

THE GENIUS OF IRVING MILLS:
DUKE ELLINGTON, IMAGE
ADVERTISING, & GANGSTA RAP

BY JESSE NOLAN

INDIANA UNIVERSITY JACOBS SCHOOL OF MUSIC
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“In the record business, money is spent on two things: recording music and promoting it.”¹

And so has been the case since the dawn of the music recording industry and even before then, in the years of Tin Pan Alley when publishing houses paid song-pluggers for a new hit tune and then spent money promoting the sheet music. And while times have changed, marketing and promoting tactics surrounding popular music have not. Industry executives, managers, promoters, and the media relied and continue to rely on an artist’s image as the number one marketing tool to push a product. In fact, far more important than the music to the blockbuster commercial success of an artist is the image conveyed to the American public either by the artist himself or by those who promote said artist in the media. This is not to say that artists in any format cannot be successful without an appealing image, but that the American marketplace has shown time and time again that those who exude such images are usually more successful than those that do not. In every decade of popular music, from Duke Ellington in the thirties and forties to Dr. Dre in the nineties, the importance of image cannot be overlooked. Although divided chronologically and musically, both Duke Ellington and gangsta rappers like Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, and a host of others enjoyed success, fame, and fortune due in no small part to the direct marketing of an image alongside their music.

“HARLEM’S ARISTOCRAT OF JAZZ”²

The construction of an alluring image is a careful and calculated process comprised of two distinct stages. The first is the way an artist’s music and talent is portrayed and perceived by the masses. The second is how the artist, as a person, is portrayed in the media; how they dress, act, and look, what clothes they wear, how they talk, who they associate with, the color of their skin; *anything* that aids the public in forging an opinion. Both Irving Mills and Duke Ellington understood the importance of

¹ McDermott, Terry. (2003). “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.” In P. Bresnick & M. Groening (Eds.), *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2003* (9-34). New York: Da Capo Press.

² Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

Ellington's image to the popular commercial success and longevity of his band and recordings.

“To promote Ellington successfully as a popular attraction and serious composer, Mills needed to accomplish more than just selling (Ellington's) music and his band; he had to create an image that circumvented the racial segregation that divided the entertainment world.”³

First, Mills “devised a way for the public to accept Ellington as an important American composer”⁴ whose music reached far beyond the scope of the “primitive” “hot” jazz that initially catapulted the band to fame. This was done through simple, descriptive advertising. The word “genius” was frequently used in tag lines advertising Ellington's music. Dozens of ads taken out by Mills in the 1930s in various “high-brow” magazines describe Ellington's music in “venerated tones.” Even his nickname, “Duke,” conjured up images of sophistication and royalty. According to Irving Mill's son, Paul, every song was “promoted like ‘another hit from this genius,’ and that went on all the years that we managed and promoted his music.”⁵ The Ellington orchestra's first press manual, drafted by Mills in 1931 even suggests a personal catch line for Duke: “Harlem's Aristocrat of Jazz.”⁶ The manual also tastefully incorporates references to the mysterious sounds made famous by Ellington at the Cotton Club. This “jungle” music, as it was described, embodied “the quintessence of physical Africa moving in sinuous and suggestive rhythms,” an idea that mesmerized the all white audiences out of curiosity of the unknown depths of the Dark Continent.⁷

Secondly, Mills sought to impress upon the public an image of his design. This was accomplished by using image advertising, “uncommon in popular music promotion at the time, but frequently used by business corporations.”⁸ For example, in June of 1931, Irving Mills took out a full page ad in *Variety* magazine, complete with the tag line “Duke Ellington: America's New Vogue (A Different Kind of Music),” which trumpeted an image of Ellington rather than promoting the recently released “Creole Rhapsody.” Mills could have left well enough alone and allowed the music to sell itself. By 1931 Ellington had already begun to establish his reputation as a unique composer. He had

³ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nicholson, Stuart. (1999). “The Duke Steps Out.” *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (130-183). Boston: Northern University Press.

⁸ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

already scored a number of hits and in 1930 his band had been voted “the most prominent Negro broadcasters on the air” who were “as heartily admired by the white as the colored people.”⁹ His music had reached the entire nation through the regular radio broadcasts from the Cotton Club. Rather than banking on the music to sell itself, Mills and Ellington clearly understood the effect of image advertising on the record buying public and knew that the right image would tip the scales in their favor.

Mills made sure that any photographs or artwork used in print advertising presented this aristocratic image. In photographs, Duke was always clad in a tailored suit or tuxedo. He always looked dapper, clean cut, and refined. The book *Duke Ellington* by Scott Yanow presents one of the finest photographic collections of Ellington, and in each picture, whether seated at the piano, conducting his band, conducting business, or simply relaxing, he always looks elegant.¹⁰ The band is dressed similarly; in tuxedos every night at the Cotton Club and in handsome suits for road gigs. In an interview circa 1990, Jimmy Heath recalled “the strong nonverbal message Ellington and his men transmitted to their audience.”¹¹ Some advertising pictures even show Duke holding a baton while conducting his orchestra, something he rarely (if ever) did in concert. These pictures in particular along with the a section entitled “exploitation” in the advertising manual drawn up by Mills liken Ellington’s persona, genius, and music to that of Percy Grainger, Basil Cameron, Leopold Stokowski, and Paul Whiteman, all white men (excuse the pun) and well respected musical figures of the time.¹² Finally, the way Ellington and the band were seen by the public, traveling in their own Pullman car and paying extra to have the car parked in the station, arriving to venues in a fleet of taxi cabs, traveling with their own lighting equipment, stage and electrician, and staying in hotels, some of which were reserved for whites only, solidified the classy and sophisticated image Mills wished to create for Ellington.^{13,14}

As part of Mills’ marketing strategy, Ellington and the band also appeared in or recorded the soundtrack for 7 motion pictures between 1929 and 1939 (the year he broke with Mills), including feature films and short subject movies. In total, Ellington and the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Yanow, Scott. (1999). *Duke Ellington*. New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers

¹¹ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

¹² Nicholson, Stuart. (1999). “The Duke Steps Out.” *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (130-183). Boston: Northern University Press.

¹³ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

¹⁴ Nicholson, Stuart. (1999). “The Duke Steps Out.” *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (130-183). Boston: Northern University Press.

band would participate in 21 motion pictures between 1929 and 1982, adding cartoons, performance videos, documentaries, and Broadway revues to their expanding catalogue.

The payoff was astounding. Because Ellington's music was placed on a higher level by both the public and record industry executives, and because Duke had proven himself with a string of early hits, he was afforded the flexibility by Victor Records to write and record whatever he wanted. This led to many of his seminal pieces and most importantly his extended works like "Creole Rhapsody" and "Reminiscing in Tempo."¹⁵ Monetarily, Mills' strategy allowed Ellington to make large amounts of money. This allowed Duke to keep his band employed throughout the Great Depression, during which the band was "typically productive" and even toured Europe for the first time.¹⁶ No other band except the Cab Calloway Orchestra, which replaced the Ellington orchestra at the Cotton Club, achieved such a feat. Benefits were also secured for Duke, something that Ellington "could not have achieved on his own, that no African American artist had achieved previously, and that few white recording artists could achieve during the 1930s."¹⁷ The marketing success achieved by Irving Mills and Duke Ellington lasted far beyond their partnership. Although Ellington split with Mills in 1939, citing a disagreement over his mother's funeral arrangement as the "final straw," the lasting impact of Mills' strategies bore fruit for the remainder of Ellington's career.¹⁸ Simply put, Mills' marketing genius matched Ellington's musical genius. His creative, inventive, and revolutionary marketing strategy "would not look out of place in today's music business" and "it is no exaggeration to say that practically all the marketing techniques outlined (by) Mills are still being successfully employed today."¹⁹

¹⁵ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro." *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

¹⁶ Yanow, Scott. (1999). "The Swing Era." Duke Ellington (42-55). New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers

¹⁷ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro." *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

¹⁸ Hasse, John Edward. (1993). "Swinging To A Different Drummer." *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (193-230). New York: Da Capo Press.

¹⁹ Nicholson, Stuart. (1999). "The Duke Steps Out." *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (130-183). Boston: Northern University Press.

“THE RACIALIZED BADMAN”²⁰

In 1988, over half a century later, and fourteen years after Ellington’s passing, the Los Angeles based gangsta rap group Niggaz With Attitude, or N.W.A., sold hundreds of thousands of copies of their record “Straight Outta Compton” without any radio play or television exposure. How did it happen? Interestingly, it started with a number of 12-inch singles, a medium utilized by Ellington in 1933 to put out a slightly longer record than the usual 10-inch single. The most significant of these singles, entitled “Surgery,” recorded by the Wreckin’ Cru and produced by Dr. Dre (one of the founding members of N.W.A.), was released in 1984 on the independent label Kru-Cut Records, which only existed in name. It sold 50,000 copies, “a huge amount for a independently made and distributed record.”²¹ CBS called and signed the Wreckin’ Cru, a completely unknown act outside of the L.A. ghetto, to a contract with a \$100,000 advance. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Dre left the group and started N.W.A. with friend Eric Wright, better known as Easy-E. They released their first 12-inch single, “Boyz N Tha Hood” on Ruthless Records, another label that existed only in name. It became a hit, and through “street level” promotion it reached teens both black and white all over the nation. By the time N.W.A. released their first full length record, “Straight Outta Compton” in 1988, eighty percent of its sales “were in the suburbs, mainly to (white) teenage boys who wouldn’t know real niggaz if one woofed in their ears.”²²

It certainly makes sense that the Wreckin’ Cru and N.W.A. sold thousands of records to the impoverished black youth of the Compton ghetto. “Hip-hop from its beginnings has been intensely placed-based. Rappers have told us about their neighborhoods and towns...and made a virtue of necessity in celebrating Compton, a place few people had ever heard of outside Southern California.”²³ But what made N.W.A.’s music so attractive to white audiences outside the harsh ghettos of south-central Los Angeles? Certainly one can point to the phenomenon of grass roots promotion, but surely it cannot stand alone as the singular reason behind N.W.A.’s success any more than the ingenuity and freshness of the new style of music they were pioneering. Simply put, the images described and conjured by the music and the images

²⁰ Quinn, Eithne. (2005). The Racialized Badman: “Without The Consolation of Tears.” *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (103-107). New York: Columbia University Press.

²¹ McDermott, Terry. (2003). “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.” In P. Bresnick & M. Groening (Eds.), *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2003* (9-34). New York: Da Capo Press.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

of the artists themselves drew teenage white audiences to a lifestyle and image that was mysterious, alluring, and dangerous.

Much like Duke Ellington captivated older white audiences with his “jungle” music at the Cotton Club, N.W.A. at once stunned and fascinated younger white audiences with their harsh language, “gleeful, celebratory hedonism..., misogyny and violence and dark-as-midnight nihilism.”²⁴ Again, it was the mystery of the unknown terrain, lifestyle, and gang-banging misfits of south-central L.A. that drew white kids in. Instead of being attracted to the aristocratic image of a figure like Duke Ellington, the record buying white public became motivated by the image of a “racialized badman.”²⁵

Many scholars and critics have asserted that “people forgot that these were songs, fictions” and that “in almost any other medium...the same content...would have been analyzed as an artistic stance, not a lifestyle,” and that “these weren’t, after all, real gangsters.”²⁶ However, this writer begs to differ simply because what is most important to the maintenance of an image is that it not be fabricated, but rather that the artists provide the “substance behind the hype.”²⁷ Duke Ellington’s background lent credibility to his image. His privileged upbringing in Washington, D.C. and his father’s job as a butler who sometimes served catered events at the White House provided this substance.²⁸ Likewise, the lives and experiences of the members of N.W.A., and all the gangsta rappers that would follow in their wake, provided the same substance. They were rapping about the harsh realities of ghetto life as they knew it: drive-by shootings, the rampant crack epidemic of the eighties, gang violence, crooked and racist police, fatherless households, and a new disease called AIDS (which would ultimately claim the life of N.W.A. founding member Easy-E), hardly fictitious circumstances in an economically disparate area such as south-central Los Angeles.

Secondly, gangsta rap artists have gone on record stating that their music was also a lifestyle. Tupac Shakur, one of the most celebrated and influential talents to come out of the gangsta rap craze of the nineties had his stomach tattooed with the words “Thug Life,” complete with a bullet for an “i.” Many of these rappers and their respective “entourages” were also involved with street gangs and drug dealing. Before he became

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

²⁸ Hasse, John Edward. (1993). “Enjoying a Capital Childhood.” *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (21-33). New York: Da Capo Press.

Easy-E, Eric Wright was a well-known Los Angeles drug dealer. Some of these gangsta rappers were at the center of numerous violent conflicts. In 1992, Dr. Dre released the second most influential gangsta rap album of all time, *The Chronic*, but quickly found himself implicated in a string of “highly publicized violent incidents” that also involved his record label, Death Row Records, which “was fast developing a reputation for strong-arm tactics and gang connections.”²⁹ Another influential rapper and Death Row Records labelmate Snoop Dogg (real name Calvin Broadus) was put on trial for murder in 1993, and although he admitted he drove the getaway car while a bodyguard fired the fatal shots, was acquitted of the charges (as was the bodyguard). In the mid-nineties, a war of words between “East Coast” and “West Coast” rappers quickly turned to extreme violence in two separate but related incidents which claimed the lives of both Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace, better known as The Notorious B.I.G., in 1996 and 1997 respectively. To assert that “these weren’t real gangsters” is ludicrous. If Duke Ellington lived the high life, these men certainly lived the “thug life,” and although their lifestyles are distinctly disparate, they were both equally attractive to the public.

One advantage gangsta rappers had over Duke Ellington was the television set. In August of 1988 MTV premiered a program dedicated to bringing the latest rap music into the living rooms of teenagers all over the globe with the launch of Yo! MTV Raps. The program was originally scheduled to air once a week, but the demand for the show catapulted the schedule to six days a week until the show ended on August 17, 1995. Although MTV initially banned N.W.A.’s “Straight Outta Compton” video, the network would eventually let its guard down and show edited versions of explicit videos.³⁰ Just like Ellington, gangsta rappers have also appeared in or on the soundtrack of various movies. Suge Knight, president of Death Row Records, branched out into the movie industry in an extreme display of “shock tactics” when he produced “Murder Was The Case: The Movie,” an eighteen minute film directed by Dr. Dre and featuring Snoop Dogg as the real-life version of himself (Calvin Broadus). The movie follows the plot line of Snoop’s 1993 song “Murder Was The Case,” produced by Dr. Dre and released on Snoop’s debut album “Doggystyle” on Death Row Records. It is certainly no coincidence that “Murder Was The Case: The Movie” was released to coincide with Snoop’s 1993 murder trial, a direct marketing ploy by Suge Knight to capitalize on Snoop’s reputation

²⁹ Quinn, Eithne. (2005). It’s A Doggy-Dogg World. *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (103-107). New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁰ www.wikipedia.org.

and portrayal in the media.³¹ Other movies featuring gangsta rappers include “8 Mile” (Eminem), “Friday” (Ice Cube – member of NWA), “Dangerous Ground” (Ice Cube), “Boyz N The Hood” (Ice Cube), “Gang Related” (Tupac Shakur), and “Gridlock’d” (Tupac Shakur). A video game entitled “50 Cent: Bulletproof” starring the gangsta rapper 50 Cent, a self-made, drug dealing hustler from South Jamaica Queens, New York who survived nine gunshots and has sold 22 million albums worldwide, was released in 2005.

In her book *Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (December 2004), Dr. Eithne Quinn asserts that “the violent images that circulated around these artists...were not simply an outwardly imposed media fabrication,” and that “the controversial management style and marketing strategies” were used to fuel “badman images” because the “musicians and entrepreneurs had always understood the importance of propagating an image of danger and criminality.” Finally, she proposes that Suge Knight, the founder of Death Row Records, “fully grasped the marketing potential of selling a product that lent itself to media-induced controversy and the publicity opportunities opened up by his artists’ legal troubles.”³²

Like Ellington, the payoff was astounding. Fueled by a letter from the FBI to N.W.A.’s record label in mid-1989 which denounced the controversial song “F--- Tha Police” as encouraging “violence against and disrespect for the law-enforcement officer,” along with MTV banning the “Straight Outta Compton” video, the record sold another 100,000 copies, sparking a huge cultural phenomenon. N.W.A. appeared on the cover of Newsweek magazine and Elle magazine even did a 10-page spread on “gangster chic” in the foreign addition.³³ In perhaps the most blatant example of image advertising, Snoop Dogg’s face appeared on the cover of Newsweek in 1993 with the headline: “His album hits the top of the charts this week. Last week he was indicted for murder.”³⁴ Albums from Snoop Dogg (“Doggystyle”) and Dr. Dre (“The Chronic”) as well as albums from numerous other artists like Tupac, The Notorious B.I.G., and Warren G sold millions of copies each during the nineties. In fact, Marshall Mathers, better known as Eminem, a white rapper from Detroit and one of Dr. Dre’s protégés who rose to pop status in 1999, has sold over 75 million records worldwide in 7 years. Like those who came before him,

³¹ Quinn, Eithne. (2005). It’s A Doggy-Dogg World. *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (103-107). New York: Columbia University Press.

³² Ibid.

³³ McDermott, Terry. (2003). “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.” In P. Bresnick & M. Groening (Eds.), *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2003* (9-34). New York: Da Capo Press.

³⁴ Quinn, Eithne. (2005). It’s A Doggy-Dogg World. *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (103-107). New York: Columbia University Press.

Eminem's career has also been marked with violence. On April 11, 2006 his best friend and fellow rapper Proof, who was a member of Eminem's clique D12, was gunned down outside a Detroit nightclub.

CROSS-PROMOTION

Aside from record sales, gangsta rappers have also participated in cross-promotions (joining forces with other companies or branching out into other ventures that tie in and have a marketing effect on one another) and many have gone on to manage and own very successful record labels and clothing lines, among other enterprises. Sean Combs, better known as Puff Daddy, Puffy, Puff, P Diddy, and Diddy, among other names, enjoyed a successful rap career and is now a media mogul whose empire includes a record label (Bad Boy Records), two clothing lines (Sean by Sean Combs and Sean John), a movie company, and a restaurant chain. Combs is reportedly worth over \$315 million. Combs has also been at the center of a number of violent conflicts, including the 1997 shooting death of best friend Christopher Wallace, aka The Notorious B.I.G.. Some believe Combs orchestrated the murder. Shawn Corey Carter, better known as Jay-Z, is the current president and CEO of Def-Jam records. He also was a co-founder of Roc-A-Fella records, which launched the careers of many popular rap and hip-hop artists. Jay-Z also owns his own clothing line (Rocawear), has his own line of Reebok sneakers (the S. Carter Collection), owns an upscale New York sports bar (the 40/40 club), is the exclusive U.S. distributor of Armadale vodka, and is part owner of the New Jersey Nets. He is worth an estimated \$320 million. Dr. Dre is the CEO of Aftermath Records, Eminem's record label. Dre is worth an unknown sum that is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Snoop Dogg has sold over 17 million records and continues to make hit records thirteen years after his first album, "Doggystyle," topped the charts. He also owns his own line of hot dogs (Snoop Doggs), a skateboard and luggage company (Snoop Dogg Board Company), a youth football league (Snoop Youth Football and Snooperbowl), a shoe brand (Doggy Bizcuitz), a clothing line distributed through Macy's (Snoop Dogg Clothing) and has published two books (*Doggy Dayz* and *The Doggfather: The Times, Trials, and Hardcore Truths of Snoop Dogg*).³⁵

Duke Ellington even enjoyed the success of cross-promotion, albeit not with clothing lines and hot dog companies. Instead, Mills used "ads accompanying (Ellington's) sheet music (that) featured cross-promotions with either exclusively or

³⁵ www.wikipedia.org

mostly white songwriters and artists.” Not only did this help Ellington’s image and the sale of his sheet music, but it also padded the pocketbook of Mills and Ellington (who was part owner of Mills’ publishing company) because “Mills used (Ellington’s) fame to cast a favorable light on other Mills-managed performers and composers” which no doubt led to increased sales.³⁶ Mills also achieved successful cross-promotion with newspapers, radio stations, sheet music companies, music stores and instrument dealers, and with Victor records. In Duke Ellington’s advertising manual (authored by Mills), which was sent out to any venue that booked the Ellington orchestra, Mills carefully encourages the venue to seek cross-promotional opportunities (Mills dubs them “tie-ups”) and then carefully outlines the procedure. He urges bookers to invite columnists, music editors, radio editors, and any other writers to interview Ellington. He suggests bookers co-ordinate with local radio stations in order to advertise the orchestra’s gig and to supply the local radio station with Ellington’s latest phonograph record should they not already have it. Mills points bookers to Victor records who he states “will be found willing to co-operate upon counter and window displays, or will make their mailing lists available to you for mutual Ellington exploitation.” Mills encourages venues to have postcards, which presumably could be purchased, for Duke to autograph before and after the show. Mills also offers to sell sheet music directly to the venue and to co-ordinate displays so patrons of the concert could purchase Ellington’s hits such as “Mood Indigo,” “Sophisticated Lady,” “Creole Love Call,” and “Black and Tan Fantasy,” among others. He also proposes that Ellington visit local music stores and autograph copies of sheet music in return for advertising space in daily newspapers; a slick way of getting some free newspaper promotion. Mills even suggests doing “tie-ups” with the Conn instrument corporation, with whom he presumably had a business arrangement. Finally, Mills goes so far as to state, “Ellington lends himself willingly to any tie-ups with newspapers whereby you help them in the collection of a charitable fund in return for publicity space.” Clearly, Mills thought of every possible option to promote and make money for himself and his star attraction.³⁷ Sixty years after Irving Mills dreamed it up, Suge Knight executed the same marketing plan for his artists, albeit artists with an image antithetical to Ellington’s.

³⁶ Cohen, Harvey G. (2004). “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting The Strategy for an African American Maestro.” *The Journal of African American History*, 89, 291-315.

³⁷ Nicholson, Stuart. (1999). “The Duke Steps Out.” *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (130-183). Boston: Northern University Press.

CONCLUSION

Would Ellington's or N.W.A.'s music have reached the same commercial success without the image to back it up? Possibly. NWA had already sold thousands of records on the grass roots level, but their audience was mainly the poor black youth of the south-central L.A. ghettos; i.e. their friends. The image was necessary to motivate young white youth, their largest audience, to purchase gangsta rap records. Duke Ellington probably would have survived on his genius alone, but most likely would not have achieved the same financial success and career longevity without Mills' ingenious marketing plan. Without the "badman" image, the dangerous lore, and the substance to back it up, gangsta rap would have not sparked the national craze that led to multi-billion dollar media empires, clothing lines, and hot dog companies. Simply put, without Irving Mills, none of this would have been possible.