

# The Elvis Effect by Uther Blakwhel



I find it sad and fascinating that the age-old saying is still true in 2010, “The more things change the more they stay the same!” June 21, 2010 Eminem and The Roots released their new CDs. Eminem’s CD is called *Recovery*. The new Roots CD is called *How I Got Over*. Eminem’s CD is selling rather well at this time. It may have already gone platinum. Various critics have called him the greatest rapper ever, an amazing lyricist, and the best battle rapper ever! Marshall Mathers released three CDs that were amazing: *SlimShady LP*, *Marshall Mathers LP*, and *The Eminem Show*. There is no doubt that Eminem is a talented rapper, but to call him the greatest rapper of all time or the king of rap because he sells more CDs than other rappers is a GROSS EXAGGERATION! Just because an alleged artist sells more records than another artist does not make him necessarily better!

Eminem has definitely had an Elvis effect. I guess the question one can ask especially the African American community is, what makes white people or non African-Americans so fascinated with Black culture, especially in the music sense? Before America knew what Buddy Holly looked like they heard him on the radio and assumed he was black. Rock and Roll music was created by black people. The derogative term for rock and roll music during its inception was “Race Music” and colloquially it was called “Nigga Music” until Jerry Wexler called it R&B and Alan Freed made the expression “Rock and Roll” popular.

White America and black America seems to have selective amnesia in regards to rock and roll’s history. Chuck Berry,

Little Richard, Fats Domino, and Bo Diddley, were becoming pop icons in American culture. And even they were feeling the influence of Big Joe Turner, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Louis Jordan and others that came before them. Black kids and white kids were listening to and enjoying these artists. They started becoming sex symbols to white and black women in America. Racism was very prevalent in America in the 1950s. White fathers did not like the idea of their daughters having romantic crushes on these famous black men! A desire developed at this point and time to have black music without black people. It would be Sam Phillips, the founder of Sun Records and a longtime Black music fan, who made the statement that "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars." What if we could find someone who is white that can do what Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Bo Diddley, and Fats Domino do? They don't even have to be exactly as good. Half as good will do just fine! Elvis Aaron Presley must have heard the call in 1956. He burst on the scene singing Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog." Elvis Presley had a very deep baritone voice. When people first heard him on the radio, they thought he was black and Phillips' had accomplished his commercial musical dream.

Elvis Presley copied, stole and imitated black people in rock and roll and in blues and was crowned "The King" of rock and roll. How can you be the king of an art form that is completely from the African-American experience? Here's a quote referenced from [ELVIS-HISTORY-BLOG.COM](http://ELVIS-HISTORY-BLOG.COM) Elvis did refute this idea consistently throughout his career such as the time he told a reporter in Vegas that Fats Domino was really the king, at a 1969 press conference after his first shows in Vegas. But Elvis never helped any black musicians the way white hip-hoppers 3rd Base would years later by producing KMD's first release and discovering Nas. If Elvis had respect for the Black pioneers that influenced him why did he not work with them or promote their current works in his media appearances? Outside of his black back-up singers The Sweet

Inspirations, Elvis's public musical world was quite white. Even Sam Phillips knew better because he always considered Howlin' Wolf his best discovery and Elvis his second best. Coincidentally it would be inside Phillips' Sun studios that Ike Turner's ["Rocket 88"](#) would be recorded in 1951 and this is the song most historians label as the first official rock and roll recording.

Black rock and roll artists like Little Richard were very vocal about the unfair treatment their talents received in the wake of Elvis. He was once quoted as saying, "Elvis was paid \$25,000 for doing three songs in a movie and I only got \$5,000, and if it wasn't for me, Elvis would starve." And, after hearing Presley's version of the song "Trouble," blues legend Muddy Waters thought it sounded an awful lot like his recording of "Hootchie Coochie Man." "I better watch out," he concluded. "I believe whitey's pickin' up on things that I'm doin'."

In her 2002 article in *The Guardian*, Helen Kolawole claimed, "Black music never stays underground. White people always seek it out, dilute it and eventually claim it as their own."

Eminem has openly acknowledged the fact that being white and rapping well has made him more successful than any black rapper. His song "White America" from *The Eminem Show* states the following:

#### "WHITE AMERICA"

"Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself,  
if they were brown, Shady lose, Shady

Sits on the shelf, but Shady's cute, Shady knew, Shady's  
dimple's would help, make ladies swoon

Baby, {ooh baby}, look at my sales, let's do the math, if I  
was black, I would've sold half, I

Ain't have to graduate from Lincoln high school to know that,  
but I could rap, so fuck school,

I'm too cool to go back, gimme the mic, show me where the  
fuckin' studio's at, when I was

Underground, no one gave a fuck I was white, no labels wanted  
to sign me, almost gave up, I was

Like, fuck it, until I met Dre, the only one to look past,  
gave me a chance, and I lit a fire up

Under his ass, helped him get back to the top, every fan black  
that I got, was probably his in

Exchange for every white fan that he's got, like damn, we just  
swapped, sittin' back lookin' at

Shit, wow, I'm like my skin is it starting to work to my  
benefit now, .â€

The rapper even dons an Elvis costume in his video for  
"Without Me." I definitely want to set the record straight. I  
own Eminem's first four CDs, and I enjoyed the first three. He  
is a definite talent! However, tricky wordplay and misogyny  
does not equal up to a great MC! Making fun of pop singers  
male and female is not hip-hop! Disrespecting a married black  
woman is not hip-hop! A white man doing black music and  
disrespecting black women within that culture is wrong on many  
levels! You do not get a pass into black America just because  
you sold a few albums. Alternative radio stations play  
Eminem's music in regular rotation along with the Beastie  
Boys. Why would alternative radio play a rapper on their rock  
stations? You would be hard pressed to hear The Roots, Nas,  
Talib Kweli or Mos Def on alternative radio, but you can  
always hear Eminem and The Beastie Boys on alternative radio!

I heard Eminem's new album called *Recovery* one time all the  
way through. There were two to three songs on the album that I

enjoyed. The Roots new album which is called *How I Got Over* is completely mind blowing! It will not sell as well as Eminem's CD, not because it's bad, It's actually a much better and soulful record. Racial politics have always been deeply ingrained in America. The Elvis Effect is when a white person/musician imitates black music culture well. This white musician gets massive exposure to the crossover audience which also happens to be white. White America automatically identifies with this musician and they become a household name and the greatest thing since sliced bread! While the original black counterparts get left in the wind. America has witnessed this up close and personal with The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Pat Boone! It was much more socially acceptable for four white guys from Great Britain to come over to America singing Black American music rather than hearing it directly from the original black counterparts! How can anyone honestly say that Eminem has a right to be in a cypher with KRS-One or Mos Def? It is insulting to black people and rap music in general to call this man the king of rap. Especially when LL COOL J, KRS-ONE, SLICK RICK, RAKIM, CHUCK D., MOS DEF, TALIB KWELI, BOOTS RILEY, BIG DADDY KANE, AND NAS STILL ROAM THIS EARTH!

There was only one white group in Hip-Hop that truly understood black music and its culture! 3rd Bass was an amazing rap group that unfortunately put out only two albums. Yes, I can still remember when they were still called albums! 3rd Bass was a group that acknowledged the importance of hip hop and of black people. They also addressed stereotypes between black and white culture. They jokingly stated that they were two white guys trying to be black. MC Serch and Prime Minister Pete Nice produced KMD's first album called *Mr. Hood*. MF Doom rose from KMD's ashes. MC Serch went on to executive produce Nas's first album entitled *Illmatic*. 3rd Bass gave back to hip-hop and the black community by putting Nas and MF Doom on. Their contributions to hip-hop will be studied and revered in the near and distant future. When a

rapper comes back to his or her neighborhood and signs a new artist the artist's lifestyle has immediately changed, usually for the better. Eminem can also be credited for doing the same thing with D-12, Obie Trice, 50 Cent and it is rumored Slaughterhouse. This makes Eminem a much better artist than Elvis Presley and Kid Rock! Elvis Presley and Kid Rock took from black people and never gave back.

Kid Rock's first album, *Grit Sandwiches For Breakfast*, was produced by D-Nice, Too Short and Mike E. Clark. Kid Rock's DJ Blackman worked with him for this CD and is also on the cover with Kid Rock. In other words there was a great deal of black people involved with Kid Rock when he first got started. Once he blew up off of *Devil Without A Cause* the only black person he worked with is his drummer from Twisted Brown Trucker. The first thing Kid Rock did once he became successful was to go back to Michigan and sign his best friend Uncle Kracker to his record label. He has not signed any black artists to his label and he has not worked with any black emcees from Detroit.

The Beastie Boys were a failed punk rock group that started messing around with hip-hop. Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin signed them to Def Jam Records. They released a single called "Cookie Puss" and "She's On It" from the *Krush Groove* soundtrack. When *Licensed To Ill* came out The Beastie Boys became a household name. The record became a national success going platinum multiple times. The Beastie Boys left Def Jam Records and moved to Los Angeles, California and started an alternative record label! The question you have to ask yourself is if the Beastie Boys were three black guys from Queens, New York would they have been so successful in the American market? Why is it always more acceptable for a white person to imitate black music than for the actual black people who perform it and originate the music art form itself?

African-American people are much more willing to accept white people doing black music, like Robin Thicke, Joss Stone,

Justin Timberlake, Kid Rock and Eminem more than white people are willing to accept black people doing rock and roll! It took Lenny Kravitz ten years in America before he became the only mainstream black artist in America doing rock and roll music. Black people have allowed themselves to become alienated from the very music that they created! Mainstream black and white America have not heard of Bad Brains, Fishbone, Living Colour, Meshell Ndegeocello, Kings X, Ben Harper, 24-7Spyz, and Love!

To call Elvis Presley the "King of Rock and Roll" is an insult to Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Bo Diddley and Ike Turner! Elvis Presley stole from most of the men previously mentioned. Elvis Presley did have talent. I'm not saying he didn't. There are even a few songs of his that I happen to like. However, one white guy with a black voice and rhythm does not a king make!

Eminem is also a talented rapper who happens to have more credibility than Elvis for the simple fact that he did give back to the one community that accepted him and did not discard his potential and talent. That community is the black community. Some people may have issue with the people he did sign from Detroit, but that's definitely another conversation. He didn't steal from black culture and call himself the king, or move to Los Angeles and start an alternative label and criticize the very music that got him famous. I do feel compelled to mention that as a white male performing in a black art form you do not have a pass that allows you to criticize black women within American culture (Mariah Carey). It is not a good practice to criticize married women from someone else's tribe!

Music is universal and should be enjoyed by everyone, however when we start giving more credit to some people over others because they are white doing black music it just goes to show that racism is definitely in everything that is American especially in its music. Maybe one day the Elvis Effect will

fade away. I look forward to that day!

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