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Hip Hop Rhetoric: Relandscaping the Rhetorical Tradition

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those that made my education possible: my ancestors, my professors, my friends, my family, my wife, and especially my parents. It is a privilege to be able to spend so much time sitting, thinking, and writing. I am lucky and blessed.

HIP HOP RHETORIC: RELANDSCAPING THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

by

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Chapter 1

Relandscaping the Rhetorical Tradition

In “Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric,” Jacqueline

Jones Royster writes:

What we choose to showcase depends materially on where on the landscape we stand and what we have in mind. The imperative is to recognize that the process of showcasing space is an interpretive one, one that acknowledges a view and often re-scopes that view in light of aesthetic sensibilities—values, preferences, beliefs. We landscape. (148)

Royster sees the field of rhetoric as a “richly textured” epistemological terrain, constantly being shaped and shifted by new voices, new realities, new rhetorics. But in many ways, for many years, the soil has been stagnant with historically dominant voices. Royster’s call for a fresh and rebellious approach to rhetorical historiography is heeded in the study of Hip Hop Rhetoric.

This notion of “landscaping,” or what I like to call “relandscaping,” because it more succinctly points to the inherent revisionary component, is a central theme in rhetoric, as the field has moved from focusing only on historically elite voices (Western, White, privileged, males), to historically ignored and disenfranchised voices, such as those of women and racial minorities. Echoing Royster’s call for a more dynamic and inclusive rhetorical tradition are Michael Leff, who states, “tradition...is a living force that requires constant change and adaptation...” (144) and Patricia Bizzell, who believes, “...we must hear from rhetoricians who have struggled with culturally complex venues in which they were marginalized, if we are to live and work and function as responsible citizens in the American multicultural democracy,” among others (Charland 2003; Glenn qtd. in Portnoy 2003; Berlin 1994; Jarratt 1991). Attitudes such as

these, and the implementation of such attitudes, have begun to have a diversifying effect on the field.

“Rhetorical history” is now commonly approached as the “histories of rhetorics,” an approach that has enriched the field and, in some ways, made more legitimate the lives, experiences, and discourses of a growing number of peoples. This approach is a catalyst for uncovering/highlighting “new” discourse communities. Hip Hop Rhetoric, as a relatively new terrain in rhetoric, is a meaningful, useful, and instructive lens from which to approach the ever-expanding realms of the field. My aim is to be a voice in that process of relandscaping—a voice that helps Hip Hop Rhetoric come alive in the discipline, in its historiography, and in pedagogical circles. I hope to join the conversation in the rhetorical parlor, while luring some to the alley out back to discuss a dynamic, but marginalized, rhetoric—Hip Hop Rhetoric.

Shifting Perspectives

The work of relandscaping the rhetorical tradition involves shifting and reshifting its terrain. This occurs when our perspective on what we do in rhetorical studies, and how we do it, changes. In Royster’s words, we must shift where we stand, shift rhetorical subjects, shift the circle of practice, and shift the theoretical frame (150-162). All are integral parts in the important changes that continue to influence the field. In **shifting where we stand**, we change our point of view and begin to notice the plethora and substantive existence of discourses—oral, written, visual, and technological—outside of the historical norm. This can mean looking at “new” groups, such as African American women, which Royster has done much of, or looking at non-traditional modes of discourse, such as “anonymous songs, poetry, folktales, griot histories, and so on” (151). A rather new and often ignored place to “stand” is with Hip Hop

Rhetoric, a strong catalyst in shifting the rhetorical terrain and opening new possibilities for research.

In **shifting rhetorical subjects**, we continue to uncover, recover, and recognize traditionally silenced voices. Our perspective on whose rhetoric matters evolves and diversifies. While much of the focus in changes to the rhetorical tradition have been on women's discourse (i.e. Aspasia, Enheduanna, Pan Chao, Sor Juana, Ida B. Wells, Gloria Anzaldua, etc.), there are a plethora of voices left uncovered and ignored in rhetoric, one of which is the dynamic voice of Hip Hop. While some serious work has been done by a handful of scholars (*The Hip Hop Reader* 2008; Richardson 2006; Campbell 2005), there is much more that can, and should, be done considering the impact of Hip Hop Rhetoric on United States and global culture, and its direct illustration of traditional *and* modern definitions of rhetoric.

In **shifting the circle of practice**, scholars must reconsider "what constitutes rhetorical action or participation," moving beyond the traditional arenas of "the courts, the pulpit, [and] the arenas of politics and public service" (Royster 157). For those outside the field, it is common to associate rhetoric only with political discourse, and inside the field, it continues to be the norm to focus mostly on the rhetorical spheres mentioned above, and nothing else (though this is rapidly beginning to change). With Hip Hop Rhetoric we are forced to turn our gaze towards non-traditional textual/visual/special avenues such as song lyrics, musical beats, music videos, "mixtapes," "underground" videos, video games, graffiti, popular magazines, and websites, which ask us to pay close attention to minority-produced poetry, racialized, gendered, and sexualized discourse (both private and public)—all of which constitute a paradigmatic shift in what constitutes rhetoric's circle of practice.

Finally, in **shifting the theoretical frame**, we shy away from constraining non-traditional viewpoints and theory. In order to highlight new features of the rhetorical terrain, we must allow for new perspectives and new lenses from which to view rhetoric and allow new paradigms to affect our analysis of the multi-faceted rhetorics which exist in our world. This includes not only adding “new” voices to the landscape but challenging the very paradigmatic foundations which have placed “traditionally traditional” (Bizzell 110) rhetorics at the apex of a socially constructed rhetorical hierarchy. Hip Hop Rhetoric provides one venue from which to shift the normative theoretical frame as it was birthed from a very different world-view than that of traditional rhetorics, one of marginalization.

Thus, the rhetoric of Hip Hop provides an avenue from which to do this shifting work, work that is productive and important if relandscaping is truly a central component of the field of rhetoric. As Royster critically understands, we must not only work at uncovering and analyzing these catalysts for change, but be involved in “knowledge-using,” that is, in persuading those inside and outside of the discipline that “new” rhetorics, such as Hip Hop Rhetoric, are “valuable...in the re-envisioning of what constitutes knowledge” (161). Thus, my work in this area is a call for the critical use of Hip Hop Rhetoric in our ever-evolving creation of what constitutes important rhetoric, rhetorical historiography, and the rhetorical tradition. While each of the following chapters will focus on a unique piece of Hip Hop Rhetoric, the unifying thread of this book will be this notion of relandscaping. By intellectually spotlighting and analyzing different rhetorical and cultural aspects, the landscape of Hip Hop Rhetoric, and rhetorical studies in general, will grow and become more kaleidoscopic in its makeup—a positive change if we are interested in avoiding a narrow and elitist tradition.

Defining Hip Hop and Hip Hop Rhetoric

Hip Hop is a musical genre but also a cultural movement. Its beginnings are in African American communities in New York in the early 1970s but its roots trace back to Jamaica and, according to Kermit Campbell (“gettin’”), West African griots (traveling poets/historians/singers). DJing, the playing and mixing of music, was central to early Hip Hop but quickly incorporated a verbal component as DJs became MCs and shouted out impromptu poetry and sayings while the music played.

This verbal component developed into longer and more complex rhythmic speaking and became what we know as “rapping” today. Thus, rapping and Hip Hop are intricately connected and even used as synonyms by many. But, Hip Hop encompasses other components beyond the music and rapping. Dancing and graffiti are also central pieces to the culture of Hip Hop and have continued to change and develop since the 1970s. These four components, DJing (music), MCing (lyrics), dancing, and graffiti, are seen as the four central elements of Hip Hop.

Hip Hop has also been historically connected to marginalization and struggle. Throughout the short history of the movement, Hip Hop lyrics have focused on issues central to racial minorities, to the poor, the oppressed, and those attempting to break from cultural norms. From Melle Mel’s “The Message” (1982) to Jay Z’s “Minority Report” (2007), and countless others, counterhegemonic rhetoric has been central to much of Hip Hop. This counter-message has also manifested itself in highly sexual, violent, and materialistic discourse which has been at the center of opposition to Hip Hop music and culture (from Bill O’Reilly to Bill Cosby). But it must also be stated that rap music which emphasizes violence and sexuality is

only one part of Hip Hop rhetoric and does not represent its entirety. Hip Hop is continually diversifying and incorporating any number of themes and messages.

From its humble beginnings on the streets of the Bronx, Hip Hop has catapulted onto the national and international scene. Regional Hip Hop (East Coast, West Coast, Third Coast, Midwest, etc.) styles have developed with their unique beats, rhyming, and dress and “just about every country on the planet seems to have developed its own local rap scene” (Pryor). The influence of Hip Hop culture has been huge and continues to grow, as does its rhetorical output which includes music lyrics, videos, movies, popular publications, video games, and internet content.

Hip Hop as a whole is not easily defined, but “Hip Hop” will be used here to represent both the general cultural movement and the music itself. The term “rap” will be used mainly to represent specifically the musical and lyrical output of Hip Hop, and “rappers” as those who deliver the lyrics. Though it blurs strict definitions between the two, “rap” and “Hip Hop,” at times, will be used interchangeably, a common occurrence among those familiar with the culture of Hip Hop.

The designation Hip Hop Rhetoric succinctly joins Hip Hop and the academic field of rhetoric. Rhetoricians interested in Hip Hop Rhetoric engage in *the critical analysis of the rhetorical output and/or culture of Hip Hop through the lens of rhetorical studies, and vice versa*. More generally, Hip Hop Rhetoric is also the rhetorical output of Hip Hop culture. The output may be in the form of lyrics (written and performed), musical beats, websites, magazines, interviews, and the visual rhetoric of music videos, dress, and even vehicular alterations. Thus, as with the rhetorical analysis of any group or culture, any rhetoric (oral,

textual, visual, etc.) produced by the group can be a launching point for understanding and analysis. In this case, the analysis comes through the academic lens of rhetoric.

The (shifting) Rhetorical Tradition

Despite the enormous influence of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop's voice has been and, to a very large degree, continues to lie on the margins of formal academic rhetorical study. This fact is highlighted in a discussion of the rhetorical tradition/*The Rhetorical Tradition*, which melds the concepts of re-landscaping through Hip Hop and important aspects of rhetorical studies

The words "rhetorical tradition" take on double meaning for rhetoric scholars. They represent both the history of the field of rhetoric and, more specifically, the anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. At first consideration, the former seems the more important of the two, but one must realize that the first is in many ways constructed, packaged, and maintained by anthologies, such as the latter. As in history, psychology, physics, literature, etc., the anthologized texts and knowledge are what shape the field and give it its disciplinary boundaries. Obviously, an endless number of discourse communities and rhetorics have existed throughout human history, but by choosing specific texts, and deeming them important/essential/foundational, we construct disciplines and foundations for knowledge-building. In this way, we create a landscape of/for the field of rhetoric.

The problem within the Western rhetorical tradition (and in many fields), is the fact that the epistemic foundations have been laid by the historically powerful—White, privileged, male. While these foundations should not be erased, they also should not be continually held as the

venerated norm. In Western culture, the roots of rhetoric have always been traced to Ancient Greece, namely Plato and Aristotle, while the voices of the socially marginalized have been ignored and silenced. The landscape of traditional rhetorical studies and historiography has focused on figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, Erasmus, Bacon, Blair, Burke, etc., what Bizzell labels in a stock-exchange metaphor the prized and highly stable “blue chip stocks” of the tradition (112), while leaving out women, racial minorities, and other historically subjugated groups. Traditional rhetorical historiography has also focused on those that have textually theorized the nature of rhetoric, on those that use Greek, Latin, or Standard English, and on those that speak from an economically and culturally privileged position. Fortunately, this has begun to change.

As Bizzell discusses in “Editing the Rhetorical Tradition,” “the rhetorical tradition is always being edited” and it has begun to embrace more voices and experiences (109). This editing includes the actual text, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, the preeminent and highly influential anthology that is now in its second addition. Bizzell goes on to state that while changes are taking place, they are quite slow, as traditional rhetoricians/rhetorics remain resilient in a field where even up to the mid 1980s, elite discourses still dominated (111). And even when Bizzell and Herzberg were editing the first volume of the anthology to produce the second in the late 1990s, there were no calls by reviewers to have fewer of the “traditional” rhetoricians (111), which would have created more space for the non-traditional. Luckily, Bizzell and Herzberg worked at including a greater diversity of voices.

Early in the twenty-first century significant changes have taken root, as women, racial minorities, bilingual, and non-traditional theorizers of rhetoric, have made their way into the

rhetorical tradition and *The Rhetorical Tradition*. The addition of rhetoricians such as Aspasia, Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz, Francis Willard, Fredrick Douglas, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Gloria Anzaldúa illustrate some of the relandscaping that has taken place. These additions are promising, but there remain countless voices which are sidelined in rhetorical studies. One such voice is that of Hip Hop, an influential genre and culture which encompasses a vast number of voices and experiences—some of which will be highlighted throughout my work.

And while some work has been done on Hip Hop in the field of rhetoric, the closest Hip Hop Rhetoric gets to achieving a valued and sustained post in the rhetorical tradition/*The Rhetorical Tradition* is through Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s discussion of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a topic closely related to Hip Hop discourse (see *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 2nd Ed.). But this is not sufficient because Hip Hop Rhetoric moves beyond linguistics to examine the entire rhetorical output of Hip Hop culture. This output is vast but constitutes one of the main reasons Hip Hop Rhetoric should be a component of the academic rhetorical tradition. I say “academic rhetorical tradition” because Hip Hop Rhetoric is already a living and complex rhetorical phenomenon, just one that has been largely ignored in the academic field of rhetoric. And why should Hip Hop Rhetoric not be ignored by the rhetorical tradition and *The Rhetorical Tradition*? Here are some reasons:

- Hip Hop Rhetors are directly involved in the critical use of language to persuade and entertain
- Hip Hop Rhetors show a “metacritical awareness of how language can be used to do things in the world [including] persuading [people] to make important political change” (Bizzell 115)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric is a rhetoric born of the margins and is an illustration of a counter-hegemonic textual and visual discourse (i.e. language, social commentary, dress, etc.)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric illustrates hegemony at work (dominance, appropriation, and consent)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric forces us to look beyond traditional rhetorical texts

- Hip Hop Rhetoric can be used to teach traditionally Western aspects of rhetoric (i.e. invention, memory, delivery, pathos, ethos, etc.)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric forces us to discuss central themes in contemporary rhetoric (i.e. race, gender, power, sexuality, etc.)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric forces us to look at the continued dominance of the male voice in many discourse communities
- Hip Hop Rhetoric allows us to jump international and cultural borders as it continues to spread throughout the world to places like Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, etc.
- Hip Hop Rhetoric will ask us to look at issues of technology and rhetoric, including the use of technology to produce and disseminate rhetoric, and issues of technological access

All of these are reasons why Hip Hop Rhetoric should hold an important place in contemporary rhetorical studies and why adding Hip Hop to the landscape that is the rhetorical tradition is a valuable endeavor.

Ultimately, we must consider and reconsider what counts in rhetoric. Especially since the 1970s rhetoricians have taken a critical look at the rhetorical tradition, but we have a long way to go and many more voices to consider when discussing rhetorical historiography. In her discussion of feminist rhetoric in “Telling Evidence: Rethinking What Counts in Rhetoric,” Carol Mattingly states, “We have barely begun to explore the broad range of texts that can contribute a vibrant understanding and appreciation of women’s role in rhetoric” (100). The same can be said of Hip Hop Rhetoric, as it is a multi-vocal discourse which, as the points above illustrate, can become an important voice in rhetorical studies. Hip Hop Rhetoric can contribute a vibrant understanding and appreciation of a marginalized culture’s role in rhetoric.

Hip Hop is a major part of contemporary United States’ (and to a growing degree, Western and beyond) culture, but remains only a niche discourse in the field of rhetoric. Why is such a dynamic and influential discourse largely ignored in the academic discipline of rhetoric? Some possible answers include the following:

- Hip Hop Rhetoric is not critically understood by many (most?) academics in the field
- Hip Hop Rhetoric is strongly (only?) associated with violence and misogyny
- Hip Hop Rhetoric asks us to look at very non-traditional “texts” (i.e. music lyrics, “battling,” music videos, websites, blogs, underground “mixtapes,” videos, etc.)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric is strongly associated with AAVE and “street slang”
- Hip Hop Rhetoric is many times laced with profanities
- Much of Hip Hop Rhetoric thrives on popular culture (i.e. references to TV shows, popular movies, popular magazines, sports figures, etc.) as opposed to traditional reference points such as Literature, the Bible, and “Historical” figures and events
- Hip Hop Rhetoric involves music
- Hip Hop Rhetoric’s roots are not in Ancient Greece but mainly in Africa (i.e. griots)
- Hip Hop Rhetoric is seen as a purely negative force by many conservative *and* liberal academics
- Those most influenced by Hip Hop culture are not in positions to affect change in the rhetorical tradition
- The most influential Hip Hop rhetors in the United States are/were poor racial minorities

Thus, there are reasons, both simple and complex, why Hip Hop Rhetoric is still a marginalized rhetoric in rhetorical studies and why it can serve as a rhetorical mechanism in the process of relandscaping. And while inroads have been made with conference presentations, a handful of published articles, a few book-length discussions, and little pedagogical work, there remains a vast and fruitful terrain to be unearthed.

The Alley behind the Parlor: Burke, hooks, and Hip Hop Rhetoricians

Relandscaping, adding diversity to the “terrain” of the rhetorical tradition, is not a new idea, but it is still confronted by centuries of hegemonic rule. The adding of new voices, new experiences, new rhetorical acts, and new rhetoricians to the rhetorical tradition, is both important and arduous. Kenneth Burke and bell hooks shed some understanding on the importance and reality of this relandscaping.

One of Burke’s central metaphors in describing rhetorical acts is “the parlor” (*The Philosophy of Literary Form*). He sees discourse as taking place in specific

situations/communities with each of us entering those situations/parlors with no explanation from those already there, hearing the conversation, and ultimately entering and affecting the conversation (“put[ting] in your oar”). The conversation was going on long before we arrived and even when we leave, as individual agents, the conversation/parlor continues (110-111). Different rhetorical situations exist around us—the academic journal, the political debate, a meeting among new coworkers, a conversation about the best football team, a discussion over what new car to buy, etc. All are “parlors” we enter as speakers, hoping to know or learn the dynamics of the situation in order to intelligently take part in the conversation.

The rhetorical tradition is a parlor. To enter its doors, to understand the conversation, and to take part in the ongoing discussion, one, for hundreds of years, would have needed to know about the rhetoric which was labeled elite—namely that of White, Western, privileged, males. However, this rhetorical parlor, including its texts, discourse, and participants, has transformed over time, with its most major shifts beginning in the mid 1900s with the addition of nontraditional voices such as those of females and racial minorities. In many ways the parlor of the early 21st century would be unrecognizable to classical and Enlightenment rhetoricians. New paradigms are now in play.

Many in rhetoric no longer want to fit in to the traditional rhetorical parlor or impress those that see traditional rhetoric as pristine and didactically unproblematic. And many, like Ernest Stromberg, emphasize the fact that the rhetorical parlor has not, and does not, automatically imply “equal access...and equal opportunity” (4). New paradigms are being created and a new landscape is being produced where traditional voices are giving way to historically ignored and marginalized voices. Subcultures and countercultures are slowly and

steadily gaining a stronghold in rhetorical historiography and, as bell hooks writes, these counter-voices are “central locations[s] for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse” (149).

Like Royster, hooks is interested in shifting the landscape of rhetoric and claims that those “who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice [must] identify spaces where we begin the process of re-vision” (145). Hip Hop Rhetoric is one of those spaces. The culture and discourse of Hip Hop is very popular but, paradoxically, it is also still the “exotic Other” in many ways because it points to something different than what has been displayed and theorized in traditional rhetorical historiography. Despite its historical roots it remains counter-traditional and in the alley/margins of the rhetorical tradition.

But, importantly, hooks reminds us that the margin is not simply a site of deprivation but a place of productive resistance and a site of “radical possibility” (149). In simpler terms, it is a fresh and counter-traditional lens from which to view rhetoric and society. The voices of Hip Hop Rhetoric are not only voices of pain, hurt, and hate. Though they include these, they are much more as well. Among a plethora of others, they also include struggle, hope, healing, family, race, religion, and employ rhetorical tactics that would make both Aristotle and bell hooks appreciative.

Hip Hop does not fit comfortably in contemporary rhetorical studies, though it is a relevant and influential rhetoric. It resides in a place near but outside the parlor of the rhetorical tradition. It is a place with an edge, with a dark side, a place that channels to new and unknown regions, a place of marginality but with proud roots—Hip Hop Rhetoric is the intricate alley behind the rhetorical parlor. This alley is host to the important work of

relandscaping and hook's notion of re-visioning the margin. Despite the growing diversification of the rhetorical parlor, Hip Hop has remained in its shadows. Though socially and rhetorically relevant enough to deserve a place in discussions of the rhetorical tradition, Hip Hop Rhetoric remains (and even grows) in the margins of such discussions. But, exclusion has not weakened or diminished what is a vibrant discourse.

Hip Hop Rhetoric may be looking into the parlor of the rhetorical tradition from the alley out back, but it also functions and prospers without its inclusion. It is both self-sustaining *and* important enough to be included in academic discussion of the rhetorical tradition. After all, this alley is full of colorful and intriguing voices—sad, joyful, hopeful, proud, angry, resisting, hurting, and hurtful voices—all complex voices, some of which need to be part of the Rhetorical Parlor.

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Chapter 2

Hip Hop Kairos

Discourse is part of the network of knowledge and power.

-Foucault

My words are like a dagger / with a jagged edge.

-Eminem

While rhetorical studies “have become more broadly engaged with the rhetorical practices of groups who have been excluded by the dominant intellectual tradition” (Octalog II 42), the landscape of rhetorical studies is still lacking in its discussion and analysis of the highly popular and influential rhetoric of Hip Hop culture. One reason for this lack is the stereotyped notion that Hip Hop rhetoric focuses primarily on materialism, misogyny, and violence. Beyond these simplistic stereotypes are the often superficial and uncomplicated discussions of Hip Hop’s connection to society and rap music’s link to negative behavior. National figures such as Bill O’Reilly, Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Tipper Gore, Lynne Cheney, Bob Dole, and former Education Secretary William Bennett, just to name a few, attack the, what they call “crude” and “destructive” lyrics of rap music and rarely delve into complicated and researched discussions. The trickle-down effect of such national criticism and the mere fact that scholars in the field have, for whatever reason, ignored the rhetoric of Hip Hop, has created an important void in rhetorical studies. There certainly has been *some* work done by scholars of rhetoric and

composition, led by the book-length works of Kermit Campbell and Elaine Richardson¹, and the collection *The Hip Hop Reader*, along with a handful of published articles, but much more can and should be done.

Importantly, and to heed intellectual rigor, it must be noted that some of the stereotyped characteristics of Hip Hop rhetoric actually do apply to *some* of it, especially to a significant percentage of the most popularized American Hip Hop music classification of the last fifteen years—“gangsta rap.” Ignoring the fact that Hip Hop certainly does contain a plethora of lyrics and images that seem to condone hyper-materialism, misogyny, and violence (among others) would lead one to believe that significant scrutiny was not applied to this discourse or that I was ignoring the very real implications of such imagery. But my aim is a rhetorical analysis that moves beyond the simplistic discussions of the negative stereotypes of Hip Hop and which highlights the fact that Hip Hop rhetoric is an important discourse that teaches much about the identity of Hip Hop culture and, more significantly, that the textual and visual rhetoric of Hip Hop displays *kairotic* truths and social-personal identity forming messages.

The situated realities and messages espoused by Hip Hop rhetoric are important in understanding the social and political vibe of the culture and of those whose worldview is highly influenced by the culture’s discourse. These messages are important in that they not only display the worldview of those persons, but they are central in creating that worldview. As bell hooks reminds us, “words impose themselves” (“Language” 167), and they not only impose themselves on particular individuals but also on groups, cultures, and societies. This discourse displays formative truths held by many in Hip Hop culture. These truths, which in the kairotic

¹ Campbell’s *Getting’ Our Groove On: Rhetoric...*; Richardson’s *Hip Hop Literacies*

sense are never universal, unchanging, or unproblematic, include a focus on a very racial and politicized message, on linking the U.S. government mainly to the White race, on linking much of the White race to historical and contemporarily situated injustice, on labeling White Republicans as elitist and at times racist, and on putting forward a liberal message and supporting mainly Democratic candidates.

Future scholarship may argue the validity of these truths and their complex effects but understanding some of these truths and realizing their epistemic nature is an important first step. Putting Hip Hop rhetoric on par with more traditionally studied types/genres/segments of discourse is not only viable but important. It is important in the study, and living out of, social, political, racial, economic, and ideological theories and realities.

Hip Hop is a strong voice in displaying and affecting the historical moment at hand. Whether fully understood by individual rappers/Hip Hoppers or not, the rhetoric of Hip Hop is kairotic in that it mixes social, racial, and economic theories with the very real “moments” of the day—and it does so in an unrelenting and rhetorically situated manner. With its focus on specific events, specific people, usage of “of-the-time” language and references, the rhetoric of Hip Hop is consistently aimed at providing a voice for “the people” in the here and now and in rhetorically creating/constituting a complex Hip Hop ethos. It is a rhetoric that will continue to affect and create, at least in part, minds, communities, and social relations.

Importantly, the identity-forming messages and truths discussed in this chapter are not the end-all message of Hip Hop, or the only perspectives that are embraced by those highly influenced by Hip Hop: that thinking would be too simplistic and essentializing. However, the messages *do* represent important communal truths that stem from social circumstances which

tend to be largely ignored by mainstream society and, at times, rhetorical studies. Hip Hop discourse displays a different, sometimes radical, lens from which many view the world. This is important to a growing discipline that, as Keith Walter's argues in "Whose Culture? Whose Literacy?" "profit[s] from...many perspectives on the past, present, and future" (9).

Finally, this chapter hopes to erase the notion that Hip Hop is, at best, merely an entertainment medium and, at worst, simply "noise." Hip Hop rhetoric discursively displays and affects reality and contains truths in its depiction and usage of the *kairotic* moment². The rhetorical message of Hip Hop can also be seen as revolutionary in that it complicates what can be seen as important "text" or "rhetoric" and challenges many middle and upper class ideals and sensibilities; in many cases, it provides unfiltered commentary on race and society. Ultimately, some Hip Hop rhetoricians must be seen as "organic intellectuals" (Villanueva 333) who have become, and continue to become, discursive leaders to the Hip Hop community by espousing situated truths about specific *kairotic* and historical moments. Hip Hop rhetoric is also a rich avenue from which to approach central aspects of Critical Race Theory, namely issues of racial hegemony, racial formation, and racial identity.

Organization and Theory

As an organizing framework this chapter positions Hip Hop rhetoric within the important discussion of rhetoric as (1) containing empty glibness, (2) containing eternal Truths, and/or (3) providing *kairotic*/situated/Sophistic truths. Situating Hip Hop discourse within this discussion

² Some of this wording was taken from e-mail communication with Elaine Fredericksen.

addresses the popular notion that the discourse of the Hip Hop community, particularly rap music, is glib, uncomplicated, and not worthy of scholarly study.

Beyond that general framework, and most central to this chapter, is the focus on specific kairotic messages put forth and embraced by many in the Hip Hop community with Critical Race Theory as the theoretical backdrop of the analysis. I begin with the understanding that the rhetoric of Hip Hop “is used to *constitute* rather than [only] report historical reality and its causes” (Kubrin 366) and that, importantly, in its discourse, as James Berlin believes about all discourse of daily practice, “ideology is minutely inscribed” (“Social Epistemic” 78). I also hold that “a given historical moment displays a wide variety of competing ideologies” (“Social Epistemic” 78) and use Race Critical Theory to inform, and further complicate, my discussion of these competing ideologies. This approach helps me posit the larger social implications and ramifications of Hip Hop rhetoric. Important work has been done to rhetorically analyze this rhetoric but at times stops at making deeper connections with historical oppression, racism, and classism. This previous work seeks to understanding the discourse mainly *within* the culture of Hip Hop. For example, Charis E. Kubrin’s work in “Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and the Code of the Street in Rap Music,” while focusing on the fact that rappers use language to construct identities, discusses victimization, snitching, and retaliation in connection to rappers/Hip Hoppers *within* their environments. Kubrin takes as his focus the “local social order” of Hip Hop and black inner-city communities (363). My analysis seeks to connect the rhetorical construction of “street” or “Hip Hop” identity with larger issues of cultural, social, and economic hegemony.

Thus, the work of Critical Race Theorists such as Etienne Balibar, Stuart Hall, Cornel West, Michael Omi, and Howard Winant, among others, becomes central. Balibar holds that “all identity is individual, but there is no individual identity that is not historical or, in other words, constructed within a field of social values, norms of behavior, and collective symbols” (221). In this instance, it is the discourse of Hip Hop rhetoricians, namely rappers, that helps form the social values, behaviors, and symbols of Hip Hop culture; in most cases these elements of culture are racially charged. Hall reminds us that the value-forming events/discourse, the “racially structured social formations,” are formed and lived out within a complex economic, social, and ideological web—a web referred to as “articulation” (“Race”). This “articulation” is central to Hip Hop discourse and ethos.

Cornel West helps to locate contemporary racial identity and racism within a broad historical context in “A Genealogy of Modern Racism” and helps us understand the racial and racist underpinnings from which rap and Hip Hop culture and discourse emerged. Hip Hop rhetoric forces us to discuss race, racial categorization, and the effects of historical racism in the very real and kairotic moments of contemporary society. Along with the racial-historical backdrop of Hip Hop rhetoric is the crucial question of identity—specifically the formation of racial identities (which consequently is connected to “articulation”). The formation of racial identities, for Michael Omi and Howard Winant, occurs through “a process of historically situated projects” (124). These kairotic and racial “projects” simultaneously interpret, represent, and/or explain racial dynamics (125). Hip Hop not only responds to racial projects—situated racial moments—but is itself a racial project and thus complexly connected to racial formation.

The discursive messages of Hip Hop not only add to the variety of messages on and within society and serve to expand the landscape of rhetorical studies,³ but also, and crucially, create/constitute social realities/truths within a very racialized worldview for those strongly connected to the Hip Hop ethos and, consequently, affect racial formation.

To develop these connections, formed through Hip Hop rhetoric, between kairotic moments and racial identity I first develop the importance of kairotic messages and their place within the realm of truth-telling then proceed to analyze secondary examples of kairotic messages put forth by influential Hip Hop artists Public Enemy and Dead Prez. The analysis then moves to two primary “moments” in American history and Hip Hop music: the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and Katrina, the devastating hurricane which hit the U.S. Gulf coast in 2005. Finally, along with these events, political commentary coming from Hip Hop concerning presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barak Obama presents important communal truths and identity-shaping messages that display the reigning political ethos of Hip Hop while displaying deep connections to racial identity and racial formation.

Glibness vs. Eternal Truths vs. *Kairotic* truths

In contemporary times the popular understanding of rhetoric is that of empty or misleading discourse and is often connected with the world of politics. The term *rhetoric* is cast upon the speech of persons, many times those seeking political approval, who are viewed as espousing empty, at times flowery, commentary that is simply meant to entertain or gain favor and is assumed not to promise serious action in the future. This popular understanding of

³ See Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric.”

rhetoric is a manifestation of the thinking of ancient rhetors Plato and Confucius who felt empty and glib speech was counter to the Truth-telling and Truth-seeking nature of True rhetoric/discourse/dialectic.

The formal study of rhetoric has fortunately moved beyond the study of only political, legal, and religious persuasive theory and discourse, as can be viewed in the vast amount of scholarship produced by rhetorical scholars over the last half-century and specifically in the diversification of the influential anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition*. Rhetorically analyzing Hip Hop discourse may be a continuation of “look[ing] for rhetoric where it has not been found—in many cultural locations (Octalog II 33), but adding Hip Hop rhetoric to the discussion of the truth-nature of rhetoric is new and important. Within the current atmosphere of rhetorical studies, which includes (1) scholarship interested in reclaiming the Sophistic view of situated/*kairotic* truths (2) the traditional view of rhetoric being empty speech and (3) the continuously developing understanding of rhetoric as a socially constructed, social constructing, and social epistemic reality, the injection of Hip Hop rhetoric adds a new lens from which to view the nature of truth in rhetoric—a lens constructed by a non-traditional, often minority, often marginalized community. It is a rhetoric that is part of “our search for alterity, for rhetorics other than the familiar, [which] can reveal to us alternative possibilities in conceiving discursive practices and their power formations (Berlin, “Revisionary Histories” 118).

Glibness and Truth/truth

In ancient rhetoric, two prominent figures, Plato (Greece) and Confucius (China), shared similar views on glibness in discourse—both criticized the use of flowery and empty rhetoric. For Plato, focused

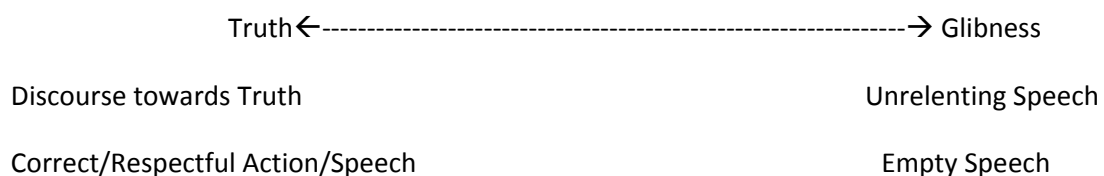
dialectic was central to coming to understand philosophical Truths in the world, not glib discourse which could be manipulated to prove any case (sometimes characteristic of epideictic speech). Plato’s hostility towards rhetoric can be seen in his *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*.

As for Confucius, he stressed one’s silent actions in opposition to entertaining speech. In *The Analects* he states:

It is a rare thing for glib speech and insinuating appearance to accompany authoritative conduct (1.3).

Exemplary persons would feel shame if their words were better than their deeds (14.27).

Both Platonic and Confucian views on rhetoric were not only against “sophistic” and glib speech, but viewed these qualities, and a totalizing Truth, at opposite ends of a spectrum. Not only was glib speech seen as unnecessary, but also counterproductive in one’s search for Truths and respectful living. These True rhetorics were not interested in developing “empty” speech that would serve merely for entertainment or for boasting the rhetorical talents of the speaker. Furthermore, ancient Chinese rhetoric stressed silence and harmony while maintaining the status quo and avoiding confrontation. Urging and remonstrating were favored above aggressive discourse and argumentation (Lyon 134; 139ff), and being unrelenting in one’s speech was looked down upon because it “results in the breakdown of relationship” (138). These points are illustrated in the following visual:



Hip Hop rhetoric has been characterized as ultra-glib and unrelenting in its rhetorical approach. It also, as will be highlighted throughout the chapter, seems to foreground difference and confrontation over mutual identity, which can offer rhetoricians new interpretations of the present (Berlin "Revisionary Histories" 122). Looking specifically at Hip Hop/rap artists, there is undoubtedly a focus on the rhetor's ability to entertain with words and a battle for linguistic supremacy, traits that can be associated with glibness. However, even when there is no philosophical point or argument at the center of the lyrical discourse, rappers illustrate the power of words and are unrelenting as they hurl them at the audience and at other rappers. Rather than meaningless, though, their words serve as "signs of struggle" (Thomas West) and point to the underdog mentality strongly connected to the Hip Hop ethos⁴. Some short examples:

In "My Words are Weapons," rapper Eminem states:

My words are weapons/I use them to crush opponents/My words are weapons/
I use them to kill whoever's steppin' to me/My words are like weaponry

And in "Criminal":

My words are like a dagger/with a jagged edge/That'll stab you in the head

⁴ Struggle in Hip Hop is epitomized in the "soldier mentality/ethos" and is discussed in chapter 3.

Eminem's sentiments are highly indicative of Hip Hop rhetoric and show a clear link with power and discourse. They are echoed by one of Eminem's biggest influences, Tupac Shakur, in "Let Them Thangs [guns/bullets] Go":

Hitting [you] with new rhymes/I can make you love me

Like Eminem, Shakur understands that lyrical rhetoric has the power to sway opinion and, in this case, get people to "love" the rapper. Yet, in Hip Hop rhetoric it is not only about understanding the power of words, but also about using them to show superiority over one's opponents—and in Hip Hop, the opponent is anyone who thinks his/her rhetorical skills are better than one's own.

Hip Hop artists are continually battling for rhetorical supremacy, lyrically and in delivery, and do not shy away from pointing out their skills and, in many cases, claiming supremacy. Southern rap artist Lil' Wayne, on his album *Tha Carter II*, has a track titled "Best Rapper Alive" in which he claims:

Bring the crowd and I'm loud In Living Color/It is Lil' Wayne, got these rappers in my stomach/Yummy, I'm takin' it, I ain't asking them for nothing/If you sell a million records we can battle for ya' money

This rap is characteristic of rappers who boast about their skill and lyrical dominance over other rappers. The in-your-face nature of the rhetoric (I'm loud In Living Color) is in sharp contrast to the silence and "respect" encouraged by Confucius. The rapper also shows his dominance over other rappers by stating he has defeated, even metaphorically eaten, his competition (...got these rappers in my stomach/Yummy). He is also aggressively *taking*, not respectfully asking for, the label of rhetorical superiority. And, only when other rappers have similar success to his (If you sell a million records), can they think of battling him on his level. He later adds, in the same song:

The young heart attack, I spit dat cardiac/You can't see me baby boy, you got dat cataract

This continues Lil' Wayne's argument that not only do his words have power, but that he is on a higher level of rhetorical talent. He claims to be young and powerful (The young heart attack) and claims to be "spitting"⁵ words that have the power to cause serious damage (cardiac). And in stating "you can't see me" the rapper uses a well-know phrase in Hip Hop rhetoric that signifies the inferiority of someone's ability or perspective. He addresses his presumed audience of competitors as "baby boy," combining two images that represent immaturity and lack of complexity. Lil' Wayne then ends the song by suggesting his talents come easily and naturally to him, and that his song, "Best Rapper Alive," was an easy task for him to produce and deliver:

It's just a victory lap baby/ I'm just joggin' /And I ain't even out of breathe/ the motherfuckin' best yet

These lyrics may only belong to a single song, but they illustrate a common theme in Hip Hop rhetoric—the boasting of lyrical skill and power and the pervasive attitude of struggle and competition. It is a seemingly constant cry of "this is who I am; I have struggled; I am not only a survivor, but I'm better than you and everyone else." This boasting can be seen in nearly every major Hip Hop artist of the past twenty years including Rakim, Slick Rick, Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Nas, Mase, Eminem, Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Ludacris, and Lil Wayne (just to name a very few highly successful and influential artists).

⁵ "Spitting" is a common term in Hip Hop rhetoric used to signify the delivery of words/rhymes.

There are even those that attempt to rank the best Hip Hop rappers/rhetoricians which also highlights the competitive nature of Hip Hop culture. From popular Hip Hop magazines (e.g. *XXL*, *The Source*), to general websites (e.g. epinions.com; mtv.com), to blogs, to full-length books, many in Hip Hop are interested in compiling their own list or debating lists that have been created⁶. As one Hip Hop fan states about his favorite artist, “Jay-Z is the best rapper in the game. Period. Point Blank. His voice, his lyrics, his stage presence, and his ability to move the crowd, cements his position at the top of the Hip Hop food chain” (G-Rice). This praise is similar to Phaedrus’ praise of Lysias in Plato’s *Phaedrus*:

Do you think that a mere dilettante like me could recite from memory in a manner worthy of him a speech that Lysias, the best of our writers, took such time and trouble to compose? Far from it—thought actually I would rather be able to do that than come into a large fortune! (2).

In the scene, Phaedrus is about to attempt to recite a speech previously presented by Lysias, an orator known for his brilliant and erudite speeches. Having loyal fans is apparently nothing new to great rhetoricians.

But glibness and aggressiveness in Hip Hop rhetoric goes to another level when one considers a central phenomena in Hip Hop rhetoric—the rap battle. Rap battles are when two rappers go head to head in a battle of lyrical talent and wits. Each rapper gets a turn (usually lasting anywhere from 30 seconds to 2 minutes, if timed at all) to show off their lyrical talent and, importantly, to attack his/her opponent. The winner is sometimes determined by an individual who has been chosen to pick the winner, but it is usually determined by audience applause and feedback. These Hip Hop battles can take place on a large scale (Rap Olympics, Scribble Jam) or on a much smaller scale (schoolyards, street

⁶ Some sources: *There’s a God on the Mic: The True 50 Greatest MCs*; <http://rap.about.com/od/toppicks/ss/Top50Emcees.htm>; www.vibe.com/bestrapper; www.mtv.com/bands/h/hip_hop_week/2006/emcees/index11.jhtml

corners), but always involve the lyrical battling between two competitors who are trying to verbally beat, even destroy, the other participant.

In the ultimate illustration of glibness and rhetorical showmanship in Hip Hop rhetoric, the rap battle, competitors are not interested in any Platonic, philosophic Truth or in refraining from unrelenting attacks. And they are certainly not interested in silence. Silence in the rap battle constitutes defeat and humiliation. Some could compare these rap battles to a more traditional war-of-words such as a presidential/political debate, but that is a weak comparison. In political debates there tend to be specific issues addressed, and each participant attempts to get his view and agenda across to the audience/voters. While the audience determines the “winner” in polls and on election day, there is always a focus on topics during the debate itself.

All that matters in the rap battle is rhetorical talent, in some sense similar to epideictic speeches/dialogues of ancient Greece and in a sense, very different. Looking again at one of Plato’s seminal works, *Phaedrus*, we have the title character and Socrates examining a speech by Lysias and Socrates’ first speech in the text. The speeches are meant to be strong and complex rhetorical works, but not meant to point to any real Truths, in the Platonic sense. They consist of word-play and the manipulation of thought to show rhetorical talent—much like the rappers in a rap battle. But, ancient Greek rhetors, like Plato and Socrates, as illustrated in the second half of *Phaedrus*, were ultimately interested in using language to figure out and convey Truths about the world. Philosophical thought was meant to prevail, not the language used (glib or otherwise).

Thus, much of Hip Hop rhetoric, particularly in the realm of the Hip Hop battle, is at odds with the view of rhetoric by ancient rhetors like Socrates, Plato, and Confucius. The aggressiveness of the rap battle is perfectly illustrated in the final rap battle scene of the highly successful Hip Hop film *8 Mile*. The movie is based on the life of rapper Eminem, who grew up in Detroit, in the area known as 8 mile, a

lower-class area where he honed his skills as a rapper and was involved in number of these rap battles. Eminem's character in the film, *Rabbit*, makes his way to the finals of a rap battle competition at a local club and, in the final battle scene, goes up against "Papa Doc," known as the best freestyle rapper in the area. The two go head-to-head, with each getting two minutes to lyrically attack the other. Rabbit skillfully and verbally attacks Papa Doc, using counter-argumentation and diminishing Papa Docs Hip Hop ethos⁷, to the cheers of the audience who determine Rabbit as the winner. Papa Doc is so verbally defeated that he is silent when it is his turn at the microphone.

This scene is reminiscent of the ultra-glibness and showmanship previously discussed, and in clear contrast to the philosophic rhetoric proposed by Plato and the respectful, relenting speech favored in ancient Chinese rhetoric. The rap battler is highly confrontational, many times getting right in the face of the competitor as he/she rhymes/attacks, and is only concerned with defeating his/her opponent, nearly always making personal attacks. So, in nearly every important way, the rap battle and rhetoric produced from the battle is, at its core, extremely different from the use/limited use of rhetoric proposed by ancient Platonic and Confucian rhetoric (though Plato employed rhetoric to attack it). This raises two interesting and important questions: Is there no truth or value in Hip Hop discourse? Are rhetorics rich in glibness and unrelenting speech perpetually at odds with truth?

Glibness vs(?) Truth

While Rabbit's rhetorical delivery/attack in *8 Mile* not only displays complex rhetorical devices, it is also a highly aggressive, entertaining, and artistic attack—qualities looked down upon by ancient rhetors such as Plato and Confucius. The lyrics rhyme, follow a specific beat, and are filled with poetic

⁷ To read/see an analysis of this rap battle scene go to <http://scentersstudentsites.iss.utep.edu/rjtinajero/digirhetorati.htm>

imagery. In rap battles the object is not only to attack the competitor, but to do so while showing linguistic creativity and talent. It is the sharp mind and the sharp tongue that join to make the Hip Hop rhetorician successful. If aggressive lyrics and showmanship are staples of Hip Hop rhetoric, is there then any Truth being conveyed in Hip Hop rhetoric? In a Platonic sense probably not much, if any—at all.

But if we are to understand the rap battle in the context of struggle—social, economic, and linguistic—then we see that even these battles have much to show us. They highlight the fact that many who strongly identify with the Hip Hop ethos may do so because of the consistent rhetorical undercurrent of struggle—of having to battle social inequity and injustice. This translates into the highly competitive/combatative nature of Hip Hop rhetoric of which the Hip Hop battle is a significant piece. The Hip Hop battle also points to the “ethnocentric and erratic will to power from which texts can spring” (Said 184)—in this instance with the discourse of the rap battle representing a dynamic “text.” This text is born out of a culture of struggle *and* creates and perpetuates an underdog mentality that permeates the discourse of the Hip Hop community and protests the plight of minority groups at this moment in history.

Furthermore, if we are to use Sophistry—not in the traditional sense of glibness or superficial rhetoric—in our analysis, then we find an important angle from which to look at truth in Hip Hop rhetoric. In Platonic vs. Sophistic thought, there is a clear distinction between an ultimate philosophical Truth (capital T) and *kairotic* truths (lower case and plural), with the Sophists representing the latter. Much of Plato’s work was in direct opposition to the Sophists who believed absolute Truth was/is not available to man. The Sophists stressed probable knowledge, or “truths,” and worked at contextualizing both knowledge and rhetoric (*kairos*). In this Sophistic sense, much of Hip Hop rhetoric is concerned with expressing truths about life and struggle, and does so from very contextualized positions. A

Sophistic view of rhetoric understands, as Susan Jarratt pointed out about ancient Athenians in *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Reconfigured*, that rhetors, in this case Hip Hop rhetors, are given the opportunity and “ability to create accounts of communal possibilities through persuasive speech” (98).

While *rap battles* lean heavily on the side of pure rhetorical showmanship (an old view of Sophistry), there is much Hip Hop rhetoric that attempts to directly address important issues in the world and express particular views on reality to an audience. This rhetoric does not simply display the realities of many who connect deeply with the Hip Hop community, but “forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies—different ways of thinking and knowing that [are] crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview” (hooks, “Language” 171). Hip Hop discourse also seems continually to work out what Victor Villanueva has stated about rhetoric in general, that it *is* politics and a precedent for action (334).

Though there are numerous examples to choose from, I will focus first in this section on two rap groups and how their message represents kairotic truths: Public Enemy, and Dead Prez. I will also make a statement about non-U.S. Hip Hop rhetoric before moving on to discuss Hip Hop rhetoric in connection to specific “moments” in U.S. history.

The first example comes from Public Enemy, a very prominent rap group of the late 1980s and early 1990s, who continue to produce albums into the new millennium. Addressing a vote against the creation of a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday by Arizonians, in the early 1990s, the groups front man Chuck D posits, “the whole state’s racist” and directly addressing Whites: “he trying to keep it yesteryear/the good ol’ days/the same ol’ ways/that kept us dyin’.” In “What Kind of Power We Got” the group addresses the government by rapping, “stop trying to take our money...because we’re...sick and tired of being mistreated.” These “street truths” are a reflection of Hip Hop culture and reminiscent

of popular sentiments expressed in Hip Hop rhetoric over the past twenty years. It may seem that this lyrical discourse is simply an angry reaction to opposition to the holiday, but the opposition and the reaction to the opposition can not be seen in a social vacuum. The existence of historical racism, the presence of social and rhetorical disadvantage, and the presence of competing ideologies—many directly connected to race—are part of the web of opposition and reaction. The events surrounding the vote on the MLK holiday played out “ideological social relations”...which shape social actions, function through concrete institutions and apparatuses, and are materialized through practices” (Hall 55). The MLK situation in Arizona did not constitute a simple vote for a new holiday but “articulated” conditions in a historical moment—it displayed and created a network of complex interactions between social, political, and ideological realities (Hall 42).

Next is the political rap group Dead Prez, who became influential Hip Hop artists with their 2000 release of *Let's Get Free*. In “They Schools,” the group unleashes a lyrical attack on the American social system.

The same people who control the school system/control the prison system/
and the whole social system/ever since slavery...[in history class] they seem to
only glorify Europeans/...to advance in life they try to make you pull your pants up⁸/
...so school don't even relate to us...

While these “truths” may shock and anger many, they *are* truths for many in American society. They are Sophistic, contextualized truths born out of specific moments and social realities. Much of Hip Hop rhetoric is focused on grasping the *kairotic* moment of the struggling, disillusioned minority, of asserting

⁸ This is referring to the baggy clothing popular in Hip Hop culture

difference, and of rhetorically analyzing and attacking social norms. In the process, whether they realize it or not, Hip Hop rhetoricians enable resistance and subvert and disrupt cultural imperialism (hooks “Language” 171).

One final note on Hip Hop rhetoric and truth is that Hip Hop has spread throughout the world and in many instances works as counter-discourse to dominant rhetorics and realities. In Britain, France, Japan, Palestine, Israel, Mexico, Africa, and many other places, Hip Hop rhetoric continues its legacy of opposition and counter-hegemonic discourse and continues to provide truths from new and fresh perspectives. While continually being concerned with artistry and linguistic showmanship, Hip Hop rhetoric, the world over, is also concerned with providing social truths, and helping listeners understand, like the Sophists, that not one person, or group, has, or should have, a monopoly on truth.

The glib speech of Hip Hop does not disqualify it from containing truth—but truth in a kairotic/situated sense and not in the Platonic and Confucian sense. In many ways, Hip Hop serves as that radical creative space written about by bell hooks—that rhetorical space which can serve as a “central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse” and a location of marginality that one, including many rappers, does not wish to lose, “give up or surrender as part of moving into the center... A site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist (“Choosing the Margin” 157). It is a rhetoric born of the margins that continually adds to, and problematizes, the developing landscape of rhetorical studies.

Glibness, Truth, and Kairos

Glibness does not exclude kairotic truths in the case of Hip Hop rhetoric. The skillful, unrelenting discourse of this musical and cultural genre rhetorically brings to life the thoughts,

emotions, and actions of a culture which continues to spread throughout the world. “Brings to life” is a general term for the more specific phenomena of creating and perpetuating a Hip Hop mentality in many individuals. The rhetoric of Hip Hop both represents *and* creates a real and perceived world. This world, *vis a vis* the culture of Hip Hop, is directly influenced by, and influential to, the discourse espoused.

Much Hip Hop, from its beginning, has been anything but relenting and respectful of the status quo. While I aim to be careful not to essentialize all Hip Hop music and culture, there is no doubt that most Hip Hop rhetoric is aimed at delivering a strong message—more skillfully than other writers/rappers (one’s rhetorical competition). But, my central point is that along with the competitive nature of Hip Hop rhetoric comes the telling and production of cultural/communal truths. These kairotic truths are always situated in real life situations *and* among real and perceived social conditions.

Hip Hop rhetoric illustrates the lives and struggles of often poor, minority, and socially-rhetorically silenced individuals in their real and perceived struggles with social issues. It is also involved in the perpetuation of these real and perceived struggles while displaying the epistemic nature of the rhetoric of Hip Hop. It is a situated rhetoric espousing situated truths and, importantly, it speaks to, and of, millions of people worldwide.

These kairotic truths may focus on general concerns like the schooling system (Dead Prez) and issues of struggle (see Chapter 3), or on more specific occurrences like the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday situation in Arizona (Public Enemy). The following section will focus on the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Hurricane Katrina of 2005, and on the political ethos of Hip Hop culture, with a look at commentary about presidents Clinton, W. Bush, and Obama. In all cases,

the rhetoric of Hip Hop culture will be central and will be aimed at displaying the kairotic truths of this influential discourse. As James Berlin points out in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, “language practices engender a set of ideological prescriptions regarding the nature of ‘reality’: economic ‘realities’ and the distribution of wealth; social and political ‘realities’ regarding class, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender and their relations to power...” (93). Such is certainly true in the case of Hip Hop rhetoric.

Kairotic and Epistemic Truths

The textual and visual rhetoric of Hip Hop culture points to and directly affects the real and perceived realities of a countless number of individuals who strongly connect to the Hip Hop ethos. The rhetoric of Hip Hop culture (as with all discourse) does not only display/relay worldly phenomena, but also is involved in the creation of worldly phenomena. It is discourse that affects our thoughts and actions and thus affects social structures and social events. Hip Hop songs, lyrics, and videos create a culture/ethos of Hip Hop that becomes the foundation from which a large group of people think/function/act. While, as with any culture, the culture of Hip Hop is not simplistic or monolithic, the rhetoric of Hip Hop allows us to begin to understand some of the foundational aspects of a Hip Hop ethos and how that ethos displays, affects, and perpetuates itself.

Looking at two very specific and situated moments and at political commentary through the rhetoric of Hip Hop can begin to unfold some of the complexities and kairotic truths of Hip Hop culture. We begin to see that Hip Hop’s political discourse presents a very liberal and, in

most cases, a very anti-Republican message. In all three cases there is a focus on race and racial factors.

Kairotic Events, Hip Hop, and Racial Projects

Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that “*racial formation* [is] the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (124). Hip Hop rhetoric is part of racial formation in that it illustrates, creates, and perpetuates ideas of race which thus affect the racial identities and beliefs of those who strongly connect with Hip Hop culture and music. Central to racial formation are “historically situated projects” (Racial Projects) which interpret, represent, and/or explain racial dynamics and which attempt to “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (124-125). The 1992 L.A. Riots, the events surrounding hurricane Katrina, the political landscape surrounding presidents Clinton, W. Bush, and Obama, and, centrally, the discourse coming from Hip Hop culture about these kairotic moments, constitute racial projects that help form racial identity.

While the discourse coming from the Hip Hop community about these “moments” is often straightforward and unrelenting, it is at the same time an important identity-showing and identity-shaping message. It is a message full of both anger and hope but always one that displays communal and situated truths.

These truths, in many ways, highlight the existence of what Etienne Balibar refers to as the “fictive nation-state” and “fictive ethnicity” which are primarily constructed rhetorically. He writes in “The Nation Form: History and Ideology”:

The term [fictive]...should not be taken in the sense of a pure and simply illusion without historical effects, but...be understood as a “fabrication.” No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized...” (223-224)

Balibar also stresses that “fictive ethnicity” is produced primarily through language and race, what he refers to as linguistic and racial ethnicity, and that this has “obvious political consequences” (225).

Hip Hop rhetoric challenges the unifying ideal of the fictive state by complicating and radicalizing its racial identity and, in its discursive output, disrupts the linguistic ethnicity of the nation. Hip Hop rhetoric at once depicts communal truths, solidifying or acting out fictive ethnicity *and* challenges the call to unity of the fictive nation-state. This challenge to unity is complexly packaged in, among others, Hip Hop’s growing mistrust or apathy toward institutions such as law enforcement, schooling⁹, and the traditional family and in its confrontational racial discourse.

Hip Hop’s usage and response to the kairotic moments below are part of the discursive fabric of Hip Hop culture and a narrative which is a part of, but challenges and complicates, the collective narrative of the United States.

1992 L.A. Riots

In a 2009 interview with Katie Couric, rapper Lil Wayne stated, “music is another form of journalism to me.” This sense of kairotic news-telling is nothing new among hip hop rhetoricians. Rapper Ice Cube has referred to himself, and Hip Hop rhetoric in general, as the Black CNN (all-news cable network). He, like most Hip Hop artists, believes that he is a historian and purveyor of truth, a truth that is not

⁹ See Dead Prez’s song “They Schools.”

available in traditional media and, I would add, in traditional rhetorical circles. Hip Hop rhetoricians, as James Berlin points out about historians, are “never simply writing an account of the past...[but] an account of the present..and a vision of the future” (“Revisionary Histories” 127). But Hip Hop artists are also not simply *writing accounts*, they are rhetorically constructing the present and future (and even the past) for the masses who deeply connect with Hip Hop.

Ice Cube artistically and rhetorically displays the realities, and sometimes perceived realities, of living as a poor minority in the United States and dealing with society and the police.

More specifically, in vivid social commentary, Ice Cube, in his album *The Predator*, discusses the Los Angeles riots of 1992, which were sparked when White members of the Los Angeles Police Department were found not-guilty on charges stemming from their beating of an African American, Rodney King, a beating that was captured on video and widely broadcast.

While a vast amount of literature including news stories, op-ed pieces, and academic articles, among others, were created in reaction to the beating, acquittal, and subsequent rioting, little attention has been placed on the reactionary rhetoric of Hip Hop artists, including in rhetorical studies. Much of the discourse from Hip Hop culture that deals with the events surrounding the 1992 L.A. Riots came specifically from those Hip Hop artists who lived in Los Angeles during, or prior to, the riots. This situated discourse is not only important due to its propinquity with the riots, but also because police brutality was something that much “gangsta” rap music had focused on leading up to the riots. As Robin Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*, “...though the media believes that the riots began with the shock of the beating of Rodney King, neither the hip hop community nor residents of South Central Los Angeles were really surprised by the videotape. Countless numbers of black Angelenos had experienced or witnessed this sort of terror before” (184). Furthermore, much Hip Hop discourse about the riots not only verbalized the thoughts and feelings of many, especially Black and poor, citizens of the United States,

but helped create and perpetuate a distrust, and even hatred, toward law enforcement, the justice system, and the social system of the United States—three entities that were seen as White-dominated and that were implicated in the social terrorization of poor minorities. A recursive response involving action-reaction-rhetoric, police brutality (as with Rodney King) and discourse about police brutality, cause many disadvantaged and often minority communities to “be wary of the police” and “cause residents...to avoid [police]...not cooperate with investigations, to assume dishonesty on the part of officers, and to teach others that such reactions are prudent lessons of survival on the streets” (Kubrin 362). It is no coincidence that such themes are prevalent in Hip Hop rhetoric, which serves as a rhetorical voice/hammer to those members of disadvantaged and racial minority groups.

In “We Had to Tear This Motherfucker Up,” Ice Cube violently addresses some of the defendants in the Rodney King case (Powell, Coon, Wynd, Vaugsinio). The vulgar language is indicative of the frustration, angst, and hatred felt by many and of the unrelenting and unapologetic nature of much Hip Hop rhetoric. But the nature of the discourse is not in contrast to kairotic/communal truths; it is deeply part of those truths:

Vaughn, wicked, Lawrence Powell, foul / Cut his fuckin throat and I smile

Pretty soon we'll catch Sergeant Coon / Shoot him in the face, run up in him witta broom

I gotta Mac10 for Officer Wynd / Damn, his devil ass need to be shipped back to Kansas

/ in a casket... / Now he ain't nothin but food for the maggots

The song also addresses a deep anger toward the jury in the case (which was moved to the predominantly White Simi Valley) which, in this kairotic commentary, directly represents the entire U.S. justice system for many poor minorities:

Go to Simi Valley and surely / somebody knows the address of the jury / Pay a little visit, "Who is it?" (Who is Ice Cube?) / "Can I talk to the grand wizard?" then boom / Make him eat the barrel, modern day feral

For many, especially fans of gangsta rap, equating the King jury to members of the Ku Klux Klan (the "grand wizard") seemed legitimate and obvious. While many citizens of the United States were stunned by the decision, it was the rhetoric of Hip Hop that presented a less-than-stunned reaction. Hip Hop rhetoric also did not shy away from highlighting racial labels and escalating the attacks on the King jury and on the *entire* social system of the United States.

Even more telling than the violence and naming of specific individuals is the song's refrain, "we had to tear this motherfucker up," referring to the rioting done in Los Angeles. The most telling part of the phrase, "had to," points to the Hip Hop community's belief that the rioting was less of a choice and more of a *necessity* in light of the events surrounding the beating of Rodney King and many others¹⁰ and the acquittal of the police officers even though the beating was clearly caught on video. This thinking can, to this day, be connected to the anti-police, anti-justice system, and anti-White sentiments and actions of many poor minorities in the United States. These sentiments are compounded by specific occurrences of police brutality against minorities and continue to be perpetuated by much gangsta rap music. Otherwise said, even if police officers today use correct protocol and legitimate force with a minority citizen, many, especially those who most fully embrace gangsta rap, will see the officers' use of force as stemming from racist ideology. This is no surprise coming from a community that embraces struggle as a theme and violence as a necessary option.

The violence and aggression in the Rodney King incident, as portrayed in Ice Cube's song, are part of a very contextualized rhetorical situation that pointed to lives and perceived truths about the

¹⁰ See p. 184 in *Race Rebels* which includes L.A. Police Chief Darryl Getes' ignorant and racist explanation of injuries and deaths caused by police officer chokeholds on Black citizens.

United States as perceived by many, mostly minority, citizens. It also displayed, once again, the “articulated” web of competing social, economic, and ideological realities and discourse spoken of by Stuart Hall. For some in the United States, the acquittal was justified: for many others, it was unjust. What gangsta rap pointed to was the situated “truth” for many that the events surrounding the King situation were simply a continuation of racist social ideals, some of which are documented in Cornel West’s “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” and thus a racist justice system.

On the same album, in “When Will They Shoot?” Ice Cube states:

Calling me an African American / like everything is fair again

and

They killed JFK in '63 / so what...do you think they'll do to me?

These lyrics, along with the aforementioned ones, represent contextualized, community-constructed truths about the nature of life in America for many African Americans and racial minorities. They are truths that are part of the worldview of those who feel that, at its core, the United States is an unjust country—one which gunned down a socially progressive president and which holds a metaphorically and literally similar fate for poor minorities. And while the validity of these statements can be debated, the fact that they constitute truths for a very large portion of the population *is* a reality. Those who produce much of gangsta rap, like Ice Cube, and many who embrace the ethos of gangsta rap, believe that the social and justice systems are stacked against them. As Erin I. Kelly states in “Criminal-Justice Minded: Retribution, Punishment, and Authority,” in rappers “lies a firm belief that the law does not, and doesn’t aim to, protect them.” He continues by stating, “If the law doesn’t protect you and won’t deliver justice, you may have to protect your own honor and reputation by seeking vengeance against your enemies” (183). In the streets of Los Angeles in 1992, and in the rhetoric of much gangsta

rap, it was the delivery of justice that was central—a redistribution of judicial resources along particular racial lines. The method of delivery may appall and baffle many, but the situated justice of the riots, and of Ice Cube’s raps, make clear sense to many others.

Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina pummeled the Gulf region of the United States in 2005, devastating many areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, with varying levels of damage from central Florida to Texas. The hardest hit area was New Orleans. What makes the events surrounding Katrina pertinent to the discussion of this chapter are the underlying social, racial, and rhetorical factors that come into play. While the hurricane and subsequent storm surge did not only affect one group or race, a spotlight can rightly be placed on the situation of poor African Americans in the aftermath of the storm and, importantly, on the reaction to the inept response by various federal entities. More specifically, the rhetoric of some Hip Hop artists, as with the L.A. Riots, displays, perpetuates, and creates the sentiments of many within and outside of Hip Hop culture, especially poor minorities. This transforms the events surrounding hurricane Katrina from a mere discussion on storm relief to a racial project that is connected to the ongoing formation of racial ideals in the United States and beyond. This racial project, occasioned by strong winds from the Atlantic, has entered the American psyche and become a part of its racial discourse, part of which is the influential rhetoric of the Hip Hop world.

The rhetorically situated discourse of some Hip Hop artists in the aftermath of Katrina (and even before then), point to two interesting sentiments prevalent in Hip Hop culture: (1)

blame and race are unapologetically linked and (2) all U.S. government entities and their response, or lack thereof, to the victims of hurricane Katrina are consistently and directly linked to the White race. While lyrics and statements by numerous Hip Hop artists could be pointed at to highlight these two sentiments, the discussion here will focus on three very popular and rhetorically influential artists: Lil Wayne (a native of New Orleans), Jay-Z, and Kanye West. There will also be mention of two compilation albums put together in response to the events surrounding Katrina, a statement by Latino rapper Chingo Bling, and an e-interview with DJ Raj Smoove, another native of New Orleans.

Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and Kanye West

Much Hip Hop music has historically focused on situated events while pointing to specific moments—with rappers not shying away from “keeping it real” or pointing to hard truths. These truths of course are situated/kariotic truths that help shape the psyche, racial and otherwise, of those deeply connected to Hip Hop culture. Not surprisingly, this is no different in much of Hip Hop’s response to the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

In the song “Georgia Bush,”¹¹ Louisiana rapper Lil Wayne attacks President Bush for the inadequate government response to the victims of Katrina and begins with:

This song is dedicated to / the one with the suit / thick white skin / and his eyes bright blue

He continues his link of blame to Bush and the White race in general with statements such as:

They telling you lies on the news / White people smiling like everything’s cool /

¹¹ The title connects President George W. Bush’s name with the song “Georgia on my Mind,” famously sung by Ray Charles, whose refrain beat is also used in Lil Wayne’s song. The title may also be meant to pay homage to the Southern United States and may be meant to emasculate Bush’s first name.

But I know people that died in that pool / I know people that died in them schools

When you see that confederate flag / you know what it is / a White cracker
motherfucker that probably voted for him

There was certainly blame put on Bush by many groups and individuals not connected to Hip Hop but the rhetoric of Hip Hop was the boldest in condemning the president, linking blame to White people in general, and unapologetically suggesting that racism played a role in the government's response.

In "Minority Report," rapper Jay-Z echoes some of the sentiments of "Georgia Bush." In a scathing and vivid attack on Bush and the chaotic response to victims, he raps:

The commander in chief / just flew by / ..what if he ran out of jet fuel / and just
dropped?

Poor kids left on the porches / same old story in New Orleans

And in referring to his own donation of money to help hurricane victims, Jay-Z seems to later realize:

Damn, I just put my monies in the hands / of the same people that left my people
stranded

This linkage of blame to George Bush specifically, and the labeling of him as a representative of the White race, was heard by millions during a nationally televised telethon put together to raise money for the hurricane victims. During a live segment, rapper Kanye West ad-libbed the statement "George Bush doesn't care about black people." This was a very public display by a popular representative of the Hip Hop community of the sentiments felt by many that George Bush, and the government in general, was not merely incompetent but that their actions were dictated by racist ideology. Interestingly, in the song "Like This N Like That (They Can't Deport

Us All), popular Houston-based Latino rapper Chingo Bling echoes West's nationally televised statement by rapping, "They got us cleaning up Katrina / Yo, Kanye / Bush don't like Mexicans neither."

These sentiments by minority rappers are of no surprise to many, including Bill E. Lawson who writes in "Microphone Commandos: Rap Music and Political Philosophy," "rap music, if one listens closely, can be heard as challenging basic philosophical assumptions underlying the political order" (161). Lawson sees much Hip Hop rhetoric as a reaction to the broken "social contract" of the United States, particularly in its failure to live up to its "agreement" with Blacks (162). I would emphasize that much Hip Hop rhetoric, especially that which is presented in this chapter, is not only a reaction to this broken social contract but is directly involved in the breaking-work of this philosophically envisioned contract. The rhetoric of Hip Hop displays and creates mistrust and blame which, rightly or wrongly, affects the "social contract" of the United States.

This deep blame and mistrust of the president/government/Whites is also touched on in Lil Wayne's and Jay-Z's songs. Lil Wayne mentions the fact that the levee system, meant to prevent or diminish flooding in New Orleans, was flawed—a valid argument made by many. But, he goes beyond simply blaming inadequate engineering by bringing up the fact that many believe that the levees were intentionally sabotaged by the federal government: "I know some folk that lived by the levee / they keep on telling me they heard explosions / same [thing] happened in hurricane Betsy / 1965 / I aint too young to know this / that was president Johnson

/ but now it's Georgia Bush¹²." He then adds, "New Orleans, baby / now the White house hatin' / trying to wash us away like we not on the map." These claims of sabotage may be brushed off as far-fetched conspiracy theories by some, but the claims are important in that they highlight, create, and perpetuate mistrust by many (especially poor minorities) towards the federal government. They point to the fact that many people would actually not be surprised if the federal government did intentionally sabotage the levees¹³. And if there is a direct connection being established, especially in the Hip Hop world, between the federal government and the White race, and in many cases, White racists, then this "racial project" (constituted by the aftermath of Katrina and Hip Hop's response), goes a long way in establishing racial worldviews and actions.

Lil Wayne's and Jay-Z's songs also state the rappers' opinions that the police force and the media were too aggressive in labeling victims as "looters" in the hours after the hurricane hit. Lil Wayne writes, "They make it look like a lot of stealing going on / boy those cops are killers in my home / nigga shot dead in the middle of the street / I aint no thief / I'm just trying to eat" and Jay-Z states, "wouldn't you loot / if you didn't have the loot / baby needed food / and you stuck on the roof?" This highlights a strong division (real and/or perceived) between the worldviews of White, especially middle-class and rich, Americans and poor minorities. It also emphasizes the need to examine non-traditional rhetorics like those coming from the Hip Hop community.

¹² Hurricane Betsy (1965) also devastated Louisiana and some have suggested that some levees were intentionally breached in order to save the popular and richer French Quarter area. Lyndon Johnson was president at the time.

¹³ These claims echo similar beliefs that it was the federal government, or a branch of it (like the CIA or FBI), who introduced cocaine and crack into inner-city ghettos in the 1970s in order to criminalize and confine poor minority populations—a claim also highlighted in numerous Hip Hop songs.

The rhetorical response by Hip Hop to the aftermath of hurricane Katrina cannot be simply discarded as radical and marginal, but must be looked at seriously for what it says and for ways in which it works epistemically in our world today. It is a rhetoric of the “resistance culture” that in many instances operates “outside of the norms and conventions of White mainstream society” (Smitherman 10).

Hip Hop rhetoric draws a clear line between the racial “us” and “them.” Many in Hip Hop stated that it was “my people” that were devastated and forgotten in New Orleans, and rappers like Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and Kanye West, among others, gave of their time and money to help the victims of Katrina in ways they had not helped in other crises. Some Hip Hop DJs and producers also supplied monetary help and rhetorical donations by putting out albums to highlight the events and aftermath of Katrina—not a common occurrence in situations that do not have a direct effect on the African American community. As New Orleans DJ Raj Smoove put it, “We have a voice and it wasn’t drowned.” Compilation albums like Smoove’s *The Day After Tomorrow*, with an image of New Orleans drowning on the front cover, and Master P’s *Hurricane Katrina: We Gon’ Bounce Back*, along with the lyrics of Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, Kanye West, and numerous other voices of Hip Hop, may not be the fodder of traditional rhetorical studies (or traditional media reporting) but they provide insight into the experiences and worldviews of a large segment of the United States. Because of this, Hip Hop rhetoric may today truly be the “Black CNN” and certainly an important piece of the modern Black *Rhetorical Tradition*¹⁴.

Clinton, Bush, Obama: Hip Hop’s Political Ethos

¹⁴ This reference is to the highly influential rhetorical anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition* edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg.

The highly kairotic rhetoric of Hip Hop, as can be seen in its response to the 1992 L.A. Riots and Katrina, does not shy away from critical political and social messages. Its situated truths continue to be a part of the formation of racial ideologies and race relations. The statements made by rapper Lil Wayne in “Georgia Bush” provide just a small glimpse into the political ethos of Hip Hop culture. The political rhetoric of much Hip Hop, some of which will be analyzed here, highlights, perpetuates, and creates an anti-government, often anti-White ethos among those who use the rhetoric of Hip Hop to help shape their political ideology and agenda.

Commentary by rappers like Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Chingo Bling show a strong mistrust of the political machine in the United States, and within that general mistrust is much greater animosity towards the Republican party and Republican presidents. Hip Hop is a relatively young form of expression, reaching prominence in the 1980s, thus fitting into a 30-year or so time period from which to express a political message. This section will focus on Hip Hop rhetoric that expresses views on the two prominent political parties and, more specifically, on presidents Bill Clinton (Dem.), George W. Bush (Rep.), and Barak Obama (Dem.). The fact that Obama is the first black (bi-racial) president of the United States adds important layers of analysis, thus there is a lengthier discussion about him.

This entire discussion once again highlights the kairotic elements of Hip Hop rhetoric and its connections to communal truths, race, and racial identity.

Clinton, Bush, and Obama

President Clinton enjoyed rather positive feedback from the Hip Hop community, partially because his Democratic administration followed the Republican administration of the elder George Bush, but in large part due to his seeming connectedness to, and concern for, the

African American community. A debate on whether Clinton or W. Bush actually did more to help minority communities is better saved for a separate discussion, but the perceived and perpetuated reality was/is that Clinton, and Democrats in general, are more concerned for minorities in general and specifically African Americans, who are the dominant force behind Hip Hop culture. This connection of Clinton to the African American and Hip Hop community was visually highlighted in the then-presidential-candidate's appearance on the Arsenio Hall Show in which he played the saxophone¹⁵. This connection continued after Clinton's two-term presidency was over when he chose Harlem, New York, as the location for his office and claimed, "Now I feel like I'm home" (Hinojosa and Palmer). His life and presidency even led some to refer to Clinton as "the first black president,"¹⁶ a historically foolish statement considering the 2008 election of Obama. While most of the Hip Hop community supported Obama in the 2008 presidential election, a statement made by popular rapper 50 Cent shows the continued support for Bill Clinton even eight years removed from his presidency: "Electing Hillary 'is a way for us to have Bill Clinton be president again'..." (Greenburg).

This support for Clinton, very much connected to his link to the Democratic party, is in sharp contrast to Hip Hop's negative sentiments towards George W. Bush and the Republican Party. This contrast becomes even more evident when commentary on Bush is compared to Hip Hop's commentary on Obama. In Hip Hop rhetoric, the Republican party is often labeled as the party of rich, White, and racist individuals—individuals who have little concern for the plight of poor racial minorities, including African Americans. While other entities, and some

¹⁵ The Arsenio Hall show was a late night talk show hosted by African American comedian/actor Arsenio Hall and aired from 1989-1994. The show was popular among young, urban youth and the "MTV Generation." Clinton played the saxophone on the show in June of 1992 which, some say, helped him win the presidential election.

¹⁶ See "Clinton as the First Black President" by Toni Morrison (*New Yorker*, Oct. 1998).

politicians themselves, have labeled the Republican Party as out of touch and elitist, Hip Hop rhetoric offers a more vivid, direct, and un-politically correct attack on Republicans, much of which attacks President Bush directly. As with Hip Hop's discourse about the 1992 L.A. Riots and Hurricane Katrina, some might label it as unfair, hate-filled, and even racist, but the aim of this section, and of this chapter, is not to argue the merits of the arguments but to point to the epistemic and kairotic nature of the discourse. It is a rhetoric ripe with commentary about specific and situated realities and one which holds communal truths about the racial state of the country and, importantly, which affects identity and action.

Among these espoused truths is that White, conservative (usually Republican) politicians and national leaders are consistently hurting the poor African American community, from which Hip Hop grew. As Michael Eric Dyson writes in "Gangsta Rap and American Culture":

Cruel Cuts in social programs for the neediest, an upward redistribution of wealth to the rich, and an unprincipled conservative political campaign to demonize poor black mothers and their children have left...[them] in the dust. Many of gangsta rap's most vocal black critics...fail to see how the alliances they forge with conservative white politicians such as Bennett and Dole¹⁷ are plagued with problems. Bennett and Dole have put up roadblocks to many legislative and political measures that would enhance the fortunes of the black poor.

He adds:

Moreover, many of the same conservative politicians who support the attack on gangsta rap also attack black women..., affirmative action, and the redrawing of voting districts to achieve parity for black voters. Ironically, such critics appear oblivious to how their rhetoric of absolute opposition to gangsta rap has been used to justify political attacks on poor black teens. (178-179)

In the climate of much Republican mistrust by the African American community, attacks on George W. Bush are not surprising. In a blatant attempt to affect the reelection possibilities of

¹⁷ Former Secretary of Education William Bennett and former Senator Bob Dole; both Republicans.

Bush in 2004, rapper Eminem put out the song and video “Mosh.” The video urges citizens, especially the youth, to march on Washington and vote against Bush. Some of the lyrics include:

Stomp, push, shove, mush / F**k Bush / until they bring our troops home

Imagine it pouring / just raining down on us / mosh pits outside the oval office /
Someone’s tryin’ tell us something / maybe this is God just sayin’ we’re responsible /
For this monster / this coward / that we have empowered

...disarm this weapon of mass destruction / that we call our president

Such rhetorical attacks are echoed in the lyrics and comments made by many in Hip Hop, including politically-minded rapper Mos Def who stated, “[Bush] got a policy for handling [black people] and trash” (Greenburg). The attacks on Bush from Hip Hop rhetors grew to a fever pitch in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Even though part of the responsibility should have seemingly fallen on the mayor of the city, it was Bush and the federal government that took the most heat from the Hip Hop community. This may well have occurred because New Orleans’ mayor was Black and, therefore, not a comfortable target for rappers. As New Orleans DJ Raj Smoove explains it, “As president he should have stepped in and over whatever state boundaries he was wary of to save American citizens. You know he is fast to travel halfway across the world and impose his measures...but somehow he was concerned about what the governor wanted to do and they play[ed] volley with the responsibility.” Interestingly, the African American and Democratic mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, gained reelection while national criticism grew (rightly or wrongly) for President Bush and the Republican Party.

In sharp contrast, or in part because of the highly unpopular Bush/Republican administration at the time of the 2008 presidential election cycle, Barak Obama received much

support from the Hip Hop community. There is no doubt that there was also a strong racial component to this support. But, just as the racial component was strong, so to was the fact that Obama was a Democrat. In somewhat simplistic terms, Obama was much praised in Hip Hop rhetoric because of his status as a non-Republican, non-conservative, and non-White candidate. But that seems to be only part, be it a large part, of the reason behind Hip Hop's support. After all, Black presidential candidates of the Hip Hop era, like Jesse Jackson, did not achieve the level of popularity as Obama did in the Hip Hop community.

It seems that Obama was so popular in Hip Hop because he was a black, liberal, Democrat, three things that had become appreciated in the socio-historical creation and evolution of the American Hip Hop ethos, but also because he seemed to exude characteristics important to Hip Hop: he was fresh, cool, aware of racial struggle (and willing to talk about it), had a message of social change, and was rhetorically powerful. Obama was also a self-proclaimed Jay-Z fan who was seen “brushing off his shoulder” and “fist-bumping¹⁸” his wife on a number of occasions—visually rhetorical body language that connected him, in a small but important way, to the Hip Hop ethos. He fit the moment of the election very well (almost perfectly for those in Hip Hop). It was as though the kairos of the Obama campaign and the kairotic nature of Hip Hop rhetoric meshed nearly seamlessly at this particular political moment.

Some major Hip Hop artists that showed open support for Obama included Jay-Z, Ludacris, Common, Talib Kweli, Nas, Rakim, and Red Man. Also, numerous songs were

¹⁸ “Brushing off his shoulder” refers to the motion that signifies not letting criticism affect one's actions and self-confidence. It was a popular motion in Hip Hop early in the millennium and most popularized by Jay-Z's song “Dirt Off Your Shoulders.” The “fist bump” was a hip handshake of sorts where two individuals would tap or bump each other's closed fists.

produced with rhetoric that directly supported the Obama campaign. The vast amount of rhetorical support was/is unprecedented in the short history of Hip Hop. Some notable songs include Nas' "Black President" where he raps, "America, surprise us / and let a black man guide us" and calls Obama the "new-improved JFK," and Common's song "The People" where he states, "standin' in front of the judge with no honor / ...unite the people like Obama." Also, in his song "Say Something," Talib Kweli raps, "speak to the people like Barack Obama." In this song he contrasts the struggles of "the people" to those focused on making profit, "a product of Reaganomics." Another nod of support can be seen in the rapper Jin's (a Chinese-American) "Open Letter to Obama" where he refers to one of Obama's popular phrases: "Red states / blue states / that's kinda late / In your eyes / it's only the United States. The song was so liked by the Obama campaign team that they added Jin as "friend" on Obama's official MySpace site¹⁹.

Finally, there was the song "Work to Do" by Kidz in the Hall which was meant to serve as a campaign song for Obama. The song is ripe with positive messages, including the repeated anthem of there's "work to do" in light of the struggles facing the county, along with the phrase "Obama for America." In the remix of the song, which included Talib Kweli and Bun B, there is a more political message:

One said he had a dream / Malcolm said "by any means" / Forty years later /
Now I'm sort of seeing what he means / ..and the reality is we need a new plan /
Critics say we can't / but Barack say we can / ...take our neck out the noose /
Go and bring back the youth / Give our nation a boost

In my lifetime / I've never seen the dream of Dr. King / fully realized in the flesh

Lookin' in the face / of the current administration [Bush] / it's not reflecting me /

¹⁹ MySpace is a popular social networking site, mainly among youth and young adults, that displays information about individuals and allows them to connect to, and keep in contact with, others.

And I'm starting to lose my patience

The message of the song, especially the remixed version, re-emphasizes the political and racial message behind much of Hip Hop's support for the Obama campaign, and its mistrust and hatred towards the Bush administration and Republican Party in general. It is a message that helps shape the political ethos of the Hip Hop community and, consequently, affects political and racial formation.

Support for Obama from the Hip Hop community can also be seen in Russell Simmons', a Hip Hop legend and media mogul, vast work in support of the Obama campaign. As Simmons put it, Obama "represents the best candidate to suit the ideas that matter most to me—eradicating poverty, conflict resolution, the environment, and foreign policy" (Cheers and Holmes). Further support is highlighted in the fact that an Urban Inaugural Ball, hosted by rappers Ludacris and Big Boi, was thrown in support of Obama's January 2009 Inauguration.

At other inauguration night events, rapper Jay-Z stated, "No more white lies, my president is black" and rapper Young Jeezy, who released the song "My President's Black," expressed thanks to the Iraqi journalist who threw his two shoes at President Bush's head in December of 2008. The footage of the two rappers aired on the O'Reilly Factor, a very popular news show hosted by Bill O'Reilly on the Republican-leaning (according to most in the Hip Hop community) Fox News Channel. Interestingly, O'Reilly, who is a vocal opponent of "gangsta rap," occasionally includes segments on Hip Hop artists because he seems to understand the power of their message. In contrast, a guest on O'Reilly's show, commentator Dennis Miller,

seems to downplay the impact of Hip Hop rhetoric on shaping the worldview of many in society when he states that the commentary of Jay-Z and Young Jeezy are “a sidebar to a sidebar.”²⁰

In an interesting, and telling/shaping, message, one of the hosts of the aforementioned Urban Inaugural Ball, Ludacris, put out a pre-election song (“Politics as Usual”) in support of Obama in which he rapped, “Hillary [Clinton] hated on you / so that bitch is irrelevant / [John] McCain don’t belong in a chair / unless he’s paralyzed.” This message was denounced by an Obama campaign spokesman (see Cheers and Holmes), but is yet another vivid example of the unrelenting message of much of Hip Hop. While the rhetoric of the song is offensive, it represents the feelings of some (many?) that are deeply connected to Hip Hop. It, along with much of the rhetorical support for Obama by the Hip Hop community, is not the respectful, philosophical, controlled dialogue desired by Plato and Confucius, but it is no less important to the study of truth and identity-forming discourse.

In a telling interview, Obama seems to grasp the power and importance of Hip Hop rhetoric and understand its complex relevance, another reason for his popularity in Hip Hop culture. He states:

A lot of these kids are not going to be reading the New York Times...Hip Hop is not just a mirror of what is, it should also be a reflection of what can be.

That “what is” and “can be” is at the center of the kairotic message of Hip Hop. The discourse of this community, which is in sharp contrast to the preferred rhetoric/discourse of Plato and Confucius, drives the political ideology of a large segment of the population. It is an ideology

²⁰ The episode of *The O’Reilly Factor* I am referring to aired on January 21, 2009.

that is mostly liberal and Democratic, hyper-aware of race and race relations, and one which does not shy away from conflict, rhetorical or otherwise.

Conclusion: Hip Hop Kairos and Why it Matters

The discursive output of Hip Hop points to identity-representing and identity-forming messages of a highly popular and influential culture. While these messages may not come through a traditionally studied medium in rhetorical studies or contain Truth in the Platonic or Confucian sense, they serve as powerful and complex rhetorical avenues from which to study issues of identity and race and their connections to social and ideological philosophies and realities. The kairotic messages and communal truths of Hip Hop bring to light the intricate web of rhetoric, race, and identity and ask us, whether we agree with the messages or not, to consider the ramifications of social and historical inequity and racialization on the creation of discourse and, conversely, on the ramifications of discourse on social and historical inequity and racialization.

It asks us to consider this in the socio-historical moment of the situated *now*—the *now* of the first quarter of the new millennium, the *now* of our communities, the *now* of the Hip Hop rhetoric being created in basements, backyards, and street corners around the world, the *now* of lyrics pouring through music players and satellite radios at this very moment, and the *now* that is always connected to “articulated” moments of historical socialization and racialization.

Hip Hop kairos has much to say, show, and do and goes a long way in affecting the identity and actions of millions across the world, especially those most connected to the Hip Hop message and ethos. It is far from empty and glib speech—it is discourse strongly connected to the oppressed, to the marginalized, to an underdog and struggle mentality, and to

the rhetorical and physical lives of many individuals, communities, cities, states, countries, and peoples the world over. Hip Hop rhetoric highlights, challenges, complicates, constitutes, and articulates complex social realities—it is rhetoric at its best.

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Chapter 3

Black and Brown in Hip Hop: Tenuous-Solidarity

“...discourse serves as the vehicle for which
racial ideals are promulgated and advanced”

-Cornel West-

Race is an important and growing area of study in contemporary rhetorical studies (see Gilyard; Ratcliffe; Villanueva; West), but the terrain of this discussion has not delved much into musical/lyrical rhetoric, especially not that of Hip Hop. Analyzing this “everyday” (Essed)²¹ rhetoric, one that is continually expanding, diversifying, and being pumped into the ears of millions of listeners, can add to the landscape of race discussions in rhetorical circles and beyond. Performing this non-traditional rhetorical analysis works towards the shifts Jacqueline Jones Royster has spoken of (see chapter 1), which include “shifting where we stand,” “shifting rhetorical subjects,” “shifting the circle of practice,” and “shifting the theoretical frame.” The study of race through Hip Hop Rhetoric, and vice versa, asks scholars to address and enact these important shifts in rhetorical studies.

As integral parts of Hip Hop culture, rap music lyrics, rap music videos, and Hip Hop films, some of which will be discussed later in the chapter, are in many ways the rhetorical voice of that culture and can teach much about racial interactions within and beyond that culture. With their beginnings in New York African American communities in the 1970s, rap music and Hip Hop culture have catapulted into the American ethos and cannot be ignored when discussing the continual formation of the American identity. More specifically, because of its popularity, Hip Hop has been incorporated by other racial

²¹ Philomena Essed labels the “everyday” as routine situations in everyday life and connects “everyday racism” to the structural forces of racism. In similar fashion, I connect the everyday aspects of Hip Hop culture (music, video, and film) to the forces of Black and Brown tension and solidarity.

groups and has created opportunities for physical and rhetorical interaction between those groups and African Americans. One of these groups is the Latino/a American community.

According to 2006 census reports, Hispanics and African Americans each comprised approximately 13-14% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census), and these numbers continue to grow. As the two largest, and most culturally and politically influential minority groups in the United States, it is important to analyze the rhetorical interactions between Latino/a Americans and African Americans. Hip Hop music lyrics (particularly rap), video, and film, all which can be far reaching and highly influential, provide useful sites of analysis. While academic writings have a limited trickle down influence on youth and society at large, through the filter of academia or popular media, it is in music and film that much larger segments of the population rhetorically interact with the world on a regular basis. Critically analyzing textual and visual rhetorical content from Hip Hop culture should be an important endeavor in rhetorical studies.

This endeavor is new; Hip Hop rhetoric is young in the historical scheme of rhetoric and in studies of human discourse. But its youth is not the only reason Hip Hop rhetoric has been largely ignored in the academic field of rhetoric. This discourse and its community are much different from, and in many ways challenge, the traditional landscape of the discipline. While the realm of rhetorical studies has expanded over the years, more traditional subjects of study continue to dominate the field. Also, those who either do not understand Hip Hop discourse, who fear its influence, or who believe it is inappropriate in the formal study of rhetoric tend to marginalize or ignore it.

Rhetorical scholarship in Hip Hop Rhetoric can strongly add to the intellectual landscape of rhetorical studies, help us add to the diversity of the discipline, and, importantly, shift our understanding of what can/should be deemed valuable in rhetorical studies. One valuable aspect of this work is the

discussion of race relations—in this case, the complex relationship between Latino/a Americans and African Americans.

Tenuous-Solidarity

I propose that Latino/a Americans and African Americans—highlighted in this chapter through the lens of Hip Hop—are in a constant state of tension *and* solidarity. Here I offer a new term which I feel may capture best this relationship—*tenuous-solidarity*. The two groups interact in a physical, linguistic, and rhetorical borderland (Anzaldua) and co-exist in what LuMing Mao might refer to as a state of “together-in-difference” (434). They “meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt qtd. in Mao 434) in a brutally beautiful manner that is indicative of many racially (or otherwise) divided people throughout the world. While Pratt and Mao refer more specifically to the relationship between a dominant and subordinate culture, the complexities of competing cultures can be applied to the Latino American/African American situation as they both “compete” against one another *and* against the dominant culture of the United States.

Crucially, the interactions between these two populations in Hip Hop culture must be viewed in a parametric manner—that is, they not only characterize the relationship within the realm of Hip Hop but are reflections of interactions between these two groups in society at large. It is in this tenuous-solidarity, I believe, that these two groups will continue to struggle within, under, and against hegemonic forces in the United States for years to come.

At the micro level there are certainly points of tension and outright hatred and violence between individuals in the Latino/a American and African American communities. There is also growing tension between large sectors of those two communities. One example of this are fights that broke out between Latino/a American and African American students in Los Angeles schools during the immigration reform protests of 2006 and continued brawls between Latino American and African

American students throughout South Central Los Angeles and other cities in the United States (McGrath). I have also heard of clashes and small riots between African American and Latino students at high schools in my home town of El Paso, Texas.

There has also been heated debate between national organizational leaders from the two groups over jobs (Wood), immigration, bilingual education, and political representation (Hutchinson “Black Latino Clash”). While these political clashes are important examples, the tension between the two groups is perhaps most clearly illustrated in gang activity and prison life, both influences on Hip Hop culture. In jails and prisons across America, the Brown-Black divide is exacerbated, as it is in many of the urban communities that produce Hip Hop artists/rhetors. As Joseph Holguin, a Latino gang member, put it, “The whole racial thing [in prison] leaks out into the real world” (Glazer).

And while all these manifestations of tension may not be simply and directly linked only to issues of race (one must consider class, gender, culture, and general situatedness as well), I believe race *is* central to many of these interactions. The hyper-awareness and hyper-pride in one’s Blackness or Brownness, expressed constantly in much of Hip Hop rhetoric, points to this dynamic. Also, both positive and negative individual acts and rhetoric aimed at the other group, as well as social interactions between the two groups in general, are indicative of both specific agents (the micro/individual) and systemic structures (the macro/community)²². It would be near-sighted to focus only on individual rappers as autonomous agents and not members of racial and socioeconomic groups as well as it would be far-sighted not to consider specific rap lyrics and images that come from particularized contexts.

A telling quotation that points to this notion of tenuous-solidarity comes from Latino rapper Down A.K.A. Kilo who states, “You could be a Latino, a big gang member, and you could hate black people, but if Snoop Dogg [an African American] comes out with a record, you’re still going to buy it.

²² For discussions of racism at the micro and macro levels read Steve Fenton’s “Ethnicity and the Modern World: Historical Trajectories,” Omi and Winant’s “Racial Formation,” and Teun A. van Dijk’s *Elite Discourse and Racism*

When Ice Cube [an African American] comes out with a record, you're still going to buy it" (Vibe 132). Even more poignantly and violently stated in "To Live and Die in L.A.," by rap icon Tupac Shakur, we hear further discourse that points to both tension and solidarity: "Black love, Brown pride/ We might fight against each other, but I promise you this/ We'll burn this [city] down/ just get us pissed (mad)." Both rappers are keenly aware of the tension (hatred, fighting) and the solidarity (support, connection) between the two groups.

If we are to concede that many negative interactions between these two communities are race-based (racism), then it seems we must agree with Philomena Essed that racism is perpetuated "through multiple relations and situations...[within] the process of the system" at work (189). Thus, I will argue that some of the textual and visual rhetoric coming from Hip Hop is indicative of what Essed defines as "everyday racism" because it is both an expression and an underlying catalyst of racist interactions between Latino/a Americans and African Americans in "everyday" venues—music, music videos, and film. Individual rhetorical moments coming from these media both create a system of racial interaction and are expressions of individual thoughts by persons within those communities. If the *everyday* involves "the direct reproduction of the person embedded in social relations" and belongs to routine and repetitive practices which can be deemed "generalizable and taken for granted" (Essed 186-187), then rap artists and their product, if part of popular culture or the culture of a large segment of society, are integral parts of the formation of racial identities in the minds of those that listen to the music and watch the videos and films on a regular basis. Otherwise said, the rap music being pumped into the ears of people, and the visual rhetoric poured into their eyes, can have an effect on their attitudes and interactions towards another racial group. After all, rhetoric shapes attitude and "attitudes are not purely mental...[one] carries them in [one's] interactions with others; actions are shaped and formed by attitudes" (Heldke 40).

If rap lyrics, rap music videos, and Hip Hop films at times create and display structures and moments of everyday racism, this media may also create structures and moments of everyday solidarity, which involve cooperation, understanding, and empathy. When Latino/a Americans and African Americans confront similar issues and struggles, their combined rhetoric encourages important moments of understanding and union. This interplay between rhetoric that illustrates togetherness and rhetoric that illustrates difference and tension develops the notion of tenuous-solidarity. If we agree with Teun van Dijk that “discourse is the principle means for the construction and reproduction of sociocognitive framework[s]” (“Denying” 307), then these discursive messages of tension and solidarity displayed in Hip Hop culture serve as powerful agents in the development of relations between the two groups.

Black and Brown Solidarity

Soldier Imagery/Mentality: Illustrating and Perpetuating an Ethos of Struggle

You got to think like a soldier/
And we gonna organize a people army/
And we gonna get control over our own lives

-Dead Prez-

People worldwide, many of them young, use rap music as a vehicle for voicing their struggles—a quality prevalent in African American rap music since its early beginnings. From France and Latin America to Africa and Palestine, rap artists express the frustration and angst of millions. This expression of angst-filled and socially conscious rhetoric through rap music, which often focuses on social struggle, is also prevalent in the Latino/a American community.

To connect themselves with the notion of struggle, both Latino/a American and African American rap artists continually incorporate the rhetorical metaphor of *soldier* in their lyrics, which is indicative of, and perpetuates, a soldier ethos. As with soldiers in a traditional army, many rappers and individuals that identify with the Hip Hop ethos, identify with the notion of meaningful struggle—struggle that is both for survival and purpose. While the image of the soldier can conjure up a plethora of characteristics, from institutional and social hegemony to unquestioned obedience, I believe Hip Hop rhetoric connects with soldier imagery because of the characteristics of strength, struggle, and survival in the face of adversity.

Often coming from poor and violent neighborhoods, the creators of rap music (and many in their audience) are keenly aware of struggle—struggle to survive physically, emotionally, and rhetorically in a world that continually subjugates the poor (often minorities) and subjects them to oppressive circumstances. But it is important to highlight that the soldier metaphor, one of the reigning metaphors in rap music and Hip Hop culture, is a rhetorically powerful tool of identity and agency—not a metaphor of the weak. This seems indicative of much of Hip Hop culture’s world view—an acceptance of the fact that there *is* struggle, that there *is* the presence of oppressive social forces, but that something *can* be done to combat those forces, as soldiers confront their enemies on the battlefield.

As in the armed forces, struggle is always both individualistic and group-based—for personal *and* group survival and agency. Individuals can battle politically racist and classist hegemonic forces, but that struggle is almost always within and for a group: Latino/a Americans, African Americans, a particular class, community, city, clique, etc. Just as military soldiers are proud of being an “Army of one” (a popular slogan in Army advertisements), rappers and those in their audience many times express their strength as individuals but also as members of a group. Military soldiers have strong

connections to their battalion, their arm of the military, and the country they fight for. The same connection to a group, clique, gang, city, and region is present in rappers and many in their audience.

It is no wonder that both Latino/a Americans and African Americans connect with the metaphor of purposeful struggle, come to life in the soldier. The two groups are continually at the bottom of U.S. economic and educational achievement indicators and in many instances share a distinction as second-class citizens who have been born into the bottom ranks of the social and economic order. Some examples help illustrate this point. Linguistically, both groups battle against the delegitimization of “non-Standard” languages/dialects (African American Vernacular English/Black English, Spanish and Spanglish). In health care, Latino Americans and African Americans continue to be victims of gaps in health insurance and access to the best medicines and doctors (Stein). In technology, these two populations lag behind in access to computers and Internet access and to the best education in turning those technologies into catalysts for social advancement (Banks). Politically, Latino/a Americans and African Americans continue to battle for more representation at the local, state, and federal level. Both are at the bottom of numbers indicating home ownership, wages, net worth, and education (Associated Press). The groups also account for the highest incarceration rates in the United States (Liptak).

These conditions explain why struggle is a central theme in these communities and in their production of Hip Hop rhetoric—a production that highlights, perpetuates, and creates an ethos of struggle. As most contemporary rhetoricians would claim, discourse should be analyzed not only for what it points to, but also for what it creates. Rhetoric is epistemic and thus powerful—powerful not only in an inspirational sense, but also in that it points to power structures inherent in society. Though many would argue that Latino/a and African Americans have the same access to upward mobility and equal levels of cultural capital, a vast amount of Hip Hop rhetoric serves as a constant reminder of the

social and racial injustice, and the consequent struggle, involved in the lives of many, especially poor, Blacks and Latinos.

Importantly, the voices of Hip Hop often come from those that are otherwise voiceless, directly or indirectly, especially in academic settings. They may have a strong voice within smaller social networks, but their experiences and discourse are largely ignored in rhetorical studies. Their discussion of struggle and their perpetuation of a struggle mentality is ignored even though Hip Hop rhetoric is readily available in the airwaves and texts around us. This sense of presence but exclusion, socially and rhetorically, adds to the notion of struggle.

While the notion of struggle has been discussed in many ways, the struggle ethos in Hip Hop is habitually personified through the “soldier” by many rappers, and, because rhetoric *is* epistemic, this soldier rhetoric produces a large population of individuals with varying levels of soldier mentality on the streets of this nation and throughout the world.

Some Examples

Throughout their 2000 album *Let's Get Free*, the rap group Dead Prez incorporates soldier imagery. The track “We Want Freedom” states, “we gonna organize a people army,” “would you be ready for civil war?” “train yourself, clean your shottie (shotgun),” and “military formation, anyone’s participation is welcome.” Continued imagery and direct pronouncements of organized, military-like struggle are rampant in this album and in the group’s other releases: *Turn off the Radio Volume 1*, *Turn off the Radio Volume 2: Get Free or Die Tryin’* and *Revolutionary But Gangsta*. One of the group’s icons is the *shi* hexagram (from the *I Ching*), which symbolizes the Army and is part of their logo.

In “I’m a Soldier,” rapper 50 Cent claims, as he directly or indirectly does in numerous songs, “I’m a soldier, I done told ya, don’t make me f**k you up,” and ends the song with the marching

commands of “left, right, left, right.” On the same track fellow rapper Lloyd Banks expresses, “everyday’s war.” In a remix of “I’m a Soldier,” 50 Cent orders the audience to “Salute me.” These are clear references to the soldier metaphor typical of Hip Hop rhetoric.

While some in Hip Hop focus on a more politically-charged message of struggle (e.g. Dead Prez), most Hip Hop discourse that puts forth soldier imagery views struggle as an everyday reality (e.g. 50 Cent). Most individuals creating and affected by the soldier ethos of Hip Hop are not calling for a deconstruction or dismantling of the social order, as is Dead Prez, but are more focused on expressing the fact that social inequity exists and that one must live as a soldier to survive. In a sense, societal conditions create the Hip Hop soldier who creates rhetoric about being a soldier, which in turn enhances the existence of soldier imagery in this segment of the population. Other Hip Hop rhetoricians, like Tupac Shakur, Cypress Hill, Silencer, South Park Mexican, and rap label No Limit Soldiers, have been involved in the dissemination of this soldier rhetoric and point to the presence of such rhetoric in Black and Latino Hip Hop.

Rap label No Limit Soldiers is an example of an independent recording label that saw huge success in the late 1990s while making explicit connections to soldier life and the soldier ethos. Born from the rugged streets of New Orleans, No Limit Soldiers produced numerous albums that were sold on the streets, and later through more corporate venues, to thousands of youth who connected with the soldier rhetoric. No Limit artist Master P made numerous references to the “soldier life” in songs such as “Soulja,” “No Limit Soldiers II,” and “Is There a Heaven for a Gangsta?”

Tupac Shakur, one of Hip Hop’s icons, makes several references to living as a soldier. In “Soulja’s Story,” he raps:

They cuttin' off welfare..
They think crime is risin' now
You got whites killin' blacks,
cops killin' blacks, and blacks killin' blacks
Shit just gon' get worse
They just gon' become souljas
Straight souljas

In "Soulja's Revenge":

Real niggaz don't fold, straight souljah!
Can't find peace on the streets

In "Ballad of a Dead Soulja":

If you play the game, you play to win..
(this is the ballad of a dead soldier)...

...The situation's critical
Nothin' is colder - than to hear the ballad of a dead soldier...

...[to]All the niggaz that put it down, all the soldiers
All the niggaz that go through that day to day struggle
This is the ballad of a dead soldier!...

In "Soldier (Return of the Souldja)":

Tryin' to keep a nigga down, but ya failed
Before I let ya take me, I told ya
Fuck being trapped, I'm a soulja

These few examples are reminiscent of countless references in rap music to the notion that one's identity is analogous to the life of a soldier, who is in a situation of purposeful struggle. As can be seen by these examples, rap music is a vehicle for the telling of these critical stories of perseverance in the face of crime and social warfare.

As Shakur illustrates, soldier/struggle-ethos is connected to a day-to-day reality and is in opposition/warfare with the social ills "trapping" one's existence. The presence of crime and the reduction of welfare, coupled with the lack of "peace on the streets," are seen by Shakur as direct reasons for the creation of "souljas." The statement that "real" soldiers don't fold once again highlights the fact that many Hip Hop rhetoricians connect with the strong image of the soldier and not that of a weak or defeated victim. Some soldiers may die, as alluded to in Shakur's ballad, but if a soldier is to die it is as a fighter. Finally, Shakur understands that the situation on the streets is just as important as that in other circles of society ("the situation's critical").

While specific examples of soldier imagery coming from African American Hip Hop have been discussed, Latino/a Hip Hop also provides examples to add to the discussion of soldier imagery and to the rhetorical landscape. Latino rap artists Cypress Hill, in "Worldwide," ask listeners to "Remember me now, Cypress Hill soldier," and in "Tú No Ajuanta" (You Can't Handle), they rap, "listo, preparado, como un soldado" (ready, prepared, like a soldier)²³. On their official Website, the group calls their latest tour biography "Soldier Stories." In "You Don't Want to F**k With Us," Latino American rapper Silencer refers to himself as "the one of a kind soldado." Houston's South Park Mexican (SPM), one of the most popular Latino rap artists, in "Who's Over There," states "soldier, I sleep with one eye open" and in "Suckaz N Hataz" makes reference to his rap label by calling himself a "Dopehouse soldier." These references continue in Spanish as well, as in "Illegal Amigos" where SPM refers to one of his friends in

²³ These are the author's translations. Though "ajuanta" is grammatically incorrect, this is how it appears in a number of sources. "Tú No Ajuanta" could also be "you can't take it" or "you don't last."

stating, “You always have my back, my number one soldado.” In “I Wanna Know Her Name,” he makes reference to his identity as an immigrant and a soldier: “I swam across the bayou/ a mojado (wetback)/...a soldado.” These references point to the complex nuances present in the Hip Hop soldier ethos— reflecting individual struggle, clique struggle (Dopehouse Records), and racial/cultural struggle (immigrant/“wetback”).

Another telling example comes from the rap group Souldado, which mixes the Spanish word for “soldier” (soldado) with “soul” to create its name. In an interview with BrownPride.com, one of the group’s frontmen states:

We chose it (groups name) because that’s who our group is really repping (representing) for...the souldados! Whether being a soldier for your hood, your country, or your family...We’re repping for the people in the trenches, not the Generals, not the Captains, not the so called Leaders but the people who get their hands dirty... (Danny/LaUnion)

As is evident in the Latino rapper’s commentary, he and his group feel directly connected to the struggle of those marginalized in society, not those in power but those who “get their hands dirty.” This rhetoric is common among Latino/a rap artists and represents a strong point of solidarity and connectedness between African American Hip Hop artists and Latino/a Hip Hop artists and those in their audience, of whom there are many, who subscribe to the understanding that struggle is a central characteristic for many in these two communities.

Part of the struggle for the Latino/a American rappers is fitting into a system and a culture that many times does not embrace them. Latino/a Americans, as stated earlier, are marginalized in a number of ways in the United States, and within Hip Hop itself, a culture

dominated by African Americans, they remain a marginalized group. In many ways Latinos and African Americans struggle against and under dominant cultural forces in the United States and understand that while they are Americans, even profitable with their craft at times, they remain victims of the normative lens in areas such as language/discourse/rhetoric, culture, dress, customs, etc. But within, and because of, this struggle, many Latino and African American rappers and followers of Hip Hop continue to embrace the soldier ethos.

Beyond these Black and Latino/a rap artists, there is the hugely popular R&B trio, Destiny's Child, who scored a hit with their 2005 song "Soldier" in which they state that they need a "soldier" to take care of them: "I need a soldier who'll stand up for me." While they are not a rap group, their music video for the song integrates Hip Hop culture as it involves popular rapper Lil' Wayne and several young men dressed in Hip Hop attire. This reference, along with others by popular female R&B artists like Keyshia Cole, Mariah Carey, Erykah Badu, and others, reinforces not only the presence of a soldier mentality, especially among Black males, but also the acceptance and glorification of it in some circles.

It is also worth noting that rap artist 4th25, made up of soldiers who served in the Iraqi war (2003) and who recorded their debut album *Live From Iraq* in a makeshift studio in Iraq, lashed out against rap artists who use the soldier metaphor to describe themselves. On "Reality Check" the group directs rap artists to stop using the soldier metaphor because they are disillusioned to believe that their struggles are comparable to the struggles of "real" soldiers in the Iraqi conflict. And while much could be debated and analyzed in this context, the main point to take from this is an admission by these rap artists that the soldier imagery is so prevalent in rap music that they felt they had to address it. So much so that 4th25 focuses much

of their debut album in confronting the oft-used metaphor and rapping about the realities of warfare and the experiences of American soldiers in the Iraqi conflict.

So while some rap artists use surface level analogies to soldier life (e.g. 50 Cent and SPM), and others incorporate deep levels of the soldier ethos (e.g. Dead Prez, No Limit Soldiers, and Public Enemy), both are clear indications that the purposeful struggle of the soldier and the soldier mentality are central to much of rap music and the overall Hip Hop culture, both in the African American community and Latino/a American community.

Why the Soldier Mentality?

The answer to why the soldier/struggle ethos is such a major part of Black and Latino/a rap music and culture is both simple and complex. As minorities in the United States, Latino/a Americans and African Americans, especially those among the poor, are living within and under hegemonic forces—forces that devalue Black and Latino/a language/discourse and culture. Some may point out that Black and Latino/a culture has permeated American popular culture (e.g. music, language), but this is not the same as to say that this culture is valued in cultural, professional, and academic circles.

These underlying, systematic forces were not too long ago openly direct forces that constituted periods of racial dictatorship and racial democracy, from slavery to Jim Crow (Omi and Winant). That is, White middle and upper-class sensibilities have dominated American culture, first in a dictatorial manner where Black and Brown culture/existence was openly denigrated and devalued, to a “racial democracy” in which the numerical and representational minority status of Blacks and Browns left them marginalized in the arenas of culture, politics, and academia. But now, Latino/a and African American discourse/language and culture are suppressed, attacked, devalued, and ignored by many.

The notions of racial dictatorship and racial democracy have been written about by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, who argue that the United States was a racial dictatorship “from 1607-1865...[when] most nonwhites were firmly eliminated from the sphere of politics.” This period was then followed by nearly a century of racial democracy that included “legally sanctioned segregation and denial of the vote, nearly absolute in the South and much of the Southwest...” (129). These eras are connected not only directly to political power, but also to education, economics, and social “norms” as established at times in the arts.

While strong arguments can be made to categorize the contemporary United States as sustaining a state of racial democracy, in which one racial group dominates through quasi-democratic processes, there is no doubt that openly racist notions and laws have been supplanted by a more vague system of structures and ideology that indirectly place White middle and upper class notions as the “norm.” This normalizing of middle and upper-class Whiteness, along with what Omi and Winant characterize as the “negation of racialized ‘otherness’—at first largely African and indigenous, later Latin American and Asian as well” (129), firmly places the contemporary United States in a state of racial hegemony. In this state, characterized by Antonio Gramsci’s notions of coercion and consent, the dominant culture continues its dominance by incorporating some of the culture of non-dominant groups, possibly even popularizing aspects of those cultures, which gives the illusion of equality, while the dominant group maintains critical control of culture, economics, and social “norms.” This aspect of hegemony plays out in the case of Hip Hop rhetoric, which has reached high levels of popularity, but which remains marginalized by many who deem it less important, less valuable, and more low brow when compared to “high” culture, language, literature, discourse, and rhetoric. Hip Hop rhetoric becomes supplanted by the gaze of seemingly erudite taste, culture, and sensibilities. This, along with the very real presence of poverty and social inequality (including even the power structure in the music industry) makes the presence of a soldier ethos unsurprising in Hip Hop rhetoric.

The normative gaze of middle-class Whiteness is imposed upon African Americans and Latinos in general, and the Hip Hop community in particular, as they are labeled inferior, a phenomenon that has roots in the genealogical history of Western racism (West). If Omi and Winant go a long way in helping us understand the current racial state of the United States, Cornel West illuminates a connection between the socio-racial history of the West and modern racism (which includes racial democracy and racial hegemony). In his "Genealogy of Modern Racism," West traces Western racism from the crowning of scientific authority in the 1600s, through the revival of Greek "classics" (where West emphasizes the 14th-19th centuries but which could easily include the 20th century in the field of rhetoric), to the development of pseudo-sciences such as phrenology and physiognomy that devalued non-White physicality and intellect, to the racist ideologies of Enlightenment thinkers like Kant, Hume, and Voltaire (90-112). This genealogy extends into contemporary circles where "the idea of [non-white] equality in beauty, culture, and intellectual capacity remains problematic and controversial within prestigious halls of learning and sophisticated intellectual circles" (90). Directly connected to this is the marginalized status of Latino/a and African American Hip Hop rhetoric in the academic field of rhetorical studies, and the normative gaze placed upon non-traditional rhetoric.

This normative gaze, along with real-life conditions, which fuels soldier imagery in Hip Hop, is steeped in issues of history, economics, politics, and ideology. This is indicative of what Stuart Hall refers to as "articulation," or the joining of complex forces which attempt to explain social structures of oppression and racism. The complex realities which are detrimental to Latino/a American and African American quasi-citizens are not always easily seen because hegemony creates a promise of the possibility for upward mobility when in fact that mobility is often more illusory than truly accessible.

The pervasive presence of soldier imagery by many African American and Latino/a Hip Hop artists speaks volumes to the presence of poor Black and Brown angst in the United States. This angst, directly connected to struggle, is directed at other races and cultures, the educational system, police departments, the economic system, and the perceived White-controlled social system, which are set up as the direct causes of struggle among many within these two groups. The reality excavated here is the presence of a strong psychological connection between Black and Latino/a Hip Hop artists (and many in their audience) and a soldier ethos—a psychology perpetuated through their rhetoric and connected to real-life *and* perceived social conditions.

As is indicative of this angst and soldier ethos, rap lyrics attempt to work as a disruptive force against the oppressive social system. Though many rap artists are partially controlled by White record label executives, who are given un-critical consent by some artists to exploit their talents (hegemony and cultural neo-colonialism at work), they continue to work as social and rhetorical spearheads against the *status quo*. Rap music, particularly that brand which is labeled “gangsta,” unapologetically expresses notions of struggle, rage, Blackness, Brownness, and poverty, in exploiting and mocking the dominant culture. This supports Homi Bhabha’s notion of *menace*, in which subaltern groups move beyond stages of mimicry and mockery to a state where they are capable of challenging the dominant culture and system. And while Hip Hop has been appropriated by many in mainstream society, the hard truths and lives of the poor minorities expressed in much rap music (and other media outlet) continue to be wake-up calls to middle-class, White America. As stated by rapper Chuck D, “Rap is the CNN of the streets.” We should listen more closely.

Beyond the Music

Beyond, and along with, the strong connection both Latino/a and African American rappers have with the persona of the soldier, there are other specific examples of solidarity, cinematic and political, between the two groups. In the film *Menace II Society* (1993), a very popular film in Hip Hop circles, solidarity in opposition to white power structures (the police in this case) is evident. Narrated discourse and visual rhetoric bring to life this solidarity in one specific scene. After being beaten by White police officers, two African American characters, Caine and Sharif, are dropped off by the police in an alley in a Latino neighborhood. The police know about the ongoing feud between Latino and African American gang members in the area, so the police believe they are sending the two boys to another beating or death at the hands of Latino gang members. But in a display of solidarity, likely because of the circumstances (two Latinos saw the police throwing the two Blacks from their squad car), the Latinos help the young men. This understanding of solidarity in joint opposition to Whites and the legal system, is echoed by the character Montana in the film *Bound by Honor: Blood in Blood Out* (1993) when he states, “Chicanos killing Chicanos is what they want! Blacks and Chicanos killing each other is what they want! That’s how they run this [prison]. Once we get together, they don’t run [anything].” These vivid visual and rhetorical examples highlight the solidarity created between Latino and African Americans and are, not surprisingly, connected to joint-opposition to White power structures—connecting them to the previously visited notion of racial hegemony and solidarity created between two marginalized groups. And while these are cinematic examples, they illustrate and perpetuate solidarity between the two groups in “real-life” situations.

On a more directly political level we have the statement made by Mexican-American rapper Chingo Bling, “Yo, Kanye, [President] Bush don’t like Mexicans neither,” on his 2007 album *They Can’t Deport Us All*. The Latino rapper refers here to a comment made by African American rapper Kanye West in 2005. During a live fundraising campaign on NBC for victims of hurricane Katrina, the rapper ad-libbed the line, “[President] George Bush doesn’t care about Black people.” Many people thought

West's rhetoric on live national television was irresponsible, but it expressed a lot of the anger and disenchantment by Black Americans towards the American government and particularly the Bush administration for their lackluster response after hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf region in 2005.

In 2006, the Hip Hop Caucus, a political and civil rights organization founded in 2004 by Jeff Johnson and Reverend Yearwood, stated that one of its goals was to “develop a working relationship with the Hispanic Caucus of the U.S. Congress” (Woodson). The Hip Hop Caucus has already developed a “strategic partnership with the Congressional Black Caucus” (Woodson). This connection is a promising step in the ongoing development of solidarity between Latinos and African Americans in Hip Hop and beyond.

There is no doubt that textual and visual rhetoric coming from the Hip Hop community points to a growing solidarity between Latinos and African Americans. It does not exist in an atmosphere of total peace and togetherness, as we will see in the following section, but it *does* exist. Those interested in racial harmony, or at least understanding and tolerance, can use Hip Hop Rhetoric as an avenue for this important endeavor. As Hip Hop legend Snoop Dogg states, speaking of Latinos and African Americans,

It's about time we start to fight for each other rather than fighting against each other. I have homies from all cultural backgrounds and love all of my brothers, black and brown. There is nothing that can stop us from creating a better future for ourselves, for our families and generations to come if we all came together. (Daily)

It may not come from a source most rhetoricians are paying attention to, but this message of understanding and solidarity between Latino and African Americans is clear and important. It also reminds us that the relationship between these two groups is not only discussed and

affected by politicians and scholars, but also by Hip Hop rhetoricians who affect millions through their actions and rhetoric.

For those in the field of rhetoric, it is not only the message of Hip Hop that is important, but also the fact that the message is coming from a non-traditional (in an academic sense) arena. A careful look at the discourse of Hip Hop rhetoricians points to Jacqueline Jones Royster's important notion of "shifting the circle of practice," discussed in chapter 1. Research and scholarship should not ignore the real and perceived struggles of Black and Latino/a Americans for these two racial groups continue to grow in numbers, prominence, and influence, and in their interactions with one another. Those interested in deconstructing and articulating race relations in America must have a strong grasp of the relations between these two groups and begin to understand the shared soldier mentality and sense of solidarity among thousands of Blacks and Latinos. Also, rhetoricians interested in expanding and diversifying the rhetorical tradition, should not ignore the influential discourse community of the Hip Hop world, specifically that which comes through the lens of African Americans and Latino/a Americans.

As with rhetors important to the field of rhetorical studies, Victor Villanueva and W.E.B. Du Bois, who could not "just be" but were instead very aware/made aware of their veil of Blackness and Brownness²⁴, Hip Hop rhetoricians face and express social struggles. And, like popular Hip Hop rhetoricians, Villanueva and Du Bois represented "Gramsci's exceptions—those who 'through chance...[have] had opportunities that the thousand others in reality could

²⁴ See Villanueva's *Bootstraps* and Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*

not or did not have'—are experiences are in no sense unique but are always analogous to other experiences from among those exceptions" ("Memoria" 15).

With that said, I do not argue that rappers (or those aligned with Hip Hop) are directly concerned with breaking the canonical barriers of the rhetorical tradition (though some are)²⁵, but their influential and didactic discourse is an important one that has been largely ignored by a discipline concerned with diversifying the range of rhetorics studied and valued. The reasons for this exclusion may be as benign as not having any exposure to or understanding of Hip Hop culture, or as politically charged as directly or indirectly representing a continuance of the historical practice of ignoring and devaluing discourse that is seen as too minority, too different, and too dangerous to the status quo. Either way, the rhetoric of Hip Hop presents the opportunity to highlight and value a rhetoric with those qualities and a valuable opportunity for further discussion about the reasons why soldier rhetoric is so prevalent in Black and Latino/a Hip Hop.

By focusing attention on the non-traditional discourse of Hip Hop we are able to glean valuable insight into the lives, experiences, and social relationships of the two largest minority groups in the United States and their real and perceived struggles against culturally dominant forces²⁶. And by focusing our attention on the rhetorical output of Hip Hop we can come to a better understanding of the points of solidarity among these two groups in Hip Hop circles and in society at large.

²⁵ See Word, Beats & Life, Inc at www.wblinc.org and the International Association for Hip Hop Education at www.iahhe.org.

²⁶ Readers may be interested here in Homi Bhabha's discussion of cultural hegemony and his notion of "almost the same but not white" (118).

In studying Hip Hop culture in a more serious and complex manner, beyond the typical question of whether Hip Hop is good or bad for society, a stronger understanding of the relationship between these two populations can more completely unfold. At times it unfolds to show us points of solidarity, many of which involve a soldier/struggle mentality, and at times it unfolds to show us friction and the tenuous nature of the relationship.

Black and Brown Tension

An Extension of Historical Conflict

While there are strong points of solidarity among Latino/a American and African American citizens, illustrated in the struggle ethos of rap artists, there is tension as well. Those optimistic about relations between Latinos and African Americans can point to rhetoric and action in Hip Hop that highlights solidarity, but that would only be half the story. Although rap music continually points to similar realities in the lives of Latino/a Americans and African Americans, and a sense of together-in-struggle, there is no doubt an on-going struggle between the two as well.

It is important to put tensions between Latino/a Americans and African Americans within a historical context, for the tension between these two populations certainly did not begin with the emergence of rap music and Hip Hop culture; rather rap music and Hip Hop culture serve to illustrate and perpetuate these tensions. A quick look at this relationship shows strong points of division. In the 1800s, “Negro soldiers were used as a battering ram against Native Americans”—direct ancestors of many Latino Americans. In 1916, African American soldiers were even sent into Mexico in search of Pancho Villa, an act which was disliked by many Mexicans (Horne viii-ix). In 1968, as Martin Luther King,

Jr. was formulating plans for the Poor People's March, he was approached by Reies Lopez Tijerina, a Latino American land grant and farmworker activist, who asked to join King in the March and Civil Rights struggle. While King demanded that Latino Americans "play a top role in the March" and walk in lockstep with African Americans, he was "virtually a lone voice calling for such an alliance." The message from King's inner circle was that "Latinos and other ethnic groups were at best subservient partners that were welcome as long as they knew their place." Attitudes like this led to divisions among the two groups and to racial isolation (Hutchinson "United").

More recently, discussions over illegal immigration (particularly from Mexico) have reinvigorated tensions between African Americans and recent legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico. As a number of African Americans saw (see) it, illegal immigrants are taking jobs away from Americans, particularly poor African Americans. It did not help matters when in 2005 President Vicente Fox of Mexico stated that Mexicans were going to the United States to do jobs that "not even Blacks want to do." This statement drew ire from many, including African American leader Jesse Jackson (CNN). Many African Americans felt Fox was disrespecting them and misrepresenting the situation by not appreciating the situation of Black-Americans looking for blue-collar work. There has also been growing tension between Latino/a American and African American high school students in a number of states, most noticeably in South Central Los Angeles (one of rap music's meccas) where the racial makeup shifted from a majority African American population to a majority Latino American population during the 1990s (McGrath). Numerous small and large scale riots have broken out at schools between these two populations (McGrath). If high school students are our future, then tension is certainly part of that future.

The most vivid example of contemporary tensions between the two populations is in gang and prison life, two significant influences on the Hip Hop scene, especially the brand of Hip Hop music

labeled “gangsta” rap. Racial tensions in gang life are evident in cities across the United States, most notably Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, Miami, Kansas City, Albuquerque, and Dallas, and spill in to, and out of, racial tensions present in prisons across the country. These racial tensions in gang and prison life do not exist in a vacuum, but affect those in society at large—having a disproportionate affect on poor and minority communities. An extreme but telling example of the “street” tensions between these two communities in the United States was the much publicized 2006 slaying in Los Angeles of “a black fourteen-year-old named Cheryl Green [which] the U.S. Attorney’s office officially called ‘ethnic cleansing’ and which is linked to a larger movement by Hispanic gang members to claim or reclaim territories held by African American gangs” (Rivera 150). Rap music is connected to much gang culture in Los Angeles and across the United States, and this music continually emphasizes connections to a particular gang, race, “-hood,” city, region, and/or race.

These examples of conflict highlight the tension between Latinos and African Americans and are typical in the discussion of race relations. At present, scholarly discussion of these issues has remained the territory of politics and history. As contemporary rhetors add new venues of scholarship and re-evaluate what counts as important discourse, they may well look to Hip Hop rhetoric as an important area of discourse/language studies and for examples of the relationship between language and power.

Tension in Hip Hop

There are numerous examples from Hip Hop culture which illustrate tensions between Blacks and Latinos and add to the political and historical examples mentioned above. In his music video *Just A Lil Bit*, rapper 50 Cent employs visual rhetoric that illustrates the tension between African Americans and Latino/a Americans. Though the lyrics to the song have nothing to do with these tensions, the storyline of the video is indicative of the separation and ongoing feud between these two groups. In two different scenes, 50 Cent uses African American females to seduce and incapacitate two rich Latino

characters, one by tying the Latino to the posts of a bed and the other by drugging. It is alluded to in the video that the rapper is robbing (and probably killing) the two Latino characters and taking over their money and “space.” 50 Cent calmly smokes a cigar as the two men become aware of the fact that they have been duped and that they will soon meet their demise. This video illustrates, through visual rhetoric, not only the division between the two racial groups, but also the ongoing battle for resources and power.

In the popular Hip Hop movie *Next Friday* (2000), a comedy written by rap icon Ice-Cube, African Americans and Latino Americans are pitted against one another in the suburbs. Young Craig, played by Ice-Cube, has moved to the suburbs to live with his Uncle Elroy and cousin Day-Day, who have become rich through lottery winnings. While moving to the suburbs to escape problems, conflict ensues between the African American characters and their young drug-dealing Latino American neighbors. These neighbors are clearly essentialized as they are portrayed as young “gangstas” with thick accents. They are even referred to as the *eses*, a Spanish slang term used by young African Americans in a number of films to refer to Latino characters (instead of using the more politically correct terms of *Latinos* or *Mexican Americans*). Throughout the film, there are run-ins between the Latino American and African American characters, even between Craig and the neighbor’s dog, Chico, and the film ends with a violent struggle between Craig, his uncle and father, and the Latino “gangstas.” While the movie is intended as a comedy, the distinction and tension between Latino Americans and African Americans is telling, especially considering the movie was written by one of the most influential voices of the Hip Hop community: Ice Cube. This movie is a comedic, hyper-stereotyped illustration of the tenuous relationship between these two groups, but it points to a serious and very real situation in the United States.

These two examples are indicative of numerous instances in rap videos and Hip Hop films (i.e. Menace II Society, Blood In Blood Out, Boyz N The Hood, American Me, Get Rich or Die Trying) where there are obvious divisions between African Americans and Latino/a Americans. If it is in the “everyday” that divisive and racist notions are conveyed (Essed), then the visual rhetoric coming from these Hip Hop videos and films illustrates and perpetuates underlying tensions between these two groups. By becoming part of the fabric that is Hip Hop culture, these images affect the relations between these two groups and feed the essentialized images of each group. They affect attitudes, and thus actions, of those whose identity is strongly linked to the Hip Hop ethos.

It is not surprising to see these two racial minorities in conflict considering that both are economically, rhetorically, and ideologically battling under racially hegemonic circumstances and battling for the same small slice of the social pie allowed to minorities in the United States. As they struggle against historical forces, economic oppression, a gap in health services (Stein), the digital divide (Banks), and violence, Latino/a Americans and African Americans are pitted against one another as they grasp for the next rung on the ladder of social equity. While White upper and middle class Americans continue to hold a strong grip on the social order of the United States, those with fewer opportunities will continue to struggle vertically (against the dominant culture) and horizontally (against other minorities). And while many tensions between the two groups are because of their coexisting status at the economic margins of society, racial and ethnic identity also serve as a strong catalyst for division.

Battles over space (as highlighted by the Los Angeles example), Latino immigration, and political power, directly and indirectly connected to economic and cultural issues, highlight the tension between these two groups. These battles point to the fact that there would continue to be division and struggle between racial groups, including Latino/a Americans and African Americans, even if economic parity were achieved. Clashes over whose cultural capital is most important and prestigious would continue,

and issues of language and cultural literacy would take center stage. Questions of whether the descendants of Africa or of Mexico should call the shots (as in the Poor People's March) would ensue.

These tensions are not merely economic, but also social and cultural and thus rhetorical—highlighting a central premise of rhetorical studies that rhetoric/discourse is epistemic and deeply intertwined with all aspects of society. And, these tensions, highlighted in some avenues of Hip Hop culture, seem destined to continue for years to come. African Americans and Latino/a Americans will have to find ways to come together in positive and productive ways and/or, at the very least, find ways to coexist and respect one another culturally and rhetorically. Much of the future of the United States, in respect to politics, economics, culture, language, and racial stability, will be affected by this relationship. Also, just as the cultural capital of White middle and upper class America dominates American society today, Blacks and Latinos should not look to replace it with their own authoritative and hegemonic culture, but work at respecting and incorporating diversity while fighting for a voice. Before, and while, we work at greater racial harmony we must proceed to take a hard look at the tensions between Blacks and Latinos and their combined tension towards Whites. Part of this process can/should include listening to the voices of Hip Hop, something which will help us understand the climate of some of these underlying tensions.

Finally, studying the rhetorical output of Hip Hop, in relation to Black-Brown tension, can help us move toward a more harmonious, or at least respectful, understanding of the views of each culture and the underlying catalysts for rhetorical and physical attacks—attacks against each group and against the dominant culture. Through the discourse of Hip Hop we are able to highlight racial tensions among those at the “everyday” level and it is through discourse—in music lyrics, discussions, articles, lectures, blogs, publications, and conversations—that racial tensions will be perpetuated and/or diminished.

Towards a Conclusion

The stakes of developing a respectful coalition between Blacks and Latinos is that rank-and-file Blacks who are resentful of Latino's gains could be brought along if they see them fighting for a common agenda that lifts their own access to opportunity. (Walters)

The textual (particularly rap lyrics) and visual (music videos and film) rhetorics of Hip Hop culture illustrate and perpetuate the tenuous-solidarity between Latino Americans and African Americans. They are indicative of the everyday tension and everyday solidarity between these two populations. While they cannot account for the attitudes and actions of every single individual, they are indicative of the overriding ethos of this relationship, especially among those that strongly identify with Hip Hop culture.

While studying the rhetoric and relations between political and organizational leaders from these two groups has value, analysis and discussion of the discourse and visual rhetoric coming from the didactic and influential world of Hip Hop is just as valuable. It is not only the "what" (race relations) that is important but also the "how" and "who." If we only focus our attention on those with political power we will be dismissive of a rhetoric that has a strong influence on millions of Americans. Similarly, focusing only on traditional subjects in rhetorical studies, such as politicians, scholars, academics, preachers, etc., seems counter to the growing call in the field for a more diverse, complex, and inclusive approach to the study and teaching of rhetoric. Rap lyrics and visual rhetoric coming from Hip Hop culture are one of our best avenues to plug in to the tensions and solidarity within racial groups in our country. Studying race relations between Latino/a Americans and African Americans through Hip Hop rhetors, lyrics, websites, popular Hip Hop films, and other media sources, represents a new and important shift in the discipline. It is a shift that will provide scholars, influential media figures, and the

public with important fodder for the ever-growing and important discussion of race relations between Latinos and African Americans.

The Racial Project that is Hip Hop

Because of its roots in the African American community and its continued presence within, under, and against hegemonic forces, Hip Hop culture—particularly rap lyrics, music videos, and Hip Hop films—constitutes a “racial project” in which Latino Americans and African Americans express relational attitudes towards each other and the dominant culture. Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe a racial project as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics...” (125). Rap music constitutes one of these projects as it not only interprets and illustrates racial dynamics but also represents complex social structures and influences relations among racial groups. The historical realities that are linked to the contemporary situation of Latino Americans and African Americans as oppressed groups come alive in Hip Hop culture as this culture, to a large extent, was born out of systemic structures that created the need for a new voice among the economically and rhetorically oppressed.

This racial project known as Hip Hop brings to life the situatedness of many Latino/a American and African American quasi-citizens and continues to develop in a racially influenced atmosphere. Within Hip Hop, there is a struggling, tugging, and pulling between Latino/a American and African American forces. But even though these two elements often work against one another, they also form part of a complexly unified force that constantly interacts with and pushes against dominating cultural and economic forces. Together they constitute a cultural hurricane of sorts, whose identity is created mostly in opposition to White, middle-class America and that works under, within, and through the overriding atmosphere of historical Whiteness. The two groups, individually and collectively, challenge

some of the dominant modes of being through their use of verbal and visual rhetoric. In so doing, they rearticulate notions of identity and “reverse ‘in part’ colonial appropriation” (Bhabha 117).

Hip Hop is a culture born of the margins that exists as a “community of resistance.” It readily identifies with the empowering image of the soldier and is not a “site of deprivation...[but] a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse” (hooks 149). Hip Hop culture, come to life in rap lyrics, music videos and film, “offers to one the possibility of radical perspective” (149) and reminds us that the margins do continue to exist, and, though pieces of that culture are absorbed into the dominant culture (hegemony at work), Hip Hop largely remains a site of resistance, education and, specifically here, a window into racial relations.

Furthermore, the tenuous-solidarity between Latino/a Americans and African Americans is not merely contained in Hip Hop culture, but is indicative of the relationship between these two groups in the United States at large. It would not be as productive if the analysis of racial relations between Latinos and African Americans were contained only within the world of Hip Hop. The work done in this chapter is even more important if one continually remembers that race relations in Hip Hop point to realities in race relations between these two groups, and even towards White America, in society at large. Hip Hop Rhetoric is important in its own right, but extremely important in what it highlights and teaches us about the social order and/or disorder.

Future work in this area can/must also address the presence of Puerto Ricans in Hip Hop. This is important because this group, unlike other minority groups in the United States, has unique connections to the Latino/a and African American cultures while not fitting neatly into the Black-Brown dynamic. A proper discussion of Puerto Ricans *vis a vis* racial relations in Hip Hop and U.S. culture is too extensive to add to this chapter but is a very fruitful avenue for the discussion of racial tenuous-solidarity.

Furthermore, newer examples from Hip Hop, pointing to the tenuous-solidarity discussed in this

chapter, will emerge as time passes. The examples presented here are undoubtedly important pieces of the history of this racial/ethnic relationship, but are only some of the pieces of the larger fabric of racial relations between Blacks and Latinos in Hip Hop. As new generations of Hip Hop rhetoricians create textual and visual rhetoric that speaks to this tenuous and unified relationship, they will create fodder for future analysis. It is up to those doing scholarship in this area in the future to find new examples that highlight this complex relationship and to continue to shine a light on racial rhetoric coming from those in the margins of academic rhetorical studies.

Finally, one must not forget that these margins are never a simple, monolithic reality, whether in Hip Hop or not. They are created through complex forces and made up of different groups that interact with the dominant group and each other. As two components of the margins, Latino/a Americans and African Americans continually exist as a united force against hegemony but at the same time as competing entities. This reality is an integral part to the development of this nation.

The continued study of the rhetorical output of Hip Hop culture not only adds to the important discussion of race relations, but also adds to the terrain of rhetorical analysis. This study will develop a new venue to analyze, visualize, teach, and affect race relations *and* display the importance of adding an academically marginalized rhetoric to the fray of “intellectual” race discussion. By adding Hip Hop rhetoric to the rhetorical landscape, something seldom done by scholars in the field, we can add to the understanding of the tenuous-solidarity between Latinos and African Americans which will influence, enhance, and mar this continuing project which is the United States of America.

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Chapter 4

Latin@/Borderland Hip Hop Rhetoric:

Identity and Counter-Hegemony

The discursive practices of Latin@s²⁷ have been studied and written about by numerous scholars from a diverse number of angles and disciplines. This scholarship continues to grow in importance considering the fact that this population will soon be the largest minority group in the United States and arguably the most influential in political and social matters. Scholars of Rhetoric and Composition have produced a plethora of important works connected to the Latin@ population but have yet to approach Latin@ rhetoric through the lens of Hip Hop discourse/culture. Latin@ Hip Hop is only one piece of the landscape of Latin@ rhetorical studies but it is an important, and thus far underrepresented, area of study.

This chapter foregrounds Hip Hop rhetoric in analyzing the identity-showing and identity-shaping discourse of the present day Latin@ community while emphasizing linguistic practices, culture, and identity. While no one rhetorical analysis ever functions as a full representation of any community, or an exact representation of all individuals in a specific population, critically analyzing the Latin@ community through the lens of Hip Hop provides important and unique insight and functions as a critically useful tool to approach Latin@ studies. The discourse of this community is identity-showing in that it displays the lived

²⁷ The term Latin@s, with the “@”, is used to signify both males and females. “Latino” is used periodically to signify only males while “Latina” is used specifically for females. The use of the progressive term here, and not in previous chapters, emphasizes this chapter’s focus on Latin identity and serves as a visual marker of that complex identity.

realities of many in the Latin@ community—many of whom live on and in literal and metaphorical borders. The discourse is identity-shaping in that the rhetoric (lyrical, textual, visual) can also shape the lives and worldviews of those who strongly connect with Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric. As discourse is a showing/telling phenomenon, it is also an epistemic one, and this is no different in the case of the Latin@ community.

More specifically, this chapter focuses on issues of identity. Identity among the Latin@ population functions many times in a state of double-consciousness but, as viewed through the community's Hip Hop discourse, more readily functions in a state of multi-consciousness. This is manifested in Latin@s placement in cultural, linguistic, physical, and psychological borderlands (Anzaldua) and their possession of a "contradictory consciousness" (Villanueva). Furthermore, the discourse of many Latin@ Hip Hoppers is counter-hegemonic in critical ways: It can function, as much Hip Hop discourse does, in opposition to social "norms" and sensibilities in regard to linguistic practices, identity, and culture and it is espoused through nontraditional mediums of rhetorical studies such as lyrics, music videos, graffiti, tagging, and "vehicular rhetoric." The multi-consciousness of this community, expressed in linguistic practices and culture, will be addressed first followed by an analysis of how this multi-consciousness serves as a counter-hegemonic force.

Ultimately, the Hip Hop discourse of the Latin@ community is directly connected to the complex identity of this ethnic group and is a powerful tool in displaying some of its central characteristics while also serving as a shaping-tool of the group's identity. Latin@ Hip Hop illustrates the power of everyday rhetorics to affect identity and society. Reaching out toward

these untraditional places expands and enriches the rhetorical landscape and teaches us about a historically marginalized population that is growing in numbers and influence.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical framework of this dissertation begins with the call of Jacqueline Jones Royster to critically analyze and re-analyze the field of rhetorical studies and rethink its “terrain.” She asks that scholars of rhetoric shift rhetorical subjects, shift the circle of practice, shift where they stand, and shift the theoretical frame (150-162). These sentiments are discussed at length in Chapter 1 and are echoed by many others in the field including Michael Leff and Patricia Bizzell, among others (Charland 2003; Glenn qtd. in Portnoy 2003; Berlin 1994; Jarratt 1991). The work of relandscaping the terrain of rhetorical studies is important in that it diversifies the field, expands the number of voices and experiences heard and analyzed, adds to the fabric of world discourse, adds legitimacy to lost/forgotten/ignored rhetorics and the populations that produce(d) them, and creates new lenses from which to study the power of discourse in displaying and creating the identity of communities. The study of Latin@ Hip Hop accomplishes these tasks. The very use of Hip Hop lyrics throughout this chapter represents a shift from the subjects of traditional rhetorical studies and the multiplicity of non-traditional mediums incorporated by Latin@ Hip Hop will be touched on at the end of the chapter.

Beyond the general sense that the study of Hip Hop rhetoric, in this case Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric, adds to the terrain of rhetorical studies, this chapter uses theory that focuses on multi-conscious identity and cultural counter-hegemony—with the latter frequently expressed in terms of Homi Bhabha’s notion of “menace.” The identity of many Latin@s can be described as influenced by two dominant cultures—that of the United States and that of their mother

country (and even a third that already is a mixture of U.S. and Latin American cultures).

Interestingly, the discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric reveals two other cultural layers of influence for those Latin@s strongly connected to the Hip Hop ethos, that of African American culture and Hip Hop culture. These four layers create an organic multi-consciousness among those Latin@s who produce and are highly influenced by Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric²⁸.

A state of multi-consciousness is created as Latin@s become aware and deal with—linguistically, psychologically, and physically—the influence of a multitude of social forces. The notion of multi-consciousness is rooted in the idea of “double-consciousness” introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his influential work *The Souls of Black Folk*. What he explains about African Americans of his time resonates with Latin@s today²⁹:

[they are] born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness... (896).

This resonates with Latin@s of the new millennium because the consciousness of many Latin@s is split in a multitude of ways as well. This sense of multi-consciousness is thematic in Latin@ discourse and Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric and has been expressed by Latin@ Hip Hoppers just as it has been expressed through more traditional mediums by scholars like Victor Villanueva, Richard Rodriguez, and Gloria Anzaldua. Some of these Latin@ Hip Hop texts, and their connection to multi-consciousness in language and culture, will be discussed at length in the next section.

²⁸ A more expansive analysis could consider other characteristics such as sexuality and region (both the regional home within the United States and the region of the Latin@’s mother country).

²⁹ Not surprisingly, as can be seen in Hip Hop rhetoric in general, the struggles and social concerns of Latin@s and African Americans have historically paralleled each other in important ways. See Chapter 3 for more.

Cultural and critical race theory also offer valuable perspectives on Latin@ Hip Hop culture. The work of Homi Bhabha can be used to complicate and politicize the multi-consciousness of Latin@s. While, on one level, the layered existence of Latin@s can be said to be a common sociological occurrence in most people (i.e. all people exist in different roles in their lives—child, parent, employee, friend, etc.) the multi-consciousness of Latin@s was born out of powerful historical circumstances that have, in many instances, devalued at least a portion of their identity. This diminution of the value of Latin@ existence, experience, and culture in traditionally powerful circles, which has encompassed language, cultural norms, dress, food, etc., is part of the history of Latin@s and surfaces in Latin@ Hip Hop. It is also important to note that while other ethnic groups, such as the Irish, Polish, and Italian, were historically demonized in the United States they have since, to a large extent, become part of the main-stream of American society³⁰ and, at this point in history, do not face the cultural, social, and linguistic attacks that Latin@s do—certainly not to the same degree. Furthermore, these ethnic groups do not deal directly with a history of colonization. Latin@s are not only metaphorically colonized, considering their subordinate status in American society, but many of their ancestors were literally colonized when the United States took over parts of Mexico. These historic and present-day realities are connected to the identity of Latin@s, especially many who strongly identify with Latin@ Hip Hop, in that it articulates and creates a sense of struggle and counter-hegemony among that population. And while it is important to note that Latin@s are not simply a woe-is-us community that has only been victimized, it is equally

³⁰ For a discussion of whiteness, ethnicity, and historical relations between differing racial and ethnic groups in the United States see “Whiteness and Ethnicity in the History of ‘White Ethnics’ in the United States” by David Roediger.

important not to ignore the historical and present-day struggles of Latin@s which include high rates in regard to teenage pregnancy and incarceration and racial disparities in income, education, and home ownership (Associated Press).

These struggles and multi-consciousness lead to discourse, and an identity bound up with this discourse, that is indicative of Bhabha's notions of camouflaging, mimicry, and mockery—but especially “menace” which serves as an aggressive counter-hegemonic force against the dominant culture of the United States. Bhabha writes of subaltern groups within a colonialist state who exist “camouflaged” within a society where they are not the dominant group and voice. Within this state the subalterns, in this case Latin@s, are formed and reformed into a “recognizable Other” who, in their difference, are “almost the same [as the dominant group], but not quite” (Bhabha 114). In this “camouflaged” state, Latin@s often mimic and mock dominant White culture and can also be seen as a social menace to White middle and upper class norms and sensibilities. This menacing is at the heart of their counter-dominant linguistic practices and culture—both of which have been marginalized by White middle and upper-class sensibilities.

Furthermore, the unbalanced split between dominant culture and Latin@ culture is a playing out of neo-colonialism in that the dominant culture possesses indirect control over the non-dominant group. Invaluable to this discussion, as Stuart Hall reminds us, is the fact that this control is not simply economic—thus we cannot only explain racial or ethnic social divisions through the discussion of economic structures and processes. Hall understands and highlights the complex nature of the situation and uses the term “articulation” to describe the joining up of complex social, historical, ideological, and economic forces in analyzing social strata and

racial and ethnic interaction (39). As applied to the Latin@ milieu, articulation highlights the multitude of ways in which Latin@s feel their culture is dominated, which then leads to discourse that expresses counter-dominant sentiments that, at once, are born out of Latin@ experience and shape Latin@ identity. Simply put, social, historical, economic, and ideological realities have shaped the multi-conscious Latin@ identity which in turn produces a discursive output that incorporates, directly and indirectly, a counter-hegemonic message. This message, viewed here through the lens of Hip Hop, then becomes a part of Latino identity *and* a shaping-tool of that identity, especially for those Latin@s who strongly connect with Latin@ Hip Hop.

Ultimately, the multi-conscious and “othered” identity of Latin@s—which is both dominated by *and* incorporated with dominant culture—serves as a menacing and counter-hegemonic force to dominant culture and ideals. Rhetorically, Latin@ Hip Hop works within the realm of this force. As Antonio Gramsci expresses, hegemony is “always constituted by a combination of coercion and consent” (Omi and Winant 130) and much Latin@ Hip Hop, whether knowingly or not, is “coerced” by record labels, social norms, the English language, the sensibilities of dominant culture, etc. But, central to this chapter, Latin@ Hip Hop also contests this cultural hegemony with its lyrical, textual, and visual rhetoric. It can serve as “political opposition...[with its] insistence on identifying itself and speaking for itself”(Omi and Winant 132) and with its expression of an *othered* experience—an experience deeply connected with social, cultural, linguistic, and ideological multi-consciousness and struggle. The following section will highlight ways in which Latino identity is bound up in multi-consciousness, expressed rhetorically through Hip Hop discourse, while the final section will more deeply delve into ways this identity grapples with and against the dominant culture.

Multi-consciousness: Language, Culture, and Identity

How you know where I'm at / when you haven't been where I've been /
Understand where I'm coming from? -Cypress Hill-

The discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop highlights integral pieces of the Latin@ experience, and it also creates a rhetorical atmosphere in which many Latin@s who strongly identify with Hip Hop, usually from an early age, are influenced to think and act (verbally and physically) in specific ways—ways “othered” by dominant culture³¹. These experiences and influences come to light in issues of language and culture as Latin@ Hip Hop exists within a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural borders.

Language

As John Frances Burke states in *Mestizo Democracy*, “being open to dialogue with the ‘other’ that is different from us” is important and the “use [and analysis] of multiple languages increase[s] the breadth and depth of the understanding [and knowledge] that ensues” (207). In this case, the knowledge that ensues is a deeper understanding of the complex linguistic makeup of Latin@ Hip Hop discourse and how this discourse articulates and influences important pieces of the Latin@ identity.

Linguistically, Latin@ Hip Hop functions at the crossroads of a number of languages/dialects: English, Spanish, Spanglish, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and Hip Hop. Many have discussed Latin@ linguistics only in relation to the Spanish-English

³¹ Once again, I find it important to stress that no one section/type of discourse, in this case Latin@ Hip Hop, can fully describe the identity of an entire people nor does it describe perfectly any one individual of that community.

dichotomy, but when looking through the lens of Latin@ Hip Hop discourse, AAVE and Hip Hop linguistic practices must also be considered. These linguistic influences create a layered and complex ethnolinguistic rhetorical situation and are representative of the code-switching ethos of *mestizaje* (Burke). This presentation—and a discussion of its connection to cultural hegemony in the final section—also represents a move toward what Ulla Connor terms as “intercultural rhetoric research” where there is a focus on studying language through “social context and ideology” (295-296). This section focuses on displaying the multi-layered linguistic practices of Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoricians, providing lyrics from two representative examples: Cypress Hill and Kid Frost.

Many scholars in the field of rhetoric and writing studies have discussed the importance of studying and valuing ethnolinguistic practices (Gilyard; Elbow; Schroeder, Fox; Bizzell). Jonathan Kozol in *Savage Inequalities: Children in American's Schools* discusses the marginalization of Latin@ students and how “language ideologies” have negatively affected Latin@s in general. These negative effects illustrate the effects that devaluing multi-ethnolinguistic practices have on Latin@s in general and create an atmosphere ripe for Latin@ backlash. They also show that valuing layered and ethnolinguistic practices is often not the norm for a dominant culture that applies its linguistic normative gaze to, among others, Latin@ discourse. It is a gaze that often devalues non-traditional and non-standard English. Thus, the linguistic practices of Latin@ Hip Hoppers not only constitute a multi-layered discourse but a discourse that represents opposition to monolingualistic (English) and monocultural (simplified Americanness) leanings. These leanings have been present in the United States from the

Americanization movement against Native Americans to contemporary English-Only movements and will be addressed more fully in the following section on counter-hegemony.

The quotation that begins this section is by Cypress Hill, a Latino rap group that utilizes linguistically complex lyrics and that understands that the Latin@ experience is many times misunderstood—and diminished—in dominant culture. “How you know where I’m at / when you haven’t been where I’ve been” is a defensive statement that emphasizes the fact that others—non-Latin@s, especially those of the middle/upper class—cannot understand the situation of Latin@s. Part of this “situation” involves the common use of a number of languages/dialects and is indicative of how Gloria Anzaldua describes her “language of the Borderlands”—it is a space at the juncture of cultures where “languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized” (Preface).

The first, and most obvious, is the space that much Latin@ Hip Hop occupies between English and Spanish. This may come in the form of intermixing English and Spanish words within a single phrase/sentence as in “*el closet*” or using Spanglish words/phrases like “*troca*”³² which take the English “closet” and “truck” and Spanish-izes them. This linguistic interplay is a common, everyday practice for many Latin@s living on the border or in areas where border-existence has moved into non-border regions (e.g. Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, etc.). Latin@s who use this mixture of Spanish and English are often criticized by non-Latin@s (and even Latin@s) who look down on this practice of linguistic mixing. The call of “just speak

³² *El closet* is “the closet” while a proper Spanish word for “truck” is *camion*.

one language” attests to the fact that many, especially those who serve to gain the most from speaking only English, are bothered and/or threatened by the intermixing of languages³³.

Whether they purposefully employ this linguistic mixing or, more often, are simply speaking a language/dialect they were raised in, the Spanish-English-Spanglish interplay, functions as a form of dissent and protest that pushes up against dominant culture and “standard” English. As Cypress Hill states, “they clownin’ [ragging/disrespecting] on me ‘cause of my language / I have to tell them it’s called Spanglish.” These Latino rappers understand that their linguistic practices are disrespected and diminished by dominant culture because they do not fit neatly into a linguistic category. And because linguistic practices are linked to one’s identity, many Latin@ Hip Hoppers, and Latin@s in general, feel that their identity—their very being—is commonly disrespected by dominant culture.

As Victor Villanueva discusses in “*Memoria Is a Friend of Ours*,” “for the Latino and Latina, [their] language contains the assertion of the interconnectedness among identity...and the personal” and it is an identity of “contradictory consciousness” (17). For Latin@ Hip Hoppers, there is little separation between their multi-layered linguistic practices and their identity. Their language(s), their rhetorical output, are integrated pieces of their history, their family life, their neighborhood, their worldview, their means of communicating who they are. In turn, this output becomes part of the fabric of Latin@ness which shapes future generations.

To add to this dynamic, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and words, phrases, and imagery that are directly connected to Hip Hop discourse are also a major piece of the linguistic collage that is Latin@/Borderland Hip Hop. Because African American experience

³³ The irony here, of course, is that Standard English itself is already an intermixed language.

and discourse is the central template from which Hip Hop was created, Hip Hop rhetoric is already infused with African American culture. The following example, also from rap group Cypress Hill, illustrates the linguistic interplay of Spanish, English, AAVE, and Hip Hop. These are lines from their song "Latin Lingo":

Freak to the funk that no one else is bringin'

Sen Dog with the funky bilingue
Yeah that's the nombre, heard the homie
Peace to Mellow and Frost en el deporte
Sen Dog is not kid of veterano
I'm down, another proud hispano
One of the many of the Latinos de este año...

But wait, they're clownin' on me 'cause of my language
I have to tell 'em straight up, it's called Spanglish
Now who's on the pinga, tha gringo
Tryin' to get paid, from the funky bilingual

[Chorus]

Latin lingo baby (funky bilingual) funky bilingual...

It's the Latin lingo!

[Sen Dog]

Cuando entro, when I come in, suckers fronted
Me mira another bilingual from villa
Vengo con un ejemplo, check the tiempo

Hey homes, pass the cerveza
Before I have to go and push up on your esa

Where you live, si tu puedes
Nowadays you ain't shit without your cuetes
Something like it's gangbang, vatos quieren BANG BANG!

Salte de mi cara, sal de mi camino
Make way, for the funky bilingual

The back-and-forth of Spanish and English is obvious in the very first line as one of the rappers calls himself the “funky *bilingue*”³⁴. This mixture of Spanish and English words is common among Latin@ rappers and among many in the Latino community. Words that are Spanglish slang, and which depend on the country or region the Spanish speaker comes from, are present as well: “pinga,” “esa,” and “cuetes”³⁵ are used to mean “penis,” “girlfriend,” and “guns,” respectively. Also, terminology/imagery that is common in Hip Hop discourse is displayed: “homie” is commonly used to mean “friend/comrade”; “el deporte” refers to “the game” which is how many in Hip Hop refer to life in general or the rap industry or one’s work/hustle to make a living; “veterano” is used to refer to a veteran of “the game” and is synonymous to the OG (original gangsta) of African American rap; “check the *tiempo*” is a common Hip Hop phrase—in this case mixing Spanish and English—meaning that one should check/analyze the status of one’s place/situation. The general reference to defending one’s space/identity (*salte de mi cara, sal de mi camino*; get out of my face, get out of my way) and defending it violently if need be (nowadays you aint shit without your *cuetes*³⁶) are also commonplace in Hip Hop rhetoric.

Beyond that, the complexity of the language issue is caught up in the social structure. The counter-hegemonic message—“that gringo / tryin’ to get paid, from the funky bilingual”—brings to light the opinion among many in the Latin@ community that some/many White individuals will exploit Latin@ culture and language in order to profit financially. Cypress Hill seem aware that their ability to incorporate Spanish, English, and AAVE in the context of Hip Hop and to connect with Latin@ and African American audiences could be exploited by White-

³⁴ *Bilingue* is the Spanish word for “bilingual.”

³⁵ These terms are used by Latin@s of various origins and are common among Cubans (*pinga*) and Mexican Americans (*esa* and *cuetes*).

³⁶ *Cuete* is a Spanish slang word, sometimes spelled *quete*, that is used to refer to a gun/pistol; it can also be used to refer to “firecracker” or “getting “drunk/plastered.”

led record labels who may look at the linguistically complex lyrics of Latin@ rappers as not an important rhetorical production but as a means to gain larger profits. It is a matter of linguistic exploitation and appropriation that, as Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh remind us in *Western Music and Its Others*, are necessarily bound up in culture, power, ethnicity, and class (3). So while Cypress Hill believes that society needs to “make way” for Latin@ rappers, the group seems aware, at least at some level, of some of the political, social, and economic implications—a complex web of implications directly connected to Hall’s discussion of “articulation” and cultural hegemony. These implications are connected to the fact that the Latin@ identity—linguistically and otherwise—can function as a form of social protest against the dominant culture. At times it is a purposeful/intentional menacing of dominant culture and other times the organic existence of Latin@ culture is labeled as non-normal, illegitimate, or menacing by the dominant culture.

Lyrics from the song “La Raza” by Kid Frost, a pioneer of Latino rap provide another short example of linguistic layering by a Hip Hop rhetorician. In his song, which translates as “the race,” but which more closely means “the people” or “the people of the race³⁷,” he raps:

What's da matter? Are you afraid, you gonna get hurt?
I'm with my homeboys, my camaradas

Yo soy chingon, ese
Like Al Capone, ese

Once again, the intermixing of English and Spanish words is present as is the use of Spanish slang like “chingon” (awesome/great/tough), “ese” (used by some Latin@s, many times of Mexican descent, and many times as a slang/street term, to mean “that one,” “that guy,” or

³⁷ The term *la raza* was coined by Mexican writer Jose Vasconcelos in his 1925 book *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race).

“that guy who is my friend or homeboy”), and even “camaradas” (comrades/friends) which is common in “street” and Latin@ Hip Hop dialect. Even the reference to Al Capone is linked here, in the lyrics of a Latino rapper, to both American culture *and* Hip Hop culture. Al Capone was an American gangster of the 1920s and 1930s and the image of the “gangster” or “gangsta” is highly prevalent in Hip Hop culture. As an important side note, the 1983 film *Scarface* (“scarface” was a nickname for Al Capone), based on a gangster figure, is extremely popular in Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop textual and visual rhetoric. Thus, the reference to Al Capone is a discursively implicit way for Kid Frost, who is already rapping in Spanish and English in a Black-dominated medium, to connect to a Hip Hop audience that readily identifies with gangsta and “tough-guy” imagery—imagery that connects with the prominent strand of machismo and self-reliance among Latinos who have strong connections to Latino Hip Hop.

References to a gangster lifestyle—like that of Al Capone—add another layer to the complex rhetorical output of Latin@ Hip Hop discourse—connecting it to popular Hip Hop discursive practices—and shows how dynamic this rhetoric is. Latin@ Hip Hop discourse often rhetorically connects itself to the overall Hip Hop ethos of struggle and violence by using words such as “gangsta” and “soldier”—or referencing specific gangsters or soldier-like activities. This not only articulates a self-identity bound up in struggle but directly connects Latin@ Hip Hop to the culture and wordplay of Hip Hop in general. The use of “gangsta” also re-emphasizes the anti-establishment and menacing nature of the discourse—after all, gangsters are characterized as social outsiders proud of their rule-breaking. The reference then to “gangsta” rhetorically and ideologically connects Latin@ Hip Hop to Hip Hop discourse in general and, as Michael Eric Dyson reminds us, to African American discourse considering that the genre of Hip Hop,

especially through gangsta rap, “aggressively narrate[s] the pains and possibilities, the fantasies and fears, of poor black urban youth” (179). It is no wonder that one struggling minority group would incorporate the textual and ideological output of another. Deeper connections between the Latin@ “gangsta” attitude in Hip Hop and counter-hegemony will be more fully explored in the final section “Counter-Hegemony: Complex Connections.”

Those studying linguistics, sociology, literature, composition, rhetoric, etc. can find in Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric, and Hip Hop rhetoric in general, complex linguistic practices and a deep well of knowledge and experiences. They will find that the multi-mixed discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop is a central piece of the “code-switching ethos of *mestizaje*” (Burke 209)—a common thread among these “mixed” people—and that this multi-ethnolinguistic discourse represents a challenge to dominant culture and contains a counter-normative message. The ability of many Latin@ Hip Hoppers to code-switch between English, Spanish, Spanglish, AAVE, and Hip Hop is a discursively rich and powerful tool embraced by many in the Latin@ community and highlights their identities as multi-conscious *mestizos*.

The examples above, from Cypress Hill and Kid Frost, are but two short instances of this complex interplay but many other artists are available as examples. A few of these artists include South Park Mexican, Down A.K.A. Kilo, Lil Rob, Chingo Bling, Big Pun, Fat Joe, A Lighter Shade of Brown, Mellow Man Ace, and Latin Alliance³⁸. In all instances there is linguistic and cultural weaving and, in most cases, an emphasis on the “otherness” of the Latin@ experience.

³⁸ There are certainly hundreds of Latin@ artists to choose from but I chose some of the more influential and commercially popular artists in this short list. Also, Reggaeton and other sub-genres of Latino rap were not included in my analysis. See a list of Latin@ rapper at www.brownpride.com.

Ultimately, the dynamic and multi-linguistic/multi-dialectical discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop, while diversifying the landscape of rhetorical studies, forces scholars to focus on issues of language, dialect, and identity, and highlights the complexity of Latin@ rhetoric in general. As Khadar Bashir-Ali argues in “Language Learning and the Definition of One’s Social, Cultural, and Racial Identity,” linguistic practices help individuals form an allegiance to a group (628)—in this case the allegiance is to the Latin@ population and, more specifically, to the Latin@ population that embraces the Hip Hop ethos. Their discourse reveals and creates identity while complicating our understanding of the discursive practices of a particular section of the Latin@ community whose discourse is often marginalized and labeled as dumbed-down and discursively simplistic. It highlights the fact that Latin@ rhetoric, in general, is linguistically rich and that this richness is actually in opposition to dominant ideals that emphasize standard Americanness and the use of standard English as a leveling tool for those interested in maintaining the linguistic status quo.

Multi-conscious Culture/Identity

The complex linguistic practices of Latin@ Hip Hop artists serve as integral pieces of the overall culture of Latin@ Hip Hop, but other elements also merit attention. Latin@s also deal with the discursive practice of labeling/self-labeling—a process connected to assimilation/opposition to the dominant culture—and with dichotomies between economic struggle and wealth, placidness and violence, and gender equality and discrimination. These layers/dichotomies are embodied by the cultural *mestizo* that is the Latin@ Hip Hopper who rhetorically displays, and forges, the identity of myriad Latin@s, and thus affects relations between different sectors of society in regards to race, ethnicity, and gender. Latin@ Hip Hoppers are directly affecting the

ethos and identity of a specific social grouping and, as sociologists Lawrence D. Bobo and Cybelle Fox emphasize, are thus “guid[ing] patterns of relations among individuals recognized as members [of this group]” which “entail[s] the labeling and social learning of group categories, identity, feelings, beliefs, and related cognitive structures” (319).

Latin@s are simultaneously influenced by the history and cultural norms of Latin@ culture and by the norms and sensibilities of White cultural hegemony and African American culture. This creates a situation where Latin@s become concerned with their identity in relation to a diverse racial landscape. The most obvious ways that Latin@ Hip Hop is connected to White and Black culture are through the use of English and AAVE which add to the linguistic complexity of Latin@ rhetoric. Beyond that, Latin@ Hip Hoppers are at once very main-stream American with their cultural and pop references, their emphasis on individualism, and a focus on a personal climb toward wealth. They are simultaneously connected to Black culture in their use of Hip Hop as their discursive medium, in modes of dress, and with their anti-establishment message which has been engrained in Black Hip Hop since at least the early 1980s. This last point, the anti-establishment message, is central in that it emphasizes that Latin@ Hip Hop is a multi-conscious genre that complexly integrates three races/cultures while attacking one. Because Hip Hop often contains an anti-establishment—mainly anti-White—message, it is caught up in the “micro social process” of imbuing ethnoracial groups with meaning and developing racial categorizations and identities (Bobo and Fox 325). The use of Hip Hop by many Latin@s connects their status as a marginalized group to the pervasive anti-dominant message of the genre. This is highlighted in their practice of self-labeling.

The naming of Latin@ identity—that is, the discursive labels used to describe/self-describe Latin@s—plays a role in the identity-showing, identity-shaping, and menace-producing ethos of Latin@ culture. Latin@s directly or indirectly address their place/stance within U.S. culture through self-labeling and by using/not-using labels created for their populations. The aspect of self-labeling is important because it is a “proclamation of existence” (Root 365) and is directly connected to the identity and ethos of individuals and cultural communities. Importantly, this self-labeling becomes part of the rhetorical web of “social structural conditions [which] create individuals possessing particular types of ethnoracial identities, beliefs, attitudes, value orientations, and the like” (Bobo and Fox 325).

One telling example is offered by the Latin@ population that has its roots in Mexico. This population uses (or is given) a number of labels: Mexican American, Mexican-American, Hispanic/*Hispano*, Latino, Mexican, *Mexicano*, and Chicano. These labels carry with them complex social and political meaning:

Mexican American: stresses the persons/populations connection to the separate countries of Mexico and the United States

Mexican-American: this hyphenated phrase stresses the melding of Mexican culture and U.S. culture in the individual or population

Hispanic/*Hispano*: is a term with much history that was used by the 1970 U.S. Census to denote people of Latin/Spanish origin³⁹; because the term was used by the U.S. Census it is seen by many Latinos as a label imposed by the ruling racial group (Whites); the Spanish version (*Hispano*) is more commonly used in Latino Hip Hop

Latino: this term denotes someone of Latin American descent living in the United States and is preferred by many of this group over “Hispanic,” especially in Hip Hop rhetoric

³⁹ For more information visit <http://www.census.gov/population>

Mexican/Mexicano: term used by many in this group who prefer to stress their ancestry and connection to Mexico; this connection is further stressed when expressed in its Spanish form

Chicano: Chicano was created in a highly politicized atmosphere and is used by many in this group who wish to stress, in varying degrees, their opposition to U.S. and White hegemony

So among Latin@ rappers one hears Lil Rob saying, “it’s Lil Rob the Chicano, and proud one” and calling himself the “Mexican gangsta” or Cypress Hill rapping, “another proud Hispano” and “one of the many Latinos *de este año*.” Rappers also name themselves in reference to their Latino-ness: South Park Mexican, Another Latin Timebomb, Aztlan Nation, Brownside, Cuban Link, Funky Aztecs, Latin Alliance, Latin Bomb Squad, Latin Frozz, Latino Velvet Clique, Lighter Shade of Brown, Tha Mexakinz, Spanish Fly, 2 Mex, and the Brownness Camp.

The process of self-labeling by Latin@ rappers points to the many meaningful labels at their disposal and their multi-consciousness in choosing a label for themselves and their people. Most notable, as will be discussed more fully in the final section, is the how this self-labeling is part of a process of resistance. For Latin@ rappers, and Latin@s in general, there is a deep personal, psychological, and social connection between themselves and their self-imposed label and a larger connection to historical dominance and White hegemony.

Interestingly, Latin@s also deal with a variety of identities and labels *within* Latino culture. One example is how the country of origin (e.g. Mexico, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, etc.) can play an important role in the cultural and linguistic norms associated with communities, families, and individuals. “Latino-ness” is an essentializing term that tends to blur the diverse backgrounds of this population—in many cases blurring out national roots. While using the general “Latino” term is common it is important to remain aware that “Latino”

represents a very diverse population. Within Latin@ Hip Hop there is mutual Latin@ respect, yet difference, in say Puerto Rican rappers like Fat Joe or Big Pun and Mexican-American rappers like South Park Mexican or Lil Rob. Country of origin and cultural references are the main ways in which these rappers emphasize their Latin@ distinctiveness. Thus, another set of borders that Latin@s work within are those borders that divide Latin countries/cultures.

Beyond these central cultural crossroads are other borders often expressed, implicitly and explicitly, in Latin@ Hip Hop. One of these borders/crossroads is a seeming struggle between expressing one's connection to modest means and life on "the streets" while putting a strong emphasis on gaining material wealth. Secondly, there is the struggle between respect/placidness and necessary violence. Latin@ Hip Hop expresses, once again, a complex multi-consciousness which in this case sits on the border of struggle and complacency—a common characteristic in the general Latin@ community. These two psychological borders are highlighted in much Latin@ Hip Hop.

An excellent representative example of this can be found in South Park Mexican's song "SPM vs. Los." The title itself refers to the split existence the rapper embodies—"Los" is short for Carlos, the rapper's given name, which is meant to signal his calm/respectful self and "SPM" which stands for South Park Mexican and represents the rapper's angry and money-hungry self. In the song, the rapper alternates between stanzas of lyrics by SPM and Los, with the former expressing an angry diatribe that includes telling of a childhood filled with personal and social struggle while the latter tries to placate "SPM" with discourse about success and enjoying life. Below are lines from each personality:

"SPM":

I was raised on beans and rice...
Mama used to trip cuz I fed the mice
I'm the one they sent home cuz my head had lice...
Mama sat me down for some serious talks
On how to keep the rats out the cereal box

"Los":

Sure we was broke but we were BB guns
Havin' hella fun...
Now you got children and a beautiful wife
The kind of money that you make...you set for life

"SPM":

The penitentiary's the only place that I can relax
I'm just sippin' Patron, I handle shit on my own
It's in my blood to be a drunk and not give a fuck
...daddy left me at the age of three

"Los"

You blessed by God man, you can't give up
And run around town not givin' a fuck...
It's hard to be that Mexican that came up so quick

"SPM":

Muthafuck you...stop preachin' n'shit
I'll grab my glock and start squeezing that shit
You gettin' soft now? You must wanna die too
All it takes is one bullet to kill me and you

The song ends with the rapper pulling the trigger of a gun and killing the two personas that struggle within his one body—SPM and Los.

This song, with its layered and divisive consciousness, is symbolic of the thoughts and feelings within much Latin@ Hip Hop discourse. It expresses cultural and social complexity and vividly expresses a deep sense of struggle—many times a cultural and economic struggle that pushes up against White middle and upper class hegemony. This is an expression of economic

realities in the United States where Latin@s (Hispanics) experience over double the poverty rate of Whites (non-Hispanic), according to the Pew Hispanic Center's 2007 information, and a dominant culture that at times devalues Latin@ cultural identity. The "pushing up" against the White middle and upper classes is not simply an economic phenomena but illustrates that the very fact that Latin@ rappers bring up, and popularly express, economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, is an act of resistance that menaces the "narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (Bhabha 117).

The song displays the common psychological struggle between wanting to gain wealth *and* not wanting to be seen as disconnected to the struggles of poverty and/or modest means. This is also connected to the struggle to achieve and enjoy success "peacefully/legitimately" and/or achieve some success/respect through violent means—something common in Hip Hop culture. Importantly, this song, and other Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric with the same sentiments, is not an expression of the crossroads that convene in only the Latin@ Hip Hopper but in many Latin@s in general, as well as other minority groups. It also works as part of the complex web of popular discourse that helps both express and shape the Latin@ psyche.

A final border in which many Latin@s exist/struggle involves gender bias and gender (in)equality. While important strides have been made for women in general, and Latinas specifically, there is still a strong male-centered ethos present in Latino culture and especially in Latin@ Hip Hop. No Latina Hip Hop artists appear in this chapter because there are so few women actively rapping, and none who have, or have been allowed to have, a large impact on the overall Latin@ Hip Hop scene. It is also not surprising that a search through Latinrapper.com produces very little information about Latina rappers but quite a bit on "sexy

and hot Latina pictures” and “Latin eye candy.”⁴⁰ This lack of Latina Hip Hop discourse is somewhat surprising considering the popularity of rap music among Latin@s in general and the fact that there have been quite a few successful female rappers from the African American community. This lack is representative of a culture that has its struggle with issues of gender equality.

Many traditional values in Latin@ culture are also conservative values when it comes to the role of Latinas. While Latinas are meant to be respected, especially mothers and grandmothers, there is also the sense that Latinas are meant to be silent supporters and caregivers—while the males are viewed by many in the culture as the physical and verbal leaders. Interestingly, in “Racial and Ethnic Variations in Gender-Related Attitudes” sociologist Emily W. Kane finds contradictory results when studying the attitudes of Hispanic Americans toward gender roles. Some propose and defend more traditional and subservient roles for Latinas while others work against these views. This is not surprising considering the complex mix of respect, disrespect, veneration, and gender-role conservatism in Latin@ culture. It is also not surprising that Jezy P, a female rapper from the slums of Mexico City, expresses often that she is “furious about sexism in macho Mexico” (Grillo). The machismo of Latin American countries, not surprisingly, trickles into Latin@ culture—expressed vividly in its Hip Hop. This way of thinking, of course, has varying levels of severity and it is important to remember that most cultures display sexism to one degree or another. Gender roles do, however, represent a crossroad for many Latin@s. Certainly in Latino Hip Hop, there is simultaneously a respect-giving and respect-taking in regards to Latinas.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.latinrapper.com/eyecandy.html>.

On one hand there is, in Latino Hip Hop, the deep respect for and defense of mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and at times wives and girlfriends. This is expressed by South Park Mexican when he raps, “My only daughter she’s daddy’s girl / And for her I’ll buy the whole Astro world” and by Lil Rob when he writes, “call the *ruca* [girlfriend] on the phone... / let her know she looks beautiful to me... / ...she is such a sight to me / the kind of woman that would put up a fight for me.” While the woman/girl is willing to fight, it is in the context of fighting for “him”—it is still the male at the center of that action. There is also a strong defense of female family members by males who at once often see these females as women deserving of respect (mainly by other males) but also women who are socially and physically weak and need “their man” to defend them. On the other hand there is the more common objectification of women in much Latino Hip Hop. As Imani Perry reminds us, most rappers “exist within...a colonized space, particularly in regard to race and gender...[which is] full of traditional gender messages” (145). These messages are vivid in Latino Hip Hop where references to “bitches,” “hos,” and “*putas*” are common along with visual images of scantily clad Latinas in music videos and on websites.

Thus, though Latino Hip Hoppers at times project female respect/defense/veneration it is the female objectifying and misogyny that often wins out. This rhetoric displays and affects the fact that many Latinas, especially those strongly connected to Hip Hop culture and “the streets,” are at the crossroads between physical, psychological, and social advancement and the competing rhetoric and images of male dominance and traditional views in regard to gender roles—views perpetuated by both United States culture and the culture of their national roots. This final point is emphasized by Jessica Enoch, though she does not directly discuss Hip

Hop, in *“Para la Mujer: Defining a Chicana Feminist Rhetoric at the Turn of the Century”* where she highlights the fact that Latinas (she discusses Mexican women here), battle a long history of male-centered views in texts from Anglo writers like “Stephen Crane, Carleton Beals, and Ruth Allen” and in Mexican texts where “women’s gender roles were clearly defined” (23). This places Latin@s in a web of borders characterized by gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and cultural tradition. More specifically, it highlights the pervasiveness of misogynistic rhetoric among Latin males and the presence of many Latin females who become subservient to male dominance—both of which challenge the dominant discourse of female equality and advancement.

Critically, these complex gender roles can have long-reaching affects on the Latin@ community. They can affect Latina self-esteem, education, career goals (or lack there of), economics, health⁴¹, and general social standing. For *some* Latinas, especially those entrenched in a more traditional social web—as many Latinas who are strongly connected to Latin@ Hip Hop culture are—there can also be a strong psychological struggle in dealing with real and perceived gender roles. If a Latina is entrenched in a world (Hip Hop culture) that often espouses traditional gender roles—and at times misogynistic discourse and imagery—then that Latina may from an early age be “trapped” in a situation where she is over-sexualized, becomes a mother, and serves the role as a mother without the father present, while never achieving much social advancement—unfortunately a common trend among many Latinas. This very “real world” connection between Latin@ Hip Hop discourse and what is happening with many Latin@s points to the importance of studying this discourse and, as it closely pertains to the

⁴¹ See *Gender Roles, Power Strategies, and Precautionary Sexual Self-Efficacy: Implications for Black and Latina Women’s HIV/AIDS Protective Behaviors* by Lisa Bowleg, Faye Z. Belgrave, and Carol E. Reisen.

following section, to the menacing threat that Latin@ Hip Hop poses to dominant culture. After all, dominant culture in the United States champions women's rights and does not want to be reminded of past (and present) gender inequality and injustice. It also fears a popular discourse that espouses misogyny, traditional gender roles, and which may be a rhetorical force in the production of fatherless minority children.

Ultimately, multi-consciousness is an umbrella term that incorporates the many languages, cultures, ideologies, and identities that many Latin@s embody and traverse on a daily basis and which are vividly expressed in Latin@ Hip Hop. From the incorporation of Black, White, and Brown culture, to the process of self-labeling, to social and mental struggles of economics and gender roles, Latin@s are physically and ideologically *mestizos* whose multi-layered existence can, implicitly and explicitly, serve as a counter-hegemonic force to the dominant culture. This force contains deep and complex connections to historical, cultural, racial, political, and ideological realities of the American social fabric.

Counter-Hegemony: Expanding the Complex Connections

While the previous section touched on ways that a multi-conscious Latin@ identity runs counter to some dominant social norms and sensibilities, this section delves more deeply into the ways that the linguistic and cultural *mestizaje* of Latin@s, as expressed in Latin@ Hip Hop, challenges, agitates, and disrupts dominant culture. Important to this discussion is the fact that the marginalization of Latin@s in the United States has created a space from which Latin@s have carved out an identity that pulls marginality from the shackles of a rhetorically neutered existence toward a "space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies"

(hooks 171). That is, Latin@ rhetoric, of which Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric is an important strand, does not simply function as a dominated discourse but as a discourse that points to complex social realities—it helps us see and understand the world, and connections between cultures, from a different lens. More specifically, the alternative discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric, in espousing an alternative epistemology, contains the quality of social “menace.”

The Latin@ Hip Hopper is a cultural *mestizo*, equipped with a multi-ethnolinguistic tongue, whose culturally and psychologically bordered existence disrupts dominant social ideals. These ideals include strong sentiments toward preserving “the security of a monolingual English public discourse” (Burke 206) and traditionally White American culture. This border existence highlights much of what Gloria Anzaldua wrote of in her seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. She writes that “to survive the Borderlands / you must... / be a crossroads” (217). Anzaldua acknowledges the interplay between a borderland/multi-conscious existence and survival—survival that happens at the intersection of many social crossroads. That is, existence is not only *within* crossroads but *acts as* a crossroads—a crossroads where “you are the battleground / you are at home, a stranger” (216). This sense of difference, otherness, border-ness is many times tinged with angst and anger in the discourse of Latin@ Hip Hop. This discourse suggests that many Latin@s, while being extremely proud of the cultural differences that distinguish them from White-American and Black-American culture, are highly cognizant of their marginalization from White-American, middle and upper-class sensibilities—of their subaltern status. As a consequence, the Latin@ Hip Hopper has no trouble understanding—and in fact preaching—the notion of a cultural “battleground” where cultural soldiers and gangsters fight for equality and supremacy.

An important aspect of this battleground is the maintenance of simple ethnic and cultural classification and the rupture of this by Latin@ness. As Maria P.P. Root writes, the insistence and perpetuation of “clean lines between groups...establish and maintains a social hierarchy in which the creators and enforcers of the system occupy a superior berth. Consequently, members of some groups are always ‘deserving’ of inferior status...” (357). Whether the enforcement of such clean lines is accomplished through larger social machinations such as the census or ensuing legislation, or through everyday comments that keep in place strict racial divisions, preserving these simplified divisions between racial and cultural groups helps maintain the status quo of White dominance. Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric, through its very multi-conscious, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural nature, poses a vivid challenge to the drawing of these clean lines of division.

This multi-conscious Latin@ nature proves anti-hegemonic and menacing to dominant modes of being while a more aggressive and direct message of resistance acknowledges and perpetuates a battleground of sorts where the Latin@ Hip Hopper can be presented as not simply a challenger to simplified cultural and racial division but a menacing “gangsta.” This type of menace is articulated by Homi Bhabha, who asserts that menace is produced by a “double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” and by discourse that “articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority” (117). Although Bhabha refers to a different group of subalterns in a different place, his theory applies equally well to Latin@s in the United States. In the case of Latin@ Hip rhetoric, a mirror is held up to the dominance and neo-colonialism of White authority and a challenge presented to the cultural, racial, and

ideological history of that dominance. Furthermore, Latin@ Hip Hop, in its multi-linguistic and multi-conscious ways, provides a “displacing gaze” where the traditional “observer” (White middle and upper class individuals) becomes the “observed” (117). Latin@ Hip Hop, whether aware or unaware of this, reverses the critical gaze of dominant culture by espousing a multi-layered existence and in directly revealing and attacking dominance.

Linguistically, the nature of Latin@ Hip Hop serves in opposition to sentiments toward a simplified monolingual English public discourse—a sentiment cloaked many times in nationalistic and culturally and politically conservative ideals and most poignantly represented by “English-only” and “official English” movements. While these movements do not look to rid the United States of all other languages, per se, they function under an ideological umbrella that seeks the simplification of cultural practices in the United States and preserving the social superiority of the English language. While supporters of English-only and official English hold that “reaffirming the preeminence of English means reaffirming a unifying force in American life” (Crawford 2), they fail to understand the divisiveness that such ideologies and policies breed. At best, such ideology perpetuates a history of diminishing the linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural output of minority groups and, at worst, “serves to justify racist and nativist biases under the cover of American patriotism” (Crawford 3).

The ethnolinguistic patterns of Latin@ Hip Hoppers, who regularly use Spanish, English, Spanglish, AAVE, and Hip Hop discourse, also challenge the notion that the discourse these individuals are producing is immature and simplistic—two characteristics viewed as opposite to that of expertise in using one language (i.e. English). While these Latin@ Hip Hoppers do not attend a course in “The Implementation of Multi-ethnolinguistic Speech Patterns,” their

interaction with peers, and especially with Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric in the form of song lyrics, videos, texts, etc., produces individuals with highly complex linguistic patterns. Not only are these patterns anti-hegemonic in that they challenge the push of English dominance, but they also produce multi-linguals who, as seen in a psychology study on bilinguals, “enjoy some cognitive advantages over monolinguals in areas such as cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, concept formation, and creativity” (Padilla, et. al.). The view that Latin@ Hip Hoppers are more cognitively advanced than White monolingual non-Hip Hoppers challenges deeply rooted racial and social stereotypes.

As a matter of being/nature, the linguistic patterns of Latin@ Hip Hoppers both reflect and shape multi-lingual/multi-dialectical individuals who pose a threat to English monolingual hegemony. Through more direct rhetoric, Latin@ Hip Hoppers move into the realm of social “gangsta”—providing a more aggressive form of menace in that this discourse differs from and threatens the conservative ideal of a monolingual America. When Cypress Hill rap, “now who’s on the pinga?, tha gringo / tryin’ to get paid, from the funky bilingual,” they are expressing deeply held sentiments of angst, resistance, even hatred, toward the “gringo” who they feel is exploiting their culture and talent. There is also rap/rock group Molotov who state in their song “Frijolero⁴²”, “*no me diges beaner / te sacaré un susto / por racista y culero / no me llames frijolero / pinche gringo puñetero.*” The angry and crude lyrics translate to “don’t call me a beaner / I’ll give you a scare / for being a racist and an asshole / don’t call me a beaner / fucking White jerk.” This aggressive rhetoric moves Latin@ Hip Hop discourse into the realm of aggressive menace and the Latin@ Hip Hopper into the realm of the cultural “gangsta.”

⁴² Frijolero is slang for “beaner” which is a derogatory term used to refer to Latin@s in reference to their skin color and the fact that beans are a popular Latin American food.

This move is not surprising considering that the genre of Hip Hop was born from “bleak conditions” and, from its early existence, has produced “lyrical elegies” about the “tortuous twists of urban fate” (Dyson 174)—something that continues in Latin@ Hip Hop. These elegies “force us to confront the demands of racial representation” and can “force our nation to confront crucial social problems” (181) and in doing so serve as a powerful menace to dominant culture. Latin@ Hip Hoppers that deliver these angry elegies envy, and in fact embody, “the lowdown hustlers [and gangsters]...who are not slaves to white power” (185) of whom bell hooks writes in “Gangsta Culture.” The words of Cypress Hill and Molotov express violent opposition toward dominant White culture and power which is not only present in Latin@ Hip Hop, but also, to varying degrees, in Latin@ culture in general.

Furthermore, Tim Strode and Tim Wood point out in “Growing Up Gangsta: Gangsta Rap and the Politics of Identity” that White condemnation of gangsta rap and a gangsta message many times demonstrates an ignorance of what is happening in low-income Black and Latin@ Communities (156-157). For many middle- and upper-class Whites, it is almost impossible to understand that a community that lives in the same country can have such a different social experience—a multi-conscious experience connected to economic and ideological struggle. They are in some respects, “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 118). The dominant group focuses on the “sameness” between Latin@s and themselves—the push for sameness coming at times through direct means like the English-Only movement and at other times through cultural hegemony—while not fully understanding the presence of struggle or valuing a multi-cultural and multi-ethnolinguistic existence (the “not quite”) so expressed in Latin@ Hip Hop.

Certainly, Latin@s have agency in the formation and evolution of their own group identity, but the forces of history and dominant culture impose themselves during this process. It is the “articulation” (Hall) of a number of forces—social, economic, ideological—which form the imposition by dominant forces and provoke the violent backlash found in Latin@ Hip Hop. While all groups and cultures are influenced by other cultures, including the influence Latin@ culture has on the United States, it must be noted that the dynamics are different when this influence involves the diminution of one culture. In a number of ways, Latin@ culture has come under attack for decades in the United States—in recent history there has been openly racist thinking and policies in the early and mid-1900s, to attacks on bilingual education which include the English-only movement, to a vast amount of stereotypical images in popular media, to a plethora of group actions against Latin@s which have included a “find the illegal immigrant” event⁴³. In more extreme cases there is race-based violence against Latin@s which includes “the birth of at least 144 ‘nativist extremist’ groups...that do not merely target immigration policies they do not agree with, but instead confront or harass individual immigrants” (Lovato). Illustrating the extent of anti-Latin@ sentiment are FBI reports which state that in 2006 “Hispanics comprised 62.8% of victims of crimes motivated by a bias toward the victims’ ethnicity or national origin” (MALDEF) and that hate crimes targeting Latinos increased 40% from 2003 to 2007 (“Hate Crimes”).

It is no wonder that many Latin@ Hip Hoppers support an aggressive opposition to dominant culture and that, as also seen in the example of rapper Chingo Bling, this menacing comes alive in their discursive output. In 2007, the Houston, Texas based rapper rented out

⁴³ The College Republicans group at New York University held a “Find the Illegal Immigrant” event on February 2, 2007.

billboard space to promote the release of his new album. The billboard read, in large text, “They Can’t Deport Us All” and caused controversy. Many conservative pundits attacked the billboard including Michelle Malkin who wrote on her blog that it was “obnoxious” and “defiant.” It was also reported that Chingo Bling received several death threats after the billboard went up (MTV). While the merits of the billboard could be debated at length, there is no doubt that Chingo Bling was acting, and perceived, as a cultural “gangsta” who was aggressively attacking dominant culture. Chingo Bling also highlights the fact that there is strong solidarity between Latin@ Hip Hoppers and Latin immigrants—legal and illegal—in the push against White cultural hegemony. Part of that push also includes Chingo Bling’s music video for the song “Like This ‘N’ Like That” which includes images of Latin@ immigrants running from the border patrol and the repetitive image of people wearing “They Can’t Deport Us All” t-shirts.

Thus, from lyrics to billboards to music videos, Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric functions like the narratives of people of color that Villanueva commends: it is a narrative that “validates...resonates...and awakens” (15). The anti-hegemonic message of this genre resonates with millions of Latin@s; it awakens and expresses an anti-dominant ethos. It is an expression of historical struggle and a rhetorical perpetuation of an ethos of struggle and menace.

Another oppositional move made by the Latin@ Hip Hopper returns to the act of self-labeling. Because self-labeling is a “proclamation of existence” (Root 365), there is deep agency in this act for Latin@s who not only see themselves as individuals but as members of a racialized community. There is telling evidence of identity and opposition in the self-labeling

we encounter in Latin@ Hip Hop. As one example, in the self-labeling used by rappers of Mexican descent there are very few instances of the use of the terms Mexican American, Mexican-American, or especially Hispanic, in song lyrics and in the names of individual rappers or rap groups. This is no coincidence as these three terms are the most “Americanized” labels for Latin@s. In connecting with the general Hip Hop ethos of decent, “menace,” and counter-hegemony, these terms, for many Latin@s (especially those in Hip Hop) are not rhetorically powerful enough in expressing a prideful connection to one’s roots in Latin@ culture. Choosing names like South Park Mexican, Aztlan Nation, or Brownness Camp, for example, are ways for these artists to clearly connect to Latin@ culture and mark their difference/defiance of White culture. From the worldview of Latin@ Hip Hop—and many Latin@s in general—it would be seen as odd or weak if these names were changed to South Park Hispanic, Hispanic Nation, or Hispanic Camp. Thus, these cultural labels are not simplistic nomenclature but express deep personal and political meaning and can influence the cultural psyche of Latin@s who strongly connect with Latin@ Hip Hop. It creates a rhetorical environment that stresses Latin@-ness and challenges American-ness—or, more specifically, their White United Statesian-ness.

This struggle/anti-dominant ethos can also be seen in the Latin@ Hip Hoppers psychological dichotomy between a pursuit of wealth and an interest in remaining connected to modest means. As in much Hip Hop, and society in general, Latin@ Hip Hoppers stress the accumulation of wealth and the things they can buy with that wealth—not surprising considering the “ethic of consumption that pervades our culture” (Dyson 175). Yet, Latin@ Hip Hoppers make it clear that they are, or once were, connected to social and economic hardship. When South Park Mexican raps that he got sent home because “my head had lice” and that he

had to learn how to “keep the rats out [of] the cereal box,” he is not only telling his life story but explicitly expressing the fact he had to deal with economic hardship. So while South Park Mexican and many Latin@ rappers consistently rap about their real or imagined wealth, they make sure to stress their struggle as well.

What pushes this dichotomy into the realm of the aggressive gangsta is when Latin@ rappers begin espousing violence or illegal actions as a way—or *the way*—to accumulate wealth. While many Latin@ Hip Hoppers choose to gain wealth by legal and non-violent means, the rhetoric of the genre more often stresses aggressive and illegal actions. Michael Eric Dyson writes “gangsta rappers...don’t merely respond to the values and visions of the marketplace; they shape them as well” (175) and “respond to economic exploitation” with, at times, “vulgar rhetorical traditions” (174). The Latin@ Hip Hop social gangsta does this as well by stressing the accumulation of wealth through the *violent* shaping of the marketplace through illegitimate acts like robbery and/or drug dealing. In the eyes of many Latin@ Hip Hoppers, the accumulation of wealth through any means necessary (hustlin’ or playin’ the game) is legitimate—especially among a population that deals with economic struggle on a daily basis. Thus, Latin@ Hip Hoppers mimic capitalistic ideals but add the element of violence and “street capitalism” which menaces the dominant “legitimate marketplace.”

Finally, this aggressive anti-hegemony is espoused through a number of media, which in themselves challenge the hegemony of the traditional rhetorical landscape. Latin@ Hip Hoppers use lyrics, music videos, traditional websites, social video sites (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook; Twitter), murals, graffiti, tagging, body art, and even their vehicles to broadcast their message. Thus, this multi-conscious and anti-dominant discourse

reaches the eyes and ears of millions of people in multiple ways. Importantly, in “Encountering Visions of Aztlan: Arguments for Ethnic Pride, Community Activism and Cultural Revitalization in Chicano Murals,” author Margaret R. LaWare points out that “reasoning takes various forms” and “in order for a minority community to argue that its culture has distinct properties that sets it apart from dominant culture, it needs to show those distinctions within cultural artifacts.” These cultural artifacts are often attacked and criminalized by dominant culture—music lyrics and videos demonized, murals and graffiti labeled simply as the work of criminals, and loud and colorful vehicles mocked as not conforming to “normal” standards. A debate over the aesthetics of these media is not the focus here, but instead the realization that the anti-dominant message is espoused through multiple avenues and that these media themselves pose a threat to dominant sensibilities.

These sensibilities include the thinking that only certain forms of expression are valid and important. This thinking even creeps into the discipline of rhetorical studies and what is labeled as *the* rhetorical tradition. Patricia Bizzell, co-author of the influential *The Rhetorical Tradition*, has acknowledged that traditional texts—such as rhetorical manuals, published texts, and political discourse—still dominate the field into the early 21st century (“Editing” 110). This is why Jacqueline Jones Royster argues that “new” rhetorics are valuable in the re-envisioning...of what constitutes knowledge (161). This is echoed by Bizzell herself who states, “we must hear from rhetoricians who have struggled with culturally complex venues in which they were marginalized” (112). Latin@ Hip Hoppers are representatives of a new, complex, marginalized rhetoric that is espoused through non-traditional mediums. And because it carries

an aggressive anti-hegemonic message through non-traditional means, it is a part of the cultural gangstanes that pervades the Latin@ Hip Hop ethos.

Conclusion

Latin@ Rap is for...

The OG, life story tatted up on both sleeves⁴⁴...
For every Latin tryna make it with his rappin'
I'm so confused...trying to break loose
It's the mic or the cuete I'm expected to choose⁴⁵ ...
It's for the people...who seem to have the odds against them
Since the day of their birth...
And try to figure out what their living is worth
...and when you try to do some good in your life
Everybody acts like nothing you're doing is right...
We try to give a closer look to how it is on the streets
So when we hearing these beats, we grab some sheets
And write down everything we feelin' til we finally have peace...
--Duende in "Chicano Rap"

These lines "from the streets" echo what Latino academic Villanueva speaks of when he states, "I'm trying to figure this out, somehow: who I am, from where, playing out the mixes within. I am contradictory consciousness. The discourse should reflect that. I am these uneasy mixes of races...[that] find themselves victim to racism. The discourse should reflect that" (17). And certainly, Latin@ Hip Hop's identity-showing and identity-shaping rhetoric expresses a multi-conscious and bordered ethos which contains an anti-dominant message and worldview that challenges those who would push for a more unified cultural and national identity—more specifically, a unified identity which places greater value in the linguistic, cultural, historical, and ideological practices of White middle and upper-class Americans. In more antagonistic instances, the Latin@ Hip Hop ethos works in aggressive opposition toward dominant culture and highlights the presence of the cultural gangsta. These menacing instances include

⁴⁴ Meaning: the Original Gangsta with his life stories tattooed on both arms.

⁴⁵ Meaning: it's the microphone or gun I'm expected to choose between

messages which are Anti-White, that venerate violence and illegal activity in the accumulation of wealth, that defend illegal immigration, and that use self-labeling to diminish American-ness/White-ness.

Importantly, Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric also points to the ethos of the greater Latin@ community. Many Latin@s rely on personal experience and the memory of past racial injustice to help shape an identity that is tinged with subtle *and* aggressive anti-hegemony. The Latin@ Hip Hopper affects this formation of a collective—though complex—Latin@ identity. As a “narrative of people of color” Latin@ Hip Hop “jogs our memories as a collective in a scattered world and within an ideology that praises individualism” while asserting “the interconnectedness among identity, memory, and the personal” (Villanueva 16). This “jogging of memory” occurs for both the Latin@ and the dominant culture and is a reminder of a past and present that is complicated with competing cultural, linguistic, social, economic, and ideological realities.

Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric is a validation of that memory and of the bordered and layered existence experienced by many Latin@s. It is a rhetoric that shows and complicates “racial and ethnic power dynamics of...cultural relations” (Born and Hesmondhalgh 6) as well as complex connections to linguistic and cultural identity. These complex connections work within Latin@s and produce—in the Latin@ Hip Hopper—a discourse that challenges dominant cultural hegemony. In this rich discourse we find the playing out of Bhabha’s notions of “camouflaging, mimicry, and menace,” of Stuart Hall’s “articulation,” and of Anzaldúa’s and Villanueva’s fight for the validation of multi-cultural identity. All of these are directly or indirectly connected to the many borders navigated by Latin@s who are strongly connected to Hip Hop culture and, to

various extents, Latin@s in general. These borders create a culture of *mestizaje* which is vividly displayed by the Latin@ Hip Hopper and which is worth deep analysis because, ultimately, we must work at increasing our capacity to “acknowledge and combine multiple identities”—work that can help us understand a “shrinking world in which each of us is increasingly ‘crossing borders’” (Burke 245). Latin@ Hip Hop rhetoric can be an important part of this work.

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Chapter 5

Hip Hop and Religion: Gangsta Rap's Christian Rhetoric

Indeed, gangsta rap's in-your-face style may do more to force our nation to confront crucial social problems than countless sermons or political speeches.

– Michael Eric Dyson

Religiosity⁴⁶ is an influential part of individual and social identity. The pervasiveness of religious thought, rhetoric, and symbolism is seen in its deep-rooted connections to historical, social, political, and popular discourse and action. In Hip Hop culture important and telling connections exist between that culture's discourse and religious thinking and symbolism—connections that extend into the realms of social justice and individual and cultural identity. In studying it we also begin to understand that “music is...implicated in the formulation of life; ...it is something that is a formative, albeit often unrecognized, resource of social agency” (DeNora 152-253). This resource of social agency, in this case rap, can both be revealing and formative.

Hip Hop music and culture are telling sources of identity for myriad of people in the United States and beyond and can teach us much about the religious beliefs of those who produce and closely identify with them. More intriguing is the fact that a sub-genre of rap music, gangsta rap, known mainly for its crude and violent rhetoric, also contains a vast amount of religious discourse and imagery. Religious discourse in gangsta rap may be seen as an incompatible paradox but rhetorical analysis reveals a complicated and layered paradox in which the producers of gangsta rap, and those who strongly identify with its message, attempt

⁴⁶ “Religiosity” will be used in this chapter as a general term to represent religious beliefs, actions, and/or discourse. The chapter will emphasize the fact that organized religion itself is not a central characteristic of gangsta rap's culture.

to reconcile personal and social marginalization with religious thought. The paradox of religious discourse and “gangsta” discourse is then played out under the umbrella of a community—the gangsta Hip Hop community—which struggles within a socially and economically marginalized realm and one which has been born from communities that stress hope through religion.

Gangsta rappers, and those who closely identify with their message, most often come from poor, inner city neighborhoods and are usually African American or Latino/a. In fact, the very few Caucasian gangsta rappers who have been successful and “accepted” by Hip Hop culture have had their gangsta ethos legitimized by the fact that they came from poor, minority neighborhoods⁴⁷. The African American and Latino/a communities in the United States are highly religious and many within those communities use religion (mainly Christianity) as a means to understanding, and getting through, life and social ordeals. This is not to say that gangsta rappers are highly religious, but there is ample evidence in textual and visual form to show that religion does indeed play a role in their worldviews.

The religious rhetorical output of gangsta rap displays key characteristics of the religious ethos of marginalized inner city communities, especially of those who strongly identify with the message of gangsta rap. One characteristic is a strong solidarity with Jesus Christ and an embracing of Him as a symbol of suffering and marginalization. On a basic level, gangsta rappers predominantly embrace the life of Jesus because, as aforementioned, Christianity is the predominant religion of African American and Latino/a communities in the United States. On a more important level, Jesus, and His life story, are also embraced because they point to suffering caused by an unjust society and because they represent meaning-in-suffering and

⁴⁷ This includes Paul Wall, Shamrock and, to a certain extent, Eminem.

hope beyond suffering. As Cornel West points out, one of Hip Hop music's aims is to "forge new ways of escaping social misery" (xi) so it is not surprising that gangsta rap rhetoric and culture—a particular type of Hip Hop—would connect to a figure whose life was surrounded by much social misery and suffering. It is Jesus, among the most recognizable religious figure-heads, who most represents suffering and is predominantly who gangsta rappers most identify with in the religious realm.

Another characteristic of gangsta rap's religious rhetoric is that while it glorifies the life and suffering of Jesus it simultaneously expresses a deep mistrust of organized religion. For the gangsta rapper, and his/her followers, religion gets in the way of God and the message of Jesus and can be part of the social order that has marginalized many poor, often minority, individuals and communities. Finally, gangsta rap seems to fully embrace the notion that good and evil exist simultaneously within individuals and society.

These characteristics are displayed by vast amounts of textual and visual rhetoric, some of which will be discussed here, and in the lived experiences of many gangsta rappers. Some of these rappers include Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Nas, South Park Mexican, DMX, and Mase. Importantly, these gangsta rappers are not insignificant figures in the rap industry, but artists who have sold millions of albums and discursively connected with thousands of inner city individuals, particularly African Americans and Latino/as. They are "philosophers...pondering the truths of inner-city life" (Mills) and often use religious rhetoric to do so. Their religious rhetoric is an important piece of the rhetorical landscape and the terrain of religious scholarship and one that should not be trivialized or ignored.

Gangsta Rap and Christian Rhetoric: Between Religion and the Jesus Trope

The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made head of the corner;
This was from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes? -Matt. 21:42-

On the surface, gangsta rap's connection to religion may seem superficial—large diamond, gold, and silver crucifix necklaces around the necks of many rappers and references to being a god of rap. Lil Wayne stating “ask ya reverend ‘bout me, I’m the young god” and Jay-Z regularly referring to himself as Jay-Hova or Hova⁴⁸ are but two examples. Yet, a deeper study of religious rhetoric and imagery in gangsta rap music reveals a complex connection between the identity of those who produce and strongly identify with the musical genre and the religious figure of Jesus Christ. This connection is forged mainly through two themes that are central to both—struggle and marginalization. It is not surprising that a musical genre born from a marginalized community, and a sub-genre (gangsta rap) which often focuses on the “struggle in the streets,” often highlight the image and life of the suffering servant of Yahweh.

This emphasis on Jesus may be seen by some as a simple extension or re-use of the Jesus trope in pop culture and entertainment. Others may see it as a sign that gangsta rappers are truly religious figures and “pastors of the street.” I argue that the use of religious rhetoric by gangsta rappers places them somewhere in the middle of these poles. On one hand, gangsta rappers are not merely identifying with Jesus for entertainment value or to simply tell an interesting story. This is the case with recent uses of the Jesus trope in movies such as *The Matrix*, *The Lion King*, *Braveheart*, *Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Harry Potter*, just to name a few. Gangsta rappers are in fact “real people” born of “real situations” telling “real stories” about their life experiences. They connect their identity with the suffering

⁴⁸ Jay-Hova and Hova refer to Jehova (JHVH) which was the term used to refer to God in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures.

in Jesus' life and are not fictionalizing this connection for entertainment value. On the other hand, gangsta rappers are not highly religious in the sense of living lives centered on religious practices and creeds. Gangsta rap is still predominantly materialistic, violent, and misogynistic—all characteristics which run counter to the message and practices of organized religion. Gangsta rap in fact looks upon organized religion with strong suspicion, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Thus, for gangsta rappers, identifying with Jesus is not trivial or simply a storytelling trope, it in fact seems to be an important piece of many of their identities and the identities of many inner city minorities. This identification, though, seems to stop at the doors of the church. It is one which is simultaneously bound up in the image of Jesus-as-suffer *and* with a strong indifference and/or mistrust of organized religion. Their focus on Jesus is less religious and more meaningful, practical, and identity showing and telling.

Identifying with Jesus the Sufferer

As theologian Luis G. Pedraja states about how marginalized groups experience God, “it is an embodied and empirical experience that acknowledges...particular experiences” and is connected to important contexts (49). These contexts for those that produce and strongly connect to gangsta rap include the potent presence of cultural, economic, social, historical, and ideological struggle and marginalization. This is not surprising considering that a vast majority of this music, and the gangsta rap ethos, is created by poor racial minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos⁴⁹. These individuals, especially those who actually write the song lyrics, are members of groups who have been socially and economically marginalized by a historical

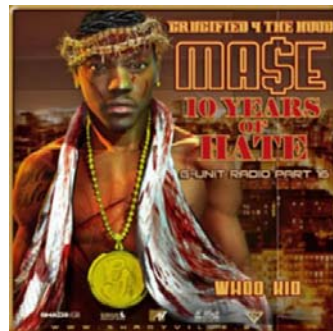
⁴⁹ I use the masculine “Latinos” due to the fact that a vast majority of Latin gangsta rap is produced by males.

process of racialization. This process is connected to economic, sociological, political, and ideological developments (Hall) and is constituted by racial projects that work within the web of cultural hegemony (Omi and Winant). These complex and complicated circumstances have led to the creation of a genre with a textual and visual rhetorical output that both understands and perpetuates the experience of marginalization. And because of this marginalization, those individuals accept the notion that God deeply understands their historical context. This notion is born from an understanding that “Jesus came from a place at the margin of society and [that] he identifies with those who were rejected and marginalized by society” and empowers marginalized individuals and communities to claim Jesus as their own (Pedraja 50).

The ultimate image of Jesus’ suffering is the crucifix, which has a prominent place in gangsta raps symbology. This visual rhetoric is often displayed by rappers on large necklaces and has adorned the necks of some of gangsta raps most popular and influential artists: Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Lil Wayne, 50 Cent, and DMX, just to name a very few. The notion that Jesus understands the suffering of these individuals and the community they look to represent—poor minorities—is *the* reason that the crucifix plays such an important role in many rappers telling of their life experiences. And while it cannot be ignored that gangsta rap includes numerous references to drug use, misplaced violence, and misogyny—which tends to be the only focus of many social pundits—much of the focus of gangsta rap music is actually on the social circumstances of poor minorities in the United States. As Anthony B. Pinn asks, “is it not possible that rappers are modern griots...who are continuing a tradition of social critique using an ‘organic’ vocabulary?” (1). It is not only possible; it is in fact true. Because these circumstances have created a marginalized group, it is not surprising that they use one of their

most powerful discursive mediums—Hip Hop—to express the experience of economic and social marginalization and that this medium often highlights the life of the suffering Jesus Christ.

Beyond the crucifix being displayed on jewelry, some gangsta rappers have directly integrated the image of the crucified Jesus with their own image on album covers and in music videos. Some of the most popular of these images include Tupac’s image of himself as Jesus on the cross on the cover of his album *Makaveli*, rapper Nas being crucified in the video “Hate Me Now,” and Mase standing with a crown of thorns and bloody neck garb on the cover of his mixtape⁵⁰ *10 Years of Hate*. These rappers, like many in their community, not only feel solidarity with the suffering Jesus but actually see themselves as Jesus-figures in that they encounter suffering, injustice, and persecution by an unjust society. While the merits of this connection can be argued at length and may be found by many to be inaccurate or blasphemous, the fact that gangsta rap embraces and perpetuates this suffering identity in lyrical stories and images, and the fact that this identity is born out of real-life social and historical circumstances, is undeniable.



⁵⁰ Mixtapes are “underground” albums that are not commercially released but which, in many instances, accomplish large distribution, especially among those who are more serious listeners of Hip Hop.

The visual rhetoric of rappers-as-Jesus-figures is powerful and telling and because it represents real people and their real-life struggles it moves rappers beyond any simplified view of the use of the Jesus trope for story-telling purposes. J. Anthony Blair in “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments” states that “the narratives we formulate for ourselves from visual images can easily shape our attitudes” (43). Not only are narratives formulated and followed, and attitudes shaped, from the religious images espoused by gangsta rappers but these images are formed from specific social circumstances. A recursive cycle of image formation and image influence is at work. Gangsta rappers incorporate images of the crucified Christ in their ethos because of their life experiences, and these images in turn affect the attitudes and psyche of those who connect to the visual and textual message of gangsta rap’s religiosity—many of whom are, not surprisingly, poor urban minorities. Ultimately, these images are *didactic narratives* (Blair 52)—they teach us something about the psychological makeup of some/many urban minorities who see suffering and marginalization as central characteristics of their personhood and community. These narratives also, along with textual rhetoric, display the religious ethos espoused by gangsta rap.

As Jeffrey D. Jones states about the power of stories to convey and form religious identity:

Faith stories aren’t just about success. They are about people seeking to find faithful ways of being and doing in the world. Sometimes they struggle; sometimes they succeed; sometimes they just hang on. Often they do this in an environment that is hostile. Often they are uncertain about what God is up to. (7)

Gangsta rappers, like many in society, seek to understand the world and use religion to do so. What makes their situation different is that many of them come from a world full of economic,

racial, and cultural marginalization and from hostile/violent neighborhoods. Interestingly, they simultaneously see themselves as suffering figures *and* triumphant figures. They are looking at their particular social context, understanding that struggle is a big part of that context, and embracing a figure they feel understands their situation and provides meaning. After all, in Scripture, “Jesus is to be found in those places where people suffer and die” (Pedraja 50), characteristics common in poor inner city neighborhoods, but he is also ultimately seen as a triumphant martyr. This leads to textual and visual rhetoric that finds solidarity with the figure of Christ. This “story” of suffering, solidarity, and occasional triumph, is conveyed visually in the wearing of crucifixes and in the images of rapper-as-Jesus-figures, and textually/verbally in numerous song lyrics and interviews. It is as if these gangsta rappers tell their real-life stories in order to connect their stories to the “grander story that is God’s” (Jones 8). But these “stories,” once again, are not stories about characters in a novel or film, they are the all too common narratives poor inner city peoples who feel that Jesus understand their specific social situations and suffering.

In the song “Lord Give Me a Sign” rapper DMX writes:

I know you’re here with us now
Jesus
I know you’re still with us now
Keep it real with us now
I wanna feel, show me how
Let me take your hand, guide me
I’ll walk slow, but stay right beside me
Devil’s trying to find me
Hide me---hold up, I take that back
Protect me and give me the strength to fight back

The rapper is expressing the common sentiment in gangsta rap that Jesus understands the plight of those struggling and does not abandon those in need (“I know you’re still with us

now”). He also states “keep it real with us now” which is a way of asking Jesus to not be fake in His claims of solidarity with the downtrodden and to allow the truth of His message to connect directly with the real-life situations faced by the rapper and the community he wishes to represent. And finally, DMX changes his request of Jesus from one of fear from evil (“hide me”) to a more forceful request—“give me the strength to fight back.” This final request is reminiscent of the Hip Hop and gangsta rap ethos which emphasizes strength in the face of adversity and highlights the fact that while gangsta rappers see themselves as victims of oppressive and violent social circumstances they, and their religious identity, are not to be labeled weak or neutered. Physical strength and spiritual strength, in the form of a mental and emotional solidarity with Christ, carry them through life.

This sense of solidarity is also seen in a song entitled “My Life” by The Game and Lil’ Wayne where the rappers express their feelings about life “on the streets” and offer up a sort of prayer to God. The most telling lines are delivered in the first section of the song:

I’m from...
From a block close to where Biggie was crucified
That was Brooklyn’s Jesus
Shot for no fuckin’ reason
And you wonder why Kanye wears Jesus pieces?
‘cause that Jesus people
And The Game, he’s the equal

First, the references to “Biggie” (Notorious B.I.G.), “Kanye” (rapper Kanye West), and “The Game” (the one rapping) are ones that would be easily recognizable to those familiar with rap music and show a very direct and *kairotic* connection between the stories being told by gangsta rappers and real, everyday life. In “keeping it real” these rappers do not look to reference mythic and historical literature, figures, and texts, but instead want to tell the stories of

struggle, injustice, and survival in terms of their particular social circumstances. As Robin Sylvan puts it, the religious world view of rappers “refuses to take refuge in the hope of otherworldly salvation but, rather, tells the truth about the harsh reality...of oppression” (281). The focus on Jesus-as-sufferer is not necessarily spiritual but meaningful and practical.

When The Game states he is from the same area where “Biggie was crucified” there is the layered understanding of who Biggie is and the circumstances of his death. Notorious B.I.G. is a pillar of rap music and was a native of Brooklyn, New York, who was gunned down in 1997. What is especially interesting, and very telling in regards to the social and religious identity of many poor Black and Latino/a communities, is how the death of Biggie is perceived. For privileged non-minorities, the death of a rapper who often rapped about sex, drugs, and violence was nothing important and happened simply because he chose to live a life, and follow a career path, that was surrounded by those very things he often rapped about. But, for many disadvantaged minorities, especially Blacks and Latino/as, Biggie was/is seen as “Brooklyn’s Jesus”—a Christ-figure in that he suffered in life and died at the hands of senseless evil and injustice (“shot for no fuckin’ reason”). Some may argue that Jesus, on the other hand, was not killed for “no reason” but in fact for the salvation of humanity. But that would be a misreading of the sentiment of Biggie’s message. Biggie, and Jesus, being killed “for no reason” stresses the senselessness of the killing and the fact that, like Jesus, society did not *have to* kill, but did. And for those strongly identify with DMX’s message, if Biggie rapped about sex, drugs, and violence, it was because those were central characteristics of the life that was handed him; they were characteristics born from the same society that might eventually kill them. As Michael Eric Dyson puts it in “Gangsta Rap and American Culture,” while misogyny, violence, and

materialism are common characteristics of gangsta rap, they are not its exclusive domain—“at its best, [gangsta rap] draws attention to complex dimensions of ghetto life ignored by many Americans” (179). This includes the use of religious rhetoric to “aggressively narrate the pains and possibilities, the fantasies and fears” of urban youth (179). While not every disadvantaged minority would rush to label Biggie a Jesus-figure, there is an understanding by disadvantaged urban communities, especially by those who strongly connect to gangsta rap, of how a gunned-down rapper could be equated to the suffering Christ. Conversely, this occurrence would, at best, be labeled as misguided by many in the dominant culture and, at worst, disrespectful and sacrilegious.

Furthermore, in the song lyrics, The Game adds “and you wonder why Kanye wears Jesus pieces? / ‘cause that Jesus people / and The Game, he’s the equal.” Here, the rapper stresses the fact that rappers—like Kanye West and himself—wear crucifix necklaces (“Jesus pieces”) because they are members of Jesus’ community and connected to the suffering that Jesus experienced in life and in death. Once again, solidarity with Christ is created and displayed through the discourse of gangsta rap and highlights a religious identity that focuses on the martyrdom of Christ. This same sense of struggle, marginalization, and meaning-in-suffering can be seen in numerous lyrics by gangsta rappers:

“Jesus loves me, he told me so / that’s why when it gets ugly, he hugs me / ‘cause he knows me, yo.”
DMX in “Jesus Loves Me”

“On Sundays I kneel / on my knees to Jesus / please seize us / cuz my boy’s in trouble / and he needs us”
South Park Mexican in “H-Town G-Funk”

“The other day I spoke to the reverend / to see if he said that Mexican’s could go to heaven / [in heaven]... is minimum wage all they offer my people? / does my uncle gotta marry someone just to be legal? / will he get dirty looks ‘cause he can’t speak English?”
South Park Mexican in “Mexican Heaven”

“With me it’s not just bars and music / I walk with God / I got the scar to prove it”
Mase in “Jesus Walks”

“Man, I gotta get my soul right / I gotta get these devils outta my life”
Jay-Z in “Lucifer”

“I’m the boss, and I don’t follow no person. I follow Jesus.”
Snoop Dogg in “Gangsta Ride”

“God is who we praise / even though the devil’s all up in my face.”
Bone Thugs-N-Harmony in “Tha Crossroads”

“Come from the land that Jesus walked through / sacrifice my life...”
Lil Wayne in “Intro: This is Why I’m Hot”

“Tell Jesus I said thanks for the blessings he sending / please ask him to forgive me for the sins I commit
/ just let him know I’m still young and at risk”
Lil Wayne in “Everything”

“God’s the seamstress who tailor-fitted my pain / I got scriptures in my brain”
50 Cent in “Patiently Waiting”

“God love us hood niggaz / ‘cause he be with us in the prisons and he take time to listen / God love us
hood niggaz / ‘cause next to Jesus on the cross was the crook niggaz / but he forgive us”
Nas in “God Love Us”

In these lyrics we see the complex mixture of suffering, calls for help, solidarity, and the presence of specific realities. The rappers pull God in to their situations and theology from the realm of theory into the space of their lives. And because this space is often filled with suffering and marginalization, minority urban youth do not simply “cling on” to Jesus, but raise Him as a symbol of their very identity and find meaning in their lives and a will to persevere in the face of social, ideological, historical, and economic marginalization. So, it is not only in their death—as in the case of Biggie’s martyrdom—but in their lives that suffering is present.

As theologian Karl Barth stresses in *Dogmatics in Outline*, Jesus’ crucifixion was merely one part of His suffering. Barth writes, “I should think that there is involved in the *whole* of Jesus’ life the thing that takes its beginning in the article ‘He suffered’” (101)—a statement

which runs in opposition to much religious exegesis, from Calvin to the Apostles to many contemporary religious leaders, which emphasizes Jesus' suffering only in the Passion. For Barth, and seemingly for many gangsta rappers, "the whole life of Jesus comes under the heading 'suffered'" (102). It is no simple coincidence that a marginalized community would discursively and visually connect to the life of Jesus—a life that included being born in a stable, becoming a stranger among ones family and nation and a stranger in the realms of government, Church, and civilization, and a life lived full of loneliness and temptation, which involved betrayal by one's closest followers, and a life that ended by being sent to be crucified by a judge and vengeful community. It was an entire life lived in the shadow of the Cross (103).

Thus, when gangsta rappers invoke the life and name of Jesus, when they wear the crucifix, or when they display themselves as crucified Jesus-figures, they are expressing a deep connection between the totality of their lives and the totality of Jesus' life. This is made apparent in an interview with Tupac Shakur, one of gangsta raps most prominent voices. Tupac often used religious imagery in his music and was displayed as a crucified figure on the cover of his album *Makaveli*, his final album release before he was gunned down in 1996. In an interview with *Vibe* magazine the rapper states, "We get crucified. The Bible's telling us...all these people suffered so much. That's what makes them special people. I got shot five times." He then proceeds to equate his five gunshot wounds with the stigmata of Christ by outstretching his arms and legs and continues with:

I got crucified to the media, and I walked through with the thorns on and I had shit thrown on me and...I'm not saying I'm Jesus be we go through that type of thing everyday. We don't part the Red Sea but we walk through the 'hood without getting shot. We don't turn water in to wine but we turn dope fiends into productive citizens of society. We turn words into money. What greater gift can there be? So I believe God blessed us. I believe God blesses those who hustle

and those who use their mind and who, overall, are righteous... God put us in the ghetto because He's testing us even more. That makes sense.

This religious discourse by a central gangsta rap figure points to the complicated religious identity embraced and espoused by many who see gangsta rap as the soundtrack to their lives. They see the miracle of Jesus manifested in the "miracle" of surviving harsh social conditions and violence. They see blessings mixed in with suffering, and they see themselves walking in the footsteps of Christ. It is for them natural and theologically sound to equate their suffering to Christ's suffering and to understand that suffering in a social context. Tupac and many other gangsta rappers often see their suffering in connection to the evil present in society. Poverty, an unjust legal system, racism, decrepit social conditions, the media, and political pundits are just a few of the reasons, according to rappers, why individuals and communities are marginalized.

Theologically, rappers are rhetorically expressing the fact that, like Jesus, they and their communities are bearing the sin of the whole human race; a sentiment that moves their identification with Jesus beyond a simple artistic trope. They suffer mostly not out of individual choices or decisions, but because the world is structured in a way that marginalizes poor racial minorities. The link between economic poverty and racial marginalization is made by Stuart Hall who writes that modern capitalist production has produced a classed and racialized work force—one that has perpetuated black laboring classes and a class system that is structured in race (61-63). This system is very much alive in contemporary times and not only negatively affects the Black community but also the Latino/a community. Thus, the realities of economics and race form communities that understandable produce discourse—in this case gangsta rap—which carries a message of suffering at the hands of an unjust social order. This parallels Jesus

who suffered because of a lost and sinful society—“from Bethlehem to the Cross He was abandoned by the world that surrounded Him, repudiated, persecuted, finally accused, condemned and crucified” (Barth 104). From individuals who forsake them, to an unforgiving society they are born in to, to an unjust legal system⁵¹ and death at the hands of society, there are parallels made and romanticized by gangsta rappers who use Jesus and His suffering to find meaning and forge a religious identity.

Not surprisingly, Tupac, in the same interview, expresses notions of heaven and hell in very down-to-earth terms. This is not surprising considering gangsta rappers produce religious discourse that sees suffering in the context of real-life situations. For Tupac, heaven and hell are *kairotic* matters—in the here-and-now of social circumstances. They are not floating somewhere in the ether but connected to the realities of life on the streets:

Heaven and hell are here [on earth]. What do you got there that we don't have here? What? Are you gonna, [in hell], walk around aimlessly, zombied? Nigga, that's here! Have you been on the streets lately? Heaven is now, here. Look (gesturing to the expensive room he is sitting in). We sittin' up here with big screens. This is heaven, for the moment. I mean, hell is jail. I've seen that one.

This notion is directly connected to the common gangsta rap theme of materialism. While critics of gangsta rap see the ultra-materialism of the genre as fickle, short-sighted, and selfish, a more complex look at the situation points to the fact that money, cars, jewelry, and fame are small pieces of “heaven” for individuals who many times grow up in poverty-stricken areas. If hell can be here on earth in the form of poverty, violence, crime, and marginalization, then

⁵¹ Another common theme in gangsta rap is the vilification of the U.S. legal system (police, laws, judges). Future work could make deeper connections between this occurrence and the fact that “Jesus dies the penal death of Roman justice” (Barth 104).

heaven can be here as well. So for many gangsta rappers, and for those that closely relate to its rhetoric, there is a seeming dichotomy in the way they view heaven and redemption.

In a sense, the meek shall inherit the earth in two possible ways. Heaven and redemption may come in the form of material wealth for those that are either lucky, or “hustle” their way out of marginalization, or it may come at the end of time when God rightfully judges those who have not lived up to the calling of Matthew 25⁵² and “helped thy neighbor” and who have created social conditions that have led to the “crucifixion” of poor minorities. For many gangsta rappers, there is hope that in some way “the stone which the builders rejected, the same [will be] made the head of the corner” (Matt. 21:42a). That is, discarded individuals/communities, as many gangsta rappers feel they represent, may become the center of God’s heavenly kingdom. All this may upset and baffle privileged people and leave them asking, “And is it marvelous in our eyes?” (Matt.21:42b)—a question that can reflect confusion and anger in the fact that the world’s marginalized may, in God’s eyes, actually be the corner stone of heaven. Then, in fact, rappers are not simply using the Jesus trope for simplified entertainment or storytelling purposes but identify themselves and their communities with Jesus the sufferer and with those that will find some sort of justice and redemption.

Embracing Jesus, but not organized religion

An interesting aspect of gangsta rap’s religious rhetoric is that while it embraces the life of Jesus and aspects central to religious thought such as heaven, hell, justice, redemption, and meaning-in-suffering, there is a strong mistrust of organized and established religion. Gangsta

⁵² Matthew 25 tells of those who God will choose to inherit the earth—those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, visited the stranger, clothed the unclothed and visited those who were sick or in prison.

rap's theology, therefore, is centered on the person of Christ, specifically on His suffering, but not religion-centered. That is to say, while many gangsta rappers embrace the life and suffering of Jesus—and often display this attitude through visual and textual rhetoric—they do not embrace the entirety of religion nor live what most would recognize as religious lives.

This dynamic is partially laid out by rapper South Park Mexican when he states in “The System,” “without peace there can be no happiness / I wear a cross around my neck like the Catholics / I’m not sure exactly what my religion is / I just know I thank God for my little kids.” The rapper displays the attitude that while God is an important part of his life and psychology, religion itself causes an attitude of indifference. This attitude reaches the ears of many and can shape the religious attitudes of those that connect to the message. As one fan of South Park Mexican stated on an online message board directed at the rapper, “like it said in da story, Ur not da most Christian in da world. Me neither, but I do believe in God and his Son Jesus. I'm glad U have Christian beliefs now and more importantly that U speak about it freely” (Martinez).

Most gangsta rappers who mention religion go beyond South Park Mexican's indifference and openly attack organized religion. Talib Kweli⁵³ writes in “Beautiful Struggle,” “you go to church to find you some religion / and all you hear is connivin’ and gossip and contradiction.” For Kweli, religion is full of hypocrisy and un-Godly things. So while God, and particularly the life of Jesus, are good and useful presences in history and the world, the entities that purport to carry Their message is extremely flawed in the eyes of these individuals and many of those who strongly connect with gangsta rap.

⁵³ Talib Kweli is not a “gangsta rapper” but many of his raps contain sentiments often found in gangsta rap—and in Hip Hop in general.

This mistrust of religion is layered and complex considering the fact that religion plays a large role in the lives of many racial minorities. Looking specifically at the African American and Latino/a communities in the United States, two communities that have a large following in gangsta rap, Protestantism and Catholicism often play central roles in the families and communities of these groups. Yet, in gangsta rap, there is the overwhelming notion of mistrust of religion. This—a point that needs to be re-emphasized—is within a rhetoric that reverses the life of the suffering Christ. Thus, the theology of gangsta raps, unknowingly, points to the complex history of Biblical interpretation and racialization. While the ancient authors of Biblical texts were aware of color, this awareness “was by no means a political or ideological basis for enslaving, oppressing, or in any way demeaning other people” (Felder). Centrally, an awareness of color, as a physiological characteristic, was not to say that these author’s were racializing society—for the social construct of “race” did not come about until the late 17th and early 18th century through the writing of natural historians (West). It has been the long history of Biblical exegesis that has racialized many Biblical events and led, in many cases, to the diminution of racial minorities.

Cain Hope Felder, in “Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives,” shows some ways in which Biblical interpretation has subjugated “colored” people—specifically those of African descent. One instance is in the interpretation of the Biblical story usually referred to as The Curse of Ham or Curse of Canaan (Gen. 9:18-27). Ham was a son of Noah and he (actually the land of Canaan) was cursed by Noah for disrespecting his father by not doing the proper thing and covering up his father’s nakedness. Though there is much ambiguity in the connection between Ham/Canaan and Africans, the fact that there is some seeming connection between

Ham/Canaan and the peoples of Africa/Egypt, has led some “Bible interpreters to justify *their* particular history, culture, and race by developing self-serving theological constructs. In one instance the Canaanite’s ‘deserve’ subjugation; in another instance, the Hamites ‘deserve’ to be hewers of wood and drawers of water”—two lower occupations.

Furthermore, Felder points out that racism is present in the Midrashim (the teachings on/of the Bible and Biblical exegesis):

In the fifth-century Midrash (C.E.) [it states that] Noah says to Ham: “You have prevented me from doing something in the dark (cohabitation), therefore your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned.”

The Babylonian Talmud (sixth century C.E.) states that “the descendants of Ham are cursed by being Black and are sinful with a degenerate progeny.”

Into the seventeenth century the idea persisted that the blackness of Africans was due to a curse, and that idea reinforced and sanctioned the enslavement of blacks. (132)

There was a clear link made and perpetuated, through religious discourse, between blackness and unpleasing aesthetics, blackness and sinfulness, and blackness and evil. It is a link that has had a powerful historical influence and which can be connected to the “genealogy of modern racism” (West). It is a genealogy that includes in its ideological ancestry scientists, artists, and philosophers and traces the history of racism in the West, a racism that is alive and well in the minds and experiences of many inner city minorities. This connection between blackness and evil, prevalent in early Biblical hermeneutics, lives on today in religious circles in more subtle ways.

Even today in such versions of Holy Scripture as *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible* one finds a so-called great racial prophecy with following racist hermeneutic: “...after the flood. All men were white up to this point, for there was only one family line—that of Noah who was white and in the line of Christ...and his son Shem would be a chosen race and have a peculiar relationship with God...His descendants constitute the leading nations of civilization. (Felder 132)

Today, there are also those who tend to exclude black people from any role in the Christian origins...[as when] Luke's editorializing results in the circumstantial de-emphasis of a Nubian (African) in favor of an Italian (European) and enable Europeans thereby to claim that the text of Acts demonstrates some divine preference for Europeans. (142-143)

Though gangsta rappers are presumably not scholars of historical racial Biblical exegesis, they point to an understandable mistrust by some racial minorities of Biblical interpretation and the largest purveyor of that exegesis—religion. This mistrust permeates the discourse of gangsta rappers and is usually expressed in a way that dispays the notion that the church is out of touch with the marginalized. As rapper Tupac once opined, “If the church would give half of what they’re making and give it back to the community, we would be all right. Have you seen some of these god damn churches lately? There are ones that take up the whole block. Trust me, all this religion stuff is to control you.” So while the life of Jesus, and particularly his suffering, is a central theme in gangsta rap there is also the deep mistrust of organized religion, especially by young, poor, racial minorities—the most common producers of gangsta rap discourse.

This mistrust, when looked upon from a historical perspective, is fascinating and also didactic in that it teaches us about important connections between religion, economics, race, ideology and popular discourse such as rap music. All these connections emphasize the notion that music's presence “is clearly political, in every sense the political can be conceived” and that, as one genre of music, gangsta rap—including its religious discourse—can serve as a powerful medium of social understanding and social critique (DeNora 163).

Living Out the Paradox: The Conflicted Spirituality of DMX and Mase

From its very inception, the human race has been condemned to exist within the eternal division [of good and evil], always moving between those two opposing poles.

-Paulo Coelho-

Any analysis of religious rhetoric in gangsta rap music must include a discussion of the discourse and lives of rappers DMX (Earl Simmons) and Mase (Mason Betha). Both rappers reached the height of their popularity and commercial success in the 1990s, called by some the “golden age” of gangsta rap music, and remain central figures in the history of rap culture. What makes these two rappers unique, and pertinent to the discussion of this chapter, is the fact that both have openly and discursively embodied a struggle between a “gangsta” lifestyle and a life of spirituality. They have often dealt with this struggle rhetorically and have lived lives that make this struggle clear. DMX and Mase embody the paradox of gangsta discourse and religious discourse within the life of one person and display a struggle between using the life and message of Jesus in a seemingly haphazard manner and actually taking up the mantle of serving Christ through the avenue of organized religion.

It is important to establish that DMX and Mase fall into the realm of gangsta rap. Much of their lyrical discourse focuses on themes common in this genre: sex, materialism, misogyny, violence, drugs, respect, struggle, and marginalization. DMX and Mase are by no means gospel/Christian rappers—a genre of its own—but are rappers who followed the path towards gangsta rap, a path fueled by a life surrounded by those very themes of gangsta rap. These rappers, like many inner city minorities, are influenced by this musical genre which was born from a marginalized social environment. This environment, in turn, is influenced by the music

and the individuals who connect with it. It is a recursive cycle of “gangsta-ness”—a gangsta-ness that can be violent and crude but which also is linked to complex social and historical events that teach us much about the psyche of many individuals and their communities. The following lyrics provide examples that place these two rappers squarely in the realm of gangsta rap:

DMX

I resort to violence, my niggaz move in silence / like you don't know what our style is /
New York niggaz the wildest / my niggaz is wit it / you want it? Come and get it /
Took it then we split it / you fuckin' right we did it / what the fuck you gonna do when we run up
on you?
“Ruff Ryders Anthem”

I'm Evil, like Keneival, faggot I'll leave you / like I shoulda did your peoples before they could
conceive you / how's a buck-fifty sound, for a quick ass cut? / here's a flashback / I fuckin' blow
your bitch-ass up
“Don't You Ever”

Mase

Make all my guns shoot / you let your gun loose, none o'them niggas gun proof / watch them
niggas drop, when I pop one in they sunroof / and we be lead bustin', leavin' niggas heads
gushin'
“Take What's Yours”

And they send the trauma unit to come repair you / Now there you are, nigga, in the fuckin'
reservoir / ...we don't give a fuck...who you are
“You Aint Smart”

These lyrics, along with many others produced and performed by the two rappers, may seem ultra-crude to some but represent the norm for much gangsta rap rhetoric and highlight a piece of the gangsta rap ethos. What is most intriguing about DMX and Mase is not that they follow the mold of gangsta rap but that, while having such violent and crude lyrics, they also have discourse, and life experiences, that reflect a struggle with good and evil. They also, fitting the

mold of gangsta rap religiosity, continually look to God/Jesus for answers. While many gangsta rappers reflect this struggle, DMX and Mase do so most often and most poignantly.

DMX, a platinum-selling artist, in his six best-selling albums, includes a track that is a spoken-word prayer. These prayers almost always come at the end of each album—albums containing lyrics like the ones presented above and are examples of Socratic *parphesia*: bold, frank, and plain speech in the face of conventional morality and entrenched power (West xi). In his first prayer, DMX reflects the solidarity that he perceives God/Jesus to have with his suffering and connects his life to the life of Christ through meaning-in-suffering:

I come to you hungry and tired / ...I come to you weak / you give me strength and that's deep /
you called me a sheep

Lord, why is it that, that I go through so much pain? / all I saw was black and all I felt was rain / I
come to you because it's you that knows

But it's all good, 'cause I didn't expect to live long / so if it takes for me to suffer for my brother
to see the light / give me pain till I die, but please Lord, treat him right

These lines reflect the notion that the Lord understands DMX's pain and suffering and is there as a respite and savior. They also reflect the meaning-in-suffering theme discussed earlier—a theme that many gangsta rappers connect to and which is not surprising considering the suffering that many underprivileged and marginalized people experience. In DMX's second prayer, "Ready to Meet Him," he presents a conversation between himself and God and continues to emphasize the evil of the world around him ("Snakes still coming at me"), the fact that God is there for help ("My child, I'm here, as I've always been"; "My doors are not locked / ...all you gotta do is knock"), and that he (DMX) has been moved by the negativity of the world and the good of God to follow Him ("After what I just saw, I'm ridin' with the Lord"). Once

again, the spirituality presented is always very *kairotic* in that it comes from very real life experiences and the fact that God helps people persevere in their worldly struggle. DMX is not speaking of an ideological struggle between good and evil but a struggle that permeates the very streets he was raised in and walks in.

In “Prayer III” DMX continues by labeling “Lord Jesus” as his “crutch” and describes himself as a “weakened version of Your reflection.” The former statement reflects the functional use of God/Jesus in the lives of the marginalized; it literally helps them get through life. The latter statement shows the direct connection these individuals feel they have with Jesus. Like Tupac comparing his five bullet wounds to the stigmata of Christ, DMX believes that in his life and suffering he is, or is trying to be, a reflection of Christ. “Prayer IV” emphasizes similar notions of spirituality but adds to why the rapper has become a follower of Jesus: “you gave me a love most of my life I didn’t know was there.” This short line is reminiscent of much gangsta rap that emphasizes a lack of love, and an abundance of hate/anger/violence, in the lives of marginalized inner city individuals. This may come from absent fathers, over-worked mothers, dying friends and relatives, lack of material comforts, crime, an unforgiving legal system, racism, classism, and cultural hegemony.

But the religious rhetoric of gangsta rap also stresses victory and redemption on a regular basis. Gangsta rappers connect to the Biblical notion that the hungry, hurting, and meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:3-12). DMX, in “Prayer V” states, “Because of God’s favor my enemies cannot triumph over me / ...I declare restoration of everything / that the devil has stolen from me” and in “Prayer VI” asks that Jesus uplift the suffering and allow their spirits to be born. DMX also references John 2:15 where Jesus angrily drove the money changers from

the temple—the rappers way of showing that the world he lives in is full of those who are concerned with un-Godly activities and thus ignore those who need help in society. The reprimanding of money changers may represent, in today’s terms, the reprimanding of those who create an unjust social order which in turn marginalizes many in society—including the community that DMX represents.

Beyond lyrics, DMX, while expressing the more usual message of gangsta rap (the prayers constitute only about 10% of his tracks), has over time espoused more and more religious rhetoric and contemplated a religious life. He has more consistently spoken about God and religion even while he has been involved in criminal behavior, including drug possession, assault, and animal cruelty. Since 2003 he has been interested in pursuing a career as a preacher and, while working on a set of gangsta rap albums and completing a stint in prison in 2009, stated he would soon release a gospel rap album as well. His life is a symbol of the dichotomy between good and evil expressed by numerous gangsta rappers and lived out in the streets by a multitude of poor inner city individuals/communities. While many people experience personal battles between good and evil, in gangsta rap we often hear a message of meaning-in-suffering, see a connection made between Evil and specific social circumstances, and witness a reaching out toward God/Jesus for hope and solidarity. DMX is one rapper that highlights these notions and Mase is another.

When DMX thought of leaving the music business to pursue religious preaching, he went to seek the advice of Mase (Mason Betha). He told Mase, “I’m fed up with this rap shit. I know the Lord. I know my true calling is to preach the Word. Where do I go from here?” Mase answered, “As long as the Lord give you the talent to do what you do, do it. He’ll call you when

he's ready" (qtd. in Reid). The question and answer, and the fact that the conversation even took place, is quite remarkable considering the fact that both of these rappers have released a plethora of gangsta rap material—material usually seen as polar opposite to any religious message. Their rhetorical output is seemingly conflicted between a pursuit of righteous behavior and a glorification of negative and criminal behavior.

Mase, in a span of ten years, went from releasing gangsta rap music under the name Murda Mase to retiring from the music industry twice to serve as a Christian pastor. His second return to rapping included discourse which glorified killing and womanizing and ended, soon after, with a return to pastoral duties. In 2009 Mase was still contemplating a re-return to rap. This wavering and indecision illustrate the personal and ideological struggle between the world that gangsta rap espouses/creates and the world of spiritual righteousness. The rapper has simultaneously become a Christian preacher, worked with inner city youth, *and* released the gangsta mixtape albums "Mase Crucified for the Hood" and "10 Years of Hate" (the album whose cover displays Mase as a Jesus-figure). He has stated that his rapping career is incompatible with his religious beliefs *and* returned to his rapping career at least twice—not only his rapping career, but his gangsta rapping career. Also, from this one rapper we hear in the song "Gotta Survive," "you don't even know success until you know him and him is Jesus" and in "300 Shots," "put guns in niggaz mouth like 'who you dissin?' / ...I [shoot] niggaz in the chest, they never breathe again." Finally, in Mase's explanation of his moment of conversion is a sincere belief that he felt his music career was "leading millions of people to hell"⁵⁴, yet he felt it necessary, just a few years later, to return to his early persona of Murda Mase—

⁵⁴ From a UK interview with Mase at <http://realtalkny.uproxx.com>.

espousing aggressive gangsta lyrics. Part of this return could be for financial reasons but if economics was the only reason then Mase would not have left the music business in the first place. His reasoning, backed by the fact that he had in fact become a pastor, seemed based on a true mental and spiritual struggle and not simply for economic reasons.

The life and rhetorical output of Mase is revealing in that it displays a conflicted religious and spiritual ideology that is symbolic of the religious message common in gangsta rap which in turn seems to be representative of the religiosity of many inner city minorities who strongly connect with the message of the genre. This ideology is one that *simultaneously* struggles with good and evil and closely connects life on earth to the Christly characteristics of marginalization caused by an unjust society and meaning-in-suffering. When Mase expresses that he has been crucified for his religious beliefs and actions, the crucifixion is not taking place at the hands of inner city minorities who connect to the gangsta rap ethos; those individuals are in fact the ones who understand his message clearly. Many minority members understand how the violence and marginalization of their neighborhoods intermingle with the religious message of hope. They understand how a deep desire for material wealth, possibly an aspect of Mase's returns to rapping, and a belief that the poor and meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5) can be intertwined in one individual's psyche and message. They, unlike many in society, understand and live out the notion that good and evil are both constantly present within individuals and within the social order.

Conclusion

The religious rhetorical output of many gangsta rappers, both textual and visual, points to the religious ethos embraced by many marginalized inner city individuals who see the discourse of

gangsta rap as containing a form of religious *phronesis* (practical wisdom). This output focuses on some telling characteristics: solidarity with Jesus formed through the common theme of suffering; a belief that the social order is to blame for much/most of the suffering; a strong hope that one day the suffering and marginalized will experience redemption; a mistrust of organized religion; and a psycho-social battle between good and evil. These characteristics are on display in the rhetoric of rappers Tupac, South Park Mexican, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Nas, 50 Cent, and numerous others. They are also represented in the lives of DMX and Mase, two gangsta rappers who have had a large impact on the formation and perpetuation of the gangsta rap religious ethos.

Importantly, this ethos is not only characteristic of a few rappers but symbolic of the religious ideology of the multitude of individuals that connect to the message. As Derrick Darby writes and rappers, “these poor righteous teachers and lyrically gifted MCs [give] their congregations a street-side perspective on biding philosophical questions concerning the nature and existence of God [and] the problem of evil” (4). Furthermore, this religious ideology does not stand alone; it is directly influenced/created by a social system and capitalistic system that has historically marginalized certain groups and individuals. In the religious discourse of gangsta rappers, and in its analysis, are deep and complex connections between history, economics, ideology, race, politics, and religion. Gangsta rap, on many levels, speaks to the mental and physical conditions of many marginalized inner city people and complicates our understanding of what it means to be religious in the world.

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Conclusion

Though a popularized musical genre, much of Hip Hop remains entrenched in the alley behind Kenneth Burke's rhetorical parlor. It represents a discourse, and discourse community, whose message has been simplified and vilified by much popular media and largely ignored by the academic discipline of rhetoric. Importantly, Hip Hop rhetoric and culture has much to show us and teach us about a number of complex social issues including race, gender, economics, historical hegemony, identity, aggression, politics, religion, and popular culture—all of which are intertwined with textual, oral, and visual discourse.

In a general sense, Hip Hop rhetoric should be a part of the scholarly pursuit of knowledge/being (philosophy). As Cornel West states in the foreword to *Hip Hop and Philosophy*,

One must adopt subtle metaphilosophical views that permit one to relate philosophical inquiry to art and entertainment in an illuminating manner and show how sophisticated forms of *paideia* (deep education), *phronesis* (practical wisdom), and *parrhesia* (Bold, frank, and plain speech in the face of conventional morality and entrenched power) operate within the works of cultural producers in our contemporary world of free-market fundamentalism, machismo militarism, and escalating authoritarianism on the streets and in corporate suites. One must grapple with how and why gifted young people—here and abroad—choose hip hop music as a dominant form of delight and instruction with good and bad effects to resist and reinforce the iron cage of present-day life. (xii)

Scholars of multiple disciplines should continue the work of diversifying the terrain of knowledge and heeding the call of West, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and many others, who seek to complicate the landscape of scholarly work.

Because this scholarly work should push forward the advancement of our understanding of society, and spawn further scholarship, it is important to locate ways in which writing and

thinking about Hip Hop rhetoric can take place. While there are numerous angles from which Hip Hop rhetoric can be approached, there are some that I feel are important to highlight.

Looking Forward: Continuing the Work In Hip Hop Rhetoric (Relandscaping Tools)

Having useful tools is important if the work of relandscaping is to get done. There are numerous ways in which rhetoricians can approach Hip Hop Rhetoric, some of which were used in this work such as Race Critical Theory, classical rhetoric, cultural studies, and religious studies, but there are many more effective and instructive approaches that can be used and many more which future scholars will locate and implement. Some approaches which can be used in making those “shifts” in the rhetorical tradition Royster writes about, through Hip Hop Rhetoric, are below. All are already central themes in the field, but little work has been done to approach these themes, or rhetorical work, through the lens of Hip Hop culture, language, and discourse.

Linguistics

While Linguistics is a separate field from Rhetoric there are clearly strong ties between the two disciplines. If there has been work done in what I am calling Hip Hop Rhetoric, this is the most advanced part of that work. Scholarship by Henry Luis Gates Jr. and Keith Gilyard, just to name two, are staples in contemporary Rhetorical studies. The main focus is on AAVE/Black English, a major part of Hip Hop Rhetoric, with an emphasis on pointing to the history of that language/dialect and fighting for an atmosphere that “values Black culture, especially its vernacular language” (Gilyard 626).

The linguistic aspect of Hip Hop Rhetoric would have us also look at other languages and dialects used in Hip Hop, most notably, Spanish and Spanglish. Beyond those two, work could be done in every place where a “home” language intermingles with AAVE and Hip Hop linguistic tropes and themes, such as France, Germany, Japan, China, the Middle East, and Latin America.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory has become a major part of the Rhetorical terrain, especially over the past fifty years. While women’s voices have been present, and many times powerful, throughout history, their inclusion in rhetorical historiography has only been rather recent. Voices such as those of Sarah Grimké, Ida B. Wells, Sor Juan Inéz De La Cruz, and Gloria Anzaldúa have gained recognition in the field, along with recovered feminist voices from ancient times, such as Aspasia and Enheduanna. Countless other feminist rhetoricians are now not only prominent in the field of Rhetoric but many times play a central role in shaping the discipline.

So what does Hip Hop Rhetoric have to add in this discussion? For one, unfortunately, Hip Hop Rhetoric can display the continued marginalization of women’s rhetoric in many rhetorical circles. While Hip Hop music, publications, and multi-media have reached enormous heights of popularity, the genre is dominated by the male voice. Looking at contracted artists, producers, rap label executives, Hip Hop magazine writers and editors, etc., we see that women only occupy a handful of those positions, and their voice continues to be marginalized, as has been the case throughout much of world history. Sarah Grimké’s words, written in the mid-1830s, “Our powers of mind have been crushed, as far as man could do it, our sense of morality has been impaired by his interpretation of our duties; but no where does God say that he made

any distinction between us, as moral and intelligent being” (1051), could as easily be stated by a 21st century female in the Hip Hop community.

Another area in which Hip Hop Rhetoric can directly affect feminist work, and which is closely tied to Royster’s notion of “shifting rhetorical subjects,” is the uncovering of female voices and experiences in Hip Hop culture. This means moving beyond typical conversations of the affect of rap music on females and working to discover and display the voices and experiences of female Hip Hop rhetoricians who are living meaningful lives and expressing them through discourse. The most obvious would be to look at local and “part-time” female Hip Hop artists who are continually expressing their experiences through lyrics that are then put out on home-made albums and on the internet in spaces like websites, blogs, podcasts, etc. This then addresses an earlier point that Hip Hop Rhetoric will force us to look for rhetoric in nontraditional places, but this will continually become more necessary as we work to uncover “new” voices and rhetorics, such as those of female Hip Hop rhetoricians. The most interesting dynamic about this is that we don’t have to stumble across a buried papyrus scroll or ancient tablet—this feminist rhetoric is right under our noses.

Technology and Rhetoric

As alluded to in the previous section, technology will play a major role in a deep discussion of Hip Hop Rhetoric—and many rhetorics in our modern age. Specifically, the multi-modal output of Hip Hop discourse asks us to look in nontraditional places for this nontraditional rhetoric. The Internet will be a major ground of excavation from which to find publicly displayed Hip Hop rhetoric, as websites, blogs, wikis, video sites, song-upload sites, etc., continue to allow the “everyday” rhetorician to express his/her voice. Currently, websites such as MySpace.com,

YouTube.com, and Facebook.com are ripe grounds to discover much of the Hip Hop Rhetoric that never makes its way into more far-reaching media such as popular magazines, music video channels, and large record labels. MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook may be obsolete in the near future, but new sites and Internet channels will become available and be used to display the diverse voices of Hip Hop.

Secondly, looking at the major component of Hip Hop Rhetoric, musical tracks, we can consider the technology needed to produce and disseminate those songs. It is becoming easier and cheaper to get a hold of recording and beat-producing equipment and software. And historically, Hip Hop has been an inexpensive genre of music to get involved in—at its most basic level, only one’s voice is needed to produce a song, or “spit some rhymes.” This is directly linked to questions of technological access—questions discussed by Adam J. Banks in his important work *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*. Banks does not refer specifically to Hip Hop or musical production, but he points to the importance of discussing access to technology in the field of Rhetoric. He hopes for a day when poor racial minorities will gain critical access to technologies—that is, that they will not only be passive consumers but be able to affect change through the uses of technology and affect change within the technology world itself. We then can ask, What technology is essential to Hip Hop Rhetoric? How does/can technology affect Hip Hop Rhetoric? Who holds the technological power in Hip Hop Rhetoric? How are issues of race, class, gender, and economics a part of technological use and access in Hip Hop Rhetoric?

Visual Rhetoric

Beyond oral and textual discourse, Visual Rhetoric is a growing part of our discussions in the field of Rhetoric. We have complicated our notions of the visual and the ways in which images

and imagery are used rhetorically. This has marked one of the shifts in rhetorical historiography, yet it remains a small part of the larger landscape of the discipline. But as the scholarship on Visual Rhetoric grows and continues to reshape the terrain, Hip Hop can be a part of that process.

Specifically, Hip Hop visual rhetoric entails graffiti, body art (tattoos), clothing, and vehicles. In each of these we have the possibility of re-examining work done in Visual Rhetoric and the possibility of creating new ways to discuss it. As rhetoricians we must move beyond mere cultural or sociological studies (though needed) of these subsets and approach them as rhetoricians, looking for complex ways in which the visual output of peoples is connected to communication, persuasion, power, etc. When this occurs, Hip Hop will have made its important mark on theory in Visual Rhetoric.

Classical Rhetoric

Through Hip Hop Rhetoric we can examine some aspects of Classical Rhetoric and apply them to a very real, living, and contemporary discourse. This may be avoided by those that feel we should not look at all rhetorics through the lens of Classical Western Rhetoric, but for those that choose to examine, re-examine, or teach Classical Rhetoric, Hip Hop Rhetoric provides a venue from which to do that.

Beyond the classical rhetors and concepts used in this work, future scholarship may look at song production, recording, and live performance, and find strong links between Hip Hop Rhetoric and the five classical canons of Rhetoric: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*. Though not using the rhetorical lingo, rappers are highly aware of these canons and apply them as they create new songs, record them, and deliver them. Hip Hop musical

artists (rappers), invent new songs, arrange them for effect and to match musical beats, have various textual and oral styles, must memorize the songs for live performances, and are critically aware of delivery.

Other classical-to-modern rhetorical characteristics can be illustrated in Hip Hop Rhetoric as well such as *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, audience, and agency, just to name a few. Classical Rhetoric as a whole can be used, challenged, re-shaped, re-vamped, and re-theorized in the face of Hip Hop Rhetoric.

Composition

A close relative of Rhetoric, Composition Studies can also be brought into the conversation of re-landscaping through the use of Hip Hop Rhetoric. Issues of invention, audience, writing, revision, grammar, etc., are central to both Composition Studies and Hip Hop Rhetoric, and the latter can once again be used in the discussion, analysis, and teaching of the first. We can also make some specific links between major themes in the history of Composition Studies and some Hip Hop Rhetoric. For instance, during the 1960s there was a major push by Peter Elbow, and others, during the period termed Expressivism, to allow students to write about their personal experiences in their own voice. This was a shift from doing strict literary criticism and following set writing templates. It is easy to see that many Hip Hop rhetoricians/artists, whether popularly or privately, are expressing their lived experiences in their own language.

Moving to the 1980s and 1990s we see a push in Composition Studies towards discussions of Social Construction and Social Epistemic. Through Hip Hop Rhetoric we can discuss the fact that this rhetoric, like all rhetorics, is produced in social/community structures. The writer/rhetorician/rapper is never a lone island but s/he and his/her rhetoric are a product

of their social environment. We can then begin to ask questions about the writing that is being produced in Hip Hop culture and what those writings may say about the author, and ultimately his/her environment. We can also ask more politicized questions about the rhetorical output of Hip Hop, such as: If language and rhetoric are bound up in issues of power, what does the situation of Hip Hop Rhetoric say about the power dynamics in society at large?

Hip Hop Rhetoric can also allow us to re-examine writerly considerations such as citation. An example of this is Mickey Hess' 2006 *Computers and Composition* essay titled, "Was Foucault a Plagiarist? Hip Hop and Academic Citation" where Hess intelligently argues the point that "In juxtaposing academic citation systems and [Hip Hop] sampling we can look at the way writers take sources somewhere new" (294). This is just one example of how Hip Hop Rhetoric can diversify and complicate Composition Studies.

Some of Hip Hop's Most Important Voices

To enter the door of the rhetorical parlor—to understand the conversation, and to take part in the ongoing discussion—one, for hundreds of years, would have needed to know about the rhetoric which was labeled elite—namely that of White, Western, privileged, males. As we have seen, the Rhetorical parlor has continually transformed, with its most major shifts beginning in the mid 1900s with the addition of nontraditional voices such as those of females and racial minorities. In many ways the parlor of the early 21st century would be unrecognizable to classical and Enlightenment rhetoricians. New paradigms are now in play.

Many in rhetoric no longer want to fit in to, or impress, those that are in the traditional Rhetorical parlor. New paradigms are being created and a new landscape is being produced where traditional voices are giving way to historically ignored and marginalized voices.

Subcultures and countercultures are slowly and steadily gaining a strong foothold in rhetorical historiography and, as bell hooks writes, these counter-voices are “central locations[s] for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse” (149). Like Royster, hooks is interested in shifting the landscape of Rhetoric and claims that those “who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice [must] identify spaces where we begin the process of revision” (145). Hip Hop Rhetoric is one of those places.

Hip Hop is a place that does not feel comfortable in contemporary Rhetoric, though it understands its own relevance and influence. It is a place near but outside the parlor, a place with an edge, with a dark side, a place that channels to new and unknown regions, a place of marginality but with proud roots—Hip Hop Rhetoric is the intricate alley behind the Rhetorical parlor.

This alley is full of colorful and intriguing voices—sad, joyful, proud, angry, hurting, and hurtful voices—all complex voices, some of which need to be part of the rhetorical tradition. Here are some of the voices I nominate to become central figures in Hip Hop’s influence on the rhetorical tradition/*The Rhetorical Tradition*:

- Nas: One of the finest lyricists in Hip Hop with classic albums such as *Illmatic*, *Stillmatic*, *Street’s Disciple*, *Hip Hop is Dead*, and *Nigger*. His rhetoric is full of references to African culture, the Bible, and African American street culture.
- Tupac Shakur: One of the most famous and controversial rappers, the murdered Tupac, son of a Black Panther, mixed “thug” rhetoric with insightful social commentary. He was embraced by many for “keeping it real,” or being genuine. He made many comments concerning the plight of young black males as race, economics, and violence were central themes in much of his discourse. *Me Against the World*, *All Eyez on Me*, and *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* were his most influential works, though he was a poet, did numerous interviews, and released several other albums, some posthumously
- Slick Rick: Born in Britain but raised in The Bronx, Slick Rick is known for his storytelling approach to Hip Hop Rhetoric. He mixed playful themes with social commentary and

- rapped about the ability to use rapping to tell important stories. His most important works for Rhetoric are *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* and *The Art of Storytelling*
- Public Enemy: A highly political rap group which reached its highest level of popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This ultra pro-African American group was the first highly political rap group whose most important albums are *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, *Fear of a Black Planet*, and *Apocalypse '91...The Enemy Strikes Black*.
 - Dead Prez: An equally political group, Dead Prez could be called the contemporary Public Enemy. Their rhetoric is highly politicized, anti-establishment, and influenced by African American activists and the *I Ching*. Central themes in their music are race, government control, Black pride, religion and activism. Important albums include *Let's Get Free*, *Revolutionary But Gangsta*, and *Turn Off the Radio* mixtapes, volumes 1 and 2.
 - Cypress Hill: One of the most popular and influential Latino rap groups of all time, Cypress Hill took Hip Hop culture and music and gave it a Latin flavor. References to ghetto/barrio life were peppered with Spanish, Spanglish, and Latino culture. Important albums include *Cypress Hill*, *Black Sunday*, and their all-Spanish album *Los Grandes Éxitos en Español*.
 - Eminem: A White rapper with enormous worldwide success, Eminem's rhetoric can be described as troubling, humorous, talented, but always highly self-reflective. Eminem seems more aware than most Hip Hop Rhetoricians of the power of language and the ability to persuade through discourse. He uses wordplay, imagery, argumentation, pathos, and humor in a highly effective manner. The fact that he is a White rapper in a rhetoric dominated by African Americans also makes him an important figure to analyze. Important works include *The Marshall Mathers LP*, *The Eminem Show*, and *Encore*.
 - Jin: A lesser-known rapper, I'm including Jin because he represents a dynamic voice in Hip Hop Rhetoric and points to new shifts within Hip Hop itself. Jin is Chinese American, born to Chinese immigrant parents. Because of his ethnic background Jin has, in many ways, been marginalized within Hip Hop, though he eventually signed with a major record label. Also interesting is that Jin has released an all-Cantonese album and released another album solely on the Internet through his MySpace website. Important works include *The Rest is History*, *I Promise* (Internet release), and *ABC Jin* (in Cantonese).
 - Lil' Wayne: This Southern rapper, who has been rapping on records since his early teens, links the golden age of "gangsta" rap (early to mid 90s) to the Hip Hop Rhetoric of the new millennium. His extremely creative and complex wordplay is top-notch. Lil' Wayne is also a prolific artist, putting out a series of popular mixtapes in the first decade of this century. Some of those include *Tha Carter I*, *The Carter II*, *The Drought III*, *No Ceilings*.
 - Women: Unfortunately, at this point in Hip Hop Rhetoric's history, I am going to have to group a handful of women rappers together. While there have certainly been a number of female Hip Hop acts, their voice may be better served as a united front. This is not to say that none of these acts can stand alone, but it would be misleading for me not to make it apparent that female voices continue to be marginalized in Hip Hop Rhetoric. Some of the voices that have made a mark are TLC, Salt-N-Pepa, Queen Latifa, Da Brat, Foxy Brown, Lauryn Hill, Lil' Kim, Missy Elliot, Rah Digga, Eve, Nikki Minaj.

This list is no doubt up for debate, as I left out some very influential and successful artists (e.g. KRS One, The Beastie Boys, Jay Z, DMX, Notorious B.I.G., South Park Mexican), but I do think that the artists listed above belong on any list of central figures to Hip Hop Rhetoric.

Non-artists/entities are also central to Hip Hop Rhetoric and include:

- Russell Simmons: Producer and Hip Hop entrepreneur, Simmons has had a large affect on Hip Hop Rhetoric and culture. What makes Simmons stand out is his public commentary on Hip Hop culture, music, and rhetoric. He has both vehemently defended rap artists and called for positive change in the Hip Hop community. In 2007 he called for the banning of the words “nigger,” “bitch,” and “ho” from the radio versions of songs, “labeling them extreme curse words” and stating that “[eliminating] these three words will alleviate a lot of pain” (Time).
- Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs: Producer, rapper, and Hip Hop mogul, Combs has been a central figure in Hip Hop for many years. His influence in the spread of Hip Hop culture and rhetoric is undeniable as he began his own record label and entertainment group (Bad Boy) and has had his touch on a clothing line and television shows.
- Hip Hop Magazines: Important to Hip Hop Rhetoric and culture, popular Hip Hop magazines play a central role in disseminating discourse—both textual and visual. Some of the most important, along with their accompanying websites, are *Word Up!*, *The Source*, and *XXL*.
- Television Channels: While there are numerous stations that play Hip Hop music, show Hip Hop music videos, and are influenced by Hip Hop culture, the two most important at this time are BET and MTV. These two channels have helped catapult the popularity of Hip Hop.
- Others: Other outlets of for Hip Hop Rhetoric include Hip Hop websites⁵⁵, video games, “underground” albums/mixtapes and “street” videos (e.g. the *Beef* series)

As is apparent, the Hip Hop “alley” behind the Rhetorical parlor is full of voices and full of possibilities. This marginalized rhetoric is diverse and continually asks us to shift our perspective of traditional Rhetorical thought, work, and sources. It is an exiting opportunity.

Final Considerations

My look at Hip Hop Rhetoric in relation to rhetorical theory and historiography is far from complete. There are many more questions to be asked and many more ways Hip Hop Rhetoric can shift and challenge traditional thinking in the discipline. Looking back at Jacqueline Jones

⁵⁵ See the article “The 100 Best Hip-Hop Web Sites” in the December/January 2010 issue of *XXL* magazine.

Royster's notions of ways to re-vision and re-work the landscape of Rhetoric, we can see that Hip Hop provides us with many possibilities to do this work. My hope is that my scholarship is a catalyst for some of that future work.

Beyond the issues brought up in this work, future scholarship on Hip Hop Rhetoric will have to consider the growing influence of Hip Hop on regions outside the United States. Hip Hop rhetoricians in places such as the Middle East, Europe, Japan, China, Latin America, and Africa, many times voices of protest, are gaining popularity. This may seem daunting to those interested in doing scholarship in the field but we should embrace this—after all, the larger the scope of the discourse, the greater the possibilities. The more voices present, the more interesting the terrain.

My call is for Hip Hop rhetoric to gain more inclusion in discussions of rhetorical historiography, and to be a serious part of the rhetorical tradition—maybe someday even included in *The Rhetorical Tradition*. This of course does not happen on its own, but it must be argued for, and people inside and outside the discipline must be persuaded. I take on the challenge, and I believe other rhetoricians will follow, just as I have followed the few before me. After all, persuasion is what we do. And relandscaping is what keeps the field of rhetoric alive and current.

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Vita

Roberto Jose Tinajero II was born and raised in El Paso, TX. He attended Riverside High School then received a BA in English and Religion from Austin College (Sherman, TX). He went on to receive a Masters in Theological Studies from Southern Methodist University (Dallas, TX) and a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Houston. He has given a number of conference presentations including ones at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the national Popular Cultural/American Culture Conference, and presented at a religious symposium at the University of Houston.

Tinajero has taught numerous English courses at the University of Houston, El Paso Community College, the University of Texas-El Paso, and Tarrant County College. These courses have included a focus on composition, rhetoric, literature, creative writing, and business writing. He has also been involved with Writers in the Schools (Houston) and AmeriCorps.

Tinajero is also a poet, an avid viewer and participant in sports including basketball, softball, flag football, golf, and tennis. He enjoys going to concerts, writing, and spending time with his family and friends. You can view some of Tinajero's writings, teaching syllabi, and other projects at www.blueletters.com.

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