauma in childhood.

IV. EMPLOYING THE HIP-HOP FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS, COMBAT, AND TREAT ACEs

Ever since the results of the CDC-Kaiser Permanente ACE study in the 1990s, researchers, health care providers, and social workers have sought to develop evidence-based practices that would work to curtail the prevalence and negative impact that ACEs have on millions of Americans. Lawmakers, by adopting the hip-hop framework, should aggressively push back against the status quo and pay homage to the experts by enacting best practices into workable and common sense legislation. Two policy initiatives that lawmakers should strive to enact first are (1) increasing quality care and educational environments for children through ACEs home visitation programs and universal Pre-K, and (2) strengthening economic support for families by enacting state-level earned income tax credits (“EITCs”) and

128. *Slick Rick Chart History*, BILLBOARD, <https://www.billboard.com/music/slick-rick/chart-history/rap-song/song/320996> [<https://perma.cc/ZU3K-MYRR>] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

129. See Anderson, *supra* note 119, at 107.

130. *Id.*

family-friendly work policies. Mental health professionals should likewise employ a hip-hop framework by using the music and the stories of its artists in the context of treating those who have experienced childhood trauma through both group programs and individual therapy.

A. Preventing ACEs Through Hip-Hop Policy

Lawmakers have the ability to pass legislation that creates comprehensive ACEs-focused home visitation programs, that works to establish universal Pre-K and affordable, high-quality childcare, and that reinforces economic support to families aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty. These initiatives can prevent the number of ACEs children experience and allow them to be healthier adults with much more positive health outcomes.

1. Home Visitation Programs and Affordable, High-Quality Healthcare Prevent Childhood Trauma

Home visitation programs have been consistently suggested since the first ACE study and it has been recently shown that home visits decrease the causes and effects of ACEs in many ways.¹³¹ A pattern of home visits not only provides general supervision and accountability, but they also work to educate parents or guardians in the household about ACEs and provide the opportunity for professionals and members of the home to work together to implement practices that create a safer and more stable environment for the child.¹³² Some home visitors have found that simply assisting a parent in understanding his or her own ACEs is instrumental in changing the atmosphere of a home.¹³³ Lawmakers should work to implement home visitation programs in the most vulnerable and at-risk communities, consisting of well-trained health care professionals, social workers, and volunteers that routinely visit the homes of young children and work to spread awareness and education of ACEs.

Home visits can be utilized in numerous ways other than training parents on ACEs. Some home visitation programs focus on early childhood

131. Felitti et al., *supra* note 4; *Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION (2019) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES-508.pdf> [https://perma.cc/X8MG-UEX6] [hereinafter *Preventing ACEs*]; *Addressing ACEs in Home Visiting by ASKING, LISTENING, and ACCEPTING*, NEAR@HOME, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6af3b236099ba883a28b1e/t/5d9ccf215b06731c55906d45/1570557737845/NEARatHome+3rd+Edition+June+2019.pdf> [https://perma.cc/4RWP-R8H8] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020) [hereinafter *ACEs in the Home*].

132. *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131; *ACEs in the Home*, *supra* note 131.

133. *ACEs in the Home*, *supra* note 131.

development and early success in school.¹³⁴ Although they may be used for different purposes, successful home visits may take on similar structures. First, parents are often referred to a home visitation program by members of the community such as school employees, caseworkers, or other health professionals.¹³⁵ For example, Parents as Teachers, an organization that uses a home visitation model to train parents how to best support their child's development and to collaborate with the child's school, operates in a variety of settings, like in hospitals, schools, and non-profit organizations.¹³⁶ Next, a trained professional, most likely a social worker trained extensively in ACEs, would visit the home and work with the parents or legal guardians to understand what ACEs are, how they occur, and the impact they have later in an individual's life. The home visitor would then work with the child's caretaker to build skills and knowledge and provide them with resources to create safer and more stable home environments.¹³⁷ The frequency of home visits varies by the type of program in which they are associated, as some consist of only three visits total and other visits go on at intervals over the course of several years.¹³⁸ Due to the extensive ACEs education and training a household may require in creating a stable and safer environment, ACEs home visitation programs would most likely need to be several months long to achieve the most favorable results. Incorporating training about ACEs into these early childhood home visitation models is crucial to combating the ACEs epidemic.

However, children are not always at home. To ensure that children are adequately cared for in daycare settings lawmakers should work to provide affordable, or free, high-quality childcare for all. Access to high-quality childcare has been shown to decrease child neglect and abuse, reduce child behavioral problems, and increase a child's positive social skills.¹³⁹ Such benefits can also be seen in universal Pre-K programs. There are currently only three states—Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma—that offer true universal Pre-K for all four-year-olds.¹⁴⁰ Preschool enrichment programs

134. Libby Doggett, *How Engaging At-Risk Parents With Early Home Visits Can Teach Them To Work With Their Schools for Their Kids' Success*, 74 MILLION (Mar. 18, 2019), <https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-how-engaging-at-risk-parents-with-early-home-visits-can-teach-them-to-work-with-their-schools-for-their-kids-success/> [https://perma.cc/M2ZK-UB59].

135. *Id.*

136. *Id.*

137. *Id.*

138. Lauren Supplee, *5 Things to Know About Early Childhood Home Visiting*, CHILD TRENDS (Oct. 25, 2016), <https://www.childtrends.org/child-trends-5/5-things-to-know-about-early-childhood-home-visiting> [https://perma.cc/7CRB-F8VL].

139. *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131.

140. See Amanda Rock, *Universal Pre-K in the United States*, VERY WELL FAM. (last updated Oct. 8, 2019), <https://www.verywellfamily.com/universal-pre-k-2764970> [https://perma.cc/6YRX-HYY2].

that actively involve and support parents not only make it more likely that a child will have better social skills, perform better academically, graduate high school, and earn higher incomes over her or his lifetime, but also such programs have been shown to decrease youth depression and substance abuse, child abuse, and incarceration well into adulthood.¹⁴¹ Lawmakers, in addition to passing legislation creating home visitation programs, should work to pass statutes codifying universal Pre-K and other affordable, high-quality childcare. In fact, lawmakers can look to strong examples in the area of high-quality childcare and education that are already being pursued by hip-hop influenced activists and hip-hop artists like LeBron James and Meek Mill.

LeBron James is an all-time great professional basketball player, a multi-million dollar businessman, the owner of an internationally recognized brand, and, in late 2017, was dubbed “hip-hop’s most important fan.”¹⁴² LeBron, described as having “an insatiable appetite for hip-hop,” constantly uses his massive social media platforms—33.8 million followers on Instagram alone—to broadcast rap music, whether he is in his car rapping along to a song, using the music as the soundtrack of a workout, or giving shout-outs to artists like Meek Mill and Drake.¹⁴³ LeBron was even credited with the successful release of Kendrick Lamar’s *untitled unmastered* collection in 2017, as he debuted the songs on his social media platforms two weeks before their release.¹⁴⁴ There is little doubt that LeBron James, from his childhood in Akron, Ohio to blasting Kendrick Lamar songs in the Lakers workout facility, has been heavily influenced by hip-hop; in fact, he now acts as an influential voice within the hip-hop community all over the world.¹⁴⁵ Mike WiLL Made-It, a music producer that has worked with artists like Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West, and Beyoncé, told TMZ, “You gotta send the King your music, bruh” (LeBron James is often referred to as “King James” or sometimes simply as “the King”).¹⁴⁶

With this rich history of not only having hip-hop influence his life, but also now having influence *over* hip-hop, LeBron has taken action in his childhood community to provide low-income children and families more access to greater opportunities, and at times, a simple fighting chance. In July 2018, the LeBron James Family Foundation partnered with the city of

141. *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131.

142. Elias Leight, *How LeBron James Became Hip-Hop’s Most Important Fan*, GENIUS (Nov. 30, 2017), <https://genius.com/a/how-lebron-james-became-hip-hop-s-most-important-fan> [<https://perma.cc/75QA-NHY9>].

143. *Id.*

144. *Id.*

145. *Id.*

146. *Id.*

Akron to open the I Promise School.¹⁴⁷ The school, seeking to provide wrap-around services that not only include traditional education to its students, but also education, career, and emotional support for parents, boasted an inaugural class of 240 third and fourth graders that were primarily identified as at-risk students.¹⁴⁸ The I Promise School is modeled after LeBron's own childhood experiences in Akron, as he credits his success and positive path in life to a community of helpers that assisted his mother, Gloria James, in raising LeBron and ensuring his success on and off the basketball court.¹⁴⁹ Most recently, in November of 2019, LeBron announced that the I Promise School was adding safe housing for students' families to live in while the child receives their education.¹⁵⁰ In the statement announcing the addition, LeBron stated,

Initially, our work was focused on helping these kids earn an education. But we've found that it is impossible to help them learn if they are struggling to survive — if they are hungry, if they have no heat in the freezing winter, if they live in fear for their safety. We want this place to be their home where they feel safe, supported, and loved, knowing we are right there with them every step of the way as they get back on their feet.¹⁵¹

When the school first opened its doors, its principal, Brandi Davis, sought to ensure that the I Promise School would be a groundbreaking national model for urban and public school excellence.¹⁵² Thus far, Davis's goal may be in sight, as the school has hit high marks, not only academically, but also in its priority to improve the community. For example, after only the first academic year, I Promise students' test scores increased at a rate higher than ninety-nine out of 100 schools, ninety percent of students who had started the year at least one year behind reading level met or exceeded their expected growth in math and reading, and the school, which provides two meals a day for students, extends its services into the summer.¹⁵³ Lawmakers should take notice of the I Promise School's success and work to implement similar models in cities around the country,

147. Jeff Zillgitt, *LeBron James opens new public school in Akron: 'One of the greatest moments' of his life*, USA TODAY (July 30, 2018), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/2018/07/30/lebron-james-promise-school-akron-ohio/862159002/> [<https://perma.cc/UNF6-2L4A>] (the school will expand to include second and fifth grades by 2022).

148. *Id.*

149. *Id.*

150. David Williams, *LeBron James building temporary housing for families at his hometown school*, CNN (Nov. 4, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/04/us/lebron-james-i-promise-village-trnd/index.html> [<https://perma.cc/MVN3-MD3T>].

151. *Id.*

152. Zillgitt, *supra* note 147.

153. Soraya Joseph, *LeBron James' 'I Promise' school delivers on promise to help kids thrive*, GRIO (Apr. 12, 2019), <https://thegrio.com/2019/04/12/lebron-james-i-promise-school-delivers-on-promise-to-help-kids-thrive/> [<https://perma.cc/Y4M4-UF6F>].

as the evidence clearly shows that such options of high-quality child care, education, and wrap-around services are key factors in preventing ACEs.

Meek Mill has taken notice. In November of 2019, it was reported that Meek was hoping to join forces with other community leaders and his “billionaire friends” in an effort to create “super schools” in his hometown of Philadelphia by renovating and reopening several abandoned school buildings around the city.¹⁵⁴ Although there have been no specifics on the schools to date, the rapper has a long track record of giving back to the city and is committed to bettering the lives of Philadelphia’s children and struggling families.¹⁵⁵ One may predict that the schools Meek Mill will help create will not have “bullet holes in the lockers,” an improvement from the schools Meek attended in his formative years.¹⁵⁶ This hip-hop approach to education and childcare should be a model that lawmakers work to replicate and expand.

2. Economic Support for Struggling Families Prevents Childhood Trauma

Passing laws that create home visitation programs and affordable, high-quality childcare would tremendously help in the fight to prevent ACEs, but for the best possible outcomes, lawmakers must simultaneously work to combat one of the largest causes of childhood trauma: poverty. Poverty is a multigenerational and pervasive problem that has no easy fix; however, there are at least two steps that legislators could take *today* to alleviate the burden for poor families, create more stable environments for children living in poverty, and even carve a path for struggling families to improve their station in life. First, all state legislatures should adopt state EITCs.¹⁵⁷ Second, lawmakers could pass statutes instituting family-friendly work policies, focusing on passing both federal and state level paid maternity leave.¹⁵⁸

An EITC is a benefit for low income working people that ensures more money in their pocket by reducing the amount of taxes they owe.¹⁵⁹ EITCs help families across the nation make ends meet with credits at tax time that

154. Orlando Dowlatt, *Meek Mill Wants His Billionaire Friends To Help Him Build Super Schools In Philly*, URBAN ISLANDZ (Nov. 6, 2019), <https://urbanislandz.com/2019/11/06/meek-mill-billionaire-friends-build-super-schools-philly/> [https://perma.cc/BB6H-WJ7Z].

155. *Id.*; see also *infra* notes 170–71 and accompanying text.

156. MEEK MILL, *supra* note 44.

157. *Id.*; Eleanor Wheeler, *A State EITC In Arkansas: Reinforcing the Bridge Out of Poverty*, ARK. ADVOCS. FOR CHILD. & FAMILIES (Apr. 2016), <https://www.aradvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/AACF-EITC.webfinal.4.6.16.pdf> [https://perma.cc/MPN7-WW4A].

158. *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131.

159. *EITC, Earned Income Tax Credit, Questions and Answers*, IRS (last updated Dec. 20, 2019), <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/eitc-earned-income-tax-credit-questions-and-answers> [https://perma.cc/3WJG-RW2U].

are primarily used for “catching up on bills, furthering education, or providing essentials for kids, like school clothes.”¹⁶⁰ The bipartisan federal EITC program has been helping families move up the income ladder since the 1970s.¹⁶¹ The program was once lauded by President Ronald Reagan as “the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family, the best job creation measure to come out of Congress.”¹⁶² However, the wildly popular and helpful federal version has recently been characterized as a “well-worn bridge out of poverty” in need of a “reinforcing beam” in the form of state-level EITCs.¹⁶³ Adopting state EITCs would help vulnerable families in numerous ways. Twenty-six states, along with the District of Columbia, have adopted state-level EITCs, and the states have seen results that suggest EITCs help people get and keep jobs, assist in lifting families out of poverty, and improve outcomes for children.¹⁶⁴ Many of the benefits that EITCs provide for children mirror those of the implementation of universal Pre-K programs, but they have also been shown to improve infant mortality and reduce the risk for mental illness.¹⁶⁵ Lawmakers, in passing state-level EITCs, would reduce childhood trauma by tackling poverty and easing the burden on low-income families.

Hip-hop artists have been consistent in their efforts to give back to underprivileged or forgotten communities, often the very communities that they were lifted out of due to their superior musical talent. Many of the causes that hip-hop artists work to promote essentially function as an EITC: provide families with more money in their pockets so that they can better provide for their children. Hip-hop philanthropy has changed millions of lives. For example, rapper B.O.B. has donated \$10,000 to Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless.¹⁶⁶ Nas helped form Saving Our Daughters after Hurricane Sandy that helps low-income families with gifts during the holidays.¹⁶⁷ Eminem has started the Marshall Mathers Foundation, the Eight Mile Boulevard Association, and the charity Nine Million that each seek to assist inner city youth in the poverty stricken Eight Mile in Detroit.¹⁶⁸ Kanye West started the Dr. Donda West Foundation, named after his late mother, which helps kids that have dropped out of school.¹⁶⁹

160. Wheeler, *supra* note 157.

161. *Id.*

162. *Id.*

163. *Id.*

164. *Id.*

165. *Id.*; *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131.

166. Julian Sonny, *When Rappers Have Hearts: The Most Charitable Emcees In The Game*, ELITE DAILY (Aug. 7, 2013), <https://www.elitedaily.com/music/when-rappers-have-hearts-the-most-charitable-emcees-in-the-game> [https://perma.cc/J2YB-AJ2H].

167. *Id.*

168. *Id.*

169. *Id.*

50 Cent and his group G-Unit founded the G-Unity Foundation that provides grants to non-profit organizations that focus on improving the quality of life for low-income and underserved communities across the United States.¹⁷⁰ Jay Z and Meek Mill have partnered with New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft and Philadelphia 76ers owner Michael Rubin to create the Reform Alliance dedicated to radical criminal justice system reform.¹⁷¹ Upon launch of the Reform Alliance, Meek Mill stated,

I'm here to speak for all the people who don't have a voice. . . . I got caught up in the system and every time I started to further my life with the music industry—from traveling the world, performing worldwide and actually making money to be able to provide for my family and take them out of their ruthless environment, every year or two was something that always brought me back to ground zero and it was probation and I always wondered what happened to people in situations worse than mine.¹⁷²

The Reform Alliance will seek to positively disrupt the probation system in the United States as well as seek fundamental criminal justice reform going forward.

Dr. Dre recently donated \$10 million to Compton High School in order to build a new Performing Arts Center.¹⁷³ Upon announcement of the contribution, Dr. Dre stated “My goal is to provide kids with the kind of tools and learning they deserve The performing arts center will be a place for young people to be creative in a way that will help further their education and positively define their future.”¹⁷⁴ This contribution to Compton High School is the second significant philanthropic effort by Dr. Dre in Southern California’s education system. Dr. Dre and Jimmy Iovine jointly contributed \$70 million to the University of Southern California to create the “Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy for Arts, Technology and Business Innovation.”¹⁷⁵

Hip-hop and its artists are at the forefront of non-profit and charity work in low-income communities, providing assistance to those who need

170. *Id.*

171. Deena Zaru, *Meek Mill and Jay-Z launch criminal justice reform organization 'to speak for all the people who don't have a voice,'* ABC NEWS (Jan. 23, 2019 2:56 PM), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/meek-mill-jay-launch-criminal-justice-reform-organization/story?id=60552751> [<https://perma.cc/9UBS-2AP8>].

172. *Id.*

173. Andrew Barker, *Dr. Dre Donates \$10 Million for Compton High School Performing Arts Center*, VARIETY (June 15, 2017), <https://variety.com/2017/music/news/dr-dre-donates-10-million-for-compton-high-school-performing-arts-center-1202468143/> [<https://perma.cc/8A28-T34G>] (“Compton, Calif. native and hip-hop mogul Dr. Dre has committed \$10 million dollars to the construction of a performing arts center for one of his hometown’s high schools, the Compton Unified School District announced today.”).

174. *Id.*

175. *Id.*

it most. Lawmakers across the country should pass legislation, such as the EITC, to help in this effort, in giving families monetary assistance so that they can establish more stable and safe environments for their children, and possibly lift themselves out of poverty, thus directly combating the existence and impact of ACEs.

The second step legislators could immediately take to alleviate the burden on families, and thus decrease the prevalence of ACEs, is to institute family-friendly work policies. A main focus should be passing paid maternity leave for new mothers.¹⁷⁶ New mothers who have access to paid maternity leave are more likely to maintain their current employment, and research suggests that paid maternity leave may also protect against depression, pediatric abusive head trauma, and intimate partner violence.¹⁷⁷ By protecting the health of both mother and child, lawmakers' passage of family-friendly work policies would literally stop ACEs before a child can have a traumatic and harmful experience. However, only four states—California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island—currently have paid maternity leave laws.¹⁷⁸ In fact, the United States is one of only *three* countries, the other two being Papua New Guinea and Oman, that does not guarantee paid maternity leave.¹⁷⁹ The existing state laws offer new mothers only up to six weeks off—up to only four weeks in Rhode Island—with the highest salary retention rate of sixty percent over that timeframe.¹⁸⁰ For reference, mothers in Belgium can take up to fifteen weeks for maternity leave and get paid eighty percent of their salary for the thirty days after the child is born and seventy-five percent for the remainder of the time.¹⁸¹ The United States should institute a federal paid maternity leave act that creates a baseline for what states must uphold, and allow states to pass legislation with more incentives to attract new or expecting mothers to move there. The federal statute should institute at least twelve weeks of paid leave—the amount of unpaid leave granted under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993—for new mothers and allow them to retain up to seventy percent of their salary during that time.

176. *Preventing ACEs*, *supra* note 131.

177. *Id.*

178. Lyndsey Gilpin, *10 things you need to know about maternity leave in the US*, TECHREPUBLIC (May 8, 2015), <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-maternity-leave-in-the-us/> [<https://perma.cc/7N6Q-QJT2>].

179. *Id.* (the United States only offers unpaid maternity leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993).

180. *Id.*

181. Chris Weller, *These 10 countries have the best parental leave policies in the world*, BUS. INSIDER (Aug. 22, 2016), <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-with-best-parental-leave-2016-8> [<https://perma.cc/6VTY-FREJ>] (fathers are given ten days off, with the first three at 100% pay, and the last seven at 82% of salary if they are taken during the babies first four months).

Family-friendly work policies, like paid maternity leave, would have a significant positive impact on single mothers and low-income communities. In 2016, federal statistics stated there were 9.9 million single mothers with young children in the United States and that nearly one-third of those with jobs lived in poverty.¹⁸² Further, researchers from Princeton and Harvard found that seventy percent of all black children are born to unmarried mothers, three times the rate in the 1960s.¹⁸³ Twenty-five percent of all American mothers are forced to return to work within two weeks of giving birth to support their families, and many of these women are single mothers.¹⁸⁴ Aside from the problems with finding adequate and affordable childcare, research suggests a new baby's overall development is contingent on bonding with its mother, and this too is interrupted when mothers are forced back to work to put food on the table.¹⁸⁵ Many hip-hop luminaries were raised by single mothers: Tupac, Jay Z, Lil Wayne, Eminem, J. Cole, Kanye West, 50 Cent, Drake, Missy Elliott, and the list goes on.¹⁸⁶ Many of these artists leaned on their mothers during childhood and were given great strength and shown great support and love from them. Supporting single mothers in the form of family-friendly policies has the potential to lift more children and families out of poverty, and such support will curtail the likelihood of ACEs for children of single mothers. Lawmakers can, and should, make these changes today. Legislation and philanthropy are not the only areas where hip-hop can make positive differences when it comes to combating ACEs. The use of hip hop lyrics and music in therapy sessions, both group and individual has begun to show promise in both combating and treating those who have suffered harsh childhood trauma.

B. Treating ACEs with Hip-Hop: "Hip-hop is our Therapy"¹⁸⁷

Although many people find it challenging to look past the profanity and suggestive themes prevalent in some mainstream rap music, hip-hop culture, at its core, is based on values of "social justice, peace, respect, self-

182. Danielle Paquette, *Donald Trump's new paid maternity leave plan might exclude single mothers*, WASH. POST (Sept. 20, 2016), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/09/20/donald-trumps-new-paid-maternity-leave-plan-might-exclude-single-mothers/> [https://perma.cc/JZ7B-FJ6Z].

183. *Id.*

184. Monica Froese, *Maternity Leave in the United States: Facts You Need to Know*, HEALTHLINE: PARENTHOOD (Oct. 19, 2016), <https://www.healthline.com/health/pregnancy/united-states-maternity-leave-facts> [https://perma.cc/QEP5-SMBK].

185. Mary Beth Steinfeld, *Bonding is essential for normal infant development*, UC DAVIS HEALTH, https://health.ucdavis.edu/medicalcenter/healthtips/20100114_infant-bonding.html [https://perma.cc/2KLA-9RNK] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

186. Shiny Iris, *14 Rappers Raised by Single Moms*, AFROCULTURE.NET, <https://afroculture.net/14-rappers-raised-by-single-moms/> [https://perma.cc/9EBA-LVRE] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

187. Divinity, *supra* note 83.

worth, community, and having fun.”¹⁸⁸ Because of these values, hip-hop’s popularity as a therapeutic tool when working with young people is continuing to grow.¹⁸⁹ Organizations, like BluePrintForLife in Canada,¹⁹⁰ therapists who treat trauma, like Ronald Crawford in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,¹⁹¹ and educational institutions, like a group of psychiatrists at Cambridge University,¹⁹² are using hip-hop in the treatment of mental health. Using a hip-hop framework to craft policies aimed at preventing ACEs is one goal. Another goal, one just as important, is using hip-hop in treating those who have experienced ACEs.

BluePrintForLife was founded by Stephen Leafloor, a social worker and former hip-hop dancer who specializes in street work with at-risk youth, child protection, and community outreach.¹⁹³ The organization is one of the world’s leading organizations using hip-hop as a community development tool and a model for healing and alternative learning, offering programs that include Leadership Through HipHop, Respect Through HipHop, Social Work Through HipHop, and Healing Through HipHop.¹⁹⁴ Social Work Through HipHop is generally the initial program BluePrintForLife offers in inner cities or remote communities.¹⁹⁵ The website describes the course as “an intense 5-day program where up to 100 youth learn to dance, while also discovering themselves in their culture.”¹⁹⁶ Throughout the week, the young participants learn positive methods of dealing with anger, examine the topics of family violence, sexual abuse, suicide, and addictions, and collaborate with each other and others from the community like teachers and police officers.¹⁹⁷ The program ends with a final community showcase and epic dance battle, where the community

188. *The Healing Power of Hip-Hop*, COLLEGE HIP HOP (July 27, 2017), <https://collegehiphop.com/2017/07/27/healing-power-hip-hop/> [https://perma.cc/9MFH-FLTC] [hereinafter COLLEGE HIP HOP]; DIVINITY, *supra* note 83 (“What many don’t see is that hip-hop is more than just the bravado and braggadocio. It is also a positive force to help people develop, promote, and restore their mental health and social functioning. Making life easier for both rapper and fan. When in a hopeless place, hip-hop can help you get through tough times”).

189. COLLEGE HIP HOP, *supra* note 187.

190. *Healing Through HipHop*, BLUEPRINTFORLIFE, <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca> [https://perma.cc/A8Q6-XX4U] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

191. Cassie Owens, *How this Philly therapist promotes healing through hip hop*, BILLY PENN (Jun. 27, 2017), <https://billypenn.com/2017/06/27/how-this-philly-therapist-promotes-healing-through-hip-hop/> [https://perma.cc/5TFK-J9ME].

192. COLLEGE HIP HOP, *supra* note 187.

193. *Stephen Leafloor*, BLUEPRINTFORLIFE, <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/about/founder/> [https://perma.cc/F7ZR-EJYV] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

194. *Who Is BluePrintForLife?*, BLUEPRINTFORLIFE, <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/about/> [https://perma.cc/9T5D-KAEV] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

195. *Social Work Through HipHop*, BLUEPRINTFORLIFE, <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/services/social-work-through-hiphop/> [https://perma.cc/XCS5-P2U9] (last visited Feb. 15, 2020).

196. *Id.*

197. *Id.*

gathers in celebration and where parents have seen some of “the most shy and reserved youth in their community blossom with a new sense of self-confidence and pride.”¹⁹⁸

BluePrintForLife should serve as a blueprint for similar programs in the United States. Hip-hop can assist individuals in developing an identity, belonging, and purpose.¹⁹⁹ Hip-hop can allow one to understand his or her own vulnerability, reinforce his or her resilience, and inspire one to take challenges head on.²⁰⁰ Hip-hop is powerful, and it allows people to take ownership of their own story and to express it and feel it as they see fit.²⁰¹ BluePrintForLife has been successfully turning lives around in Canada and nonprofits in the United States must take notice and begin the process of increasing similar hip-hop education programs in inner cities and throughout the nation. These programs, in teaching healing and healthy coping skills through the universal language of hip-hop, could have a transformational impact on communities across the country.

In addition to the innovative hip-hop group programs offered by organizations like BluePrintForLife, hip-hop has recently been finding its way into more traditional one-on-one therapy settings. Ronald Crawford, a hip-hop fan and therapist from North Philadelphia, has found that incorporating hip-hop in his treatment plans allows him to break down barriers with his clients.²⁰² Crawford works with primarily black and Latino males, and as he started connecting with them through hip-hop, he has seen a tremendous improvement in how willing his clients are to participate with him and buy into the therapy.²⁰³ Crawford uses lyrics from artists like Jay-Z, Meek Mill, Dice Raw, and Jakk Frost to open conversations about drug use and addiction, gang life, and family troubles.²⁰⁴ Hip-hop offers a million ways to connect with one another, and Crawford, who sees himself as “a member of the hip-hop culture” uses these connections to build bridges, earn trust, and help to heal his clients’ trauma.²⁰⁵

Hip-hop holds within it a powerful potential to provide therapists tools to wield when treating mental illness both in young patients and within the minority community where mental health treatment has historically been viewed negatively or as a sign of weakness. By example, hip-hop artists

198. *Id.*

199. Divinity, *supra* note 83.

200. *Id.*

201. *Id.*

202. Owens, *supra* note 190.

203. *Id.*

204. *Id.* (Crawford asserts it is even more effective when he is able to use a local rapper from Philadelphia, like Meek Mill, so that his clients feel a direct connection to the content of the tracks).

205. *Id.*

are promoting mental health treatment as described above and by trade hip-hop artists are providing content that mental health professionals can use to benefit those that suffer from ACEs and trauma as well as those that need mental health treatment.

V. CONCLUSION

Adverse Childhood Experiences are responsible for killing too many people too early in their lives. It is clear that the trauma that a person endures in childhood will impact them for the rest of her or his life, and may lead to the contraction of a chronic disease, increase the likelihood of risky behaviors, lead to struggles of addiction to alcohol or drugs, prompt more suicidal ideation and actual attempts, and mean a shorter life span of up to twenty years in some cases. ACEs impact a majority of Americans, but they have the greatest impact in low-income and underserved communities and communities of color. If left unchecked, ACEs will continue to wreak havoc on these communities, continuing to cut lives short and contributing to generational poverty and misery. However, ACEs can be addressed and effectively treated, and the best vehicle to shed light on this issue and propose the most effective changes is hip-hop. Hip-hop was created out of adversity and trauma, and many of its most successful and recognizable stars are products of high-crime, low-income communities where adversity and trauma loomed around every street corner. The trauma these artists faced as children is present in their music and in their charity work that seeks to give back to the trauma filled communities from which they came. Lawmakers, mental health professionals, and community activists should learn from hip-hop. First, lawmakers should not be afraid to shake up the status quo. Second, lawmakers must be open and honest about the issue of ACEs and spread education and awareness of the epidemic. Finally, lawmakers must build on the hard work already accomplished and defer to the ACEs experts when crafting policies and legislation. That means it is time to begin using hip-hop to prevent ACEs by crafting and instituting home visitation programs that train caregivers on ACEs, providing access to universal Pre-K and high-quality childcare and education, passing state-level EITCs, and instituting paid maternity leave both federally and at the state level. It is time to begin using hip-hop to treat the impact of childhood trauma by developing more ways to incorporate hip-hop education into inner cities programs and into individual therapy sessions. The time has come that hip-hop be used to help solve the ACEs epidemic in this country.