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Black Urban Gang Culture and the Media in Britain

Abstract: Between 2006 and 2010, British urban space seemed to have become a battlefield for gang rivalry among young black Britons. These incidents of urban violence have received a lively response in the popular press. The paper will address the representation of the black male teenager in British online newspapers and will examine the way in which he is constructed as an iconic figure of 'otherness' against which middle class values can be measured. In conveying the image of the young black urban male as positioned outside mainstream society, the contemporary media, particularly the tabloid press, employs three strategies in particular: dehumanization, his fashioning as an inhabitant of a 'dangerous wilderness,' and the link between the gang member and the terrorist. The second part of the essay aims at exploring exemplary British 'grime' videos as a key form of black youth's self-expression and a corrective voice, but also as a medium which deliberately nourishes the anxieties of the public and thus contributes to the media's construction of 'otherness.'