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Dissin and Signifyin

Ice Cubes' use of signifyin led to the creation of the best diss track ever made. The year was 1991 and Ice Cube had recently left NWA, a popular rap group in the 1980s. Ice Cube was not happy with the group because he felt he wasn't being fairly compensated. So, Ice Cube decided to leave the group and pursue his solo rap career. Ice cube still had mixed feelings about the NWA so he decided to make a diss track about them. A diss track is a term used in rap music where you create a song and insult the people you are having issues with. Ice Cube did just that and this led to the popular diss track No Vaseline that released in 1991. Ice Cube wrote and coproduced this song with Sir Jinx a producer from Los Angeles. This song took off and to this day it is widely regarded as the greatest diss song ever made. Ice Cube's clever use of signifyin made the song extra offensive. Signifyin is the use of clever word play to either insult someone, get around the system, brag about yourself, or just show off your style. Ice Cube used signifyin in all four ways listed above.

Let's start off by analyzing the title of this song. The title is No Vaseline which is simple enough. We all know what vaseline is and for those who don't. Vaseline is a healing jelly that comes in a little tub with a blue cap. This title has a deeper more offensive meaning. Ice Cube uses signifyin to insult everyone mentioned in this song and to get around the system. Ice Cube knows he can't say what he really wants to say in a song title. Vaseline is often used by gay men as a lubricant for gay sex. So the title of the song is implying that NWA are getting fucked with

no vaseline. Which means they are having gay sex without lubrication which would end up hurting more. The members of NWA portrayed themselves as young tough straight men that didn't like authority. So, Ice Cube implicating that they were having gay sex was seen as a heavy insult.

Ice Cube was so mad at the group that he dissed every member and even their manager. Ice Cube started with Dr Dre and Eazy-E (rip). We all know Dr. Dre, the creator of Beats by Dre and one of the greatest west coast rappers. Then there is Eazy-E who is credited for creating west coast gangster rap. Ice Cube said this in his song, "Ayy, yo, Dre, stick to producing Calling me Arnold, but you been a dick Eazy-E saw your ass and went in it quick." This bar right here is such a great example of signifyin. Ice Cube is telling Dr. Dre to stick to producing since he is not cut out to be a rapper. This did not sit well with Dr. Dre at all because he did not want another man telling him what he can or can't do. Ice Cube then says that they called him Arnold, but you been a dick. This is a reference to Benedict Arnold, a military officer who is famous for being a traitor. Ice Cube is telling Dr. Dre that he is a traitor. After all those insults Ice Cube finishes Dr. Dre off with a gay insult. He says Eazy-E saw Dr Dre's ass and went in it quick. Once again Ice Cube is saying that Dr. Dre is letting another man have sexual intercourse with him. Later in the song Ice Cube comes for Eazy-E with these bars. Ice Cube says this, "Half pint bitch, fucking your homeboys, you little maggot Eazy-E turned faggot." Ice Cube first calls Eazy-E a half pint bitch. Eazy-E was only 5 foot 3 inches tall, and Ice Cube knew this, and he decided to insult his height. Most tough guys are well put together and tall. This was not the case for Eazy-E as he was short and skinny. He then says Eazy-E fucks his homeboys. This could mean two things. He either fucks them over by not paying them what they are worth or literal gay sex. Ice Cube wants the listener to decide what he means by that. Either way it's not good. He then calls him a faggot

a derogatory term that people call gay people. Once again Ice Cube is calling the members of NWA gay. Ice Cube threw shots at MC Ren and DJ Yella but they were not as impactful as what he said about Dr. Dre and Eazy-E. Ice Cube's next target was Jerry Heller, the manager of the group at the time. Ice Cube believes that Jerry Heller is the reason that he wasn't paid the money that he was worth. Ice Cube says this in his song, "Cause you can't be the Nigga 4 Life crew With a white Jew telling you what to do." Ice Cube is insulting the whole group with this bar. He is questioning that the NWA are not real black men if they let a white Jewish man tell them what to do. The NWA is a group of black men that doesn't like authority. The people usually in positions of power are white men. So, Ice Cube is asking why they are listening to this old Jewish white guy. Ice Cube knows the answer to that question. He knows they listen to him because of money. So, Ice Cube is calling the NWA a bunch of sellouts that only care about getting paid. That is the reason he left the group in the first place. Ice Cube felt like he wasn't paid what he was worth. He wrote a lot of the lyrics for the other members, and he believed he deserved more money. He was right to think that way, more work should be rewarded with more money.

Ice Cube wordplay in this song is fantastic but did he cross the line a couple of times? Ice Cube poked fun at gay people and Jewish people a lot in this song. Ice cube did receive his fair share of backlash from the Jewish community. The Jewish community went as far as to boycott his music. I don't think that Ice Cube had any ill will against gay people or Jewish people. This song came out in 1991 which was a different time. A lot of things that we find unacceptable were a lot more ok back then. His main targets were the NWA and Jerry Heller. I don't believe that Ice Cube is homophobic or anti-Semitic. I just believe that he was mad because he felt that he was being cheated on money that he believed was owed to him. Of course, it's still not right what

he said about those groups of people but I don't believe that he had negative intent towards them. This song would not be received as well as it was received back in the 90s. Things change over time and so does our tolerance.

Let's now analyze the music of No Vaseline. Ice Cube sampled a 70's funk band to make No Vaseline. He sampled the instrumental from the song "Dazz" by the band Brick. The instrumental from Dazz has an upbeat rhythm which in my opinion pairs extremely well with Ice Cubes aggressive style. Ice Cubes flow in this song is out of this world. After each insult the funky part of Dazz plays. Which makes all the insults even more impactful. Ice Cube starts the song by playing recordings that either insult NWA or make himself look good. One of my favorite recordings that he plays in the beginning is Eazy-E saying this, "Ice Cube writes rhymes that I say." This is Eazy-E admitting to letting Ice Cube write his lyrics. This is looked down upon in the rap world. Since rappers are expected to write their own lyrics. Another recording that Ice Cube plays in the beginning is of a woman screaming this, "NWA ain't shit without Ice Cube." Ice Cube sets the tone before the song even starts that NWA ain't shit and he is the main member of the group for many reasons. He is the best rapper, and he writes lyrics for other members. The recording gets the reader hyped for the song and he then drops the beat and starts the song.

Ice Cube uses signifyin extremely well in his song No Vaseline. His wordplay is unmatched, he managed to insult every member of the group in this song and do it in a subtle yet clever way. Ice Cube shows off his intelligence and his style in this song. For example, the Benedict Arnold bar probably went over many people's heads. What makes this song more impressive is that Ice Cube wrote and coproduced this song. No Vaseline is a hip hop classic and a lot of people say it's the greatest diss track ever.